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**Sunaura Taylor (2017). *Disabled Ecologies: Lessons from a Wounded Desert*. Oakland:
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“You can only have one thing,” a colleague and I often used to joke. He coordinated our school’s English as an Acquired Language services, while I coordinated disability services. Most immediately, we were referring to the systemic confusion it seemed to cause when a student who happened to “have” a diagnosable disability deemed to impact learning nevertheless managed to learn enough academic English. More broadly, I think it is fair to say — as we mused in depressed recognition — that despite intersectionality having become very familiar (though often shallowly understood) concept in the years since Crenshaw (1989), our institutions continue to do poorly in understanding and in reaching out to it. Given this, I cannot help but wish that more academics, activists, and really anyone concerned with social justice, would consider the work of Sunaura Taylor. Though her publications have tended to be in prose, I experience Taylor as a poet laureate of intersectionality. She illuminates it, personalizes it in poignant eloquence, and expertly chronicles the neglect and abuse of equity-seeking peoples, not only by the corrupt and powerful, but also by many mainstream justice movements. Taylor mobilizes the solidarities so essential to living as well as possible “with and for” (Blamey & Ricouer, 1994, p.239) each other in the increasingly precarious Anthropocene era.

I first experienced Taylor's thinking in the film *Examined Life* (Taylor, 2008), where, on a "walk" with Judith Butler — she insisted, as a wheelchair user, that she considered the event to be a walk — the two explored a range of topics involving the intersection of disability and queerness, as well as specific topics such as homophobic, transphobic, and ableist forms of violence, the constructed nature of all identities, and the harms of extreme individualism. I next read her exploration of intersections between social justice thinking regarding non-human animals and people with disabilities in *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (2017). In her always skilful blend of the academic and personal, Taylor began that book with two vignettes, one about her first realization of her physical impairment as she attempted to dance as a very young child, and the second about how she and her siblings witnessed the cruel conditions of chickens bound for a slaughterhouse — packed tightly together in sweltering conditions — during a family road trip. Now, in what I have experienced as her boldest and most challenging work yet, she explores environmentalism more broadly, and even more intimately. The central theme of the book is the health of a large Tucson aquifer polluted for decades by the US military and Hughes Aircraft Company, a body of water with a profoundly formative connection to the author due to her family's five years living in the area. "You were born disabled," Taylor's mother would tell her, "because the military put bad chemicals in the water" (3).

The aquifer, in addition to being a very tangible site of both nourishment and contamination, is a compelling metaphor for the diverse and often willfully buried discourses Taylor gathers and illuminates in this scholarly but accessible work. Not only does she carefully chronicle the decades of brazen dumping of millions of gallons of TCE

(trichloroethylene) on the ground surrounding the US Airforce-supported Hughes Aircraft Company, but she also reveals the racist and ableist gaps in thinking that marginalized effective responses to these abuses on the part of the last century's mainstream ecology movements. Mexican-American citizen communities and Indigenous reservations, she shows, were often considered sites of limited habitation when it came to where and how industrial waste was tolerated. Meanwhile, due to its convergence with the red-blooded naturalism of able-bodied (and especially masculine) recreation, early conservation often paid scant attention to disabled bodies and the ongoing effects of malignant contamination.

While grounded in careful research, the connections Taylor makes and the questions she suggests are deeply imaginative and generative. In what ways, she seems to ask, is our environment “disabled” in its era of the Anthropocene — and what might be gained by understanding it this way? How is ecology informed by the participation of the oft-excluded voices of disabled citizens, and what interpretive lenses are provided through an “ecology of the injured?” Taylor’s work reaches out in solidarity specifically to several key witnesses in her research, revealing the abuses they experienced, but also their incredible resilience and determination. More broadly, her work addresses the eventual efficacy of grassroots environmental organizations that the larger movement has ignored.

Taylor’s lens focusses sharply on the racism, ableism, toxic bureaucracies, and corruption that undergirded the late capitalist trespasses of poisoning the aquifer, and suppressing and undermining victims and other concerned advocates. Considering the personal impact these willfully negligent corporate actions have had on her, however,

Taylor's book nonetheless does not present as angry. The strong emotions she describes as having for this project appear to have been invested in its depth, accuracy, and convivial compassion for her peers impacted by the aquifer's poisoning, both human and non-human. Taylor does not hesitate to dole out blame to those responsible for this ongoing disaster, but her emphasis remains on the urgency of changing our way of thinking and acting towards each other (including all the non-human "others," be they individual plants and animals, or entire ecosystems).

Disabled Ecologies is both citatious and accessible. The author refers to the work's extensive footnotes, "the small words that hug the bottom of the pages" (5), as the book's aquifer. These notes create space for longer histories and more expansive tangents to gather, even as the larger work remains compatible with assistive screen readers, minds that might be prone to wander, and readers less schooled in academic writing, all of which might have been compromised by a different means of presenting her research. Helpfully, she also introduces each new footnote with one of the descriptors "historical," "theoretical," "definition," "informational," or "source," so as to further assist the reader in making their own way through the text. A detailed timeline similarly helps the reader navigate the detailed narrative of contamination and attendant activism she chronicles.

As noted for her visual art as she is for her writing, Taylor adds a multimedia aspect to the collection with images of own artwork depicting the aquifer, early 20th century advertising about the area, topographical maps, and press clippings about the emerging awareness of the environmental destruction. Like the footnotes, these enliven and enlarge

the text and its claims, and ensure multiple readings remain rewarding and generative of ever-deepening interpretation.

Disabled Ecologies: Lessons from a Wounded Desert is a compelling text, insisting on the need for a more inclusive ecological movement. The text proclaims the importance of the long-delayed recognition of the many voices that environmentalism has ignored; it also, however, highlights how this lens makes available the necessary awareness that we are all already living together on a wounded planet, and that the concerns “disability” makes available may be essential in continuing to live as healthily as possible and with reciprocal concern for one another. Of this understanding, Taylor writes, “*it is a language that is consciously invested in the field and movements of critical disability perspectives—perspectives that perceive disability not as unquestionably ominous or as a fate worse than death, but as a complex political issue that—under the right conditions—can offer alternative ways of living lives well lived.*”

Taylor’s work is also a challenging text, not in the sense of that its comprehensibility is elusive, but in the sense that it is so rich with considerations and so grounded in careful research that it requires close attention and frequent rereading. I would highly recommend it for scholars of critical disability studies, ecology, history, and anyone who worries about — in the military nomenclature of the Hughes airbase — the wicked problems of the Anthropocene, and our ability to fully grasp them and work toward our truly collective healing and survival.

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