

# “If No-One Speaks Out, Then Nothing Changes”

## A Personal Response to Liz Crow’s *Resistance*

Sarah Bush

Public and Commercial Services Union

I am not often rendered speechless. I am rarely haunted by things that I have read or watched. If asked, I would have said that I consider myself to be too long in the tooth, too jaded, too cynical to experience such a visceral response to any work of art, no matter how brilliant. I would have been wrong.

Liz Crow, of Roaring Girl Productions, spent ten years creating her installation *Resistance: Which Way the Future?* Given its subject matter, I shudder to think how gruelling those ten years must have been. Given its impact, I cannot find it in myself to argue that she should not have put herself through it.

What watching *Resistance* brought home to me more powerfully than any amount of reading about Aktion-T4 has ever done, or could ever do, is that it *would* have been me. I would have been taken away in a bus and gassed to death, along with the majority of my friends. People I love, admire, and respect; people of towering intellect; people of great compassion; people of piercing insight; people with children; people who are creative; people who are witty; people who are frivolous; people who are serious; people who love and are loved: *all these people* would have been slaughtered as though they were just so much vermin. And they would have been slaughtered by individuals who may, just a few months earlier, have been their neighbours; neighbours who, in response to political propaganda, had learned not to regard them as people any more; neighbours who, even worse, had been persuaded that murdering them in cold blood was a noble duty.

When the Nazis held their sophisticated, champagne-fuelled, tinkly soirée to celebrate the successful despatch of the one thousandth useless eater, the photograph at which they pointed with such smug self-congratulation could have been of me. I have absolutely no reason to assume that the young man whose gentle image Crow placed in the photograph frame used in the film was valued by his friends and family any less than I am. This, for me, was the pivotal

moment of the installation. I sat with my hand clamped over my mouth: I was close to vomiting from the utter horror of it. It beggars belief that anyone could be so callous as to celebrate their part in the murder of one innocent person, let alone a thousand. To demand energetic approval of the atrocities you are so proud of having committed from people who are bound to you by chains of fear that they will be next for the cull must surely be the very definition of evil.

And yet, against all the odds, there is hope. Even though none of the disabled people who were sent to the holding centres came out of them alive, *still* they resisted. In a time of absolute extremis, knowing that they faced their own deaths, all too aware that they would never know whether they had been successful, they took what action they could to save the lives of those who came after them. If that does not give the lie to any suggestion that disabled people are sub-human, then I do not know what would. What is remarkable is that these tiny, individual acts of resistance actually *worked*. People—non-disabled people—ultimately decided that they could no longer stomach what was going on. It must be hard to maintain the fiction that disabled people are sub-human when, as individuals, they bid you farewell before they are taken away to be gassed to death. The courage and altruism of these doomed men and women triggered a public campaign that led to the suspension of Aktion-T4.

The audience is left with a challenge: if you could do one thing—just *one* thing—to prevent this ever happening again, what would that one thing be? The unspoken counterpoint to that question is, of course: if you don't do that one thing, and it *does* happen again, how will you feel? Will you be able, after watching this, to convince yourself that the wholesale murder of tens of thousands of people, who share no other characteristic than that they just happen to have impairments, is acceptable because nature tells us that herds should be thinned?

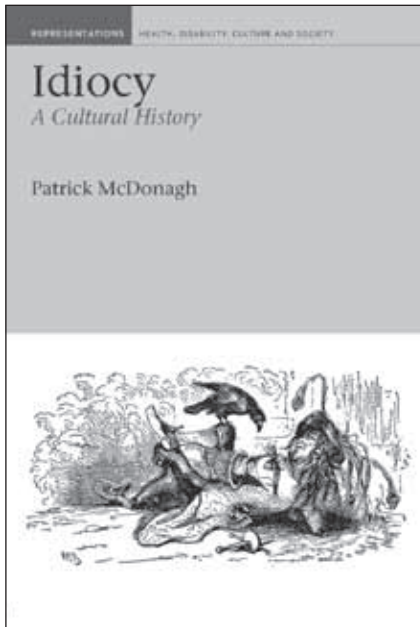
I do not want a world in which politicians are at liberty to judge my value to the wider community by the size of my tax and National Insurance contributions. I do not want to be part of a society in which there is only one right way to be, and in which biological non-conformity with that ideal is punishable by banishment, torture or death. I do not accept that, when scans show that a baby will be born with impairments, terminating the pregnancy is a sensible, permissible solution. Neither do I accept that people with impairments should be discouraged from having children. I do not want anybody to be exempt from prosecution because their stated reason for helping me to shuffle off this mortal coil is that I have “a severe and incurable physical disability from which there is no possibility of recovery.” I already have *two* of those, thank you very much, and nobody, not even the Director of Public Prosecutions, has the right to decide for me whether my life is worth living.

One of the whispering voices in the final section of the installation says, “If no-one speaks out, then nothing changes.” I speak out. I have been speaking out for a long time. Sometimes I feel as though nothing changes *despite* the fact that I speak out. Not infrequently, I conclude that I will stop speaking out because the degree of effort it takes to do so is rarely reflected in the results. Nevertheless, the one thing *I* am going to do to prevent Aktion-T4 happening again is to carry on speaking out. The murder of another quarter of a million disabled people will not happen again while it is within the reach of my arm to contribute towards its prevention. Next time I am convinced that even my best efforts are futile, I will remember *Resistance*.

# Idiocy

## A Cultural History

by Patrick McDonagh, Concordia University, Montreal



**Drawing on cultural, socio-logical, scientific and popular representations, this book explores how the idea of 'idiocy' changes across time and place, taking its shape and significance according to an era's prevailing social and cultural concerns.**

**'The most intriguing aspect of McDonagh's work is its range of sources, drawing on literary, popular, scientific and socio-political discourses to elucidate the myriad forces which shaped the constructions of idiocy. This is a fascinating and original book.'**

Professor Tim Stainton,  
*University of British Columbia*

November 2008

384 pages, 234 × 156mm

hb 9781846310959 £65.00

pb 9781846310966 £18.95

Representations: Health, Disability, Culture 3

To order:

Email: [lup@liv.ac.uk](mailto:lup@liv.ac.uk)

Telephone: +44 [0]151 794 2233

Or visit our website: [www.liverpool-unipress.co.uk](http://www.liverpool-unipress.co.uk)

[www.liverpool-unipress.co.uk](http://www.liverpool-unipress.co.uk)