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# Moving Beyond the Disability Memoir: A Critical Study of Judith Scott's Fiber Art

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## INTRODUCTION

*Judith Scott: Bound & Unbound*, the Fall 2014 to Spring 2015 exhibit at the Elizabeth Sackler Center for Feminist Art in the Brooklyn Museum, represented a significant departure from the way artist Judith Scott's work has been shown in the past. The exhibit presented the evolution of Scott's artistic career, from her first drawings, to her first piece of fiber art, to the piece of fiber art she was working on at the time of her death. The comprehensiveness of the exhibit allowed Catherine Morris, the Sackler Family Curator, to emphasize Scott's development of artistic style over the course of her artistic career.

Unlike *Bound & Unbound*, previous presentations of Scott's work focused on her intellectual disabilities, rather than the actual art. The conflation of the biography of an artist with the artwork itself is a typical phenomenon in the analysis of artistic works by people with disabilities. In this thesis, I explore the work of Judith Scott, focusing on the reception of her fiber art by the art world. I use her work as a lens to better understand how people with intellectual disabilities can participate in the "memoir boom" of the past couple of decades.

Autobiography has become an important tool for people with disabilities to make their lives visible to the rest of the world. As vital as these contributions have been, I analyze how they exclude those whose disabilities prevent them from being able to produce a piece of conventional life writing. I then explore the concept of visual autobiography, a potentially accessible form of life "writing" for people who cannot and/or do not want to produce a written narrative. Both types of autobiography, however, turn the ability to narrate one's life into a necessary way to demonstrate one's personhood. I use the various receptions of Scott's fiber art to understand the usefulness and limitations of visual autobiography and memoir in general.

Scott's oeuvre is both thought provoking and visually compelling. There is no correct way to read her work—its importance lies in its ability to raise questions about the ways in which personhood is granted to people living with intellectual disabilities.

## PART ONE: THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY AND THE DEMANDS OF LIFE WRITING

### THE THREE MODELS OF DISABILITY

In the 1980s, disability rights activists began to distinguish between different representations of disability. As disabilities have always been a part of the human experience, they have always been represented by humans in art, literature, media, and science. Activists in the United States and the United Kingdom identified three main “models” of disability: the moral model, the medical model, and the social model. Each of these models is indicative of a certain mode of thought, and thus conceives of and represents disability in a distinctive way.

The moral model of disability has had the longest history, and is arguably the most pervasive of the three models. According to the moral model, disability is either the result or portrayal of a moral failing. In other words, it could be the product of karma, the expression of a divine punishment, or a physical manifestation of a dishonorable quality (Shakespeare 266). Either way, a disability is a negative characteristic that a person obtains because of some wrongdoing or immorality. The moral model chooses to rationalize the occurrence of disability by understanding it as a form of punishment, meaning that anyone with disabilities automatically has some moral flaw or punishable quality. Moreover, in prescribing certain personality traits to bodily characteristics, the moral model makes the trait of disability into the defining

characteristic of the person. All people with that trait are then characterized in the same way, and automatically denied their own personhood and individuality (Couser 2009, 22).

#### THE MEDICAL MODEL

Following the Enlightenment, disability began to be viewed in terms of biology and medicine, as opposed to morality (Shakespeare). With further developments in science and medicine, disability came to be understood as a biological defect, or medical problem that ought to be fixed. Thus arose the medical model of disability, which has dominated discourse for the past couple hundred of years. Scholar Lenard Davis discusses the emergence of the medical model in *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. He looks to statistics to examine the development of the concept of “normalcy” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Davis, Adolphe Quetelet, a French statistician, used statistics to determine the qualities of the “average man” by averaging all of the physical and moral qualities of every man from a given country. As this was a time of “bourgeois hegemony,” the idea of the average, or bourgeois, man became the new ideal, and thus the norm (26).

Once a conception of normalcy was established, the idea of the non-normal, or a “nonstandard subpopulation” subsequently emerged (30). Moreover, when Sir Francis Galton changed the name of the statistical bell curve from the ‘error curve’ to the ‘normal distribution curve,’ he allowed for everything on the sides of the bell curve to become “distributions of a trait” instead of “errors” (33). Galton also divided the bell curve into quartiles so that he could rank the different parts of the curve. This division eliminated the idea of the average as an ideal, and allowed for a “hegemonic vision of what the human body should be” (35). The extremes on one side of the curve thus became extremely desirable traits (leading to the development of eugenics), and the extremes on the other side of the curve became undesirable, faulty, and

deficient traits. People with disabilities, who fall on the later section of the curve, were now medical anomalies that needed to be fixed or erased.

While in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the end of the Nazi regime, very few would claim to be proponents of eugenics, the medical model continued to view disability as something to be cured and/or eliminated. Arthur Frank discusses the impact of the medical model in his book *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics*. Frank argues that during the modern period, the medical narrative dominated over all other illness narratives. The story told by the physician, the medical charts, and the medical world, became the official story from which to judge the validity of all the other stories surrounding the illness. The medical narrative is the dominant narrative, and the objective is always to cure, and find a way back to “normal.”

With the medical narrative dominating over all other narratives, the voice of people living with illnesses is made invisible. As Frank demonstrates, however, illness interrupts people’s previously held life trajectory. It disrupts their life and their life story, causing “narrative wreckage” (55). Following this narrative wreckage, there is a demand for new stories—for people living with illness to narrate their new, changing lives. The medical model makes such narration impossible, and so Frank argues that it is the postmodern responsibility to allow these voices and stories to emerge, and in doing so, to allow people to reclaim their voices, their lives, and their stories. Frank analyzes different types of illness memoirs, written by those living with the illness, and how they are able to potentially reject the medical model.

#### THE SOCIAL MODEL

Frank’s argument applies directly to people with disabilities, whose narratives have also been dominated by the medical world. In 1983, disability rights activist Mike Oliver coined the term, “social model of disability” (Shakespeare 267). As opposed to the moral or medical model,

which claim disability is a reflection of a moral issue or the result of medical ailments, the social model of disability looks at how disability is impacted and even created by society. Importantly, the social model distinguishes between the word “impairment” and the word “disability.” It defines impairment as that “which is found in the body” and disability as that “which is located in the social response to, or cultural construction of, impairment” (Couser 2009, 26). The social model of disability essentially aims to reconfigure how disability is understood by demonstrating the ways that society determines disability.

As beneficial as the social model is, disability studies scholars like G. Thomas Couser and Tom Shakespeare have outlined several problems with the model. Couser, for example, expresses the concern that the social model turns people with disabilities into victims, since it defines “their condition as oppression” (Couser 2009, 29). The social model states that people with disabilities are oppressed by inaccessible societies, potentially making people with disabilities victims of society, instead of active agents who can determine their own lives. Similarly, in placing society as the determinant of disability, the social model “risks implying that impairment is not a problem” (Shakespeare 200). While the medical model can result in the dehumanization of people with disabilities, the medical world is still necessary, and risks being ostracized in the social model.

Despite these limitations of the social model, it is still the most empowering representation of disability. It not only “[challenges] the very norms that marginalize and stigmatize disabled people” but it also gives voice to people with disabilities, providing them with the opportunity to speak out and call for change (Couser 2009, 30). The social model allows people with disabilities to enter into the conversation, and vocalize the changes they want to see happen. Like the illness narratives Frank discusses, life writing—especially autobiography—has

become an important way for people with disabilities to enter into this conversation. Through narrative, people with disabilities are able to reclaim their voices from the medical/moral models of disability, and inspire social change.

## THE DISABILITY MEMOIR

In the past few decades, there has been a vast increase in the number of memoirs published and brought to the literary market. Prior to the 1990s, most memoirs were written by people already known to the public. Memoirs gave the public an insider look into the lives of people of interest. As a result, the “somebody memoir”—a memoir written by a “somebody,” or well-known person—already has an audience before publication. Starting in the nineties, however, began a boom of memoirs written by people who were not famous or previously known. Memoir scholar G. Thomas Couser, using the terms created by Lorraine Adams in an article for the *Washington Monthly*, classifies these newly popular autobiographies as the “nobody memoir,” as opposed to the “somebody memoir.” Unlike the “somebody memoir,” the “nobody memoir” must build its audience through publicity and reviews. The memoir boom of the past couple of decades is the result of an increase in the publication and popularity of the “nobody memoir.”

In *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing*, Couser singles out a third type of memoir, which he calls the “some-body memoir.” This type of autobiography places the body itself at the crux of the narrative. It is about the body—hence the name “some-*body*”—and recounts the experience of someone who is/lives in a “particular body,” often a disabled body (2). Arthur Frank, in his discussion of illness narratives, explains that an autobiography written by a person with an illness is not just about the ill body, but it is told through the ill body. The embodied experienced guides and dictates the story, determining the shape, form, and even



diction of the story. In disability memoirs, the experience of embodiment similarly influences the way that the author tells the story. In that capacity, the importance of memoirs about disability lies in their ability to force readers to face their own bodies and the values people maintain regarding bodies. Disability memoirs question basic assumptions about what it means to be a human, citizen, and member of a society.

Despite the impact disability memoirs can have, they still only appeal to readers when they conform to certain stereotypes, “preferred plots and rhetorical schemes” (Couser 2009, 44). A memoir garners a large audience when it is about someone interesting and different. Memoirs written by people with disabilities should fall under this category, however what makes them interesting and different is what Western culture “devalues” (10). Thus, a lot of disability life writing conforms to certain rhetorical schemes in order to appeal to an audience. Couser outlines the four representations, which he finds to be predominant, in the chapter “Rhetoric and Self-Representation in Disability Memoir.” He concludes the chapter with a final rhetorical scheme that he believes is positive and beneficial to people with disabilities.

#### RHETORICAL SCHEMES

The first rhetoric Couser discusses is the “triumph over adversity” story (33). In these narratives, the person with disabilities is able to overcome their disabilities through strong will and resolve. Usually, the person with disabilities can be characterized as a Supercrip, meaning that they are able to use their disabilities in a “positive way,” and do amazing things despite, or because of, their disabilities. Couser contends that because the triumph over adversity paradigm is not representative of most people of disabilities, it further stigmatizes those who cannot be “super” while disabled. Moreover, it understands disability to be a problem that can be (and needs to be) solved by the individual him/herself, without societal changes. The next rhetoric

Couser examines, the “gothic rhetoric,” views disability with horror and disgust, as something to be “shunned or avoided” (34). These narratives are often written by people who have been cured or rehabilitated, and are no longer disabled. When they reflect on their disabilities, they do so with gothic horror and revulsion—relieved to be living a life without disabilities. The problems with the gothic rhetoric are obvious: it turns disability into something to be feared and disgusted.

Couser also briefly discusses the “rhetoric of spiritual compensation,” in which the person with disabilities goes to religion in order to find compensation for a life with disabilities. Again, disabilities are seen as something to be endured—a negative aspect of life that becomes a punishment. Lastly, Couser analyzes the “the rhetoric of nostalgia.” The author in these narratives is often severely disabled or near the end of life, and the disability itself inspires the author to reflect on life before the disability. Couser argues that this rhetorical scheme marks a clear distinction between life before disability and life with disability. Moreover, in the constant reminiscing about the past, it suggests that life with disabilities is not really life at all.

Each of these rhetorical schemes demonstrates the fact that disability life writing is not automatically beneficial for people with disabilities. Life writing gives people with disabilities voice—it allows them to enter into the conversation about their lives, and speak with the rest of the world about their experience of embodiment and their marginalization. While this essential opportunity is more open now than it has ever been, that does not mean that people with disabilities are all able to enter into the conversation in the same way. As Couser’s discussion of the different rhetorical schemes demonstrates, there are certain story lines that people are interested in, and anything else is more or less dismissed. People with disabilities may be reclaiming their bodies through life writing, but only those with certain stories, or certain

disabilities, are able to enter into the literary market and reclaim their bodies through the practice of life writing.

In the end of Couser's chapter on rhetoric in disability memoir, he discusses one final type of disability memoir, the "rhetoric of emancipation," which he believes is indicative of the potential of disability life writing. The narrative Couser discusses, *I Raise My Eyes to Say Yes*, is co-authored by Ruth Sienkiewicz-Mercer, a woman with cerebral palsy, and her friend Steve Kaplan, who she met in an educational program. The memoir details the struggles Sienkiewicz-Mercer faced after being misdiagnosed as mentally retarded and institutionalized in a state hospital where she had no opportunity for education, rehabilitation, or development. She learned to communicate with people using eye contact and her vocal chords, two main parts of her body she could control. Couser identifies her gaze in contrast with the medical gaze that misdiagnosed her and institutionalized her. Her gaze has a political connotation: she uses it to communicate with others—a mental capacity the medical world had deemed her incapable of.

Nevertheless, Sienkiewicz-Mercer's story does not fall into the "triumph over adversity" paradigm because, while she finds a way to fight back against the system that has institutionalized her, she does not "overcome" her disability. Rather, Couser contends that her narrative is able to expose what life with disabilities is like for people who do not usually have any opportunity to communicate with the rest of the world. In that capacity, the memoir represents disability as a "prejudicial construct of a normative culture" rather than as a flaw or deficiency (47). It works with the disability rights movement, critiquing the construction of disability in society and looking at how it could be changed and improved upon. Narratives like *I Raise My Eyes to Say Yes* thus emancipate people with disabilities, rather than further stigmatizing them and constricting them to stereotypes.

In Couser's analysis of *I Raise My Eyes to Say Yes*, he briefly touches upon the constraints of the actual form of autobiography. While Couser praises the narrative of emancipation, he is aware of the fact that autobiography is a limiting form that encourages an individualistic mentality. Because Sienkiewicz-Mercer was not capable of physically writing her own memoir, she required the help of someone to co-author the narrative with her. As Couser briefly notes, these very facts

“...[suggest] not the limitations of people with disabilities but those of autobiography as an accessible medium of self-representation. That is, it suggests that autobiography as traditionally conceived, with its inherent valorization of individualism and autonomy, presents its own barriers to people with disabilities. The book communicates both the limitations of language and the liberation of access to it.” (45)

Life writing can be an emancipating act, but it is only accessible to certain people with certain abilities. Not only are those who cannot represent themselves using written language then denied voice, but they are also consequently deemed unaware and unintelligent. Life writing assumes that to be a knowing, rational human is to tell. Sienkiewicz-Mercer is re-granted her humanity once she demonstrates that she has intellect and is able to narrate her life story, even though she requires a translator to bring her thoughts to the rest of the world. The movement of life writing conflates intelligence with the ability to communicate—potentially with the help of a translator—verbally or in writing. It implies that knowledge is contingent on one's ability to express oneself using a specific type of language.

## INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY AND LIFE WRITING

The social model understands disability to be influenced and determined by the society at large. The impairment does not cause the disability, but rather, the disability exists because the society and environment are not equipped to accommodate different impairments and different

levels of ability. Unlike physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities are assumed to be “a label identifying a level of intelligence significantly lower than average that affects a person’s ability to meet the cultural and social expectations of his or her contemporaries” (Carey 13). While a person with physical abilities can “meet the cultural and social expectations of his or her contemporaries” as long as the society provides proper accommodations, people with intellectual disabilities, according to this commonly held definition, exist below the “average” person, regardless of societal accommodations (13). However, as disability rights scholars like Allison Carey have explained, intellectual disability is also affected by the society and environment. Carey argues it is impossible to declare that an intellectually disabled person is significantly less intelligent than a person of “normal” intelligence because s/he may be more or less disabled depending on the social context, the access to education s/he has had as an intellectually disabled person, and the general ways in which society has intersected with his/her growth and development as a person. Moreover, “intelligence” and “rationality” are incredibly subjective terms, and dependent on the situation.

#### HISTORICAL ROOTS

The assumption that people with intellectual disabilities are inferior to those with “normal” intellectual capabilities is rooted in the liberal political philosophy of the Enlightenment (Carey). According to Locke’s theory of the social contract, humans (i.e. men) are rational and autonomous beings. They formed civilization and government in order to ensure their inalienable rights, and protect themselves from the possibility of tyranny and corruption. Not only does this theory prioritize the individual, rational male, but it also implies that such qualities are a necessary prerequisite to civil rights and legal equality. Most civil rights movements, such as the disability rights movement, have had to fight against this theory and

prove that marginalized populations are also deserving of legal equality. For example, disability rights activists used feminist theory as a stepping stone to demonstrate that humans are relational beings who rely on many different support systems in order to survive. In that capacity, disability rights activists, like women's rights activists, worked to dismantle the idea that personhood is necessarily linked to autonomy.

Since the start of the disability rights movement, it has been easier for activists and scholars to explain the relational and social models in reference to people with non-intellectual disabilities. Because their disabilities are mainly physical, they are still "rational" humans, and they still have the mental capacity that liberal political philosophy requires for personhood. People with intellectual disabilities (ID), on the other hand, not only may rely on caregiving from others, but they are also not considered "rational." In fact, as Ann Fudge Schormans notes, people with ID are often not considered "knowers" or "knowable" (Schormans 2005, 113). In other words, because of the intellectual abilities that they may be lacking, it is assumed that they cannot create, retain, or be receptive to knowledge. As a result, they cannot be knowing or known by other people.

In the article "Biographical versus Biological Lives: Auto/biography and Non-Speaking Persons Labelled Intellectually Disabled," Schormans goes over the history of institutionalization of people with ID in order to explain how they were stripped of the categorization as "knowers." Schormans explains that institutions were first created during the Renaissance with the goal of educating people with intellectual disabilities, and protecting them from a society that did not know how to properly care for them. While secluding a population because of physical or mental differences is problematic, institutions were not meant to be the dark, stifling, immoral places they became. This transition occurred during the Enlightenment,

when people with disabilities began to be seen as a threat to eugenics and the advancement of the human race. It was no longer believed that they could develop into “normal” people through education, so they were instead warehoused and kept hidden from society. As scientific techniques such as IQ tests began to be used to diagnose people, those deemed intellectually disabled were further categorized as unknowledgeable and inferior to “normal” people.

The intellectual qualities a person has that allow the medical world to diagnosis him or her as intellectually disabled do not, however, mean that said person is incapable of knowledge. Schormans writes, “...we cannot assume people ‘do not know’ simply on the basis of an IQ score” (111). Nevertheless, people with intellectual disabilities are “presumed devoid of the capacity and means of knowing, and understood as objects of knowledge instead of as knowing subjects” (Schormans 2014, 172). They are deemed incapable of having lives, and moreover, narrating their lives. They are always spoken for and by other people, instead of given the chance to speak about themselves. Intellectual disabilities are assumed to prevent one from having self-knowledge, and expressing this knowledge and understanding to the rest of the world. As a result, people with ID are considered unable to have lives worth narrating, and the ability to produce a piece of life writing.

Furthermore, people with intellectual disabilities are considered incapable of understanding the narratives others have created about their lives, and thus unable to react to misrepresentations, or have an opinion about the ways in which they are represented. To further complicate matters, most representations of people with intellectual disabilities are created by the medical world, a place where people with ID are already medicalized, patronized, and even infantilized. For example, intellectually disabled people’s opinions, thoughts, and preferences are rarely considered when their photographs are taken for “medical purposes.” They are thought to

be incapable of understanding being stared at, and unable to share the gaze and stare back. They are thus objects with a “biological history, not a biographical life” (171).

In Schormans discussion of people with intellectual disabilities, she focuses on those who are non-verbal. Schormans argues that those who are non-verbal are further regarded as “unknowing” because “intelligence is considered to be co-extensive with speech” (Schormans 2005, 111). During childhood development, the development of speech is one of the most anticipated events. Children who do not develop on the established timeline are usually brought to doctors to test for possible intellectual disabilities. The widely accepted view is that when children do not develop speech *on time*, they could potentially have many *problems*. However, psychologists—Schormans cites Piaget, Polanyu, Bogdan and Taylor—demonstrate in their research that “intelligence exists independently of verbal articulation” (111). Just because a person cannot verbally communicate their thoughts does not mean that they are not thinking. In fact, non-verbal people have many ways of communicating with people beyond verbal and written communication. Given the proper tools, non-verbal people can demonstrate their intellectual abilities.

## CO-AUTHORED AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

The memoir *I Raise My Eyes to Say Yes* is an example of the communication that can happen when a non-verbal person with disabilities is given the tools to communicate in other ways. Sienkiewicz-Mercer demonstrated her intellectual abilities through her communications with others using eye contact and sounds. Using those methods, she was able to establish relationships with fellow residents at the institution and with staff members. In “Biographical Versus Biological Lives,” Schormans analyzes the possible ways in which non-verbal people



with intellectual disabilities, like Sienkiewicz-Mercer, could produce life writing. Like Couser, Schormans believes that non-verbal people with ID would be able to gain recognition and become visible members of society through life writing. She suggests that, with the help of an assistant who is attentive and skilled in interpreting non-verbal communication, non-speaking people with ID would be able to produce life writing. Schormans does not propose an exact method for non-verbal ID people and their assistants to follow, but rather suggests multiple ways life writing could be accomplished: “It is possible to give voice to people without words, and to gain access to the lives of even the most inarticulate subjects” (119).

According to the website for *I Raise My Eyes to Say Yes*, “Ruth ‘dictated’ sentences, messages, comments, and ideas to Steve [her friend and co-author] on her word boards. He would then write passages, and they worked together through countless rewrites to formulate her narrative” (“About the Authors”). Couser views the memoir as a narrative of emancipation because it gives voice to a person who would normally be silenced. Moreover, people with intellectual disabilities are so often represented in medical books and photographs that claim knowledge about life with ID without actually consulting the people who live the lives. Sienkiewicz-Mercer uses her gaze to prove that she has intellectual abilities, and reclaims her body and the representation of her body by co-authoring this memoir about her life and the experience of living with disabilities.

Even though Sienkiewicz-Mercer is potentially able to emancipate herself through the narrative, the autobiography is not a perfect example of what life writing should be like for people with ID. In fact, the memoir is more of an example of the limitations of life writing. The only way Sienkiewicz-Mercer could produce a publishable life narrative was through co-authorship. She needed someone to transcribe her thoughts and create a narrative that others

would be interested in reading. Kaplan was able to successfully work with Sienkiewicz-Mercer, and the resulting narrative was a faithful, accurate piece of work. Nevertheless, as Couser points out, because the memoir is written in words that Sienkiewicz-Mercer could have never produced herself, it both “hypernormalizes” Sienkiewicz-Mercer, and “masks or erases the disability that has so profoundly shaped [her] life” (Couser 2004, 39). The whole point of life writing is to give a person the opportunity to speak for themselves, rather than be spoken about or for by others. However, as Couser notes: “Representation in the political sense and representation in the mimetic sense seem fundamentally at odds: in his desire to speak for her, Kaplan speaks as her in a way that mis-speaks her” (39). People with intellectual abilities, especially those who are non-verbal, are not able to produce a piece of life writing that abides by the standards and structure of autobiography and is publishable. Co-authorship can be a way to bring these voices into the public, however, co-authorship ends up misrepresenting and fundamentally changing said voices.

The flaws of co-authorship point to the flaws of using life writing as a means of becoming a visible member of society. People with ID are believed to have no knowledge, especially about themselves. They are thus thought to be unable to narrate their lives. Life writing provides people with ID the opportunity to demonstrate that they have self-knowledge, and are capable of self-representation. However, this means that in order to be considered a rational, thinking-being, one must be able to narrate and tell who one is. It is only if you can “tell” that you are considered a knowing human. Many people with ID, especially those who are non-verbal, are unable to “tell” in the accepted, prescribed ways. While co-authorship makes this telling possible, it also risks “making, taking, and faking lives” (Couser 2004, 34). The problem, then, is not that there are not enough resources for people with ID to write/publish life stories,

but that people with ID are only granted personhood if they are able to narrate their lives through a form like life writing.

## IS LANGUAGE THE PROBLEM?

In 2007, disability rights activist Mel Baggs<sup>1</sup> published an eight-minute video on YouTube that confronts these exact issues regarding personhood, knowledge, and the ability to narrate. The video, which is split into two sections, is about the language sie communicates in, and the language sie must communicate in in order to be categorized as a “knower.” In the first part of the video, Baggs communicates with the world around her in hir “native language” (3:17). Sie circles two of hir fingers around the knob of a dresser, sie waves a crumpled receipt in front of hir window, and sie rubs hir face against an opened book. Baggs set the background sound of all of this to a track of hir singing “eee” in various tones. The second part of the video is introduced as “A translation,” and in it Baggs uses a synthesized voice generated by a software application to “translate” the first half of hir video and offer commentary on what sie understands to be a verbal/written language centric society.

Through the video, Baggs attempts to demonstrate the confining nature of spoken and written language, and argue that personhood should not be determined by one’s ability to communicate in such forms. Hir distinction between hir “native language” and “typical language” asks viewers to question their conception of language in general. Moreover, Baggs’ argues that one cannot assume hir level of “intelligence” because hir native language is not the one that society typically prioritizes. Of course, there is a difference between communicating with the world and communicating with other people. Baggs notes that hir language is about

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<sup>1</sup> Mel Baggs’ preferred gender pronouns are sie/hir/hirs.

connecting with his environment, as opposed to “designing words or even visual symbols for people to interpret” (3:35). For that reason, she warns viewers against attempting to find symbolism in the different ways she interacts with his environment. Just because she is not using verbal or written language, does not mean that the language she is using must be translated into verbal or written language. In that capacity, Baggs questions the tendency to always try to understand non-verbal communication in verbal/written language. Moreover, by showing the viewer his way of experiencing the world, Baggs comments on the way knowledge, and thus personhood, is judged and determined by one’s ability to communicate linguistically.

## PART TWO: VISUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND OUTSIDER ART

### VISUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS LIFE WRITING

Unlike written and verbal forms of communication, the visual arts are often a more open form of expression, and more easily accessed by populations with varying abilities. Visual autobiography, then, is potential solution for people with ID—especially those who are non-verbal and would like to produce life writing. In an essay for the journal *Auto/biography* about Frida Kahlo's self-portraits, scholar Mimi Y. Yang gives a detailed definition of visual autobiography, starting with an in-depth discussion of the etymology of the word autobiography. “graphia” / “graphein” is the Latin and Greek root of “-graphy” / “-graphic”, and means representation through “writing, drawing, description, discourse, picture, and lines” (122). Yang defines autobiography as an account or portrayal of one's life, or a part of one's life. In autobiography, one is “recasting one's own images from the past and [transmitting] memories and ideas for the present and even future through imagery reconstruction” (122). Based on the etymology of “-graphy” / “graphic”, this recasting can be done through the written narrative form, or through visual images.

In order to portray the self, Yang argues that one must have some “self-knowledge” or “self-consciousness” and be capable of seeing and recognizing one's image (124). The understanding of the self is thus initially visual, so “pictorial presentations of the self” are even arguably more natural types of autobiography than written presentations (124). Autobiography is still typically linked to the written narrative form, but Yang demonstrates the reasoning behind and potential for visual autobiography. The specific type of visual autobiography Yang discusses is portraiture—a clear-cut, obvious example of visual autobiography since the artist is literally

portraying his/her image in the work—her arguments, however, can be applied to other, less concretely representative visual and performance arts. It may be more difficult for the viewer to understand a visual autobiography that is not so direct, such as a piece of performance art, or a more abstract painting, yet such works can be just as expressive of a self.

Not only are the visual and performance arts a feasible form of life “writing,” but as Sarah Brophy and Janice Hladki demonstrate in their introduction to *Embodied Politics in Visual Autobiography*, visual autobiography also challenges conceptions of embodiment, aesthetics, and material reality. Brophy and Hladki draw on several other theorists in order to argue that visual autobiographies inspire cultural and political changes. The authors understand visual autobiography to be constantly questioning cultural norms of embodiment: “[visual autobiographies] agitate heart, head, and gut, making it possible for them to incite what, we argue, are newly critical modes of learning and remembrance” (6).

Following the language of scholar Jill Bennett, the authors even call the communication that occurs in visual autobiography, “visual language” (19). It is the visual language, then, that is able to question the current cultural pedagogy, and incite changes. Towards the end of the introduction, the authors write,

“It is precisely the quality of riskiness—a quality inherent in visual autobiographers’ embracing of strategies that can make the frames that “govern” embodied reality “come apart”—that allows us to characterize contemporary visual auto/biographical projects as significant and potentially transformative forms of culture pedagogy.” (26)

While Brophy and Hladki do not analyze visual autobiography in comparison to written autobiography, and do not present visual autobiography as a solution to the exclusionary aspects of written autobiography, their interpretation of visual autobiography serves both purposes. They see visual autobiography as having the potential to completely disrupt the ways that bodies are

conceptualized and categorized. In their introduction, Brophy and Hladki demonstrate the possibility of visual autobiography, and the potential of communicating through visual language. Their work argues that not only is it possible to have a visual autobiography, but visual autobiographies are able to question the exact issues (embodiment, aesthetics, material reality) that disability studies focuses on.

#### VISUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Just as there are few examples of written autobiographies by people with ID, there are also few examples of visual autobiography by people with ID. In 1990, professors Dorothy Atkinson and Fiona Williams of Open University in England compiled an anthology of autobiographical works by people with ID to use in a course at the Department of Health and Social Welfare. Aware that representations of people with ID are rarely created by people with ID, the editors set out to collect autobiographical works (prose, poetry, art) by people with ID. Their students would then be able to learn about living with intellectual disabilities from people with ID, rather than from medical professionals or outside observers.

The editors accepted submissions from people across the country, and organized the anthology into the several themes they found throughout the works. While the majority of the pieces are in prose and poetry, the “Creativity, imagination, and fantasy” chapter is filled with examples of visual autobiography. One clear example is Alan Williamson’s self-portrait in oil paint (see fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> Without going into an analysis of the work, there are several elements of the portrait that seem significant: the left hand is large and prominent, while the right hand is nearly non-existent; there is a mask-like head figure to the right of the head; there are five hatch marks

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<sup>2</sup> In order to allow the contributors to the anthology to truly be representing themselves, Atkinson and Williams did not provide any biographical information about the contributors, aside from the person’s name and the center they are a part of (unless the person chose to remain anonymous).

to the left of the head; the list goes on. “Person 1” and “Person 2”, both felt tip drawings by Howard Oldfield are another example of visual autobiography (see fig. 2). While both are drawings of people, they are not necessarily portraits—or at least the titles do not make that implication. These are both abstract representations of people: the body and head are oval shapes; they both have three button-like shapes on the bodies; and the feet are more evocative of webbed claw feet, as opposed to human feet. From the specific features of these pieces, there are a myriad of thoughts and emotions that could have been expressed, and that are received by the viewer.



Fig. 1. Williamson, Alan. *Self-portrait*. n.d. Oil paint. Atkinson, Dorothy and Fiona Williams, eds. *Know Me As I Am*. London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1990. Print.

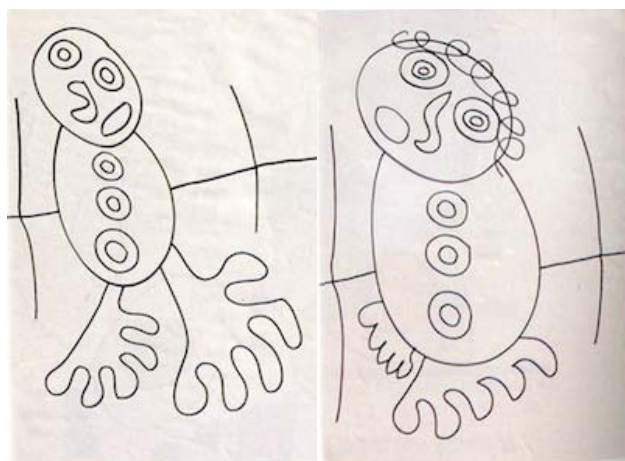


Fig. 2. Oldfield, Howard. *Person 1 and Person 2*. n.d. Felt tip. Atkinson, Dorothy and Fiona Williams, eds. *Know Me As I Am*. London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1990. Print.

In dance, just as in visual arts, the artist can express emotions, or even a story, to the viewer. Over the past decade, dance classes for people with Down syndrome have grown in popularity, although there is no literature on the autobiographical potential of dance for people with Down syndrome. Scholars like Rosemarie Garland Thomson have written extensively on disabled performance art, articulating the self-representation that is possible in performance art



as opposed to other forms of autobiography. Garland Thomson calls dance performances “platforms for profoundly liberating assertions and representations of the self in which the artist controls the terms of the encounter (335). The artist in performance art determines how his/her body is represented in a very literal way because the body is the center of the performance piece. Disabled performance art allows for “individual expression” and “an opportunity to protest cultural images of disabled people” (335).

A FOX 9 News segment on Mikayla Holmgren, a nineteen-year-old dancer with Down syndrome, addresses these possibilities of performance art. The FOX news reporter does not mention any potential for self-representation—in fact, the video presents her as an anomaly and the reporter often infantilizes Holmgren—yet, the video does show clips of Holmgren dancing and mentions that she choreographs many of her own dances. While on stage, Holmgren has control over the way she presents her body to the audience. In her own choreographed pieces, she is also able to express herself as she chooses. Holmgren is an example of the successes people with Down syndrome can achieve when given the opportunity, and her performances are a powerful way for her to present her body and express herself.

Both of these examples of visual autobiography allowed people with intellectual disabilities to express themselves and determine how they are represented to others. Their autobiographical works convey the fact that people with ID have lives, are aware of their lives, and think of themselves as people first. At the same time, however, like written autobiography, they determine knowledge and personhood by one’s ability to narrate one’s life and express oneself. By expressing themselves, the artists demonstrate their self-knowledge. Again, personhood is contingent on one’s ability to tell.

## OUTSIDER ART AND INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

The goal of *Know Me As I Am* was to give people with ID the opportunity to represent themselves as they wished. It is meant to include the participants in discussions about their lives, contesting the tendency to make assumptions about people with ID without any first-hand knowledge. In the introduction, Atkinson and Williams clearly state that the authors and artists in the anthology are not outsiders. They are often treated as outsiders, but, again, the anthology means to demonstrate the importance for inclusive discussions *with* people with ID. Nevertheless, these types of works tend to be categorized by the rest of the world as “Outsider Art”—art produced by people, usually with mental illness or intellectual disabilities, who have no artistic background. Art, including visual autobiography, by people with ID is rarely simply considered art. The very presence of intellectual disabilities places the artwork in the category of Outsider Art. If the disability memoir is the *some body* memoir, than art by people with ID is the *some mind* art.

### ORIGINS OF OUTSIDER ART & CONTEMPORARY RECEPTION

The term outsider art entered the artistic vernacular in the 1940s, following psychiatrists’ interest in the early 1900s about the art that patients in psychiatric wards were producing. In the 1920s, Dr. Hans Prinzhorn of Germany and Dr. Walter Morgenthaler of Switzerland published the first studies about psychiatric patients’ artwork. As psychiatrists, however, they focused less on the quality of the artwork and more on what the artwork revealed about the patients’ psyches. It was not until the mid 1940s, when Jean Dubuffet coined the term “Art Brut,” that the artwork produced by these people began to be looked at more seriously and through a less psychological lens. Dubuffet, along with several other artists, set out to collect artwork made by people who were untrained, often isolated from culture and society, and had no conception of “art” or

“museums” (either because of their isolation, mental illness, or a combination of the two). Importantly, “art brut” is not created with the intention of sharing it publically, gaining fame, spreading ideas, or any of the other reasons that may inspire an *artist* to create *art*. Because the person lacks these intentions, and has never received the training “necessary” to become an artist, the art that s/he creates is “raw,” “pure,” and unaffected by society. Roger Cardinal introduced the term, translating it to “Outsider Art,” to the United States and the English-speaking world in 1972. At this time, the Outsider Art collected by people like Dubuffet and Cardinal was mainly produced by patients living in insane asylums who had been diagnosed as mentally ill.

Today, Outsider Art is still a popular term. Publications like *Raw Vision*, for example, maintain the same definition of Outsider Art, and are committed to bringing Outsider Artists into the public eye. The Museum of Everything, a British based endeavor with exhibitions all across Europe, prides itself in being the “the world's first and only wandering institution for the untrained, unintentional, undiscovered and unclassifiable artists of modern times” (“About”). Similarly, the annual Outsider Art Fair in New York City exhibits a large number of Outsider Artists in a weeklong fair. In an article about this past year’s Outsider Art Fair, director Rebecca Hoffman explains that Outsider Art has become an umbrella term for her to categorize ““self-taught or non-academic work,”” whether that be because a person is a mathematician by training with no background in art, ““a member of an aboriginal tribe in Western Australia, a herdsman for her entire life, who painted prolifically for her final 14 years of life,”” or a person who lives with disabilities, including mental illness (Frank).

Hoffman’s definition conveys the fact that, unlike other categorizers of art such as time periods, styles, and movements, Outsider Art is entirely dependent on the artist’s background,

rather than the type of art that the artist produces. A herdsman from an aboriginal tribe who creates abstract sculptures, and a person with bipolar disorder who paints self-portraits could be exhibited side by side merely because they share a background that classifies their artwork as “raw,” “naïve,” and “pure.” Furthermore, while Hoffman purposefully expands the term to include those who are not diagnosed with mental illness, Outsider Art is still mostly associated with work created by those with mental illness or other disabilities.

### CRITICISM OF OUTSIDER ART

The terms Outsider Art and Outsider Artist are still highly regarded, but this broad method of categorization has been criticized for enforcing stereotypes and even exploiting the artists. In reviews of the Outsider Art Fair, for example, critics question the delineations drawn between those on the “inside” and those on the “outside,” and who gets to decide these categories. Those who argue that the distinction should not exist, maintain that Outsider Art should be included in museums in the same way that other art is exhibited. It should be categorized by style and movement, not by the biographical background of the artist. Nevertheless, the large, and ever growing, number of exhibitions and studies on Outsider Art demonstrate the fact that Outsider Art holds a strong place in the art world, and is not leaving anytime soon.

In Outsider Art, the biography of the artist is more important than the formal qualities of the art itself. The art can only be “raw” and “pure” if the artist has a certain life history. This hazy distinction between biography and art in Outsider Art is reminiscent of the discussions surrounding critic Arlene Croce’s term “victim art” to describe Bill T. Jones’ dance performance, “Still/Here.” Following Croce’s definition, “victim art” portrays the artist/performer as the victim, and forces the viewer to feel “sympathy, pity, intimidation and terror” (Berger 31).

Croce rejects “Still/Here” as art because it uses illness and suffering to “manipulate” the audience’s emotions. *The Crisis of Criticism*, a collection of essays about art and art criticism, responds to Croce’s extreme rejection of art by or with people who are suffering and/or living with illnesses. In Homi Bhabha response “Dance This Diss Around,” Bhabha argues that Croce, like proponents of Outsider Art, “fatally [confuses] the dancer with the dance” (46). Croce classified Jones’ piece as “victim art” because the performers themselves were ill. This very fact, for Croce, dominates over the performance itself and incites specific emotional reactions from the viewers. The biography of the artists determines the art itself. Responses like Bhabha’s point to the fact that an artist’s biography does not define the art, and the two should not be conflated when viewing and/or reviewing art.

“Still/Here” is not called Outsider Art because Jones is an established artist. Yet, like the word “victim,” the word “outsider” conflates biography with art. Outsider Art theorists use biography and psychoanalysis to give a narrative to work that was supposedly created without an intended meaning. Intentionality in art, however, is not a clear-cut concept. Disability studies scholar Tobin Siebers, in his book *Disability Aesthetics*, briefly examines the notion of intentionality. Siebers, following the work of W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley, explains that artists lack the ability to control both how their art is perceived and the meaning it holds for the viewer. Moreover, artists’ exact intentions can never be known, especially because they may change over time. Intentionality thus becomes a useless tool for understanding or interpreting art, seeing as it cannot be explicitly identified. Siebers then questions why it is used as a way of identifying something as art, or a person as an artist. If it is unidentifiable, it should not be a criterion for calling something art. Outsider Artists supposedly create art without intention, yet intention is an incredibly faulty method of categorization.

## ARTISTIC KNOWLEDGE

The whole idea of intention relies upon the supposition that intelligence, or even genius, is needed to create art (Siebers). Outsider Art supporters like Hoffman are careful to include “Outsiders” who do not have disabilities—namely intellectual disabilities or mental illness—yet their definition still relies on assumptions about knowledge by distinguishing between those who have artistic knowledge and those who do not. According to the definition of Outsider Art, aside from similar biographies, the unifying factor is a lack of formal artistic knowledge. Like intention, however, artistic knowledge is difficult to define and can manifest in various ways.

As I demonstrated in Part One, people with ID are considered unknowing. Because of their IQ level, and the post-Enlightenment preoccupation with autonomy and rationality, they are deemed incapable of knowledge about themselves, their surroundings, and their life. Similarly, Outsider Artists are considered bereft of any artistic knowledge. As a result of being withdrawn from mainstream art culture, and because of Western qualifications for artists, they are deemed incapable of producing works that can be categorized within the preexisting Western canon. Just as it is thought that people with ID cannot produce life writing because they do not have “knowledge,” Outsider Artists are considered incapable of producing art because they do not have “artistic knowledge.” Without going into definitions of what “art” is, it is safe to say that Outsider Artists are discriminated against in the art world because of the knowledge/lack of knowledge that they possess. While Outsider Art is definitely seen as a positive term to those who support it, it nevertheless makes this discriminating distinction.

Since people with ID are already considered incapable of intellect, their identification as artists is made even more impossible. Because the intellectual abilities of people with ID are already doubted, their ability to be creative and make art is also doubted. So, not only must

people with ID contend with the label “Outsider Artist,” but they must also first fight to be considered capable of producing art, whether or not that art is the “raw” and “pure” art of Outsider Art, or the “learned” and “purposeful” art of artists. Moreover, if their work is considered (outsider) art, their intellectual abilities raise the question of whether or not they are capable of creating art that means or expresses something. Non-verbal people especially raise these questions because they often cannot verbally communicate what they might be expressing in their artwork, if they are expressing anything at all.

These questions surrounding art produced by people with ID, along with the idea of intentionality in art, highlight this need for there to be a concrete message expressed in artistic works. In *Disability Aesthetics*, Siebers looks at how images challenge both our need to know and our need to then translate that knowledge into words. Images often have many meanings and cannot be described linguistically in an easy manner, such as a few words or sentences. Siebers suggests that the desire to understand an image in verbal/written language is a demonstration of the need to have control over the image. When images are “too complex to be read,” they “refuse this control” (122). They cannot be translated into verbal/written language, and as a result convey the limits of linguistic terminology. Outsider Art theorists place biographical meaning to works of art in an attempt to “read” the art. The art must “tell” something in order for it to be considered art. Siebers acknowledges the limits of linguistically understanding images, thus contesting the sentiment that artwork must always have a readable narrative.

The focus on the artist’s life story in presentations of Outsider Art demonstrates the demand for people to know themselves and be knowable to others. Concentrating on the life story allows critics to see the art as a telling of the artist’s life narrative, and thus a reflection of the artist’s self-knowledge and personhood. Like life writing and visual autobiography, Outsider

Art grants personhood to those who can tell, and requires the artist to be transparent—knowable—to the viewer. People with disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities, engage in life writing in order to be granted personhood. If they are unable to produce life writing, visual autobiography becomes another way for them to self-represent and become knowable to others. Artists with intellectual disabilities who are neither trained nor involved in the art world, however, are labeled Outsider Artists. Importantly, the label makes both the artist and the work understandable to the viewer, once again using “telling” as a qualifier for personhood.

While the theory behind Outsider Art further stigmatizes and ostracizes people with disabilities, the art itself is not to blame. When art by or about people with disabilities is looked at as art, not only Outsider Art, it can have profound effects. In *Disability Aesthetics*, Siebers analyzes disability’s place in and influence on modern art. He argues that disability is not just a subject or theme in art, a form of autobiography, or a method of making a political statement. He states that it is more than those because

“...disability is properly speaking an aesthetic value, which is to say, it participates in a system of knowledge that provides materials for and increases critical consciousness about the way that some bodies make other bodies feel. The idea of disability aesthetics affirms that disability operates both as a critical framework for questioning aesthetic presuppositions in the history of art and as a value in its own right important to future conceptions of what art is.” (20)

Disability in art can change the way aesthetics are conceived, and also inspire people to think about the myriad of ways that bodies can exist. It not only questions preexisting definitions of “art,” but it also encourages people to think critically about how bodies differ from one another, and the ways these differences make them feel. Outsider Art theory seeks to constantly put a definitive meaning to a piece of artwork. Siebers suggests that it is not always possible to “translate” a piece of artwork into words, but moreover it is simply enough to think about the emotional, physical, and/or philosophical response that the artwork incites.



## PART THREE: JUDITH SCOTT

### INTRODUCING JUDITH SCOTT

For many, Judith Scott (1943-2005) is one of the most famous Outsider Artists of the past two decades. Over the course of her artistic career, and continuing on past her death in 2005, Scott's reception as an artist has gone through a metamorphosis as critics and viewers alike have questioned her work, her intentions, and her status as an Outsider Artist. Scott's work begs the viewer to examine how narrative is imposed upon art made by people with intellectual disabilities, and the ways these narratives are then used to grant personhood to previously dehumanized people.

Like all Outsider Artists, Scott's biography has become almost as important as her actual work. It is an emotional story: heart warming, yet indicative of an incredibly unjust time in the United States. Scott and her fraternal twin sister were born in Ohio in 1943. At the age of seven, her parents sent her to an institution for the mentally disabled, in part because of a misdiagnosis. Scott, who had Down syndrome, also became nearly entirely deaf in her early years. Her family had not realized she had become deaf, interpreting her tendency to ignore the call of others as stubbornness. During testing to determine if Scott could be enrolled in school, her deafness went undiagnosed. The test was largely comprised of verbal questions, and Scott was as a result judged to have the intellectual capabilities of a two year old. As was customary of the times, Scott's parents sent her to an institution, where she would stay for the next 36 years. In 1985, Scott's twin sister Joyce, after a revelation brought on by a meditation retreat, decided to become Judith's legal guardian, and bring her out of the institution. Joyce brought Judith to her home in

Berkeley, California, and soon found her a group home for people with intellectual disabilities, where Judith could live as she wished (Morris).

Arguably most important to Judith Scott's artistic biography is Joyce's decision to enroll Judith in the Creative Growth Art Center in Oakland, California. The Creative Growth Art Center provides a space for people with disabilities to explore their artistic potentials. Professional artists and artists-in-residence teach methods and provide help to the participants. The Center also exhibits the participants' artwork, always alongside the artwork of the professional artists, so as to not heavily distinguish between the two. According to the narrative provided by Joyce and the employees at the Creative Growth, Judith was initially not particularly interested or involved in artistic endeavors. She produced a number of drawings, but nothing that she seemed passionate about. Judith's artistic career began after she observed a class taught by Sylvia Seventy, a fiber artist working at Creative Growth. During the class, Judith collected her own materials, and made her first piece of fiber art (see fig. 3). From that moment on, Judith would only create fiber art, and by the time of her death, she had produced over 200 pieces. Each of these pieces she would create by finding objects in the studio, such as keys, tubing, lamp shades, hats, sticks, and fans, and wrapping them with fiber, usually until the original objects are made invisible.



Fig. 3. Scott, Judith. *Untitled*. 1988. Fiber and found objects. Collection of Sylvia Seventy. © Creative Growth Art Center. (Photo: © Leon Borensztein). Morris, Catherine and Matthew Higgs, eds. *Judith Scott: Bound & Unbound*. New York: DelMonico Books, Prestel, 2014. Print.

## JUDITH SCOTT, OUTSIDER ARTIST

Scott's work started to gain attention in the late 1990s, particularly after John MacGregor published the book *Metamorphosis: the Fiber Art of Judith Scott: the Outsider Artist and the Experience of Down's Syndrome* (1999), bringing her work into the public eye across the globe. *Metamorphosis* is the first serious analysis of Scott's oeuvre, and guided how the rest of the world viewed her sculptures in the following years. MacGregor, a historian and psychoanalyst by training, had previously written about the history of Outsider Art by people with mental illnesses, looking specifically at how this art was "discovered" and how it became popularized. Following Outsider Art theory, his analysis of Scott's work focuses on potential biographical narratives he identifies in her pieces, as well as an exploration of Scott's understanding of herself as an artist.

In the introduction to *Metamorphosis*, MacGregor explains his interest in Scott's work, despite his lack of professional knowledge about both fiber art and women's art. For MacGregor, Scott's artwork challenged the assumptions he held about intellectually disabled people's capacity to be creative and make art. He became interested in Scott's sculptures on an aesthetic level, captivated by their "disturbing power," yet he was also hesitant to take on the project because of the limited ways he could communicate with Scott and thus obtain "sufficient evidence" to make his arguments (xiv, xv). Through extensive observation of Scott at Creative Growth and conversations with both Joyce and the staff at Creative Growth, MacGregor determines the intellectual capacities he believes Scott possess, questions how her disabilities allow/prevent her to create art, and examines the awareness he thinks she has of herself as an artist.

As a scholar of Outsider Art, MacGregor does not believe that artistic knowledge is necessary to create art, or at least Outsider Art. By definition, Outsider Artists do not have

artistic knowledge. From observing Scott, MacGregor concludes that she had no intention, awareness, or knowledge about the art she produced and what it meant. In that sense, Scott becomes a “true Outsider Artist” in MacGregor’s eyes (xiv). However, since Scott had Down syndrome, was deaf, and received almost no education, MacGregor wonders if she is even capable of producing art in the first place. He does not require that Outsider Artists have artistic knowledge, but he is unsure if someone with “serious mental retardation” can have the creativity necessary to produce art (2).

After many hours of observation, MacGregor concludes that Scott is capable of artistic creativity despite her intellectual disabilities and inability to communicate linguistically. Interestingly, MacGregor reaches this conclusion because he questions the association between language and thinking/knowledge. MacGregor repeatedly asks how thought or intellect is possible without language, whether that be “words or equivalent symbols” (179). This association between language and thought is exactly what Mel Baggs addresses in the video “In My Language.” Baggs argues that a person who does not think in a way that can be easily communicated with others, such as verbal, written, or sign language, should not be deemed incapable of thought all together. Following Baggs’ theory, MacGregor suggests that Scott thinks in “images, forms, colors, and tactile experiences” (179). While he believes that these non-communicative methods of thinking are inferior to thinking in words or symbols, he still importantly recognizes Scott as a thinking being capable of creativity despite her inability to communicate linguistically.

Due to Scott’s intellectual disabilities, however, MacGregor does not think that she was capable of intentionally conveying specific ideas in her artwork. Rather, he argues that through her art, Scott unconsciously communicated her desires and emotions. In his analysis of her work,

which leans on psychoanalytic interpretations, he focuses on representations of the human body, especially infants. In figure 4, for instance, MacGregor believes the cocoon-like structure reveals Scott's desire to protect and care for a baby. Moreover, he claims that the shape of the sculpture represents an actual infant body. MacGregor also argues that Scott's libido greatly influenced the passion and fervor with which she worked. Sexual drive, her desire, as a woman, for an infant, and her need for intimate relationships are all the main elements MacGregor identifies in Scott's work. As an Outsider Artist, however, Scott created these sculptures that hold these meanings in a "massively altered state of consciousness," and thus without intention (179). Each of her pieces, following psychoanalytic drive theory, emanates from her psychological drive for specific things, such as a baby.



Fig. 4. Scott, Judith. *Untitled*. 1989. Plate 19. MacGregor, John M. *Metamorphosis: the fiber art of Judith Scott: the outsider artist and the experience of Down's syndrome*. Oakland, Calif.: Creative Growth Art Center, 1999. Print.

In his conclusion, MacGregor definitively states that intentionality and "the conscious functioning of intellect" are not needed in order for a person to create art. He does not believe that Scott needed to be consciously telling her story in her artwork in order for her to be considered an Outsider Artist. In written and visual autobiography, the ability to narrate one's life becomes a prerequisite for personhood for people with disabilities. MacGregor also believes that narrative is critical to understanding the identity of a person. Since he does not think that

Scott had the intellectual capabilities to narrate, MacGregor identifies an unconscious narrative in her works of art. He uses her biography along with observations of her at work in order to impose certain narratives on her artwork and make her artwork *mean* something. By giving her artwork meaning, MacGregor is able to believe that Scott has meaning and is a person.

It is significant that MacGregor argues that a non-verbal person with intellectual disabilities is capable of creating art. Yet, his need to understand her artwork in terms of biography again demonstrates this demand for a person to be able to tell their life story—consciously or unconsciously—in order to be considered a person. Moreover, MacGregor’s conclusion that Scott “does not know that she is an artist, nor does she understand that the objects she creates are perceived by others as works of art” does not logically make sense considering Scott was working as a participant in an art studio (2). Interestingly, Syliva Seventy, the fiber artist who taught Scott, strongly believed that Scott had the “capacity to learn” (61). Seventy even thought that Scott could communicate verbally every once in a while. Essentially, Scott was able to prosper and develop her own individual style because Seventy believed she was intelligent and entirely capable of becoming an artist. Furthermore, Creative Growth does not consider its participants as Outsiders, and encourages artistic collaboration between the participants and staff. While Seventy gave Scott independence, she treated her as a fellow artist, and thus was not concerned with the possibility of influencing Scott. By definition, an Outsider Artist is isolated from society and cannot be a participant in an art studio. In several notes, MacGregor acknowledges this fact, yet because of Scott’s intellectual disabilities, he does not seem to think that it jeopardizes her status as an Outsider Artist.

*Metamorphosis* played a crucial role in bringing Scott’s work into the public eye on a global level. He importantly suggests that a person who does not have access to linguistic

terminology is still capable of thought. His use of biography in his analysis of Scott's work, however, demonstrates the tendency in Outsider Art to conflate biography with the artwork itself. Art by people with intellectual disabilities is rarely seen as just art. It must be understood in terms of the artist's biography as a way of establishing the artist's ability to narrate and, thus, the artist's personhood. Even though MacGregor does not believe Scott needed to be consciously narrating her life story in her artwork in order to be considered an (outsider) artist, he still can only understand her art if he associates an unconscious narrative with it.

### JUDITH SCOTT, EMERGING ARTIST

Outsider Art is by no means a disregarded term, but in the years following the publication of *Metamorphosis*, critics and scholars have contested the focus on intellectual abilities when looking at Judith Scott's work, and when looking at artwork by other artists with ID. Most notably, the Spanish documentary *¿Qué Tienes Debajo del Sombrero?/What's Under Your Hat?* directed by Lola Barrera and Iñaki Peñafiel (2008), presents Scott and several other artists of Creative Growth in an entirely different manner, focusing on their identity as artists, rather than their disabilities and levels of intellect. Benjamin Fraser, in "The Work of (Creating) Art," demonstrates how the film succeeds at presenting people with ID as artists. Fraser, however, does not identify the tension the film creates between the terms Outsider Artist and artist. While *What's Under Your Hat?* is assertive in its portrayal of the participants as artists first and foremost, it does not reject Outsider Artist as a term, and it does not deny the assumptions the term Outsider Art makes about intelligence and intention.

As Benjamin Fraser notes in his discussion of the film, Barrera and Peñafiel introduce Scott as an artist first, and as a person with intellectual disabilities second. The film opens with

scenes showing Scott and the other participants as they go through their daily routine travelling to and entering Creative Growth in the morning. Within the first minutes, a gallery owner comes by to pick out one of Scott's pieces for a show, demonstrating the fact that Scott is an artist in demand. Shortly after, Tom di Maria, the director of Creative Growth, explains that the staff "[does] not see [themselves] as therapists" and that the center is based on a "true artistic model" (4:53). Joyce and di Maria then go into Judith's biography, but, as Fraser notes, "photographs of Scott's art are intercalated in such a way as to emphasize that this is an artist's biography just as equally as it is a condemnation of social marginalization" (524). Not only, then, do the directors consciously give Scott's biography *after* they have established her identity as an artist, but when they do give her biography, they again put the focus on Scott as an artist, as opposed to Scott as a person with ID.

Throughout the documentary, the directors also emphasize Scott's own identification as an artist. In those first scenes that depict Scott traveling to the center in the morning, waiting outside for the center to open, and setting up her workspace once she enters the center, she is shown wrapping scarves around her head and placing her hat on top of it all. Later on in the documentary, Joyce discusses Judith's scarves and hats, explaining that she started wearing them once she began to identify as an artist. The more popular her artwork became, and the more she identified as an artist, the more scarves she would wear on top of her head. As Fraser asserts, the scarves and hat are "the outward expression of her artist persona," and the opening scene showing Scott putting on her scarves and hat is "the portrait of Scott as an artist" (523-4). By demonstrating Scott's identity as an artist, the film rejects the notion that Scott was an "Outsider" who had no conception of art, and no idea that she was creating art.



The title of the documentary, *What's Under Your Hat?*, also highlights Scott's identity as an artist, and the way that her identification manifested. At the same time, the title seems to acknowledge a preoccupation with Scott's intellect. Since underneath Scott's hat is her head, the question asks whether or not Scott has a brain, how her mind works, and the level of intellect that she has. The documentary never directly approaches these questions, and, in fact, by representing Scott as an artist first, and a person with ID second, it implies that intellectual abilities are irrelevant to the discussion of an artist. Yet, the title conveys that the directors are still intrigued by the question of intelligence when trying to understand Scott's work. They may not believe it is a significant factor for becoming or identifying as an artist, but it is not completely irrelevant to the discussion of Scott and her work.

The film also includes several monologues by Outsider Art theorist Roger Cardinal, in which he discusses Scott and Outsider Art in general. Since the rest of the film focuses on how Scott and the other participants are not outsiders, these monologues seem out of place. Cardinal defines Outsider Art, giving the general qualifiers for being an Outsider, and discusses the power Outsider Art has because of its urgency, intensity, and need to communicate. He also maintains that Outsider Art is not "self-enclosed" or "autistic," but "asks us to respond" and communicate with the piece of work (42:23). Cardinal makes no direct claims about Scott's intellect or intentions, but by categorizing her as an Outsider, he implicitly denies the possibility that Scott identifies as an artist, and has the intellectual capabilities to do so.

In a scene towards the end of the film, Scott is shown sitting on the couch with her family, flipping through the pages of *Metamorphosis*. She flips through them without paying any attention to the images, and seemingly with complete disregard or awareness that the book is about her and her artwork. No one in the film ever comments on this moment, and nothing more

is made of it. Like the title of the film and the inclusion of the monologues by Cardinal, it suggests to the viewer that Scott is unaware of the fact that she is an artist, in the traditional sense of the word. The directors present Scott as an artist first, and a person with ID second, but these moments create a tension in the film between Scott's identity as an artist and the way that critics and theorists identify her as an artist. The directors imply that it does not matter if Scott does not recognize that there is a book written about her work, or that her pieces sell for thousands of dollars, because she herself identifies as a person who creates art. She does not identify as an artist in the same way that typically able-bodied people classically identify as artists, but she is an artist nonetheless.

*What's Under Your Hat?* offers a different representation of Judith Scott, and as a result, questions the theory behind Outsider Art without explicitly addressing the issues that Outsider Art raises. This is not to say that Judith Scott is no longer considered to be an Outsider Artist, and that the ideas behind Outsider Art are deemed passé. On the contrary, Judith Scott is still presented as an Outsider Artist, and even named one of the most famous, influential Outsider Artists. In 2011, for example, The Museum of Everything exhibited some of Scott's work. James Brett, the founder of the museum, is not unaware of the issues involved in labeling certain artists as "untrained, unintentional" outsiders ("About"). In an interview with BBC about the Judith Scott exhibit at the Museum of Everything, he argues that biography is important for all artists, but for Outsider Artists it tends to take priority. He notes that it is perhaps better to see the artwork first, without knowing the biography of the artist ("Judith Scott at The Museum of Everything"). Nevertheless, Brett never questions the implications of categorizing certain people, who already tend to be discriminated against and stereotyped, separately from artists because of qualifiers such as artistic knowledge and intent. The very act of displaying Scott's work in a

museum with those philosophies demonstrates the fact that the term Outsider Art is still often neither questioned nor critically examined.

## JUDITH SCOTT, ARTIST

*Metamorphosis* introduced Scott to a wider population and impacted the worldwide perception of her work. Since its publication, there have been several other attempts to understand Scott's work, such as the documentary *What's Under Your Hat?* and the exhibit at the Museum of Everything. Both of these, along with other publications on Judith Scott, continued the conversation about her work and the term Outsider Artist. The latest, and arguably most dynamic contribution to this continued conversation was the Brooklyn Museum's exhibit *Judith Scott: Bound and Unbound*, on view from October 24, 2014 to March 29, 2015. The exhibit, which was located in the Elizabeth Sackler Center for Feminist Art, was curated by Catherine Morris, Sackler Family Curator, with Matthew Higgs, artist and Director/Chief of White Columns, New York. Through the exhibit, Morris articulates a clear vision and opinion about how Scott's work should be regarded and how Scott as an artist should be represented. *Bound and Unbound* rejects the notion of Outsider Art and looks to place Scott's work within a specific socio-political time.

## REASONING BEHIND THE EXHIBIT

Morris presents two main reasons for exhibiting Scott's work in a museum, and at the Elizabeth Sackler Center for Feminist Art in particular. First, while *Bound and Unbound* is located in a feminist art setting, Morris does not present Scott as a feminist, or her work as an example of feminist art. Rather, Morris presents Scott's oeuvre as an example of art that became possible because of the philosophies and goals of feminism. Feminist thinking greatly influenced

and inspired the disability rights movement of the 1960/70s that started in Berkeley, California. Places like Creative Growth, which grew out of the disability rights movement, also then grew out of feminism. In that sense, a main objective of the exhibit is to represent a specific moment in feminist/disability rights history. Scott's work is an example of the types of opportunities that became available following the commencement of the disability rights movement.

The second reason behind curating the *Bound and Unbound* exhibit was, clearly, to make a statement about Scott, her work, and the way it is regarded in the art world. The exhibit conscientiously presents Scott as an artist whose biography is mostly irrelevant to her work. The very fact of having the exhibit located in a center for art, not Outsider Art, highlights this objective. Rather than emphasize Scott's personal biography, Morris focuses on the development of Scott's artistic style. The curatorial decisions, such as the presentation of Scott's pieces in the exhibit, and the explanatory texts that accompany the artwork also aim to explicitly and definitively portray Scott as an artist.

The shape of the exhibit is determined by the triangular exhibit of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, and thus separated into two wings. In each wing, there are several white platforms in oblong shapes forming the center of the room. Scott's sculptures are placed on top of these platforms, oriented according to Morris' vision (see fig. 5). In the second wing, many of Scott's drawings from her first two years at Creative Growth are framed in simple black frames and displayed on the wall. The walls of the exhibit are white—except for the blocks of text in simple, small black lettering that accompany the exhibit. There are no photos of Scott displayed within the exhibit, so her artwork alone represents who she was.

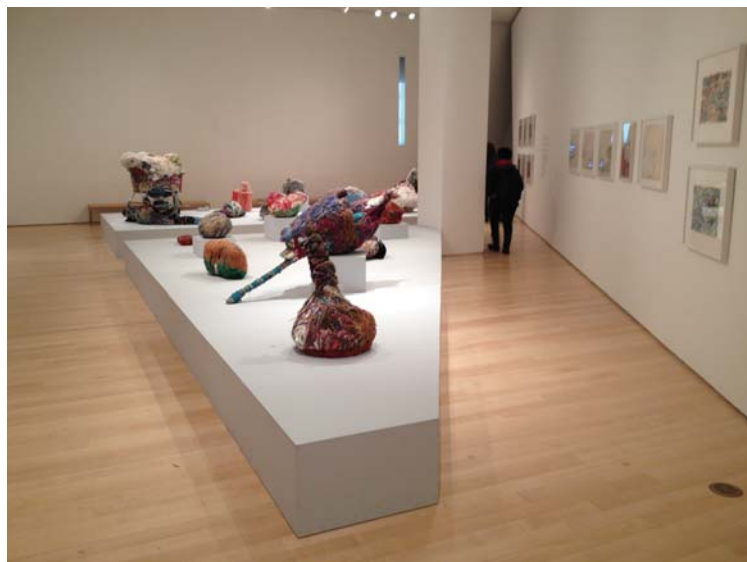


Fig. 5. Brooklyn Museum exhibit, *Judith Scott: Bound & Unbound*. Personal photograph by author. 6 March 2015.

The informational blurbs rarely reference Scott's biography, with only three that explicitly discuss her disabilities. In the introductory text to the exhibit, there are two brief sentences on Scott's childhood and background, and the rest focuses on the commencement of Scott's artistic career and the fact that it grew out of social justice movements of the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>3</sup> A short blurb entitled "The Artist's Biography" does not give more information about Scott's personal life, despite the title. Rather, it explains the exhibit's decision to de-emphasize Scott's biography. The text articulates the challenge of "finding a balance between formal analysis on the one hand—what the work looks like and the materials it is made from—and useful biographical and historical context on the other" when presenting Scott's work (Morris). Morris acknowledges the difficulties involved in curating Scott's work, but she clearly expresses the opinion that excessive emphasis on Scott's biography diminishes the art itself. The

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<sup>3</sup> "Diagnosed with Down syndrome in infancy, Scott was also deaf and unable to speak. Institutionalized in her home state of Ohio at age seven, she lived in residential facilities for 36 years before moving to California under the guardianship of her twin sister, Joyce, in 1987" (Morris, "Judith Scott—Bound and Unbound").

layout of the exhibit and the content of the accompanying texts encourage the sculptures and drawings to speak for themselves.

Instead of making Scott's biography the focus of the exhibit, Morris emphasizes Scott's artistic progression and development of style. The small blurbs of text that accompany several of the sculptures discuss the formal qualities of the pieces and the artistic process. They point to Scott's artistic development, her materials and methods, and her ability to create "movement" and "negative space," for example (Morris). While the pieces are not always displayed in exact chronological order, the various stages of Scott's artistic career are clear. The drawings in the second wing of the exhibit, for example, represent Scott's artistic endeavors before she started making fiber art. Almost all involve the same repetitive, spiraling motion and extensive color palette (see fig. 6). Interestingly, these two qualities can also be seen in Scott's complexly wrapped and colorful pieces of fiber art. While Scott's first piece of fiber art is loosely wrapped and painted over, she would over time develop a style of intricate wrapping, weaving, and knotting.

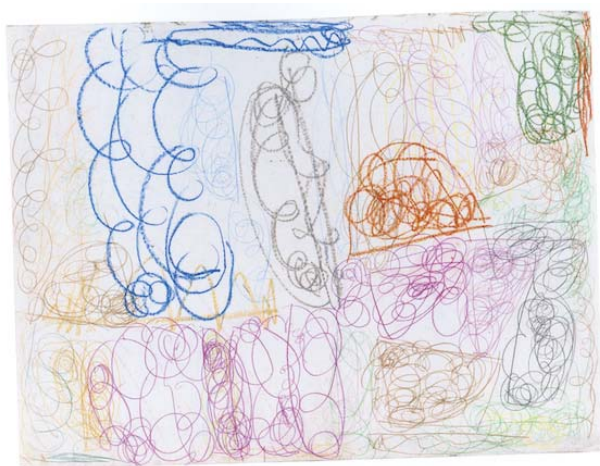


Fig. 6. Scott, Judith. *Untitled*. 1987. Mixed media on paper. Creative Growth Art Center, Oakland. © Creative Growth Art Center. (Photo: Mary K. O'Connor). Morris, Catherine and Matthew Higgs, eds. *Judith Scott: Bound & Unbound*. New York: DelMonico Books, Prestel, 2014. Print.

As Scott continued to work with fiber art, she began to wrap objects more elaborately and experiment with juxtaposing colors and manipulating similar hues. Figure 7, a piece Scott made

in 2000, highlights these developments. All of the found objects are completely hidden, and out of them Scott creates a rectangular structure with no clear bottom or top. The structure is solid, and its weight is centered, unlike her other, more uneven and asymmetrical pieces. Yet, Scott clearly distinguishes between the two halves of the piece by wrapping them in complimentary colors. The white fiber in the middle of the piece, hidden behind the green fiber, becomes a focal point, drawing the eye towards the center. Again, this establishes the solidity and centeredness of the sculpture, despite the wide array of objects that are hidden within. The piece demonstrates Scott's command of colors as well as her style of wrapping objects until they become unidentifiable.



Fig. 7. Scott, Judith. *Untitled*. 2000. Fiber and found objects. Creative Growth Art Center, Oakland. © Creative Growth Art Center. (Photo: Benjamin Blackwell). Morris, Catherine and Matthew Higgs, eds. *Judith Scott: Bound & Unbound*. New York: DelMonico Books, Prestel, 2014. Print.

#### AGAINST A BIOGRAPHICAL READING

In the discussion of Scott's work, Morris goes beyond simply presenting Scott as an artist and demonstrating her artistic development. Morris conveys the difficulties involved in providing biographical information about an artist like Scott, and also argues that Scott was neither consciously nor unconsciously representing her personal story in the work itself. MacGregor understood Scott's art making process as an indicator of subconscious emotions, such as raw sexual tension. He interpreted the obsession and compulsion necessary to complete



the repetitive wrapping motions as psychologically rooted. Morris, on the other hand, suggests that Scott was motivated by the desire to create: “As an artist, Scott did not focus on personal or political content but on the materials that captured her imagination and the objects she made from them...” (Morris). The exhibit entirely rejects the notion that Scott’s pieces are metaphorical and autobiographical.

Throughout the text blurbs, Morris continues to comment on interpretations of Scott’s work that rely on biography. In the section “Making Art,” for example, Morris writes that there is no way to know what Scott was intending to do or communicate with her sculptures, “no matter how many associations her objects might evoke” (Morris). The works she produced are clearly art, Morris explains, even though it is nearly impossible to categorize her work within a certain artistic movement, period, or style. Moreover, even though Scott may not have had a “formal concept of ‘art’ as it is conventionally understood” her participation at Creative Growth meant that she was aware of the “creative process” and understood the practice of making and creating things (Morris). Unlike MacGregor, or even the directors of *What’s Under Your Hat?*, Morris does not struggle with whether or not Scott was *aware*, worked with *intention*, had *knowledge*, or considered herself an *artist*. These are all either irrelevant or obvious for Morris. More importantly, Scott’s work challenges the way that people think about intentionality in art, artistic knowledge, and artists’ identification as artists.

The catalogue that accompanies the exhibit continues this dialogue, offering a more in depth analysis of how Scott’s work functions, if it is not metaphorical. In the introduction, Morris writes,

Judith Scott's lifework was *not* autobiographical. The sculptures she made are *not* metaphorical. Her work does *not* describe her life experience as different, and it does *not* invite a narrative of disability to be inscribed upon it. It is a form of representation that does *not* engage in explaining, moralizing, pathologizing, or



objectifying the life of the maker. A normal body, or typical maker, is not expected to explain how her or his work functions in relation to her or his own biography. The choice to do so or not is the person's own. The power of Judith Scott's work is that the legacy of her narrative is contained in what she made, but it is not visible. (16, emphasis mine)

Morris' word choice and sentence structure are strong and emphatic. The passage hones in on the issues involved in interpreting Scott's work as biographical, when her voice was already "sharply circumscribed by her life experience" (10). People with intellectual disabilities are so often denied voice. Morris argues that readings like MacGregor's, which seek to place a biographical narrative to Scott's pieces, only create a "narrative fable" that further stigmatizes Scott (10). By inscribing a biographical narrative to Scott's work, MacGregor takes control over Scott's voice and creates a narrative that allows him to understand her work. Through *Bound and Unbound*, Morris seeks to present Scott's work in a way that allows the pieces to speak for themselves.

The idea of a "narrative fable" again highlights this need to understand art by people with intellectual disabilities in terms of biography. Since Scott was unable to communicate linguistically, biographical meaning is given to her works in order to demonstrate that she was, consciously or unconsciously, communicating with the world. For example, according to MacGregor, a piece that resembles a small figurine becomes a representation of Scott's childhood doll and desire for children. Scott's work is given narrative meaning, and thus she is seen as someone who could tell her life story, whether consciously or subconsciously. These inscribed narratives only further stigmatize Scott because they require her to be expressing a particular, biographical narrative in order for her art to be considered art, and in order for people to consider her a person.

While Morris emphatically argues that Scott's work is not autobiographically, she does suggest that there is an invisible, unknowable narrative. Accepting this fact is the most

complicated and difficult part of theorizing about Scott's work. Rather than fixating on the inability to *know* what Scott was doing, Morris and the exhibit ask the viewer to think about how Scott's work rejects the categorizations and definitions so often placed on art. This claim relates back to Siebers' discussion in *Disability Aesthetics* of artwork that cannot be translated into linguistic terminology. Scott's fiber art, with its abstract shapes, intense color schemes, and hidden objects is a clear example of artwork that cannot be easily understood in words. Attempts to put a verbal and/or written narrative to the pieces suggest an inability to let the works speak for themselves in their own language. Again, it will never be possible to know what Scott was thinking when she was creating her artwork. What is clear is that Scott was involved in the process of creation almost every day for seventeen years. Whether or not Scott was creating artwork for the sake of creation, attempting to communicate, or unconsciously expressing her deep and hidden desires, her lifework does communicate something about her life in the sense that they came from inside of Scott. This "invisible narrative" is just inaccessible to viewers of her works.

Of course, in response to Morris definitive statements, one could ask, what if Scott's work was autobiographical? What if she was telling her story through her fiber art? Morris rejects a biographical reading of Scott's work because artists without intellectual disabilities are not expected to explain their works in terms of their life stories. While Morris does not discuss how biographical interpretations define personhood by one's ability to tell, the two arguments are in line with one another. However, just as an artist's work should not have to be understood in terms of biography, it should not be denied the possibility of a biographical reading. Scott's work can be seen as autobiographical, without needing to translate each piece into a specific part of

her life story. The autobiography can be invisible, just as the narrative Morris discusses is invisible.

Essentially, Scott's artwork does not have to be autobiographical, but it could be. It does not have to be another narrative, but it could be. Interpreting it exclusively as autobiography does demonstrate a need to understand a life by a person's ability to narrate their life story in a medium that can be translated into linguistic terminology. *Bound and Unbound* importantly rejects the excessive psychoanalytic, biographical reading of Scott's work, placing it instead within a specific socio-political time, and presenting Scott as an artist. One of the essays in the catalogue, the "Peer Review" by Lynne Cooke, even looks at Scott's work alongside several other fiber artists, presenting her as an artist who can be analyzed beside other artists without disabilities. The significance of this statement cannot be overlooked.

At the same time, it is necessary to consider the limitations of entirely rejecting the possibility that Scott's work was a form of visual autobiography. In the exhibit, Morris had to make such an absolute statement about Scott's work because of the ways art by people with intellectual disabilities is often categorized. It is rarely accredited for its actual artistic merits, and often placed under the umbrella term "Outsider Art." In that sense, through the exhibit Morris seeks to change the way that art by people with intellectual disabilities is both viewed and curated by the art world. Were these stigmas and stereotypes no longer to exist, and personhood always granted to people living with intellectual disabilities, perhaps it would be easier to present Scott's work as potentially autobiographical.

## CONCLUSION

In a review of the *Bound and Unbound* exhibit, critic Fay Hirsch wrote,

That said, I think it is safe to say that visitors chancing upon the splendid display at the Brooklyn Museum will have little need to know more than what is before their eyes. However mysterious in intent and meaning, these objects are wonderfully communicative, vividly conveying the efforts of a hardworking artist who found her voice, and clearly reveled in it. (102)

The review perfectly captures Scott's work and the various discussions surrounding it. The exhibit aimed to present her oeuvre as artwork—not Outsider Art—that emerged in the context of the women's rights and disability rights movements. It rejected the practice of placing biographical significance to her pieces, and dismisses the questions regarding intent and artistic intelligence. Moreover, it gave as little information about Scott's life as possible. While this lack of information may have been confusing for viewers used to long biographies accompanying exhibits of artwork by artists with disabilities, Hirsch notes that there is actually no need for this superfluous information. Scott's work speaks for itself, and speaks loudly, colorfully, and tactilely at that.

It can seem limiting to stop the discussion of an artist's work right before actually getting into an analytic conversation about it. At the same time, the unknowability of Scott's sculptures can also be incredibly empowering. Her pieces can be placed within specific artistic movements, even though Scott was unaware that such movements had existed. A sculpture involving a chair that has a large spool wrapped onto it is evocative of Duchamp's "readymades," and the tendency to make everyday objects, such as a chair, unusable (see fig. 8). The fiber used to wrap the spool to the chair and the spool itself also suggests a commentary on traditionally feminine objects. Despite these connections one can draw, Scott did not know who Duchamp was, and did not have knowledge of these types of commentaries commonly made in art. Of course, as,

Siebers argued, intention is fluid, and rarely does an artist intend everything that a critic analyzes in the work, just as a critic rarely analyzes everything the artist intended. Scott's work complicates our definitions of art, intention, and artistic knowledge, pointing to the limiting ways we define intelligence and grant personhood.



Fig. 8. Scott, Judith. *Untitled*. 2004. Fiber and found objects. Creative Growth Art Center, Oakland. © Creative Growth Art Center. (Photo: © Benjamin Blackwell). Morris, Catherine and Matthew Higgs, eds. *Judith Scott: Bound & Unbound*. New York: DelMonico Books, Prestel, 2014. Print.

The boom of disability memoirs has brought so many important voices into the public eye. Yet, because of the demands of life writing, people with intellectual disabilities, like Scott, are unable to participate. The very fact that people with intellectual disabilities are unable to participate in the life writing movement demonstrates the inherent issues involved in requiring one to narrate one's life linguistically in order to become a visible member of society and be granted personhood. Narration and self-knowledge prove that one is a rational, thinking being, thus satisfying the requirements for personhood according to classical liberal philosophy. Rationality, or intelligence, however, should not only be determined by a person's ability to communicate linguistically. As Mel Baggs explains, intelligence can exist outside of these

typical methods of communication. Nevertheless, the critical analyses of visual autobiography and Outsider Art show that even artwork is translated into linguistic terminology in an attempt to understand it.

Narrative can be a powerful way to demonstrate personhood. Memoir and visual autobiography give people the opportunity to represent themselves and determine how they are viewed by others. The problem arises when narrative becomes *the way* to demonstrate personhood. For MacGregor, Scott's work must be understood in terms of narrative—even if Scott was unconscious of the narrative she was creating—in order to consider her work art, and her an artist/person. Through the *Bound & Unbound* exhibit, Morris demonstrates the importance in focusing on Scott's artistic style, rather than attempting a biographical interpretation of her work. The exhibit emphasizes the fact that Scott's work does not need to be read biographically in order to prove that she had self-knowledge, and in order for it to be understood and/or thought of as art. Narrative can be a powerful way to demonstrate self-knowledge and personhood, but as Scott's work challenges, it is not the only way.

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