Resistance: transforming the future

Liz Crow

Transcript of a keynote speech given by Liz Crow at the 5th international Disability Studies Conference, Lancaster University, 7-9 September 2010

LIZ CROW: Fifteen years ago, I read a book ‘By Trust Betrayed’ by the disabled academic Hugh Gallagher in the States. This was a book about Aktion-T4, the Nazi programme of mass murder targeted at disabled people. The first thing that struck me about that book was how in all my years’ involvement in the disabled people’s movement, how had I never come across the history before?

And apart from the very obvious horror of what I was reading, there were two other things that really stayed with me from that book. The first was that the values that underpinned Aktion T4 felt alarmingly familiar; the ideas about disabled people that permitted all of that to happen felt very contemporary. The other thing that really hit me very powerfully was a very short part in the book that talked about people who resisted, including disabled people. At the time somebody said to me, "Well, you know, at that point what did people have to lose? Of course they resisted." And I think things can always be made worse and the courage in people who resisted in whatever way they could was extraordinary. Imagine being in an institution and being dependent, being made dependent, on the staff for your basic needs, those very same people who were going to be loading you on to a bus to go to a death centre. Trying to resist in those conditions was just, well, awe-inspiring.

At the time, I knew I needed to do something with what I had read. I didn't yet know what and, like a lot of my projects, it’s taken years to percolate. Eventually I decided I would work on something I have since called the *Resistance* project.

I would like to tell you more about that a little later on. What I want to do first is give some historical background to the project. Some of the things I read in that book and subsequent research, and in a trip to Germany with some of the other people working on the project.

Aktion T4 was preceded by a propaganda campaign through films and posters and other media. It was designed to feed the population’s anxiety and latent prejudices about disability and ready them for what came next. The first example [slide] is from a Reich propaganda ministry film. It’s a black and white picture with two white-coated orderlies standing amongst some wooden high-sided cots and, if you look closely, there are people lying inside those cot-beds. The text on it says, “Life only is a burden.”

The second was aimed at the Hitler Youth, so young people. It's a picture of a black man holding out a bowl; I am not sure if it's a begging bowl. The camera is looking down on him and the text says “Mentally ill negro English, sixteen years in an institute costing 35,000 Reich marks”.

The third one is a 1930s poster. It’s a picture of a disabled man sitting in a chair with a white-coated member of staff standing behind him with a hand on his shoulder and the text says, “This genetically-ill person will cost our people's community sixty thousand marks over his lifetime. Citizens, that is your money”. Then it goes on to implore people to join the National Socialist Party.

So it was a softening-up of the population so that they would be prepared for what came next. And what came next began with increased segregation of disabled people and then laws that brought in marriage bans on people with certain listed impairments, so the people would not carry on reproducing themselves. That was not sufficient to get rid of disabled people, so they brought in compulsory sterilisation for people in certain groups. Once again, they realised that was not going to achieve the aim quickly enough and efficiently enough, and that is the point at which they moved into mass murder.

One of the reasons I’m particularly amazed that disabled people's history in all of this hasn’t been picked up on before is that what happened to this community served as a prototype for everything that came later. This happened before the Jewish Holocaust and before other groups were targeted in this way and the methodology used became the same set of mechanics for the concentration camps. Had people intervened at that point, presumably, what came next would have been, in some way different.

To take you through the basic mechanics of Aktion T4, this lovely villa in Berlin is the bureaucratic headquarters for Aktion T4. This is where all the decisions went on. It’s on a road called Tiergartenstrasse, number 4 Tiergartenstrasse, and that is where the programme got its name T4.

Health visitors and health professionals all over the country were asked to fill in forms about any disabled people they knew, stating details of people's impairments. This was compulsory and health officials often thought they were helping disabled person to get the resources they needed, so, sometimes, they talked up people’s impairments and unwittingly made them more vulnerable to being selected. Their details were sent on a one-page form to these Headquarters. From there, three doctors looked at their forms and gave them a plus or a minus and occasionally a question mark. If it was a plus, your name was on the list, and it was as simple as that. That was the selection procedure.

From there, people would be rounded up, whether from their homes or from institutions, in these grey buses with blacked out windows. Now, the programme was designed to be secret because the Nazi party was nervous that not everybody would support it. But very quickly it became clear that it was not a secret. These buses would go through villages and children would be told by the parents, "There goes the death bus; if you are naughty you will be put on the next death bus". So it was known what was happening. People were transported from holding institutions to the six institutions marked as death centres.

This is Bernburg. We visited Bernburg on our trip to Germany. It's a somewhat forbidding, very institutional building with browny yellow bricks, lots of windows, and down at the bottom is a half basement with a series of windows which are whited-out. The windows that have a bit of scraping away from that white-out, those are where the gas chambers are based.

So people were driven in their buses to the wooden garages at the institutions. This garage could house three buses at a time and it was designed with a corridor from there into the centre so that people's arrival would be disguised from the villagers, and there would not be an outcry. They were taken into the institution and they were processed: they were photographed, they were stripped and they were examined very cursorily, just so there would be a plausible label to put on a death certificate. People who had the potential to be interesting medical or scientific specimens had a cross drawn on their shoulder. Equally, if they had gold fillings, the same happened.

From there, they were left down the stairs and through this very rough, raw, bare-brick corridor. This is at Hadamar. The claim is made that people didn't know where they were going. The pseudo-medical procedure was partly designed to put people at their ease and I think if you didn't know up to that point, at this point you knew something was terribly, terribly wrong.

From there, people were led into the gas chamber, which is a really strange space because it's really like a modern wet room: white tiled walls, tiled floors white and black checkerboard tiles, and on the ceiling there are the pipes for water, except of course they didn't carry water. So, the gas would be leaked out into the chamber once it was sealed. There is a glass brick in the wall so that staff could check on proceedings and know for when it was safe for them to enter.

At that point they would take most people to the crematorium ovens but the ones with the Xs on their shoulders would be taken next door to this dissection table, a rough stone trough, and, from there, they would go to the crematorium ovens. In the death centres, there are full sized photographs of the ovens. At the time when the concentration camp killing got underway, at that stage, they moved the ovens from the death centres and took most of the very experienced personnel with them to oversee operations and to set it up on a much bigger scale.

This is an archive photograph of Hadamar, the institution set up on the hillside above the village and a stream of black smoke pouring out of the chimney. As one of the people I made the visit with said, somebody knew, well lots of people locally knew, what was happening but somebody thought to document this. We don't know anything about the source of this photograph, but somebody tried to document it.

That was the end of the first official phase of euthanasia. It was starting to become embarrassing to Hitler and at that point it was called to an end. But what is called the second 'wild phase' of euthanasia began at that point and

that carried on in institutions throughout Germany with medical staff, one by one, killing patients as they saw fit, through injection and often through starvation.

I will talk about the people next. First, I want to talk about the perpetrators. This is a photograph of six men, probably late thirties to sixties, wearing suits sitting on a park bench, under a tree, all looking relaxed, followed by a photograph of staff in a dining room with a large Nazi flag at the end. Nurses on a day trip. And a postcard sent from the Hartheim institution, from the crew excursion. The ordinariness of the perpetrators is something that gets commented on a lot when people talk about the Holocaust. So many people have said to me “How could such ordinary people commit such evil?”

But, as I worked on this more and more, I started to hear the question the other way round, and I’m also intrigued by how many ordinary people could commit such good, because there were people that resisted through all of this. The more that research is done on what makes people do these awful things, the more it becomes clear that the potential is probably there in all of us and that it is about conditions and circumstances.

And when I move on to the next set of portraits of people who died under Aktion T4, again, their ordinariness is really apparent. They span all ages, classes, different cultures, a whole range of backgrounds; there’s even a toddler in one of the photographs.

In Berlin, there is a memorial: a large bronze slab set into the pavement where Aktion T4 was based; that building is no longer there. I don't know whether anyone felt the sense of irony when they decided on this but the backdrop to all of this is a bus terminus. So, whilst you are there, visiting this memorial to disabled people who died, the buses are roaring back and forth in the background.

I felt the need for another memorial after that and that’s why I moved on to *Resistance: which way the future?* I wanted to create a memorial to those people, but I wanted to go further than that because it's very easy to get stuck in what happened and to become really hopeless about it: it's too huge, it’s too terrifying. How do you ever stop it happening again? I wanted to start looking at *now*, at the values and the way they influence us now, the way they impact on us now, and also to look for a starting point for people to become involved in creating a different kind of future. And I think it was that possibility of looking to the future, the possibility of solutions, that kept me going through this.

Resistance: which way the future? is a touring film based installation that takes place along a time line, so it looks at the past, it looks at the present and it moves on to the future where people are asked “if you could do just one thing…”, so giving them a starting point where they can commit to doing something really practical.

The installation runs about thirty minutes and starts with a historical drama, which is the story of Elise Blick. Amongst the research there is a woman documented who was only identified under her initials EB. She was somebody who lived in an institution and she swept the institution grounds. The more I heard about this story, the more I decided this was something I could work with. I had to invent a lot of her story and she became Elise Blick for me, *blick* from the German ‘to look’. The fact she swept the grounds gave her licence to go throughout the institution, so she was able to know what was going on. So she was able to listen into the medics making their decisions, and then when she realised, she watched the buses filling up, going out, and returning empty, and she worked out what was going on. When her name was on the list she decided to escape. So, the drama tells the story of her making a decision and making a bid for escape.

From there, people follow a path of light into the area behind that first screen. And, there, there is a second short film with three of the actors from the film: Lou Birks, Jamie Beddard and Sophie Weaver. They talk about their experiences as disabled people now and what the experience of visiting Germany meant for them and what the experience of looking at that history meant for them as disabled people now.

That is the point at which we bring it into the present day and how those values impact on us now, and that point when the screen dims, the lights come up in that area and people are surrounded by banners. Amongst those banners is a series of voices, ordinary people, disabled people, non-disabled people, talking about their experiences of discrimination now and what the impact of that is on them, how it feels to be discriminated against. But also, turning the tables, the elation of how it feels to be included. And they move from there to what things actually make it work for them, and their role in that is to give a starting point to the audiences there for where they can begin to make a change, bearing in mind that a lot of people coming through that installation would say “I want to do the right thing, but haven’t we got laws now, haven’t we got policy now? Isn’t it okay now? And anyway, it's so big so where would I start?” This is the chance for them to find something, however small, to make the start.

While they are in that banner space, they are surrounded by montages of portraits of people from Action T4, as well as contemporary people, disabled people and non-disabled people.

That installation is now touring. It launched last November at Liverpool’s DaDaFest and been to Washington DC and Mansfield and it’s shortly going to Bridgewater.

One of the big questions for me in making that is how you market it. I am sure there will be plenty of you here who know that disability is not an easy thing to sell and I needed audiences to come into this. There’s the problem of disability equating with ‘worthy’ or ‘depressing’ and how do I get over that and how do I create an image that is compelling enough to get people through the

door? If you combine disability with the Holocaust, it's a really hard sell. How do you ever get that in a venue?

What I'm finding is when audiences see the installation, it makes a connection, but getting it into venues has been, and continues to be, really hard graft for all kinds of reasons, but ultimately will anyone come through the door when it's going to be worthy or depressing?

So, I had a marketing mentor when I was working on this and we were racking our brains on how to create an image for this project when an opportunity arose and it was probably an opportunity to do maybe the scariest thing I have ever chosen to do.

The *One & Other* project was announced on the news. The *One & Other* project took place in Trafalgar square, where there is the empty Fourth Plinth and public art projects are commissioned on a regular basis to go up there for a period of time and do their thing. Antony Gormley, the sculptor, was commissioned to do one of these projects and he decided that, over a period of one hundred days, two thousand four hundred people would be selected by draw, they would each have one hour up there and as long as what they did up there was legal, didn't involve fire or knives, then they would go up there.

So I saw this on the news and I thought wow, brilliant opportunity; disabled people need to be up there, we need to get represented. So I sent out emails to friends, stuck up some notices and thought there was no way I'd be exhibitionist enough to do something like that but, hey, I'll stick my name in. And then it got drawn out and kind of called my bluff.

They took you up in this JCB, inside a cherry picker, and they took you way up high above the plinth and then took you down there and you had your hour on this platform. And I had this whole thing of it's an opportunity, but I want to sit there and star gaze; I don't want to do anything controversial. And then I realised that this was never going to happen again and I had to make use of it and it coincided with the 70th anniversary of the beginning of Aktion T4 and it was obvious I needed to do something. So, *Resistance on the plinth* was born.

I still didn't know what I was going to do and Ros, my marketing person, and I were sitting around going well I could do this, I could try that, I could do the other, and the idea came up why not dress up as a Nazi? (Laughter) Yes, well, you see, that was our reaction too. We were in a cafe and fell about laughing because it was too horrible to comprehend really. And then when we stopped laughing we realised it was the image, it was the image for the project - that whole thing of those two opposing images, like repelling magnets, all in that same image, that just kept you thinking *what* and *why* and kept you returning to it.

And I went away and did some research on the Internet and I found an image of a young Asian man looking into the camera, smiling, with a bright red t-shirt with a great big swastika on it - and it is a swastika; it's not the historic

symbol, it was the Nazi symbol - and the effect on me was visceral; it was as though somebody had pulled the rug from under me and it was at that moment I just realised that if I could create the same impact on the plinth it could be something really extraordinary.

So, I had five weeks from there until my date on the plinth which was a long time to worry; not much time to prepare, but a long time to worry. And it was on-off, on-off, on-off and the night before I thought "I can't do it" and I texted round to people to say I can't do it and somebody said just sleep on it, okay? So I did and I got up the next morning and thought I can’t do it.

Then I spoke to somebody on the phone and in the course of that conversation they took me back to the *why* of it - and the *why* was about the documented rise in hate crime, it was about a population size of Cardiff living in institutions, it was about the very poorly debated race to assisted suicide, it was about the rising abortions of foetuses with impairments; that was why I was doing it and once I got that clarity I decided to go ahead. I still had no idea how people would respond when I was up there. I didn't know if they would get it and I didn’t know whether they would throw bottles. It was the most frightening thing I had ever done.

But I also had amazing supporters and Claire Lewis of Direct Action Network brought together an incredible group of people who supported me in the lead up and supported me on the night and that absolutely made the difference in whether I could do it or not

Ultimately it was a leap of trust. I guess with any piece of work, whether it's creative work, academic work, it's your audience or readership that completes the piece of work and that was the risk with this, that they would complete it in the way I didn't want them to, that they would read a meaning into it that I didn’t intend, and until I got up there I couldn’t know which way that would go. But I was on holiday the week before, lousy timing but there you go, and I came back to Bristol where I live on the afternoon of the day it was happening. My Art Director had sourced the uniform and I tried it on.

And, it was huge. And I looked in the mirror, and it has no insignia on it at the time, and it looked like a bad band leader’s uniform, and I just thought I can’t do it, I can’t do it. I just thought the worst thing of all was to get up there and make people laugh, and then I remembered something from film shoots about bulldog clips and if you gather up the clothes at the back you can fit it to the person and cheat the whole thing, so I tried that and put on all the stuff on and the person who was with me just looked at me and said “you’ve got to do it”, so we headed off to London to a crowded Trafalgar Square.

My spot was a warm, balmy August evening at 10pm, just about right for the pubs to turn out people. The sky was pitch dark and Trafalgar Square lanterns were lit up and the Square was very, very crowded. And I went up in the cherry picker. I was dressed in the uniform but with a large white shroud over me, so I was covered head to toe in white to begin with which, amongst other things, meant I couldn’t wheel my chair any more. So I needed somebody with

me, but only my Art Director knew how it all worked, so right at the last minute he became my PA for the moment, but he'd never PA'd and didn't know what to do and I ran out of time to brief him.

The gate opened and he pushed me backwards and the very first thing that happened was I went arse over tit backwards. So, two-and-a-half storeys high, a couple of feet from the edge, I was lying there thinking well it can't get worse than this, can it. So they put me upright. He went down to the ground again and they plied him with sweet tea (laughter) and I sat there all on my own for an hour! - first in the white shroud and then doing the big reveal where I removed the shroud and then, suddenly, there was a Nazi on the plinth, a Nazi using a wheelchair.

I gazed ahead at the clock through most of that hour and watched the minutes go by. I was there in the uniform probably for about twenty minutes and, at a certain point, I had a red flag just tucked under my chair and on that flag were the words were of Pastor Neimoeller, which some of you may have heard before. The usual verse that people know of goes 'First they came for the communists but I was not a communist so I did not speak out' and then it goes through various groups, Jewish people, trade unionists, and so on, and then the last line is 'Then they came for me but there was nobody to speak out for me'.

And in my research I came across another version of that which goes - and I think there are other English translations, possibly better than this, but – 'First they came for the sick but I was not ill so I did not speak out'. And I decided to use that on the flag. So at a certain point I pulled out the flag and had that on the one side and had the last bit of the verse, that there was no one left to speak out for me, on the other side.

And then, and I have to say for me this was the best bit, I got to throw the Nazi uniform down and that was just such a relief. And then for the rest of the hour I carried on being kind of 'everywoman', 'every-disabled-woman', whatever, up on the plinth with that flag. And it was interesting the extent to which - I was mostly looking ahead, partly because I started to hallucinate at the end and the buildings all started flipping in and out and I thought I'm going to be off the plinth in a minute so I just have to look ahead - but occasionally I would get people out of the corner of my eye and I know from the Twitter conversations the flag was really hard to read, and when I saw the flag, I just I thought no, no, it needed to be much clearer, but actually what happened was people stuck around until they worked it out and went down the street talking about it. And on Twitter people worked it out in this incredible virtual conversation that led all the way back to the installation and my website, so it was incredible what people did to provide that information themselves and get a dialogue going.

In the Square, there were about forty people loosely surrounding the plinth from various activists who'd turned up on the night and they had leaflets to hand out so when people came forward with that kind of "What the..." they were able to move forward and say *this* is why, and there was an explanation

of the background to what was happening on the plinth. And what they found was that people got into incredible dialogues. The leaflets went out quickly and strangers were handing them to strangers and getting into conversations and it was an extraordinary thing for triggering the conversation and exchange of ideas.

I think the most powerful thing maybe on the plinth is about the whole dissonance of that image, of how do you square those two elements put together? And that is it thing that keeps people looking; its riskiness and danger are also its power, because the longer people look, the longer they ask questions, the better chance there is of them making their own emotional connection to the history and to the now. And that, for me, is the bedrock of people deciding to take action.

So that image has become the image for the installation itself. We did a re-shoot of the plinth picture, so there is a sepia picture with me on my chair in the uniform against a very empty urban landscape with wild clouds in the background. The armband with swastika is picked out in red, as is the text *Resistance: which way the future?* And that has become the publicity for the installation on the basis that, almost whatever people's response is to that image, they want to know more and therefore if they come through the door that is where they get more.

Right through my work, *Resistance* and other pieces of work, I have seen it as a platform, a starting point for people and their action, their decision to take action. And maybe as the beginning of a direction for what that action might be.

But it's also a gathering point. Simon Minty was on the BBC *Ouch!* talkshow saying how he'd "just gone along to Trafalgar Square to support Liz" and he said "before I knew it I was giving out leaflets. It was lovely to be sucked into it." And I think that was a very strong feeling around the plinth, when word got out that something interesting would be happening up there, it went round like wildfire and people were really excited by it and, at the time where the disabled people's movement has lost its direction and its focus, and I know a lot of us are really concerned about how to rediscover a track for it, events like this are incredibly compelling for bringing people together and feeling they have a starting point, a focus point, for reorganising.

There is also that whole thing that, historically, there have been a lot of divisions in our movement, between academia, the artistic community and activists. I am sure lots of people here will have experienced that. On that night, more than I guess with any of my work, those three sectors were critically important. The academic work, the work you guys do, underpinned what I did; it gave me the evidence. So it gave the seriousness to what I did. The artistic side of it was about communicating that in another way to wider audiences, different audiences, and then the activism came in through those people on the Square, but also though those people who have seized that image and used it since to push the debate forward and to help make decisions and direct other people's action. Those three communities, for me,

and the cross fertilization of ideas and the support they can give each other, it has a potential that I think we need to work on much, much more.

In the end, everything in this comes down to the people and to the roles and actions that define them, whether we're talking about perpetrators, the people who are targeted, or the people who resist, whether we are talking about then or whether we're talking about now and the future.
Thank you
(Applause).

Nick Watson: Thanks, Liz, that was excellent. Liz will take about fifteen minutes for questions. There is roving microphones if anybody wants to ask a question and say who they are?

Rachel Purtell: Hello, firstly can I ask did you have your brakes on on the plinth? I hope you did because it looked really scary to me. It's not really a question; it's more a "Wow, that's amazing!" I think that's why everybody's speechless and unfortunately, I don't really go speechless. I have one question and it's not directly related to what you have been talking about but it's something really interesting – sorry, my name's Rachel Patel - a lot of what we currently know in medicine comes from some of that stuff and for someone like you who's been so close to it, who's physically been in those places, I just wonder what, sorry, it's not entirely related, as I said, but I just wonder what your sense of some of that is? It must be really hard to reconcile it all together. I can't imagine how you can do that.

LIZ: You know what, I think it's impossible to reconcile. It's impossible to reconcile the fact that the quick release wheel on my chair was invented courtesy of the Vietnam war; it was used for quick bomb dispatch. We have information from all sorts of terrible circumstances. Once that information is there, I guess, we use it. And what we have to do is make damn sure that the future information is found in places that are ethically sound. But I don't think, well, the one thing I have really learned in my political involvement is that you can never un-know something, so what do you do once you know it?

Larry Arnold: Following on from that, I am someone who is very concerned at the moment. We're trying to get a message across about ethical research to people that are involved in scientific and medical research who've simply forgotten all these things that have happened. But do you think that there would be something wrong if we ignored the knowledge that had been gained from people who'd died involuntarily and were murdered? Because at least they died for some gain. Do you know what I mean? Nobody wanted to be killed in those circumstances, I certainly would not, but if I was to be slaughtered tomorrow I would hope something that would come out of, do you understand what I mean?

LIZ: I think that is really what I'm meaning, is that information exists now; it can't not exist any more; it is in the public domain largely; it's there.
I think it absolutely needs to be acknowledged how it was gained. We have to

put measures in place to make sure, again, that ethically it is sound in the future; but you can't turn back time.

And I think this is the whole thing about *Resistance* is, "Look, this *happened.*" It is historical and that is what enables a lot of people to dismiss it; we need to acknowledge the history but actually also have to focus on the now: it happened now, the only thing we can really do with it is learn from it otherwise we either just go over and over the horror of what happened without moving forward, or we develop a sense of such hopelessness that we can't do anything about the future. We actually have to acknowledge that in order to do something better for the future.

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Pirkko Mahlamäki: I am from Finland. I am just turning back on one point that you said, that where it started was a media awareness campaign about the worthlessness and the cost of disabled people as a burden on public economy, and that is not something that happened only then; it's something that is happening now.
LIZ: Yes absolutely
Pirkko Mahlamäki: So it's that we need to fight.

LIZ: Yes, I completely agree. It's also important to point out it was not just Germany either. A lot of the ideas historically came from, oh, *here* and the United States, two places very strong on the whole eugenics movement and in fact there was a document in 1920, that set out most of the mechanics that were then adopted under Aktion T4. So there's lots of historical precedent and, yes, those themes keep repeating themselves. We're getting it in the UK with the current debates about benefits and "Are we worth it?"

On that, this is not a point for the movement to be divided. This is a time where the movement needs to find its way very, very rapidly and have a really strong voice because it's now urgent.

NEW SPEAKER: Yes, I think Hugh Gallagher suggested that history couldn't repeat itself. I'm just wondering if you have a perspective on that with regard to assisted suicide and the things you were talking about moments ago?

LIZ: I think it's always risky to say that history will never repeat itself. I haven't got a clue whether that could happen again; I just know that we need to guard against it. If you look at what happened then, it was incremental. Nobody woke up one day and said "Hey, let's institute a programme of mass murder." They started off with "These people cost a lot, this isn't good, this doesn't fit our ideal population." Those little ideas kind of seeped in and grew, but people thought this was not good and does not fit our ideal and they tried an idea and kind of softened people up with it and when people were ready to accept it, they upped the ante a bit more, and it kept on building.

I don't know whether we'd get that again and I don't, well, I sort of feel that's not the question in a way, or at least it's a distraction from the core which is those values still exist, those values are still impacting on people's lives and we need to do something to address that.

In terms of assistive suicide: my core position on that relates to those values and I feel, at this point, as a society, we are absolutely not mature enough in our discussions of disability and our grasp of it to make legislation that is safe. Without that kind of change in perspective, so that it is embedded in the way that we live and we function as a society, I don't know how we even begin to have the debate.

I think the debates have to happen but I don't know how we begin to have them, because at the moment what we are getting in the public realm, in the media particularly, Parliamentary wise, it's such extraordinarily biased discussion and the voice of many disabled people is not being heard in the way it needs to, in that we need to change so drastically to even contemplate legislation that is safe. I don't know if that will ever be the situation, but we are so way off it right now

CHAIR: Colin did you want to say something?

Colin Barnes It's Colin Barnes. I was going to reinforce everything that you just said over the last couple of minutes. If you look at the history of Western culture, eugenics has been around with us since the ancient world of Greece. It got scientific rationality in the UK in the nineteenth century and Germany was just the outcome of policy that was developing in most Western cultures, particularly America. That undercurrent is still with us in one way or another in the general support within the media and the general public for what is euphemistically called euthanasia for those of us who are suffering from terminal illness, a concept which is applied to life, because life is a terminal illness, and once you step out of the norm, we don't fit into today's society and, unfortunately, this is something that, for me, is the major issue that disabled people have to face in the modern world; because we do not fit in a society which is geared round economic rationality and if you don't understand that you don't then understand disability studies.

LIZ: To add something to that, I think the early stages of the movement, I guess we fought some of the easy battles. You know, there's a lot of us now who are in employment, maybe have families, can get about the country on transport, relative to twenty, twenty five, years or more ago. Those are the very public and visible things to fight. The things that are much harder because they are nebulous are about our value in society: do we deserve to live? Do we deserve to continue our lives? Do we even deserve to have lives in the first place? And I suppose that's one of the things where direct action needs to be thinking where it's going, because it was one thing to block transport when you were campaigning on transport, but it doesn't cut it when you are campaigning on these issues. And we need to find some other ways of tackling that because it's absolutely out of sight, out of mind, and an awful lot of us aren't tackling these issues because phew, well it's better than it used to be, but these are the ones that go deeper then anything else; they are the ultimate ones, about whether we are of sufficient value even to be here.

Pieter Verstraete: I am Pieter Verstraete from Belgium and I was wondering if you have any idea whether contemporary Germans resisted the Aktion T4?

LIZ: Yes, some. One of the key episodes in the resistance was in a small town where the local institution was a nunnery and the people who lived there had quite a profile in the town, they knew the townspeople. They also worked out what was happening and the night before they were going to be taken away on the bus, they went around saying good bye to everybody in town and the next day, townsfolk came out of their houses to say goodbye to them, that's all they could do at that point, to say goodbye, they couldn't actually stop the machinery.

But from there, the protests began to mount to a point where Bishop von Galen spoke from his pulpit and he was sufficiently influential that it became that stage of absolute public embarrassment for Hitler and that first phase was ended. So, yes absolutely, there were ordinary everyday German people who did resist.

Larry Arnold: Some doctors and researchers also resisted and a doctor...
CHAIR: Can you use the microphone please.
Larry Arnold: Some doctors and researchers did resist. They knew what was going on and refused and survived refusing to co-operate. I was going to give the example of Doctor Kreutzfeld, whose name is known for Kreutzfeld-Jakob Syndrome. He absolutely refused to participate in it at all.

LIZ: Remarkably, participation by staff in Aktion T4 was voluntary. When they were offered posts in Aktion T4, told there would be no action being taken against them if they refused.

CHAIR: Time for one more question.
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Mark Swetz: I am Mark from London, curious to your reaction to the previous statement where you said we need to take action and we need to make the value of ourselves. I'm curious in your introduction, you were introduced as a theatre artist and many other forms, and now you're working in film, and I'm curious if that's because film has a wider audience and mass media might be a way towards making ourselves more public and more accepted.

LIZ: Sorry, I am laughing because actually I'm a former filmmaker. I've decided that this was the last film-based based project that, I'm pretty sure, I can do. Film has an enormous potential to reach huge numbers of people and it can be so persuasive, but working in a sector where I don't fit and my work doesn't fit and the themes of my work, the fact that it tries very hard to be inclusive, personally I have to get out and do something else because I think I can't be anywhere near as effective as I could be within that sector.

The next generation of disabled filmmakers are coming up behind me so maybe they'll be able to push the walls and ceilings further than I have, but I'm currently looking for a way to do something else where I can see the results and I don't think film is it.

CHAIR: Thanks very much. I remember a long time ago, Vic Finkelstein said that the future of disability politics was in disability arts and I didn't really know what he meant until tonight; I am very clear exactly what he meant and why he was so right, so thank you very much and really enjoyed it. Thank you very much. (Applause).