

## **Book Review**

**Title:** *Face On: Disability Arts in Ireland and Beyond*

**Author:** Kaite O'Reilly, Ed.

**Publisher:** Arts & Disability Ireland, 2007.

**Paper, ISBN:** 978-0955474903, 159 pages

**Cost:** \$20.00

**Reviewer:** Steven E. Brown

This book came across my desk while I worked on a paper about disability culture across the globe. One comment from the later 1990s that has stuck with me from a trip to Germany recurred while I read this volume. In both cases, individuals lamented the lack of a disability culture in their home countries. But from my vantage, this book is full of examples of the existence of a culture of disability. Maybe some of this disconnect arises from the American belief that Europeans are much more supportive of artists than are we. While art is hardly the only marker of disability culture it is one of the most visible and accessible to many of us.

There are many different kinds of stories in this book. More than twenty authors and artists are represented. I read Davoren Hanna's 1990 "Notes from a Bone Fragment" and I returned to it again and again for two reasons. I came back first because Hanna's words hit me like a sledgehammer: "A brain scan taken when I was five years old showed an abnormality consistent with severe physical disability. My brain's ability to signal my distress at being intellectually undermined did not register on the C.A.T. scan" (pp. 29-30). When I finished the piece I received another blow. Hanna lived from 1975 to 1994. His perceptiveness within his short lifetime, and his facility with words, again hammered at me.

Other pieces in the book were equally eye-opening. I learned not only how the Graeae Theatre Company began, but how to pronounce it (gray-eye). Beyond Ireland not only ranged to England and Wales, but all the way to New Zealand, whose comic genius, Philip Patston writes about his alter ego, Philly Delphia, in an essay that analyzes disability, drag, and deviance.

My two frustrations with the book were the assumption that some words would be understood across continents. For example, what is a "traveller?" The word is used in a context new to me, but not explained for those who might be unfamiliar with the term in the context used in this book. Even more frustrating is the lack of a "Resources" section. Many resources are mentioned within various articles, but there is no follow-up on how to find them. Still, this is a book well worth having in any library that wants to demonstrate how disability arts and culture are being demonstrated in the early twenty-first century.