Robert McRuer - Feb 27 2020

**SPEAKERS**

Molly Joyce, Robert McRuer

**Molly Joyce 00:04**

So the first question is what is access for you?

**Robert McRuer 00:09**

Many things, I think I have often really liked the ways in which access has two connotations, both sort of literal access in relation to disability, but also a history of being used by radical movements in general to talk about what access might mean to a more just world a more democratic world, a more a world more attended to differences of all kinds. So, I really like to put access in that larger context while being attentive as much as we possibly can to the literal access needs of many different disabilities. So, in the field of disability studies, there has been lately just amazing work on the history of access, and I really respect that work. So, Amy Hamer's book on universal design, the history of universal design is brilliant, because they're able to kind of look at the ways in which neoliberalism has given us kind of limited forms of access that tried to make disability disappear. So, sort of access that is meeting requirements, perhaps, and then putting us in a situation where we don't have to talk about disability. And they talk about how more radical access crip access would not at all be about making disability disappear, but about inviting more disabilities to the table. And about being always kind of disruptive of the way things are in order to constantly keep us inventing new forms of accessibility, and so forth. So that book and West Williams and accessable America have just been really important publications over the past few years that have given us histories, made those connections, I've been talking about to more radical movements, and just made it possible for us to think about access in really stretchy ways. So not just what can we do, again, to make disability disappear, but what can we do to actually make disability appear in more multiplicity’s ways?

**Molly Joyce 02:44**

What is care for you?

**Robert McRuer 02:47**

Um, a central value of any just society. I think care. In the disability movement has been, especially through feminist disability studies kind of positioned as just a central value that recognizes we all live in states of interdependency with each other. I think care is something that is often deep politicized by the culture at large but has been usefully politicized in amazing ways by the disability movement. I was at a series of conferences in Germany that did amazing things around care and brought together activists and artists and performers and academics. And the first one was in minds in the western part of Germany, and was called, "Who Cares?" And I loved the ways in which they came up with this title that basically gives you on the one hand, the sense of like, oh, who cares? No one really is paying attention to these issues. But that also asking him really political ways who's doing the work of caring? How is it compensated? How are we supporting each other, and so forth? And then the next year, in Berlin, they did the same group of artists and activists and community members and academics. They did another conference that was called "Take Care" and their symbol was a raised fist. And again, they have this like beautiful sense of take care of this kind of flippent thing that we say to everyone, you know, I will take care of See you later. But also, what they meant was that political movement of we are going to take care as a political issue to be talked about and to be kept on the agenda and to be imagined in new ways. through collective conversation and so forth.

**Molly Joyce 04:49**

I read the inner Decker I feel like my friend one time that

**Robert McRuer 04:53**

Oh yeah.

**Molly Joyce 04:56**

The Berlin one Peter Worley from Zurich.

**Robert McRuer 05:02**

I met a bunch of people...that one was about two years ago is actually going on three years ago. But yeah,

**Molly Joyce 05:09**

Anyway, he mentioned it

**Robert McRuer 05:12**

It was great.

**Molly Joyce 05:14**

Next question is what is control for you?

**Robert McRuer 05:18**

Control.... Control is a concept in disability culture that I haven't thought about as much as access and care. But I think I would link it to the right for communities to have autonomy, I guess they would link it to the global disability watchword, nothing about us without us. So, control sort of suggests, if there's gonna be a conversation about disability and disability policy and disability culture and access and all these other things, it needs to be shaped by disabled voices. So, I think control obviously also has so many negative valences in a world of increasing incarceration and surveillance. And I think, right now, there's amazing stuff happening in the field of disability studies at the intersections of disability studies and prison studies. And it's really brought to the fore, the ways in which prisons are just one form of confinement and control in our society and that other institutions, including many that are very detrimental to disabled lives. Those other institutions also are about control in negative ways. So maybe I should have started with the negative i think we live in this kind of surveillance society that is out to control us more and more, but, flipping to the positive, control has been a goal of community from the beginning through that watchword of nothing about us without us watch phrase, nothing about us without us.

**Molly Joyce 07:17**

What is weakness for you?

**Robert McRuer 07:23**

Weakness, I think weakness would mark an incapacity for communicating our vulnerabilities. Actually, I think that you know, especially for men and our culture, masculineism encourages one to keep it all inside. And I think that, again, feminist disability studies has actually encouraged us to attend to vulnerability attend to interdependency. And I think that a feminist disability studies movement makes it possible for us to say that, you know, it's a weakness if we're not actually taking those feminist values and and shaping them into livable communities and relationships and identities. So, I would, from a disability or career perspective, always want to rescript dominant notions of weakness, and suggest rather, as I am that weakness really comes from not living by the values of the world transformative movements that had brought us to where we are including the disability movement and the feminist movement and queer movement and so forth.

**Molly Joyce 08:52**

And after that, what is strength?

**Robert McRuer 08:56**

I guess strength would be the flip side of weakness. Strength would come from accessing community from recognizing that none of us are in it alone, that we need each other, that our strength comes in numbers and in diversity. I think strength means listening to other people. I think it entails kind of rejecting a mastery model which is so pervasive in the age of Trump and other you know, politicians that have all the answers and in having all the answers are capable of alienating just about everyone. So I think strength would be...Naomi Klein actually calls it "kill the inner Trump" like reject that individualist demand to shape your own brand and never appear vulnerable. Never Say you're sorry, never take responsibility. So I think, you know, strength really comes in acting the opposite ways from that.

**Molly Joyce** 10:12

That's the kind of a controversial question, not the answer. What is the cure for you?

**Robert McRuer** 10:25

Cure is, I think, a concept that has been so important be interrogated by the disability movement. So first and foremost, I would say, cure is something to question. If, again, cure is really about a cultural desire to make disability go away. I think that critiques of cure in the disability community have done amazing things to talk about how cultural focus on cure has kept us from thinking about access, justice, community, and so forth. That said, I think this is an amazing moment for texture conversations about cure. So forwarded by theorists like Anna Malo, and others, Liz Crowe began these conversations way back in the late 80s, and early 90s. And many of the people putting forward complicated conversations about cure, want to talk about the fact that pain actually does generate in many people's lives a desire for the alleviation of pain. And so, for a while, in the movement, it was difficult to talk about those questions of pain and suffering, because we were more univocal and our opposition to cure. But now I feel like the conversation has shifted and gotten more multifaceted. And a lot of people with chronic illnesses, for example, are able to say, you know, I really wouldn't mind if there were a cure here. It's not just disability identity that I want to celebrate when I am in chronic pain, or I'm sick all the time. So I appreciate that we are in this moment where we can talk about those things in much more textured ways than perhaps that earlier moments in the movement.

**Molly Joyce** 12:30

What is interdependence?

**Robert McRuer** 12:31

Interdependency, again, is about rejecting that mastery model that would suggest I know it all, I can do it all. I will impose it all on everyone else. And it is humbly recognizing that actually, all of our lives are facilitated by multiple others, usually, unseen, others, I think we know, as you come to adulthood that our lives, what we wear, what we use, what we eat, is so tied up in often quite distant suffering, but suffering an exploitation, nonetheless. And I think that recognition is a sort of moment where one kind of has a light bulb go off and think like, oh, wow, we could live in a better world where my comforts and benefits don't depend on the suffering of others elsewhere. And I think that the disability movement has really contributed to that conversation with this concept of interdependency because it puts the spotlight on the fact that those others all around us are what are enabling us to live our lives. And so, I like the ways in which that becomes a positive value and not and not a negative. I also love the way that interdependency is a implicit and even explicit critique of our culture's long standing emphasis on rugged individualism. You know, the American notion of pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, all of these things where people celebrate I worked so hard to get where I am and I think interdependency is a necessary check on that, that suggests like actually, wherever any of us got, it requires so many others to support us and we should value that rather than suggest that as some sort of weakness.

**Molly Joyce** 14:43

And last one, what is assumption for you,

**Robert McRuer** 14:47

Assumption? I can not a word that I've necessarily thought about a lot in a disability context, but I Think assumption would be another concept that I would want to always check. So the movement is made up of so many different kinds of people with bodily and mental experiences. And I think that that grand coalition that generates a Disability Justice Movement has taught us not to assume anything about anyone. And so I think if one is making an assumption about what someone can or can't do, based on a presumed notion of what a disability is, I think that is, again, getting in the way of that disability value of nothing about us without us think disability movement allows people to speak in their own voices and to be able to describe their own identities and experiences and not have those be constantly described by others, maybe more than any other movement. Disabled people have been objectified by so many institutions that poke and prod and diagnose and pathologize. And I think checking the assumption that that's a good thing is a positive value, and letting people speak for themselves instead.