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Introduction: The Intersections of Critical Disability Studies and Critical Animal Studies

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Introduction

We are exceptionally pleased to present this special issue on the intersections of critical disability studies (CDS) and critical animal studies (CAS). The idea for this issue grew out of hallway conversations between the guest editors who, coming from the two different fields, found themselves voicing some of the same observations, but about different social groups.

The papers in this special issue build on an exciting, and fast growing, body of scholarship located at the intersection of critical disability studies and critical animal studies, shedding light on disablism and speciesism¹ as interconnecting oppressions, how animality and disability are mutually constitutive, as well as the tensions and coalitions shared by these two related fields (see, for example, Jenkins, Montford & Taylor, 2020; Nocella II, George & Schatz, 2017; Taylor, 2013, 2017). This literature has provided numerous examples of how these two social groups, through their experiences, histories and forms of oppression, are highly entangled. For example, disabled people have sometimes been compared to nonhuman animals as a form of

¹ Readers are likely familiar with the term disablism which references to "a set of assumptions (conscious or unconscious) and practices that promote the differential or unequal treatment of people because of actual or presumed disabilities" (Campbell, 2009, p.4). In the field of critical animal studies, the term speciesism is used to denote a similar sentiment to disablism and other "isms", such as racism, classism, and the sort; instead, in this case, rather than human-human the dualism considers humans-nonhumans where the human species is set in a constructed binary to all other species. Horta (2009) more broadly defines "speciesism as the unjustified disadvantageous consideration or treatment of those who are not classified as belonging to a certain species" (p. 243).

insult and to “de-humanization” (Taylor, 2011, 2017). People who voluntarily abstain from consuming or using animal products (i.e., vegans) are often labelled as deviant or “crazy” (Jenkins, Montford & Taylor, 2020). At the same time, human and nonhuman bodies are objectified in multifarious ways; for example, disabled people have been put on display in “freak shows”, nonhuman animals kept in zoos or circuses for entertainment, and both humans and nonhumans are subjected to involuntary medical sterilization, experimentation and the like, all with the intent of “progress” and social control (Taylor, 2017). These discourses and practices further reproduce disabled people’s oppression and the misuse and abuse of nonhuman animals.

This intersection is not without its tensions and debates, and we understand the reluctance among some disability studies scholars to delve into scholarship focused on how human and nonhuman issues meet or mirror the other. Disability studies scholars will be familiar, for example, about animal studies scholar Peter Singer who has argued that parents should be allowed to euthanize their disabled children. His utilitarian argument, based on problematic notions of “autonomy” and “self-consciousness” that devalue the lives and experiences of disabled people and frame disability as a “problem” or “abnormality” that needs to be “erased,” has been *rightly* critiqued by disability studies scholars (see, for example, Carlson & Kittay 2010; Vehmas, 2010). It is worth noting how, for the most part, disabled people and issues of disablism have been neglected by the animal welfare and sustainability movements (Taylor, 2013). As a consequence, disabled people have not been invited to be a part of this activist work (Taylor, 2013, 2017). This is unfortunate. Disabled people bring rich perspectives around interdependence, creative ways of mobilizing, and making space for non-normative ways of voicing lived experiences. At the same time, critical animal studies can contribute to disability studies scholarship and activism through its extensive work on advocating for the “voiceless”

through a holistic approach, which considers all beings and our environments, through our social relationships and unavoidably interdependent existences.

A common thread throughout this special issue are notions of functionality, dependence, and now, in light of recent world events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, an urgency to acknowledge the interdependence of humans, nonhumans, and our shared environment and lives. Our contributors attend in various ways to what makes life worth living and valuable. Those relegated to the margins of “worth” are central to both critical disability studies and critical animal studies scholarship. For example, Jenkins, Montford and Taylor (2020) address the troubling and devaluation of those engaged in borderwork: “Figures at the intersection of critical disability studies and critical animal studies include the service dog, the pathologized animal activist or animal lover, the disabled more-than-human animal, and the animalized disabled human” (p. 1).

This collection is both a demonstration and reminder of the necessity for inclusivity of disability in critical animal studies and attention to nonhuman “Others” in critical disability studies. These parallels and paradoxes of (de)valuation cross species borders, with a perceived need for control, and an assumed “right” to delegate certain individuals to a life of service and provision for humans without consent; this is especially relevant considering the degradation and disabling process that creates disabled nonhuman animals. As Taylor (2013) notes, for example:

Industrialized farm animals not only live in such cramped, filthy, and unnatural conditions that disabilities become common but also are literally bred and violently altered to physically damaging extremes, where udders produce too much milk for a cow’s body to hold, where turkeys cannot bear the weight of their own giant breasts, and where chickens are left with amputated beaks that make it difficult for them to eat (p. 761).

Such observance of ongoing and normalized manipulation and “management” of bodies and lives is but one example of the need for further dialogue between critical animal and disabilities studies scholars. This special issue showcases theoretical and empirical contributions to our understanding of disabled/non-disabled human-nonhuman animal relations, species interaction, and intersectionalities. Most importantly, we hope this special issue can bring to view the ways in which our paths to liberation are inextricably entangled.

Overview of the Special Issue

The articles included in this issue artfully straddle critical disability studies and critical animal studies perspectives, while attending to a range of timely and under researched topics, such as the weaponization of bees and wasps; animal-assisted therapy (AAT); human-nonhuman service animal bonds, rights, and representation; and posthumanism in classic literature. As such, our collection is a foray into the complex, and perhaps surprisingly similar, forms of oppression and power imbalances that disabled humans and nonhumans experience due to speciesism and disablism. Considered one by one, each article adds to a growing body of interdisciplinary literature about human and nonhuman relations, tensions, and resistance; current readings of shared lives, agency, interdependence; and narratives that transcend normative, often oppressive, understandings of us versus them. This special issue aims to provide a snapshot of this promising dialogue between these two fields.

This special issue begins with Mykhalovskiy, Kanarek, Hastings, Doig and Rock’s analysis of how disabled children are portrayed in the media as “special interest” stories, especially in regard to their perceived miraculous “improvement” through nonhuman animal-assisted therapies (AAT). The authors comb through nearly forty years of mass media accounts

of AAT from the United States and Canada. Tension is found quickly as the article considers the presentation—in this case, ignorance—of AAT’s components and value by news agencies and their simultaneous leveraging of human-therapy animal “successes” as points of inspiration for healing, for becoming more “normal”. This paper highlights the necessity for public and service-level awareness of the realities of animal-assisted therapies, where the nonhuman participant’s well-being is considered in addition to human outcomes.

In “Rights and representation: Media narratives about disabled people and their service animals in Canadian print news”, Kerzner, Jones, Haller and Blaser continue on the theme of media representation with a closer look at how disabled people and the nonhumans who assist them are written about by Canadian news agencies. Kerzner and colleagues survey five years of news stories, with a sharp focus on the individual and everyday experiences of disabled humans and nonhuman service animals. Aligning with Mykhalovskiy et al.’s article, persistent misunderstandings or non-acknowledgement of the complexities of human-nonhuman service animal relationships are revealed. Most dominant, are narratives of inequitable, difficult, and oppressive encounters with retail and service outlets. Despite disability legislation, the authors find story after story of discrimination against humans and their service animals. To this end, Kerzner et al. point to the duty and missed opportunity of the press to expose issues of (in)justice and (ir)responsibility, with a critical eye on their representation of interspecies relationships and rights.

Lastly, on the theme of humans and nonhuman service animals, is Devon MacPherson-Mayor, Cheryl van Daalen-Smith, and Barkley the Poodle’s examination of dyadic-belonging. Noting the increased interest in service-dog use by disabled people, the authors emphasize that “(o)ne set of needs stemming from structural oppression must not eclipse another’s set of needs”.

MacPherson-Mayor and colleagues work to position nonhumans in service roles as co-emancipatory agents, through nuanced consideration of the “shared oppressions and rights at both ends of the service-dog leash”. MacPherson-Mayor et al. tackle the shared oppression that both disabled humans and nonhuman species encounter daily, examining the question of whose needs are more commonly favoured in such a relationship. For the authors, “dyadic-belonging as a model strives to inspire an ethos of non-hierarchical rights, steeped in bidirectional service that challenges problematic, speciesist assumptions relegating animals to the service of humans”. Explaining the term “dyadic” as egalitarian and reciprocal, and “belonging” as membership and acceptance in a group, their model is operationalized through cognizance of common ground and shared struggles.

The second half of our collection ventures into readings of posthumanistic literature, taxidermy-based tactics of disruption, and the militant abilities of tiny ticks. Although less visible, and likely unfamiliar to many readers, the humans and nonhumans foregrounded in these articles begin the important task of locating oppression, resistance, and the particularity of relations overarching societal devaluation of all that is not human—or not “properly” or “wholly” human. Bodies are the site of disablist and speciesist modes of “Othering” in this second section, as readers are drawn through death, isolation, and infection; in lives real and imagined.

Miranda Niittynen introduces the act of rogue taxidermy, which “critique(s) historical and contemporary forms of body display”. First, links are drawn across species with museum installations of mummies or other deceased human figures and the practice of taxidermizing the bodies of hunted animals or pets. The author points to the tensions between appropriating and manipulating nonhuman animals for any purpose, including the “rogue” taxidermy which is her focus. Readers will be drawn intimately into artist Sarina Brewer’s sculpture work on

“monstrous” bodies, where carnival “freak show” characters of the past are meshed with nonhuman bodies—and parts of bodies; Niittynen reads Brewer’s “monsters” as resistant to both speciesist and disablist notions of domination and appropriation of certain beings by anthropocentric dominant, Western societies, including racialized and disabled humans.

Next in this section is Farris’ posthumanist account of H.G. Wells’s 1896 novel, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Farris focuses on the permeability of boundaries in the novel, and how Wells’ *Island* offers an, “early incarnation of posthumanism”. Posthuman in this sense deals with what comes after the human; what is more than the human form. In *Island*, Dr. Moreau attempts to turn a nonhuman animal into a human. This experiment results in “Beast Folk”, a species or type of being that Farris argues is posthuman in form, rather than the derogatory category of “subhuman”. Binaries of value and “normalcy” are challenged through this reading. Connecting the labelling of the subhuman Beast Folk as less-than-human to the common devaluation of those considered disabled, Farris argues for the adoption of multiple, hybrid ways of being. This article blurs the human-nonhuman boundary, while including disability as an equally malleable and impermanent “reality” that needs no eradication, encouraging readers to dismantle dichotomous ideologies with a posthuman reading of the plot and characters in the fantastical novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*.

Lastly, Falek and Butler examine the intriguing political and ethical implications of the bite of the Lone Star tick (*Amblyomma americanum*). The Lone Star tick, as they explain, is “quickly becoming one of the most well-known infectious hosts [...] because of its own medically anomalous effect; its bite has been found to cause people to become allergic to red meat”. In this article, the authors consider related tweets (comments) on the social media platform Twitter, and public reaction to an April Fool’s Day campaign launched by the

mainstream animal rights group, *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals* (PETA), which reported Lone Star ticks being released in national parks to “help” people on their way to vegetarianism or veganism. More than a one-day ploy, Falek and Butler ask, “why is it that when people learn of the Lone Star tick and alpha-gal allergies, they immediately and consistently suggest the ticks should/could be used to make people vegan?” Employing a joint critical disability studies and critical animal studies lens, Falek and Butler wrestle with binaried readings of tick-acquired intolerance for meat consumption as an example of the avoidance of disability (through diet) or the onset of disability (reactions can be significant). *Tricky Ticks* exposes the biopolitical weaponization of one species (ticks) to advocate for another (cows and other “red meat” animals), as less helpful for activism and more clearly an instance of human subjugation, violence, and domination of the “Other.”

Altogether, this special collection of interdisciplinary work makes theoretical and empirical contributions to our understanding of disabled human-nonhuman animal relations, species interaction, and intersectionalities. We hope these articles will inspire further conversations, foster collaboration, and inform a broad audience about populations too often relegated to the margins.

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