**Final Reflection**

By ChuHui Fu

This course has been the highlight of my whole semester. Every night I come to the meeting room in Stokes, I feel eager and excited—eager to discuss what I think of the readings, and excited about what interesting ideas that others bring to the table.

Indeed, the diversity of the class has been one of the most valuable features for me. As someone who mostly takes science and math classes, I rarely have the opportunity to sit down with a group of students studying different disciplines, not learning about what is observed and what is right, but discussing current practices and issues that are problematic. The type of questioning are so bold that I would have dared to even formulate before. For example, are people with intellectual disabilities smart? (Yes, I am calling Emily Kingsley out!) These kinds of critical thinking and questioning really add an extra dimension to my education here because given that I am in so many lectures that I just have to absorb what is said, it’s incredibly easy to fall into the trap of believing that things should be the ways they are now. And as someone aspiring to become a scientific researcher, this kind of mindset is extremely dangerous. From everyone’s comments in the class, I begin to see the interconnection among disability studies and other areas like gender and sexuality studies, education, and biomedical research. I learn to listen to my peers and consider their points instead of purely focusing on what the professor says.

This latter idea of listening is reinforced by the partnership at Center for Creative Works, where I learned that I do have biases despite my previous course, and through confronting them, I realize that communication depends on a collaborative effort. Listening to people with disabilities is not only respectful but fruitful in that I gain new knowledge from their words. I certainly wish that I could have been more talkative during my time at CCW, like the rest of the people in my group, but I am immensely grateful for everyone who invited me into conversations with warmth.

This welcoming experience at CCW certainly changed my view on disability. Due to my extremely unpleasant experience with disability in recent years, no matter what I read last semester, I couldn’t turn my head around and truly see the disability experience as essentially neutral: there are gains and losses at the same time. The idea of having disability just means a different way of living has seemed overly simplified and overly optimistic to me, (and I still think it is), but what is added to my belief that the negative aspects can definitely be erased with sufficient support from other people. Indeed, from interviews for my project, my experience at CCW, and my meetings with other students in the classroom, I realize that support from people can really make a different, that people around the person with disabilities really shape the experience, and that people with disabilities can indeed live meaningful lives. This positive confirmation through eye-witness is particularly important to me because I can be very skeptical, and if I don’t believe in the ideas I am learning, I won’t take it with me.

One of the ideas I will always take with me from this class is access and thinking about a wider range of people. Clearly, the value of any information depends on how it’s used, and if it’s inaccessible, it’s pretty much useless. When presenting or exhibiting work, I am used to thinking about how I might present better. But now, I think more about how others might be able to understand me better. Being part of the exhibit and listening to everyone’s idea has made me realize how much we’re not considering in many occasions and how much potential audience we are excluding. While I partially believe that living with disability is complicatedly different, I do value and admire the ideas and works of people with disabilities.

I was particularly amazed by works of Judith Scott, which I find to be such a rich representation of life. Certainly, through this course, my concepts on art are completely revolutionized. After half my life spent on trainings of interpreting the artists or writers’ motives for their work, I learn that intention doesn’t really matter! Wow! Also, art doesn’t have to be super complicated in order to be beautiful. And who defines what is beautiful anyway? I recall the idea of museum viewing as a human relationship experience and remember many shapes considered elegant in the “normal” body is considered pathological in disabled body. (Yes, the other Emily K. !) While at the moment, I cannot recall everything I’ve ever learned in this class, the things I have learned are in my brain and they are being carried with me, ready to come out upon unexpected triggers.

Last thing I want to mention is the disparity between theory and practice in general. Not so much in this class, but in areas such as medicine and psychology, I sense a very strong disconnect between what is intended theoretically and what actually takes place clinically. I am not going to be a medical doctor or psychologist, but as a science major and potential scientist in the future, I will definitely be aware of the miscommunication between the scientists and the general public, as misconceptions and applications of science might actually lead to social prejudice and inequity.

Again, this has been a wonderful course! I thank everyone for enabling such a wonderful learning and life experience!