The History of Disability Series

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The New Disability History: American Perspectives
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Contents

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CITATIONS FROM THE *NEW YORK TIMES*

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January 20, 1946, sec. 4, p. 17, "Group Head Elected by Blinded Veterans"

June 9, 1946, sec. 4, p. 35, Dr. Howard Rusk, "Emphasis on Ability Rather Than Disability Is Said to Be New Concept in Training Blinded Veterans in Social Adjustment"

August 9, 1946, sec. 2, p. 18, "Woodard Greeted by Blinded Veterans"

November 27, 1946, sec. 7, p. 11, "BVA to Make Claims on Veterans' Behalf"

September 7, 1947, sec. 5, p. 14, "Blinded GIS Charge VA Fails to Give Aid"

April 13, 1948, sec. 7, p. 29, "Truman Honors Blind GIs"

August 8, 1948, sec. 3, p. 20, "BVA NYS Convention Here at Waldorf"

September 3, 1948, sec. 7, p. 40, "Blinded Vets Meet"

September 6, 1948, sec. 7, p. 15, "Blinded Vets Job Campaign"

October 20, 1948, sec. 1, p. 6, "Blinded Vet to Test New Law as Restaurant Bars Him and Dog"

October 21, 1948, sec. 5, p. 29, "Orders Complaint in Blind Law Test"

October 22, 1948, sec. 3, p. 24 [editorial], "Seeing Eye Dogs"

October 28, 1948, sec. 5, p. 31, "Blinded Vet Drops Action"

August 25, 1950, sec. 1, p. 25, "Blind Ask Employment"

13

Seeing the Disabled

Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography

Rosemarie Garland Thomson

1.

Sander Gilman's landmark study *Seeing the Insane* charts a history of images of insanity ranging from classical art to clinical psychiatric photographs.[1] Gilman includes psychiatric photographs of insane patients taken by Hugh W. Diamond in the 1850s. These images are particularly arresting representations because of the sense of directness that the medium of photography confers on a human condition traditionally hidden from public view. Gilman analyzes the ways in which the insane have been portrayed in order to reveal the cultural work of these images: that is, to show what the pictures themselves, as well as the context of their presentation, try to say to their viewers about how we understand insanity and people who are labeled "insane."

Gilman's study thus excavates what Alan Sekula calls the "task" of these photographs.[2] Not only is the content of these pictures significant in understanding how the nineteenth-century British medical profession imagined insanity, but the medium of photography itself creates part of the message these images transmit. As a form of representation, photography carries more truth value than other images; in other words, we think of photographs as being closer to reality, as more reliable sources of truth than, say, drawings or even verbal representations. Maren Stange points out in her study of documentary photography that a photograph derives its status as "real" because it is an "index," that is, a symbol whose representative function is intensified because it refers to an object that exists.[3] Although photographs may seem to be transparent windows into reality, in fact, like all representations, they construct the

object they represent as they depict it, shaping it through the conventions of presentation and through cultural ideas and expectations about such pictures. Perhaps the most characteristic aspect of photography is that it obscures its mediation between the viewer and the viewed. Photographs organize our perceptions of what we see without announcing to us what they are doing. The images we see seem to ensnare truth. Even though photographic images appear to capture the genuine, at the same time this representational medium arrests time, freezes motion, and prunes away space, which are the coordinates and the context of "real" life. Photographs thus evoke the familiar only to make it seem strange, eliciting a response Alan Trachtenberg describes as "astonishment mingling with recognition."[4]

Photographs of disabled people traffic in this "dialectic of strange and familiar" that Trachtenberg finds at the heart of the photographic effect. That effect has been put to many purposes. To extrapolate from Gilman's broad premise in *Seeing the Insane*, photographs of disabled people recapitulate cultural ideas about disability at the same time that they perpetuate those beliefs. In Gilman's words, "We do not see the world, rather we are taught by representations of the world about us to conceive of it in a culturally acceptable manner."[5] The role of seeing—both figuratively and literally—influences how modern America imagines disability and disabled people.

The photos Gilman includes in *Seeing the Insane* are among the first photographs of disabled people. These images belong to the genre of medical photography, one of the major photographic modes used to shape our modern notion of disability. Modern medicine and photography arose simultaneously in the nineteenth century, converging in the use of photography's supposed truth value to support the objective view of the body that medicine claimed to capture. The clinical photograph materialized what Michel Foucault calls modernity's "medical gaze," which defines the norm by picturing the deviant.[6] Over the last century and a half, photography has contributed substantially to the medicalization of disability through its extensive use in diagnosing, documenting, identifying, treating, and pathologizing disability.

Medicalization has perhaps been the primary lens used to interpret disability in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But as the image has proliferated, becoming what many cultural critics take to be the hallmark of postmodernity, disability has been increasingly articulated in other visual modes as well. This essay explores popular photographic images of disability rather than medical images, whose circulation was generally limited to textbooks and clinical studies aimed toward a specialized and often elite audi-

ence. While medical photography certainly has inflected and reflected what Gilman calls the "visual stereotypes" that govern perceptions of disability, the rhetorical purposes of popular disability photography have been more diffuse and complex.[7] Because disability has such potent cultural resonances, its visualization has been enlisted to manipulate viewers for a wide range of aims. This essay focuses on how that manipulation has operated and what meanings it has carried.

Modernity, as many scholars have shown, is ocularcentric.[8] The very development of photography in 1839 and its rapid flourishing thereafter testify to this urgent primacy of the visual. As Roland Barthes claims despairingly in his meditation on photography, "One of the marks of our world is [that] we live according to a generalized image repertoire."[9] In modernity, the image mediates not only our desires but who we imagine ourselves to be. Indeed, Alan Trachtenberg argues that photography has made us see ourselves as images.[10] Among the myriad, often conflicting and never disinterested images modernity offers us, the picture of ourselves as disabled is an image fraught with a tangle of anxiety, distance, and identification.

This is so for complex historical reasons that can receive only brief and speculative treatment here. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, disability functions as a symbol for the corruptible and suffering body, which western culture has both fetishized and denied. One might broadly historicize the representation of disability in this tradition as a shift from displaying the wounded, suffering, disabled body of Christ as the central icon of the premodern western imagination to sequestering disability within the discourses of science and medicine. Along with this representational shift came the literal confinement of some disabled people in institutions such as asylums and hospitals.[11] As a culture, we are at once obsessed with and intensely conflicted about the disabled body. We fear, deify, disavow, avoid, abstract, revere, conceal, and reconstruct disability—perhaps because it is one of the most universal, fundamental of human experiences. After all, we will all become disabled if we live long enough. Nonetheless, in representing disability in modernity, we have made the familiar seem strange, the human seem inhuman, the pervasive seem exceptional.

At the particular historical moment in America when photography enabled us to represent the body in new ways, many disabled people and their images were largely hidden from public view. Looking at disability became inappropriate in the same way that public executions and torture came to be considered offensive by the nineteenth century. The rise of sensibility and

sympathy as marks of civilized, bourgeois status, as well as the imperative to discipline the body through self-control rather than punishment, shaped the notion of the middle-class man of fine feeling whose delicate sensibilities might be blunted by such spectacles.[12] In addition to segregating some disabled people in asylums and hospitals, so-called ugly laws codified the banishment of other disabled people from the public sphere. A Chicago ordinance, for example, forbade persons "diseased, maimed, mutilated or deformed in any way so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object or improper person to be allowed in or on the public ways or other public places."[13] This refusal to see the disabled was a kind of bowdlerizing of the body that enacted widespread consequences for people with disabilities. Among them were the slow and conflicted demise of publicly displaying disabled people as freaks, as well as institutionalizing, segregating, and medicalizing people with disabilities. Such a banishment of the image of disability is emblematized in the wounded Christ being removed from the Protestant cross. So, even though disabled people have always been a large and significant segment of any social order, those among us whose impairment could be enlisted to symbolize disability were often hidden from public view or their images ghettoized in medical textbooks.

Although modernity deemed disability an improper object to be looked at, the anxious, conflicted will to see disability persisted in the popular imagination. After the daguerreotype was launched in 1839, photography waxed in virtually every register of modern life, providing middle-class viewers with an immediate yet distanced way to contemplate the disabled body without actually having to expose themselves to visibly disabled people.

2.

Thus disability entered the public sphere as a highly mediated image shorn from interactions with actual people with disabilities. By circulating these images widely, popular photography has calcified the interpretations of disability embedded in the images. If the familiar experience of disability has been made to seem strange in western representation, then photography as a representational medium has made disability at once more familiar and stranger yet. Photography's immediacy and claim to truth intensify what it tells viewers about disability, at once shaping and registering the public perception of disability.

To look at the way we look at disability, this essay proposes a taxonomy of four primary visual rhetorics of disability: the wondrous, the sentimental, the exotic, and the realistic. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. By formulating popular photographic images of disability as visual rhetorics, we can not only "read" the content, conventions, and contexts of the photographs but also probe the relationship the pictures seek to establish with the viewer. A rhetorical analysis such as this seeks to illuminate how and what the photographs intend to persuade their audiences to believe or do.

This template of visual rhetorics complicates an often restrictive notion of images as being either "positive" or "negative," as communicating either the "truth" of disability or perpetuating some oppressive stereotype. More analysis than evaluation, the discussion here does not suggest a progress narrative in which the culture marches invariably toward a state of egalitarian enlightenment. Instead, it suggests that visual images, especially photographic images, of disabled people act as rhetorical figures that have the power to elicit a response from the viewer. The wondrous, the sentimental, the exotic, and the realistic modes of representing disability converge and inflect one another within individual pictures as well as in all genres of disability photography across modernity. These rhetorics have arisen precisely because they are useful devices with which to manipulate the viewer for a variety of purposes, almost all of which are driven to a greater or lesser degree by the economic mandates of modern capitalism. These visual rhetorics wax and wane, shift and combine, over time as they respond to the purposes for which they are produced. Moreover, these four popular rhetorics constitute part of the context into which all representations of disabled people enter. Not only do they configure public perception of disabled people, but all visual images of disabled people either inadvertently or deliberately invoke these visual rhetorics and the cultural responses that have come to be associated with them.

Spatial metaphors help describe the relation between viewer and viewed that each of these four visual rhetorics establishes. Photography operates in a visual mode in which perception takes place across distance, in contrast, for instance, to modes of perception such as touch or taste that depend on contiguity. In this way, photography choreographs a space between the observer and what is observed. In other words, photographs instruct their viewers to see the object of perception from a certain position in relation to what is viewed. This inherent distancing within the photographic relationship replicates the social untouchability of disabled people, one of the most

Figure 13.1. This photograph invokes wonder by inviting the viewer to look up in admiration and awe at the person who can scale rocks while using a wheelchair. Courtesy of Greg Lais, Wilderness Inquiry.

oppressive attitudes directed at them. The disabled figure in western culture is the to-be-looked-at rather than the to-be-embraced. Consequently, the visual—whether it is looking toward or away—is the major mode that defines disability in modernity. Most important for this analysis is to recognize that none of these rhetorical modes is in the service of actual disabled people; indeed, almost all of them appropriate the disabled body for the purposes of constructing, instructing, or assuring some aspect of an ostensibly nondisabled viewer.

Briefly then, the first visual rhetoric is the wondrous. Historically the oldest mode of representing disability, the wondrous nevertheless continues to find a place in modernity's framing of disability. Monsters and prodigies of antiquity were imagined as inspiring awe and terror. Their different bodies were thought to augur the future or encode enigmatic omens from the gods.[14] The rhetoric of the wondrous stages a spatial relation in which the viewer occupies the position of the ordinary, looking up in awe at difference framed as distinction by the wonder. This mode of representation operates

according to a model of adulation that situates the spectator in a crowd of undistinguished commoners, while elevating the object of observation to a position of eminence. Modernity secularized the wonder—whether deified (Christ's broken body) or demonized (the cloven-hoofed Devil)—into the stereotype of the "supercrip." Such a figure amazes and inspires the viewer by performing feats the common folk cannot imagine themselves able to do, such as rock climbing while using a wheelchair (figure 13.1). Here the photographic composition literally positions the viewer to look up in awe at the climber dangling in her wheelchair. The rhetorical purpose of this contemporary figure is less to humble viewers who imagine themselves as nondisabled than to invoke the extraordinariness of the disabled body in order to secure the ordinariness of the viewer. The picture operates similarly to the figurative pedestal on which women have been placed so as to keep them out of circulation in the mundane world of political and economic power. By positioning the disabled figure as the exception to human capability rather than the rule, the wondrous estranges viewer from viewed, attenuating the correspondence that equality requires.

The second visual rhetoric is the sentimental. Whereas the wondrous positions the disabled figure above the viewer, the sentimental places the disabled figure below the viewer, in the posture of the sympathetic victim or helpless sufferer needing protection or succor. If the rhetoric of wonder enlarges the disabled figure, the rhetoric of sentiment diminishes that figure to evoke pity, inspiration, and frequent contributions. The sentimental disabled figure developed as a part of the larger nineteenth-century bourgeois culture of fine feelings.[15] This discourse of middle-class noblesse oblige operates on a model of paternalism, often trafficking in children and alluding to the cute, the plucky, the long-suffering, and the courageous. The poster child (figure 13.2) is the representative figure of sentimental rhetoric. This adorable little boy, for instance, transforms viewers into parentified adults by entreating them to deliver him from his impairment. In sentimentality, disability operates as the manifestation of suffering, a seemingly undeniable sign that makes what is internal and unnarratable into something external and narratable. In this way, the visibly disabled body operates as the spectacle of suffering rather than the reality of suffering, which is less representable.[16] In other words, visible disability acts as the stigmata of suffering. Such appeals use the sympathetic helpless child to contain the threat of disability and to empower the viewer to act on his or her behalf. By configuring the viewer as above and the object of sympathy as below, the sentimental

Figure 13.2. This poster boy appeals to the rhetoric of sentiment, which often employs pathetic, courageous, or cute children to elicit the viewers' sympathy and money. By permission.

constructs the viewer as benevolent rescuer and the disabled figure as grateful recipient. Such a model infantilizes the disabled figure—literally, in the case of the poster boy—and bestows authority and agency on the spectator.

The third visual rhetoric is the exotic. Although the exotic may coach the observer to look either up or down at the object in the photograph, the primary spatial arrangement it composes is one of distance. Whereas the wondrous and the sentimental create a spatial hierarchy by promoting a complex

relation of identification and differentiation cemented by the emotions of admiration or pity, in contrast, the exotic presents disabled figures as alien, often sensationalized, eroticized, or entertaining in their difference. As such, the exotic reproduces an ethnographic model of viewing characterized by curiosity or uninvolved objectification and informed historically by western imperialism.[17] For example, a nineteenth-century freak photograph of "Spotted Boys" (figure 13.3) recruited the dermatological condition that

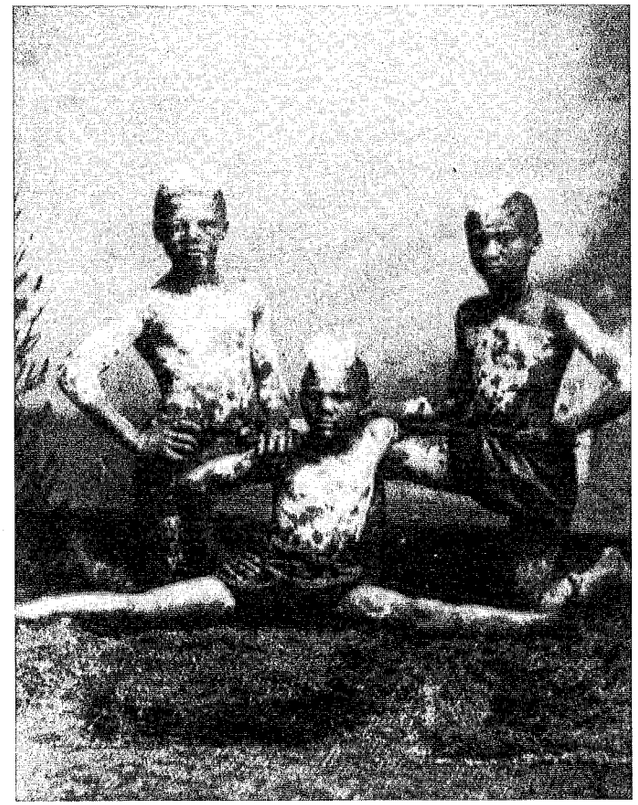

Figure 13.3. Early freak photography used the rhetoric of the exotic to transform the medical condition termed *vitiligo* into the ethnologically interesting "Spotted Boys" in this cabinet photograph. Courtesy of The Harvard Theatre Collection.

medical discourse termed *vitiligo* to fashion an engaging alien for the viewers' amusement and amazement—and for the showman's profit. The rhetoric of the exotic transforms spectators into tourists or ethnographers who imagine themselves as diverted, enlightened, or titillated by their encounter with the figure of the remote, alien body brought before them at the safe distance the image enforces.

The fourth visual rhetoric is the realistic. The realistic minimizes distance and difference by establishing a relation of contiguity between viewer and viewed. Whereas the wondrous, sentimental, and exotic modes of representation tend to exaggerate the difference of disability to confer exceptionality on the object in the picture, the realistic mode usually normalizes and often minimizes the visual mark of disability. To use the term "realistic" does not suggest that this visual rhetoric is more truthful, accurate, or real than the other modes discussed here. Realism's function is to create the illusion of reality, not to reproduce or capture its elusive and complex substance. Although more subtle perhaps, the rhetoric of realism is just as constructed and convention-bound as the rhetorics of the wondrous, sentimental, or exotic.

The rhetoric of the realistic trades in verisimilitude, regularizing the disabled figure in order to encourage a nonhierarchical identification between seer and seen. Realism in disability photography is the rhetoric of equality, most often turned utilitarian. The use of realism can be commercial or journalistic, and it can also urge the viewer to political or social action, as is suggested by the image of the African amputee (figure 13.4) . Presented as a victim of interethnic conflict, this man is portrayed completely without visual markers that particularize him—except his impairment, which is foregrounded but not exoticized or sensationalized. This presentation thus makes him a universal sign for human brutalization, with whom all viewers are encouraged to identify. As opposed to the rhetoric of diminishment invoked by the poster child or the rhetoric of distance in the exotic presentation, this image suggests that the viewer must become concerned or involved with postcolonial African politics because the disabled figure is like the viewers—socially level with them—rather than different from them.

Despite the identification with this man that the picture encourages, the photo's purpose, however, is to warn viewers against becoming disabled, suggesting that although he is similar to the viewers, he is separated from them

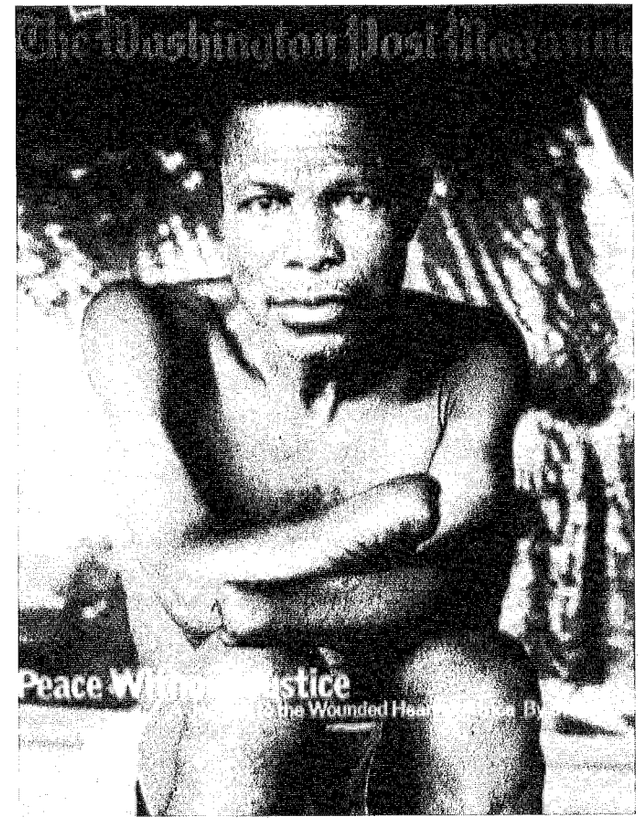

Figure 13.4. Characteristic of documentary photography, this photo of a victim of African tribal conflict draws upon the rhetoric of realism to encourage identification between the viewer and the viewed and to normalize the disabled subject. © 2000, The Washington Post. Reprinted with permission.

by misfortune. Although the picture confers political support and social acceptance, it nevertheless marks the disabled man as the person the viewer does not want to be.

To recapitulate simply these rhetorics of disability: the wondrous mode directs the viewer to look up in awe of difference; the sentimental mode instructs the spectator to look down with benevolence; the exotic mode coaches the observer to look across a wide expanse toward an alien object; and the realistic mode suggests that the onlooker align with the object of scrutiny. A visible signifier of disability—that is, the physical impairment—is always apparent in photographic images. In representing disability, the visualization of impairment, never the functional experience of it, defines the category of disability. In this sense, disability exists for the viewer to recognize and contemplate, not to express the effect it has on the person with a disability.

An important caveat here is that these rhetorics seldom occur discretely from one another. Instead, they are typically co-present in individual images and inform in varying manifestations the representation of disability throughout modernity. Moreover, creating a taxonomy with which to probe the effects and operations of these visualizations of disability implies that these rhetorics are more distinct and oppositional to one another than they actually are when they blend into any single photograph. Before fully examining this taxonomy, however, it is useful to consider the relationship of looking and disability.

3.

As anyone with a visible disability knows, being looked at is one of the universal social experiences of being disabled. Even children learn very early that disability is a potent form of embodied difference that warrants looking, even prohibited looking. The dominant mode of looking at disability in this culture is staring. Staring is an intense form of looking that enacts a relationship of spectator and spectacle between two people. In the visual choreography of staring, the starer becomes the subject of the act of staring while the staree becomes the object acted upon. The dynamic of staring registers the perception of difference by the viewer and enforces the acceptance of difference by the viewed. As such, it manifests the power relations between the subject positions of "disabled" and "able-bodied."

In contrast to glancing, glimpsing, scanning, surveying, and other forms of casual or disinterested looking, staring estranges and discomforts both people engaged in this awkward partnership. Gazing—which has been highly theorized as the dominant visual relation in patriarchy between male spectators and female objects of their gazes—differs from staring in that it usually encompasses the entirety of the body, even as it objectifies and appropriates that body.[18] Staring at disability, in contrast, intensely telescopes looking toward the physical signifier for disability. Starers gawk with abandon at the prosthetic hook, the empty sleeve, the scarred flesh, the unfocused eye, the twitching limb, but seldom do they broaden looking to envelop the whole body of the person with a disability. Staring at disability is nevertheless a form of inappropriate looking in modernity; it is, after all, considered rude in our historical moment to stare. The disabled body thus becomes a visual paradox: it is at once to-be-looked-at and not-to-be-looked-at. This illicit aspect of staring further dramatizes the encounter by making the viewer furtive and the viewed defensive. In this way, the staring dynamic attenuates the bonds of civil intercourse between equal members of the human community.

Staring is the social relationship that constitutes disability identity and gives meaning to impairment by marking it as aberrant. Even if a disability is not apparent, the threat of its erupting in some visual form is perpetually present. Disability is always ready to disclose itself, to emerge as some visually recognizable stigmata, however subtle, that will disrupt social order by its presence. The staring dynamic constitutes the starer as normal and the object of the stare as different. The exchange between starer and object witnesses both the anonymity that confers agency on the starer and the singularity that stigmatizes the one who is stared at. In this context, then, staring is the ritual enactment of exclusion from an imagined community of the fully human. As such, it is one of the cultural practices that creates disability as a state of absolute difference, rather than as simply one more variation in human form.

This analysis of staring suggests that disability is not simply the natural state of bodily inferiority and inadequacy it has traditionally been taken to be. Rather, disability is a culturally fabricated narrative of the body, similar to what we understand as the fictions of race and gender. Disability, then, is

a system that produces subjects by differentiating and marking bodies. Furthermore, this comparison of bodies legitimates the distribution of resources, status, and power within a biased social and architectural environment. As such, disability has four aspects: first, it is a system for interpreting bodily variations; second, it is a relationship between bodies and their environments; third, it is a set of practices that produce both the able-bodied and the disabled; fourth, it is a way of describing the inherent instability of the embodied self. The category of disability exists as a way to exclude the kinds of bodily forms, functions, impairments, changes, or ambiguities that call into question our cultural fantasy of the body as a neutral, compliant, and predictable instrument of some transcendent will. Moreover, *disability* is a broad term within which cluster ideological categories as varied as sick, deformed, ugly, old, maimed, afflicted, abnormal, and debilitated—all of which disadvantage people by devaluing bodies that do not conform to cultural standards. Thus disability functions to preserve and validate such privileged designations as beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, competent, intelligent—all of which provide cultural capital to those who can claim such status, who can reside within these subject positions. It is, then, the various interactions between bodies and world that make disability from the raw material of human variation and precariousness.

The history of disabled people in the western world is in part the history of being on display, of being visually conspicuous while being politically and socially erased. For example, the earliest record of disabled people is of their exhibition as prodigies, as "monsters" taken as omens from the gods or indexes of the natural or divine worlds. In religious thought, from the New Testament to the miracles at Lourdes, the lame, the halt, and the blind provide the spectacle for the story of bodily rehabilitation as spiritual redemption that is so essential to Christianity. From antiquity through modernity, the bodies of disabled people considered to be freaks and monsters have been displayed by the likes of medieval kings and P. T. Barnum for entertainment and profit in courts, street fairs, dime museums, and sideshows.[19] Moreover, medicine has from its beginnings exhibited the disabled body as what Michel Foucault calls the "case," in medical theaters and other clinical settings, in order to pathologize the exceptional and to normalize the ordinary.[20] Disabled people have variously been objects of awe, scorn, terror, delight, inspiration, pity, laughter, and fascination—but we have always been stared at.

Photography mediates between the viewer and the viewed by authorizing staring. After all, photos are made to be looked at. With the actual disabled body absent, photography tends to stylize staring, exaggerating and fixing the conventions of display and eliminating the possibility for interaction or spontaneity. Indeed, photographs of disabled people invite the viewer to stare without inhibition or contrition. They absolve viewers of responsibility to the objects of their stares at the same time that they permit a more intense form of staring than an actual social interchange might support. In other words, disability photography offers the spectator the pleasure of unaccountable, insistent looking. This license to stare that inheres in the medium of photography becomes a powerful rhetorical device that can be mobilized in the interest of persuasion. Disability photography hence manipulates its viewers, evoking an array of responses that have been harnessed—like all other images—primarily as commodities within late capitalism. In other words, these photographs appropriate the complex relations of the stare.

4.

A fuller elaboration of each of the four visual rhetorics of disability photography highlights these dynamics of the stare. The visual rhetoric of the wondrous, as was briefly suggested above, springs from a premodern interpretation of disability as either augury or a mark of distinction, whether representing good or evil. Oedipus, Tiresias, monsters, giants—even Shakespeare's Richard III—were imposing, if ominous, disabled figures. The exceedingly popular photographic portraits of the disabled people who were the elite entertainers in nineteenth-century freak shows exploited the notion of the wondrous in order to increase the circulation of freak figures and to make money. These widely disseminated photos served the dual purpose of creating a desire in the viewer to see the amazing spectacle and to re-create the satisfaction of viewing such a performance. The word *freak* meant whimsical more than monstrous to nineteenth-century popular audiences. This genre capitalized on physical differences in order to elicit amazement and admiration. This convention of presentation made freaks celebrities. For example, Charles Tripp, a famous "Armless Wonder" (figure 13.5), is pictured in a *carte*

Figure 13.5. Surrounded here by the products of his agile feet, the famous freak show entertainer, Charles Tripp, one of many "Armless Wonders," is presented as an amazing wonder. Courtesy of Robert Bogdan.

d'visite eating with his toes. This was only one of many images of the disabled performer sold to augment and promote his live appearances. This carefully choreographed portrait includes samples of Tripp's calligraphic skills, paper figures he has cut out, as well as the pen and scissors he used to accomplish such remarkable tasks. The silver tea set in the picture refers to other photos of him drinking from a cup with his toes. Here the composition acts as a kind of visual résumé documenting Tripp's accomplishments. The spectacle tries to elicit awe from the viewers, whose sense of their own clumsy toes makes Tripp's feet feat seem wondrous.

Like all disability photography, the *carte d'visite* of Tripp carefully choreographs a relationship of identification and differentiation between the subject and his viewer. In other words, it makes Tripp seem simultaneously strange and familiar. The typically exaggerated rhetoric that can be captured in nonphotographic renderings such as drawings of monsters or in verbal and textual expressions of wonder, for example, is somewhat tempered by the realism of photography, especially by the conventions of Victorian portraiture that necessarily inflect freak photos. What portraiture introduced into the rhetoric of wonder was the illusion of the ordinary that could be fused with the extraordinary. Viewers saw a regular man who engaged in the quotidian acts of writing, eating, and drinking tea, but—to those who had arms—he did these things in a most extraordinary manner. These wonder pictures thus invite viewers to identify with the mundane aspects of Tripp's presentation, which constitute almost the entire scene. But by spotlighting his unusual manner of eating, the portrait also encourages spectators to occupy the nondisabled position and differentiate themselves from Tripp. Only the single detail of eating with feet rather than hands marks this scene as distinctive. This departure from the normative expectations of the viewer creates the novelty and determines the meaning of the entire photograph. This is how disability operates visually: by juxtaposing the singular (therefore strange) mark of impairment within a surrounding context of the expected (therefore familiar), the picture coaches the viewer to understand impairment as the exception rather than the rule. Arresting time and space, the conventions of the photograph telescope the viewer's eye to the mark of impairment; in other words, the picture instructs the spectator to stare. The effect is that staring, the visual apprehension of the mark of impairment that is orchestrated and provoked by the photographic image, constitutes a particular relationship between the viewer and the viewed, thus producing disability.

The contemporary version of the wonder genre emphasizes admiration rather than amazement, in part because bourgeois respectability now deems it inappropriate to delight in staring at disabled people. The charity model of presenting disabled people has inflected the wonder model, producing the convention of the courageous "overcomer," contemporary America's favorite figure of disability. Even though armless calligraphers are no longer an acceptable form of middle-class entertainment, photos of disabled people who have adapted tasks to fit their bodies still ask their viewers to feel a sense of wonder. An advertisement for Habitat for Humanity, for example, pictures a volunteer worker with no fingers using a hammer (figure 13.6). Like Tripp, this man is portrayed as entirely ordinary except for the detail of the fingerless hand that holds the hammer, which the photo places as its center of interest. Such an arrangement at once invites and authorizes the stare. As is typical in disability photography, the text instructs the viewer how to respond to the picture by including a headline that says, "Extraordinary Volunteer, Unstoppable Spirit." The ad thus combines the narrative of admiration for "overcoming" disability with the narrative of empowerment characteristic of a post–Disability Rights movement consciousness. As in the photographs of the rock climber (figure 13.1) and of the "Armless Wonder" (figure 13.5), this carpenter places his viewer in the quotidian world, the one where prosaic people go about their business. But, by making these disabled subjects masters of ordinary activities such as climbing rocks, drinking tea, or using a hammer, the photos create a visual context that elicits adulation for accomplishing what the normalized viewer takes to be a superhuman feat. To varying degrees, these images thus lift their subjects out of the realm where ordinary people live typical lives and create them as distantly strange yet compellingly familiar.

5.

If the spatial rhetoric of wonder positions the disabled figure above the viewed, the spatial rhetoric of the sentimental places the disabled figure below the viewer in a position of supplication or impotence. Whereas the wonder mode makes its subjects the capable if exceptional agents of climbing, eating, and hammering, the sentimental mode makes its objects helpless, most often by presenting the disabled figure as a child or a woman so as to invoke other com-

Figure 13.6. This photograph of a Habitat for Humanity volunteer utilizes the narrative of overcoming to elicit admiration for the "Unstoppable Spirit" supposedly shown by his hammering regardless of having a disability. Courtesy of *Habitat World*.

Figure 13.7. This image of the famous 1863 wedding of two people of small stature, Charles Stratton ("General Tom Thumb") and Lavinia Warren, capitalizes on how these supposedly childlike adults arouse the sentiment of delight in their many viewers. Courtesy of Robert Bogdan.

plementary stereotypes that will intensify the equation of disability with diminishment, vulnerability, dependence, or incapacity. The sentimental is a hallmark of the rhetoric of charity and commerce alike. Most representations of disability promote the exchange of money, whether it is commerce or charity, buying or giving. Disability sells, for different reasons at different times.

The rhetorical element that charity introduces into the conventions of wonder is the sentiment of sympathy. Sympathy literally diminishes the wonderful, replacing awe with pity or the delight of the "cute."[21] The cute was a popular Victorian convention, as witnessed by the remarkable popularity of General Tom Thumb (figure 13.7) whose 1863 wedding, orchestrated by P. T. Barnum, was one of the major society events of New York City in the nineteenth century. Sympathy, which was largely absent from freak rhetoric, does not sell show tickets. But sympathy did flourish in the sentimental literature of nineteenth-century fiction, which often featured disabled characters intended to move their readers to political action or religious benevolence. The pathetic, the impotent, and the suffering confirmed Victorian bourgeoisie status by arousing their finest sentiments. As the increasingly empowered middle class imagined itself capable of capitalizing the world, it began to see itself as responsible for the world as well, a stewardship that launched humanitarian and reform movements that today's telethons are heir to.

The rhetoric of sentiment found an effective home in the photographic conventions of the charity poster child of the mid-twentieth century. The 1946 March of Dimes poster child (figure 13.2) clearly echoes Tom Thumb's spunky cuteness, but where the delight inspired by Tom Thumb was in his replication of adulthood in miniature—he is, after all, a "general"—this poster choreographs the boy's childlike vulnerability by showing him propped up in a corner of his crib in a before-and-after format. The poster child is the quintessential sentimental figure of twentieth-century charity campaigns. To catalyze the adult middle-class spectator to whom the photo addresses itself, this March of Dimes poster presents disability as a problem for the rescuer to solve, an obstacle to be eliminated, a challenge to be met. Such a logic transforms disability from an attribute of the disabled person to a project that morally enables the rescuer. The viewer's dimes, the poster suggests, will literally catapult the little boy who is unhappily trapped by his braces in the corner of his crib into a smiling and spirited little fellow striding determinedly toward the viewer. In this scene, disability becomes an occasion when the viewers' own narratives of progress, improvement, or heroic deliverance can be enacted.

Not only does the poster pack in the benevolent rescue and the overcoming narratives, but it suggests as well what is often called the cure-or-kill approach to disability. The logic of "cure or kill," accompanied by today's faith in technology, posits that if the disabled body cannot be normalized, it must be eliminated. If it does not respond to being improved, if it refuses to register the success of the rescuer's moral or technological efforts, the disabled body becomes intolerable, a witness to the human inability to perfect the world. This aspect of the relationship between the disabled and the nondisabled has led to such contemporary practices as aborting disabled fetuses, emphasizing elimination rather than accommodation of disability, and the sometimes excessive surgical procedures that normalize disabilities. By thwarting the narrative of heroic redemption, the permanently disabled body testifies to the impotence of its failed rescuer, a reminder that the body is ultimately not fully under the control of the human will. The disabled body moves from opportunity to rebuke if it will not be rehabilitated.

Thus the poster child of the 1940s and 1950s introduced two new elements into the rhetoric of sentiment that disability photography inherited from the nineteenth century. The first is that cure replaces suffering as the motivation for action in the viewer. Whereas the earlier sentimental literature accentuated suffering to mobilize readers for humanitarian, reform, or religious ends, the poster boy's suffering is only the background to his restoration to normalcy that results from "your dimes." Sentiment here, then, replaces the intensity of sympathy with the optimism of cure, testifying to a growing faith in medical treatment and scientific progress that developed as modernity increasingly medicalized and rationalized the body in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The second new element is what Paul Longmore describes as the self-serving opportunity that charity provides the giver for "conspicuous contribution."[22] What is clearest is that this rhetoric of sentiment diminishes the disabled figure in the interest of empowering, enhancing, and enlarging the viewers' senses of themselves.

The rhetoric of sentiment has migrated from charity to retail in late capitalism's scramble to capture markets. For example, the cover of a 1998 Benetton public relations brochure distributed in stores (figure 13.8) employs a chic sentimentality in documenting a school for developmentally disabled children that Benetton supports and outfits. The child featured has both Down's syndrome and a chic Benetton hat. Emblematic of the entire brochure, this cover girl fuses sentimental cuteness with high fashion to produce the conviction in the viewer/shopper that Benetton is humanitarian rather than crassly commercial. In anticipation of its patrons' skepticism and aptness to see this as "cynical advertising," Benetton devotes a whole introductory page to chiding the cynics and assuring its customers that this brochure is about "the gift of love." So, while commercial fashion marketing demands a certain sophistication and sleekness that preclude the gushy sentiment of the 1940s poster child, Benetton still assures its viewers of their tolerance and allows them to fantasize rescuing this child from the stigma of being disabled by dressing her smartly and supporting her school.

6.

The rhetoric of sentiment domesticates the disabled figure, making it familiar and comforting. In contrast, the visual rhetoric of the exotic traffics in

Figure 13.8. Sentimental cuteness and high fashion come together in this public relations brochure's presentation of a developmentally disabled child in a school supported and outfitted by Benetton. Courtesy of United Colors of Benetton. Photo by O. Toscani.

the alien, the strange, and the distant. Freak photography invoked the intensely exotic, which complemented the wondrous. Thus, even though the "Spotted Boys" (figure 13.3) were diminutive children, their presentation as primitives highlighted their foreignness. The boys' costuming and props suggest savagery and allude to the proliferation of popular ethnographic photography that accompanied the era of European imperialism.[23] The exotic demedicalizes, fascinates, seduces with exaggeration, and creates an often sensationalized, embellished alien. Even these domesticated "spotted boys" are distanced from the viewer by their setting, reducing their ability to elicit sympathy and making them objects of curiosity in a way the poster boy never could be.

Even self-presentation of people with disabilities can invoke the exotic mode of representation. Bob Flanagan, for instance, appropriates the rhetoric of exoticism in his live artistic performances, self-portraits, and autobiographical films. All of these seek to articulate a sensational, disturbing, but poignant connection among masochism, pain, and disability. In one self-portrait, Flanagan, who is famous for pounding a nail through his penis in one of his performances, presents himself as a "supermasochist" (figure 13.9). Creating a profane parody that fuses the cultural figures of the invincible superman, the porn star, and the sick person, he combines cape, chains, piercings, and the oxygen mask characteristic of cystic fibrosis to discomfort his viewers.[24] He deliberately provokes his viewers by rendering himself a contemporary freak figure. By hypersexualizing himself, cultivating exaggeration, and creating a radically transgressive persona, he aggressively enlists the exotic mode to counter unequivocally the rhetoric of sentimentality and renounce even the admiration of the wondrous. His self-presentation insists on the embodied dynamic of pain and its capacity to render one grotesque rather than transcendent—but never sympathetic. Regardless of how strenuously Flanagan's performances work against transcendence and toward establishing distance between himself and his spectators, there is nevertheless a strange nobility and attraction in the harsh character he creates. Perhaps that was his intent.

The introduction of disabled models has exploded the contemporary fashion world in the last several years, returning the rhetoric of the exotic to disability photography in newly acceptable, yet still controversial, ways—as the Benetton brochure (figure 13.8) suggests. Where the sentimental makes the disabled figure small and vulnerable, so as to be rescued by a

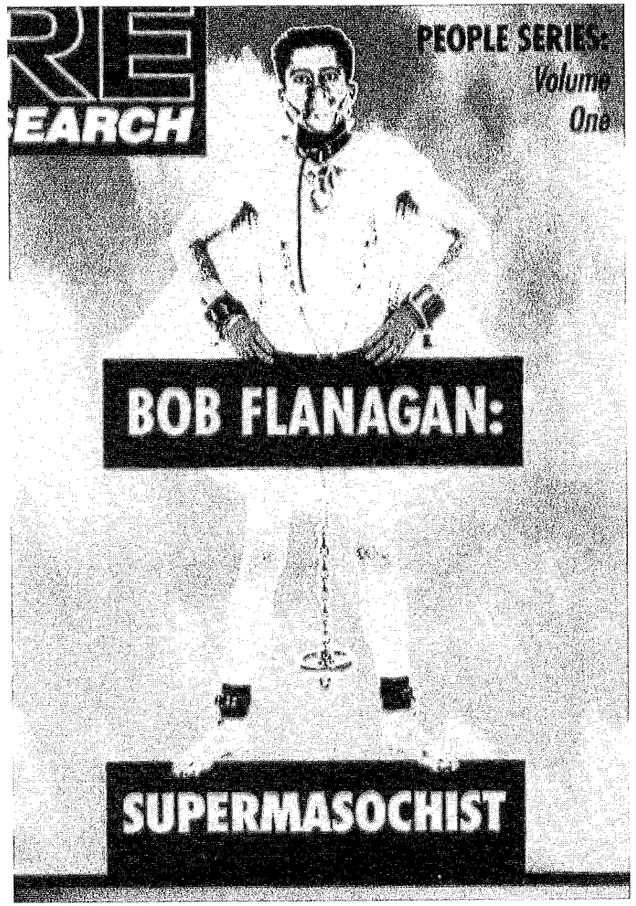

Figure 13.9. Bob Flanagan links pain, disability, and sex in his performance of the "supermasochist" role that calls on the hyperbole, sensationalism, and irony fundamental to the exotic mode. Courtesy of Vale Research.

benevolent agent, the exotic makes the disabled figure large, strange, and unlike the viewer. Ever straining for novelty and capitalizing on titillation, the fashion arm of the advertising world was sure to discover the power of disabled figures to provoke responses from viewers. Advertising has learned that disability sells in two ways. One is by making consumers feel good about buying from a company that is charitable toward the "disadvantaged," which is the Benetton brochure's pitch. The other is to capture the disability market, 54 million people and growing fast with the aging of the baby boomers, whose spending power is estimated to reach the trillion-dollar mark in 2000.[25]

Two venues for the exotic in advertising seem to have emerged in contemporary American culture. The first are ads that attempt to harvest the growing disabled market, which companies are beginning to recognize as both huge and affluent. The exotic serves here to upset the earnest, asexual, vulnerable, courageous image of disability that charity rhetoric has so firmly implanted. One image advertising wheelchairs (figure 13.10) presents a tattooed biker figure brandishing a hockey stick. The ad alludes to the strong men and tattoo kings of the sideshows and then inflects the image with a hyperphallic sexuality, completely rewriting the cultural script of the emasculated invalid and the male who becomes feminized by disability. As is typical with much popular disability photography, the text instructs the viewer to read this photo. The exaggeration characteristic of exoticization here marshals ironic hyperbole to mount a brazen, sensational parody similar to Flanagan's, provocatively challenging the viewer by lewdly commanding, "Lick this!" Such representations preclude even a trace of the sentimental or the wondrous, insisting instead on the empowerment of the transgressive, even at the expense of—or perhaps because of—distancing the spectator from the spectacle.

The second venue for disability as the exotic is emerging in the high-fashion market, always desperate to keep its edge. These advertisements and magazine features present disabled models in a dual attempt to capture a market and to novelize high fashion by introducing bodies that at once depart from and conform to the exhausted image of the high-fashion body. English fashion designer Alexander McQueen, known as "the bad boy of fashion design," recently designed a series of clothes and a shoot called "Accessible," featuring eight disabled models in the September 1998 issue of style magazine *Dazed and Confused*. McQueen's shots fold the models' dis-

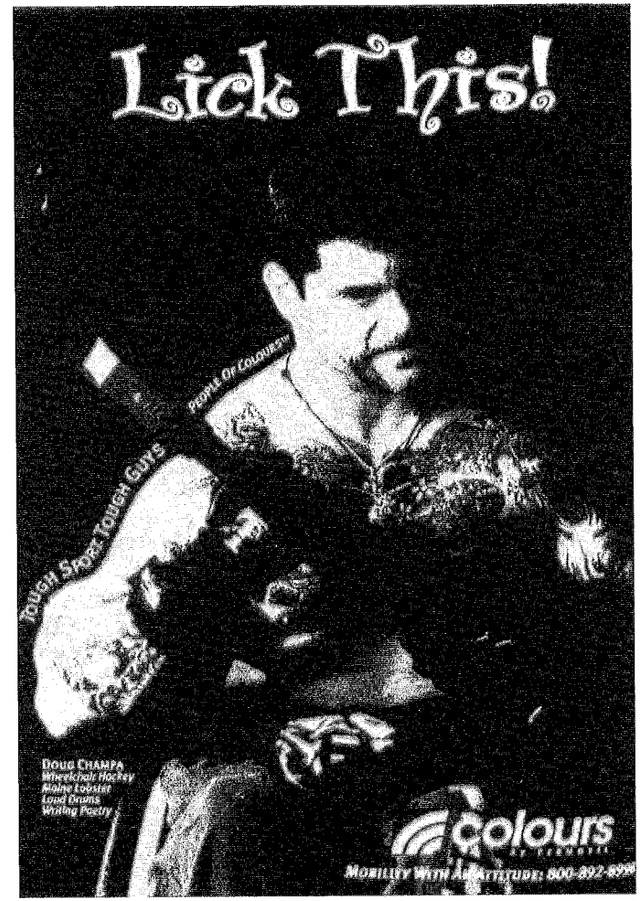

Figure 13.10. The rhetoric of the exotic in this ad for wheelchairs "with an attitude" alludes to the tatooed biker/ jock figure to create a transgressive, hyper-masculine image for the wheelchair user. By permission.

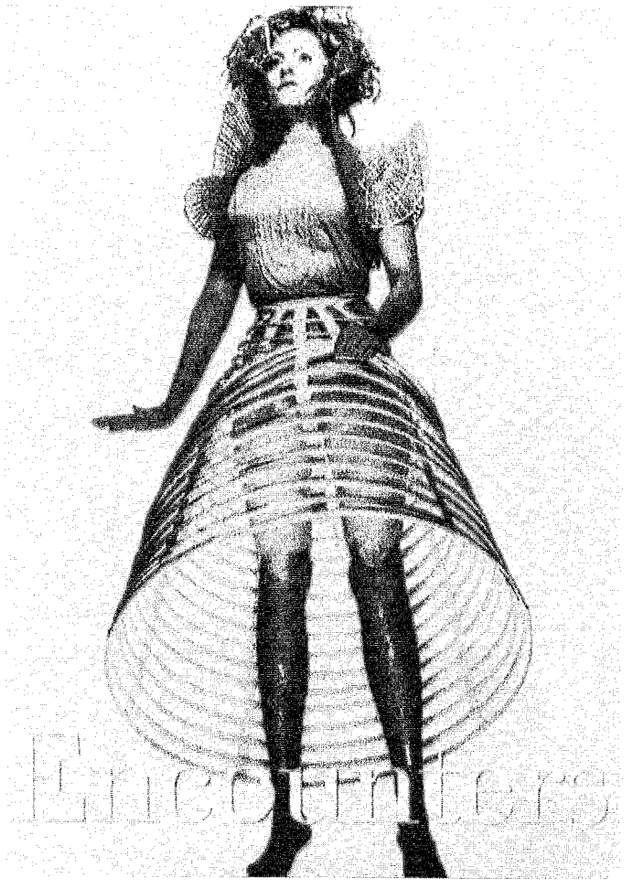

Figure 13.11. This high-fashion shot of model, sports star, and double-amputee, Aimee Mullins, emphasizes, rather than concealing, her prosthetic legs, exploiting the exotic mode to make disability seem chic. Used by permission of We media.

abilities into a context of exoticism that extends to the entire frame. The shot of Aimee Mullins, who is a double-amputee, champion runner, celebrity cover girl, renders her as a kind of high-tech bionic mannequin (figure 13.11).[26] No attempt is made to disguise her cosmetic prosthetic legs to pass for nondisabled; rather, the entire photo thematically echoes her prostheses and renders the whole image chic. As a gorgeous amputee, Mullins becomes an embodied contradiction. Her prosthetic legs parody—indeed, proudly mock—the very idea of the perfect body that has been the mark of fashion until today, even as the rest of her body conforms precisely to fashion's impossible standards.

Rather than concealing, normalizing, or erasing disability, these photos use the sensationalism and stigma traditionally associated with disability to quench postmodernity's perpetual search for the new and arresting image. Transgressive juxtapositions of disability and high fashion, such as our macho chair user and the athletic but legless Mullins, produce a fresh, attention-grabbing brand of exotic radical chic that redefines disabled identity for the disabled consumer.

7.

The final visual rhetoric of disability photography is the realistic. All photographic images employ the conventions of realism to some extent because of the verisimilitude the medium advances. Because looking at disability is at once forbidden and desired, it is always a highly charged scene that risks eclipsing the familiar with the strange. Whereas the exotic mode cultivates estrangement, the realistic mode often engages the rhetoric of realism in order to mobilize affiliation between the viewer and the viewed. Realism avoids differentiation and arouses identification, positioning the viewer and viewed on the same spatial plane, often as equals. Realism aims to routinize disability, making it seem ordinary. As such, it has the most political power in a democratic order, although one could argue that the transgressive most effectively achieves social change in democracies.

Realism emerged as a property of portraiture, documentary, and medical photography of the nineteenth century.[27] Freak photographs seem to recognize and capitalize on the way in which the mundane juxtaposed with the

wondrous can capture viewers, as is suggested by the visual choreography of the portrait of Charles Tripp eating with his feet in a context of the quotidian (figure 13.5). Realism exploits the ordinary to set off Tripp's extraordinary body, at once calling attention to his startling disability and domesticating it. Documentary photography such as that made famous by Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis aimed photographic realism at the nineteenth-century obsession with social reform.[28] Documentary and journalistic photography differ from charity and commercial photography in that they do not solicit the exchange of money directly but rather aim to democratically disseminate information intended to shape the viewers' actions and opinions.

Documentation was a strategy of social reform, the sometimes religious, sometimes secular, but ever pervasive fantasy of perfecting American society. Hine tirelessly recorded the fabric of the American underclass, exposing the supposed truth of the conditions under which they struggled. Among those he photographed were wounded workers (figure 13.12). He focused his lens particularly on men, whose disabilities he concluded robbed them of the male privilege and duty of work, and on children, whose disabilities he felt stole their childhood. His captions instructed the viewers in the narrative of disability the images visualized: "The Wounds of Work," reads one; "When a man's hand is mutilated, he keeps it out of sight."[29] The implied message here is that the social mandate to hide disability precludes entry into the workplace. Ironically, Hine's photograph reveals plainly and undramatically the physical impairment society refuses to look at. Much like the photo of the African amputee (figure 13.4) that is heir to Hine, the picture of the wounded worker exposes the empty sleeve to protest this closeting of disability by surrounding it with the common. Nevertheless, the sociopolitical protest implied in the photograph, like that of the African amputee, frames disability as the threat of affliction and catastrophe that troubles the ordinary. Such protest or reform photos, then, enlist disability to tell a cautionary tale. Disability, they suggest, should and can be avoided in a world that works right.

In its urgency to capture ostensible truth, realism often fuses the sensational to the ordinary in a gesture of obstinate opposition to the supposed pretenses or evasions of other representational modes. For example, the photograph of the African man (figure 13.4) brutally foregrounds his handless stumps. In a similar register, the realistic portrayal of disability recently provoked controversy and roused political protests over what consti-

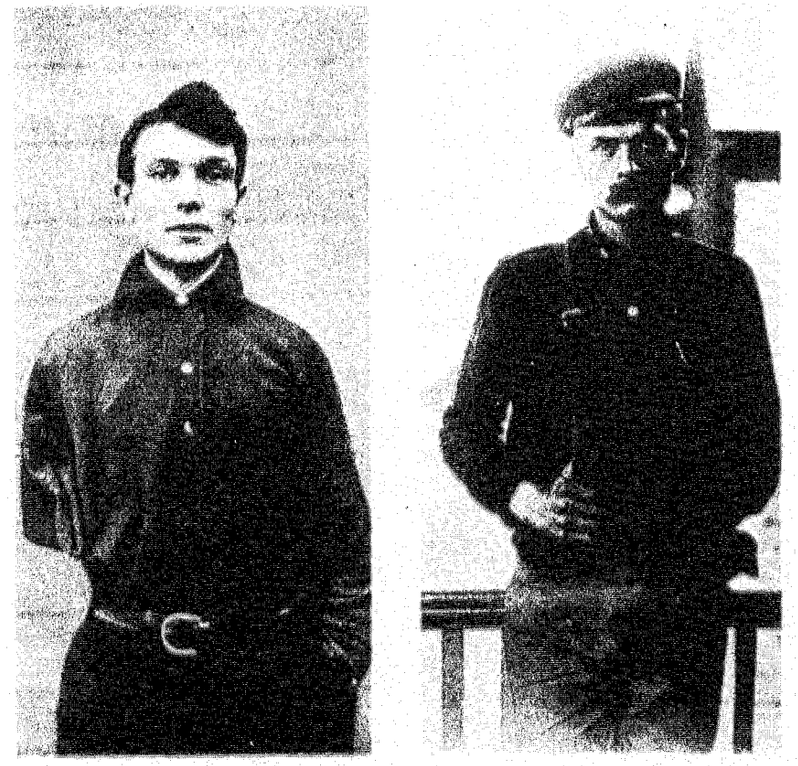

Photo by Hine

An Arm Gone at Twenty
This young brakeman when last seen was studying telegraphy in order to stay in the service

The Wounds of Work
When a man's hand is mutilated he keeps it out of sight

Figure 13.12. Lewis Hine documented the disadvantaged by using the rhetoric of realism as a form of social protest against excluding disabled workers from the privileges of labor.

tutes unacceptable looking at women's breasts. The Breast Cancer Fund, a San Francisco–based nonprofit organization dedicated to education about and funding of breast cancer research, mounted a public awareness campaign in January 2000 called "Obsessed with Breasts" that featured three posters showing women boldly displaying mastectomy scars. The posters

parodied a Victoria's Secret catalog (figure 13.13), a *Cosmopolitan* cover, and a Calvin Klein perfume ad, all of which typically parade women's breasts in upscale, semi-pornographic modes that have become an unremarkable staple of commercial magazine advertising. The Breast Cancer Fund posters disrupt the visual convention of the female breast as sexualized object for male appropriation and pleasure by replacing the now-normative eroticized breast with the proscribed image of the amputated breast. The powerful visual violation produced by exchanging the spectacle of the eroticized breast, which has been desensationalized by its endless circulation, with the medicalized image of the scarred breast, which has been concealed from public view, was so shocking to viewers that many demanded the images be removed. Of course, censuring and censoring images that demand a recognition of the reality of breast cancer ignited a conversation and controversy that more than accomplished the goals of the initial campaign. The images mobilize the charge of this forbidden version of the disabled breast by ironically juxtaposing it with the commonplace but virulently sexist eroticized breast. In this way, the posters advance a potent feminist challenge not only to sexism in medical research and treatment for breast cancer but to the oppressive representational practices that make everyday erotic spectacles of women's breasts while erasing the fact of the amputated breast that one in eight women will have. By mocking the tired sensationalism of pornography, these pictures protest against the refusal of contemporary America, literally and figuratively, to look at breast cancer.

The visual rhetoric of the ordinary, unglossed by the sensational or sentimental, has emerged in a climate of integration and diversity created by the Disability Rights movement and resulting legislation, such as Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). While the post-ADA era is not without resistances and backlashes to the integration of people with disabilities, the social environment is filling with disability in the popular press. Disability now appears not only in the sensationalist or sentimental underbelly of the press, where it always has, but tucked in various degrees of inconspicuousness into the fabric of common visual culture. Department store and catalog advertising, for instance, has adopted the rhetoric of the ordinary simultaneously to appeal to disabled people as a market and to suggest an ethic of inclusion. L. L. Bean promotes a wheelchair backpack in its catalog; Wal-Mart and many other stores feature disabled models and mannequins in everything from frumpy jogging suits to evening gowns. Toy lines such as Barbie and the upscale American Girl have wheelchair-using dolls.

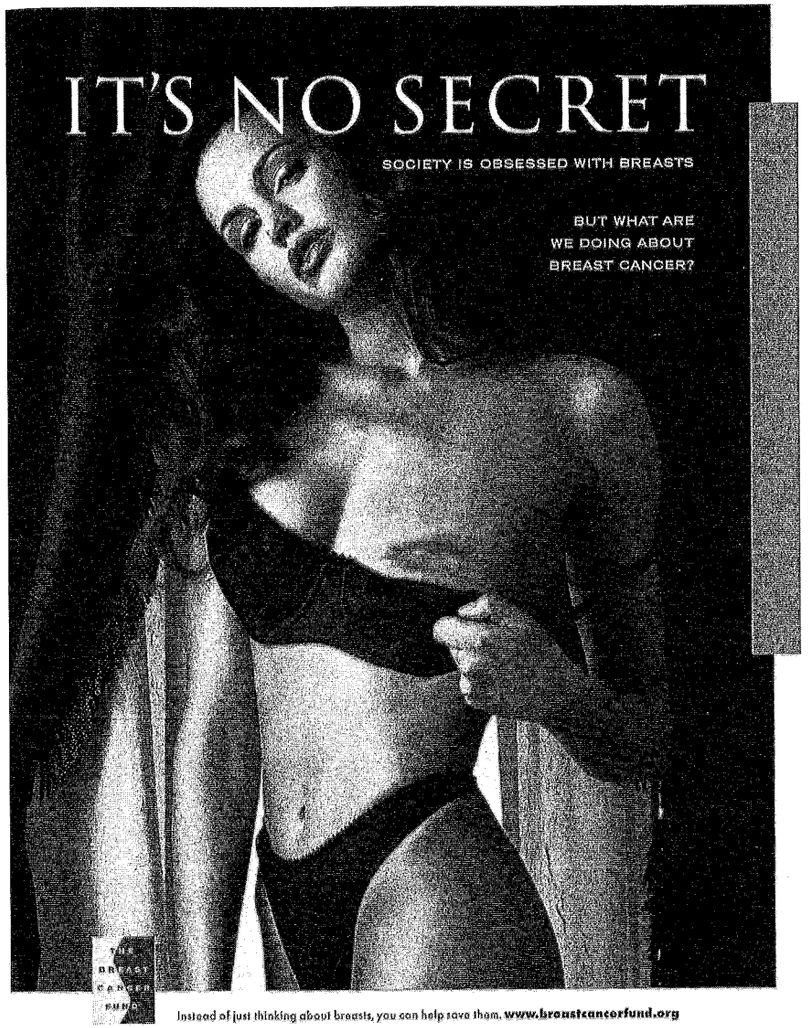

Figure 13.13. This controversial Breast Cancer Fund poster employs the sensationalism often characteristic of realism to protest inadequate breast cancer research and to expose the cultural effacement of mastectomies. Courtesy of the Breast Cancer Fund. Photo: Heward Jue.

For the most part, the conventions of realism govern the images of disabled figures in the world of commerce, the visual component of which is advertising. Ads do not usually distinguish the presentation of disabled models from nondisabled ones. In the aggregate, contemporary advertising casts disabled people as simply one of many variations that compose the market to which they appeal. Such routinization of disability imagery not only brings disability as a common human experience out of the closet but enables people with disabilities—especially those who acquire impairments as adults—to imagine themselves as a part of the ordinary world, rather than as a special class of untouchables and unviewables. Images of disability as a familiar, even mundane experience in the lives of seemingly successful, happy, well-adjusted people can reduce the identifying against oneself that is the overwhelming effect of oppressive and discriminatory attitudes toward people with disabilities.

This form of realism constitutes a rhetoric of equality radical in its refusal to foreground disability as difference. A particularly vivid example is the upscale disability fashion photography featured in magazines that target the disability market, such as *We Magazine*. Such ads reimagine disability by casting what has been culturally invisible—the disabled body—in the context of what is culturally hypervisible—the fashion model. A shot of a classically handsome, sophisticated dandy (figure 13.14) invokes the conventions of high-end fashion photography but differs from the exoticized presentation of Aimee Mullins (figure 13.11) in that it markets itself to a disabled, upscale audience who are after the look of affluent authority and charm. The image is entirely ordinary within the conventions of fashion photography except for the highly unusual detail of the prosthetic hook that replaces the model's amputated hand. Although the model looks like all models, who never look like real people, the juxtaposition of a visual disability with this conventional image is arresting, as is the restraint in its presentation. The arrangement attempts neither to conceal nor to expose the hook, instead presenting it as casually apparent, as one simple aspect of a conventionally attractive man. Although this ad panders to the conspicuous consumption that all advertising does, what makes the image radical is that it does not appeal to the conspicuous contribution associated with charity photography. In other words, the conjunction of the visual discourse of high fashion, which has traditionally trafficked exclusively in standardized, stylized bodies, with the visual discourse of disability, which has traditionally traded in

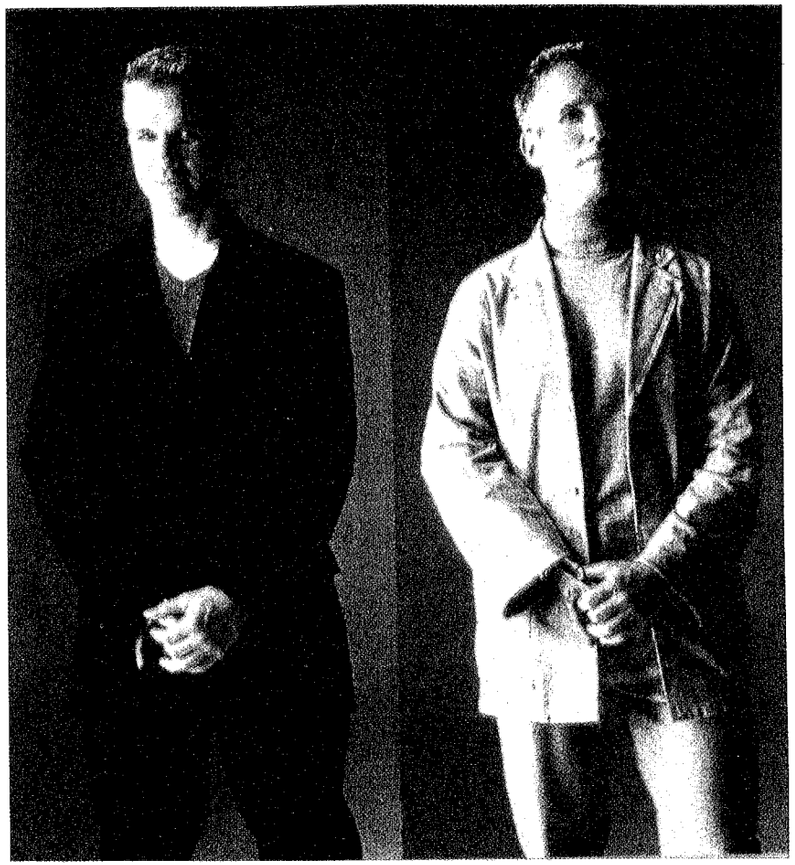

Figure 13.14. The Disability Rights movement has generated a rhetoric of the ordinary in contemporary advertising that appeals to the disability market and suggests an ideology of diversity and inclusion.

the pathetic, earnest, or sensational creates a visual disjuncture that calls previous cultural images of disability into question.

The most radical reimagining of disability offered by the realist mode is, ironically, the least visually vivid of the images discussed here, perhaps because it is the only type of photography with no commercial purpose. This

genre of disability photography is the official portrait, exemplified by the Department of Education's simple photographic portrait of Judith E. Heumann, Assistant Secretary of Education during the Clinton Administration (figure 13.15). The conventions governing such pictures strive for the effect of the everyday, inflected with enough dignity and authority to communicate the importance of the position but not enough to separate the official from the constituency. In a democracy, official portraits depict public servants, after all, in no-nonsense black and white, with standard costuming and poses, and flanked unpretentiously by flags. As opposed to commercial photography, these portrayals are neither generalized nor stylized but rather particularized. The photo suggests that this is a real, recognizable person responsible for certain official duties. In this instance, her wheelchair particularizes this woman. It is clearly an aspect of her identity, an integral element of who and what the photograph says she is. The glimpse of her chair is descriptive, as fundamental to her image as the shape of her chin, the cut of her hair, or the tint of her skin. In its ordinariness, this photo discourages staring without prohibiting it. Indeed, this photo encourages forms of looking such as glancing, if the viewer is not very interested in the secretary, or perhaps beholding, if one is engaged by her. By depicting Secretary Heumann as an ordinary person who has a position of official status in the society, this photograph encourages viewers who consider themselves as either disabled or nondisabled to identify with her. The photo suggests neither that her accomplishments are superhuman nor that she has triumphantly overcome anything. She thus becomes more familiar than strange. Most important, the picture conveys the message that a woman with a disability can occupy such a position. Secretary Heumann's picture thus sits in bold historical opposition to the many now-controversial official photos of President Franklin D. Roosevelt which hide the wheelchair that he used daily.[30] Authorized by the cultural changes the civil right movements wrought, the official portrait is one of several genres in contemporary photography that familiarize disability rather than defamiliarize it. Indeed, such representations banish the strange and cultivate the ordinary, radically reimagining disability by installing people with disabilities in the realm of human commonality and dismantling the assumption that disability precludes accomplishment.

This taxonomy of four primary visual rhetorics of disability provides a way to see how we see disability. The dynamics of looking mounted by these rhetorics suggests that all visualizations of disability are mediations that

Figure 13.15. The contrast between this official portrait of Assistant Secretary Judith E. Heumann sitting in her wheelchair and the many photos of FDR that hid the wheelchair he used daily during his Presidency marks the difference between a pre- and a post-civil rights era.

shape the world people who have or do not have disabilities inhabit and negotiate together. All representations have social and political consequences. Understanding how images create and recreate disability as a system of exclusions and prejudices moves us toward the process of dismantling the institutional, attitudinal, legislative, and architectural barriers that keep people with disabilities from full participation in the society. Although this analysis has been more descriptive than prescriptive, it suggests that the realistic mode is most likely to encourage the cultural work the Disability Rights movement began. Imagining disability as ordinary, as the typical rather the atypical human experience, can promote practices of equality and inclusion that begin to fulfill the promise of a democratic order.

NOTES

1. Sander L. Gilman, *Seeing the Insane* (New York: J. Wiley, Brunner/Mazel Publishers, 1982).

2. Alan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3–64.

3. Maren Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America, 1890–1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xiii, 66. See also John Tagg, "A Means of Surveillance: The Photograph as Evidence in Law," in *The Burden of Representation: Evidence, Truth and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

4. Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 4.

5. Gilman, *Seeing the Insane*, xi.

6. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*. trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (1964; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 29.

7. I do not want to draw too fine a line between medical and popular photography here. Medicalized photographs sometimes found their way into the larger public viewing world, as, for example, in the 1858 book of medical photos mentioned by Gilman, called *The Mind Unveiled; or, A Brief History of Twenty-two Imbecile Children*, published by Isaac Kerlin, superintendent of the Pennsylvania Asylum, for the purpose of raising funds for the asylum. See Gilman, *Seeing the Insane*, quote on xi.

8. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990); Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983); Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

9. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 118.

10. Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, 29.

11. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*; David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little Brown, 1971).

12. Karen Halttunen, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture," *American Historical Review* 100 (April 1995): 303–34; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

13. Marcia Pearce Burgdorf and Robert Burgdorf, Jr., "A History of Unequal Treatment: The Qualifications of Handicapped Persons as a 'Suspect Class' under the Equal Protection Clause," *Santa Clara Lawyer* 15 (1975): 855–910, quotation on 863.

14. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "From Wonder to Error: A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity," in Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed., *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1–22.

15. Much is written on sentimental culture in general. For explications of the disabled figure's place in the rhetoric of sentiment, see Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Crippled Little Girls and Lame Old Women: Sentimental Spectacles of Sympathy within Rhetorics of Reform in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing," in Karen Kilcup, ed., *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers: A Critical Collection* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998), 128–45; Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Narratives of Deviance and Delight: Staring at Julia Pastrana, the 'Extraordinary Lady,'" in Timothy Powell, ed., *Beyond the Binary* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 81–104; Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). For a related analysis of the slave—who is often disabled—as sentimental figure, see Elizabeth B. Clark, "'The Sacred Rights of the Weak': Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America," *Journal of American History* 82 (September 1995): 463–93.

16. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), argues that pain as a form of suffering is not narratable because it is not manifest in the body. Disability operates as pain's opposite in that it is visibly manifest in the body and therefore can be employed as the representation of suffering, even though it may not actually entail suffering.

17. Robert Bogdan uses the exotic mode to classify freaks in his pathbreaking study of freak shows, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988).

18. The exception here is sexualized staring at breasts, which are often the targets of staring if they are large. Much is written on the gaze in the context of gender. For some formulations, see, for example, Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Edward Snow, "Theorizing the Male Gaze: Some Problems," *Representations* 0, 25 (Winter 1989): 30–41; E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

19. Leslie A. Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Simon and

Schuster, 1978); Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1978); John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Kathryn Park and Lorraine Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France and England," *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies* 92 (August 1981): 20–54; Yi-Fu Tuan, *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show*; Dudley Wilson, *Signs and Portents: Monstrous Births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1993).

20. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 59.

21. Lori Merish, "Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics," in Garland Thomson, ed., *Freakery*, 185–206.

22. Paul Longmore, "Conspicuous Contribution and American Cultural Dilemmas: Telethon Rituals of Cleansing and Renewal," in David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, eds., *The Body and Physical Difference* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 134–60.

23. Christopher A. Vaughan, "Ogling Igorots: The Politics and Commerce of Exhibiting Cultural Otherness, 1898–1913," in Garland Thomson, ed., *Freakery*, 219–33.

24. Bob Flanagan, *Bob Flanagan: Supermasochist* (San Francisco: Re/Search Publications, 1993). For an analysis of Flanagan's performances, along with those of Orlan, the performance artist who repeatedly performs cosmetic surgeries on her face, see Linda S. Kauffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). The allusion in Flanagan's work to the figure of Superman has taken on new resonance since the actor Christopher Reeve, who not only has played Superman but is Superman in the cultural imagination, became disabled.

25. John M. Williams, "And Here's the Pitch: Madison Avenue Discovers the 'Invisible Consumer,'" *WE Magazine* (July–August 1999): 28–31.

26. Mullins has two types of prosthetic legs, functional sets for running and cosmetic sets for modeling. Part of her revision of the disabled role is that Mullins casts disability as a career advantage. For example, as a model, she had the advantage of choosing how tall she wanted to be. She was also featured as one of *People* magazine's "50 Most Beautiful People of 1999."

27. John Pultz, *The Body and the Lens: Photography 1839 to the Present* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1995).

28. Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890); Walter Rosenblum, Naomi Rosenblum, and Alan Trachtenberg, *America and Lewis Hine* (Millerton, N.Y.: Aperture, 1977).

29. Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life*, 60.

30. Hugh Gregory Gallagher, *FDR's Splendid Deception* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1985).

14

American Disability Policy in the Twentieth Century

Richard K. Scotch

On January 22, 1907, the Committee on Pensions of the U.S. House of Representatives held a hearing on the subject of pensions for disabled veterans of the Civil and Mexican-American Wars. The hearing began with a statement from Robert Burns Brown, Esq., of Zanesville, Ohio, the commander in chief of the influential veterans lobby the Grand Army of the Republic. He testified:

> We are not here asking for that that [*sic*] we ought not to have, for we represent a class of men who in the days of their youth surrendered to this Government the best service they had. . . . And very good authority could be cited to show that every survivor of the war of three years' service gave up about thirteen years of his life. Many of them are maimed, and they have been handsomely provided for by the American Congress. Some are blind, and they have been cared for. Many are crippled by rheumatic troubles, but they have not been cared for as we think they ought to be.[1]

This statement, one of the first policy records of the twentieth century in the United States dealing with disability, has some interesting qualities worthy of comment.

First, Brown justifies assistance to disabled veterans not merely in terms of their need but also as repayment for past military service. He bases their claims before the government not on their impairments alone but also on the moral worth and social worthiness of these men. A survey of modern U.S. disability policy reveals that Brown is far from alone in this view. Many