

Radical Disability Politics: A Global Dialogue

Book of Abstracts

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Session 1: Global Movements and **Prefigurative Politics**

Paradise for the Insane: Communizing Health/Care **– Jen Ham (UC Santa Cruz)**

This paper explores how the collectivization of health/care might disrupt the capitalist project of commodifying health and recruiting dis/ability into circuits of accumulation. At large, this paper addresses the following questions: in what ways has capitalism transformed health into a commodity that must be factored into the means of subsistence to re/produce labor-power; how the capitalist state relegates disabled and minoritized individuals to the category of surplus population, while also extracting their consumer potential outside the wage contract for capital expansion; and finally, whether socializing domestic labor outside of the profit sector, through alternative living configurations, could enable resistance to exploitation and capital accumulation.

I ground these inquiries in the historically specific and local particularity of Geel, Belgium. Often called the “paradise for the insane,” the Boarder Program in Geel offers a unique living opportunity for individuals with serious cognitive disabilities or mental illness who, after being assessed and provided with a medication plan at the Openbaar Psychiatrisch Zorgcentrum, are paired with one of 187 host

families. The Boarder Program organizes health/care collectively for their “insane” boarders through community rather than privatized institutionalization. Yet importantly, the host families are not simply care-takers for the boarders, nor is meeting health/care needs restricted to the boundaries of the host families’ homes; but rather this unique system extends beyond into the very social fabric of Geel lifestyle itself. Drawing from the series of oral histories I conducted in Geel in 2023, I explicate how the boarder system disrupts narratives and assumptions about disability; how the interpersonal relationships beyond those between the boarder and their host family contribute to the notion of health/care as a living system rather than a privatized set of commodified services and interventions; and lastly, in what ways communizing socially necessary domestic labor engenders community-building and relations of collectivity.

The radical potential of psychosocial disability activism: findings from India – Akriti Mehta (London School of Economics)

Through activism and advocacy of persons with lived experience of mental (ill)health in the global South, a new collective identity location and a framework for activism has emerged in the last decade—persons with psychosocial disabilities. This paper presents the emerging findings from my doctoral research on how activists in India understand and ‘do’ psychosocial disability.

The research draws on postcolonial, crip, and critical disability theorisations as well as my own experiences as a Mad disabled researcher and activist to analyse interviews with activists occupying multiple marginalised socio-political positions, including psychosocial disablement, in India. This research is a response to key gaps and critiques of existing empirical and theoretical literature: first, the absence of an intersectional understanding of marginalisation which mediate disability experiences; second, the emphasis on legal rights-based approaches in disability activism which obscure the role of the State in creating structural sources of disability; and third, the dominance of the global North in framing the concept of ‘psychosocial disability’.

Preliminary analysis shows that activists go beyond the use ‘psychosocial disability’ as a collective identity location and a framework to understand disability. Rather, they

employ psychosocial disability as a lens to explain, understand, and ultimately challenge oppressive structures such as casteism, fascism and militarisation, the criminal (in)justice system, and cisheteropatriarchy. They grapple with and attempt to resolve the tensions between abolition vs reform in ways which bring together radical dreams and everyday practices of care and community-building while simultaneously navigating and negotiating with deeply broken medico-legal regimes. This paper puts forth that the knowledges created by/within psychosocial disability activism in India contribute to a theorisation of disability which understands disability not just within the context of structural and State apparatuses, but as inherently and inextricably linked to them.

Session 2: Survival and Domination – 'Health', 'Welfare', and their Discontents

Beyond 'social versus medical': towards a movement that advocates for a transformative model of non-disabling healthcare – Steve Graby (Independent Researcher) & Inga Reichelt (University of Leeds)

When the phrase 'social model of disability' was coined by Oliver (1983), it was defined in opposition not to the 'medical model' but the 'individual model'. Despite this, the term 'medical model' has gained much greater currency and familiarity in the practice and rhetoric of the Disabled People's Movement (DPM) and its organisations in the UK.

We argue that this terminology has contributed to a reluctance on the part of the DPM to engage with the sphere of medicine, relegating it to an irredeemable domain of paternalistic oppressors. This has been accompanied by an 'anti-cure' politics that, by focusing on acceptance and affirmation of impairment and the body constructed as 'naturally' occurring (linked with the social model argument that it is society, rather than individuals, that must be changed or 'fixed'), may feed bio-essentialist

ontologies and contribute to oppressions such as transphobia (see Slater & Liddiard 2018).

This rhetorical position also has the potential to alienate disabled people who do desire medical amelioration of their conditions, while also supporting the DPM's transformative aims regarding the built and social environment, from the movement. It also leaves unanswered the question of what form, if any, medicine and healthcare more broadly could take in an equitable and non-disabling society.

In contrast, other movements adjacent to the DPM, including the trans health movement and the mental health system survivors' movement, have advanced critiques of medicine that suggest its practice could be transformed in accordance with the social model and with the principles of individual and collective self-determination that underpin the DPM's concept of 'independent living'. Drawing on the insights of these movements, we argue that the DPM needs to shift its relationship with healthcare from non-engagement to seeking its radical transformation, and from a politics of affirmation of bodies-as-they-are to one of bodily self-determination.

Transitioning to working from unemployment and claiming social security benefits. A qualitative exploration of the experiences of people with the diagnosis of depression in England - Krisztina Nemeth (University of Essex)

Introduction: Developing an efficient welfare system creates a conundrum for policy makers internationally. Mental health problems have been the single biggest cause for disability benefit claims in the UK for a decade. In England, welfare reforms (e.g., welfare activation) have been increasingly focused on supporting disabled people into employment, with questionable outcomes.

Aim: To qualitatively explore how people who have the label of depression experience the transition back to the labour market from being unemployed and receiving social security benefits.

Method: Recruitment involved non-statutory disability and claimant networks and used a convenience and snowball sampling method. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to analyse in-depth semi-structured interviews. The study benefited from the input of an external consultant who is a disabled activist.

Participants: All interviewees (5 males, 3 females; age range: 25–51) had worked in paid jobs and most had had several periods of unemployment. All had tried medication for depression, had received at least one psychologically

informed intervention, and had experience of the new and/or old social security benefits.

Results: Six main themes were constructed: (1) Communicating confusion, (2) Managing in hardship, (3) Managing mental health, (4) Considering the consequences of working, (5) Questioning volunteering, and (6) Facing discrimination. Two overarching themes (i.e., Interacting barriers and Counteracting the barriers) emphasise the interconnectedness of the six main themes.

Discussion: Results build on other international studies that drew attention to the barriers created by the interaction of multiple problems (Audhoe et al., 2018). Participants' experiences of navigating the welfare systems (i.e., benefits and health care) are considered within the social model of disability and comparisons are drawn to a VUCA environment. This research highlights the importance for policy makers that evaluating the combined effect of social policies across health care and welfare is essential in order to prevent avoidable harm to those in need of mental health and/or financial state support.

Care as white property: Mapping disabling racialized migrant care work and the care-care work dialectic – Sabine Fernandes (York University, Ontario) & Rachel da Silveira Gorman (York University, Ontario)

Disability Studies argues that care is coercive for disabled people. Feminists argue that care work is coercive for women. Erevelles (2011) asserts that both disability and care work need to be analyzed dialectically under transnational capitalism. Erevelles (2011) and Gorman (2016) pave the path to frame the relationship between care recipients and care providers dialectically in the historical material context of transnational racial colonial capitalism. Black theorists leading the scholarship on the humanist production of race, and gender in transatlantic slavery, plantation capitalism settler colonialism, and colonialism, reveal that care is white property and that care work is anti-Black (Spillers, 1987; Harris, 1993; Mills, 1997; Wynter 2003; Hartman, 2016; Snorten, 2017).

This paper uses Marxist dialectics, Black scholarship, and a Feminist of Color Disability Studies to examine global care chains (GCCs) in the context of transnational racial colonial capitalism. GCCs are theorized as the movement of First World white women into productive jobs, and the migration of Third World nonwhite women into the reproductive roles vacated by the former. Third World women then outsource the care of their dependants to

poorer women in their home states. Gorman (2016) proposes a disability-disablement dialectic to investigate white disabled people in the First World privileged by rights-based racial capitalist regimes versus nonwhite Third World people disabled through their disqualification by these same regimes. Racialized migrant care workers are one example of people who become disabled through non-permanent immigration status and disabling working and living conditions. Yet, these care workers are disqualified for disability rights as non-citizens with precarious relationships to work and legal status.

Rooted in our own collective experiences of disabling racialized migrant care work as Mad/disabled former care workers, we advance the care-care work dialectic to analyze the material relationship between white care recipients and nonwhite care workers producing GCCs. We propose a critique of the dominant feminist political economy discourse of care work.

Session 3: The Heritage of Struggle – Disabled People-led Archives and the Purpose of History

Panel discussion with Ella Clarke (Disabled People's Archive, Manchester); Eline Pollaert (Vrij Universiteit Amsterdam/Kreukelcollectief, Netherlands), and Theo Blackmore (Disability Cornwall)

Session 4: Labour and Surplus

Populations – From Exploitation to

Exclusion

Disability and labour: Reframing capitalist labour using disability metaphysics - Kavana Ramaswamy (University of Cambridge)

The Social Model of Disability reframes disability as a creation of capitalist economies. Capitalism constructs disability through the lines it draws around labour; disabled people are defined by their incapacity to participate as labourers in the capitalist economy. With the advancement of technology and artificial ‘intelligence’, workers in several industries are finding themselves out of work. Many are suddenly facing existential crises, having to redefine self-worth outside of their functions as “productive” members of the capitalist labour force. Some privileged people pre-empted this crisis by participating in the Great Resignation, having confronted the futility of many workplace rituals during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Social Model frames disability as a creation of the industrial revolution and capitalism. Capitalism uses disabled people as threats/warnings to incentivise workers to stay productive. Instead of restructuring society away from capitalism, disability activism has historically sought

inclusion within it. This strategy has undoubtedly harmed us. The destruction of disability support through austerity and the Covid-19 pandemic has devastated our lives. Instead, I suggest using lived experiences of disablement to inform a restructuring of work.

My paper reconsiders work, community, and participation from the perspective of disablement. In the face of increasing automation, many people suggest that workers must diversify their skills and capacity to remain relevant. My paper uses disability theory to question the hidden premise: that work, or labour under capitalism, is what makes us 'relevant' to society/community. My paper makes a case for moving away from basing existential value on capitalist labour and instead working towards building societies that treat our existence as inherently valuable.

Under Pressure: Capitalist Geologies of the Disabled Body – Jordan Whitewood-Neal (London School of Architecture)

A pressure sore, the breakdown of skin and tissue due to excessive pressure, friction and exposure is a frequent issue for disabled people. Whether we use a wheelchair, reside in bed, are thrown to the floor, or debilitated by rubble, these micro-excavations of the body, I argue, provide a theoretical yet materially tangible position by which to understand the disabled bodies exploitation by labour practices.

Architectural workers, as we are now favourably known, sit at the heart of the production of built space. Our labour, time, and bodies are often utilised to perpetuate the capitalist processes that underpin the development of cities. Like many professions that work long hours for low pay, architectural workers are now beginning to unionise, brought together by the acknowledgement of our own exploitation, and inherently that of others exploited by the global systems of construction and manufacturing that harm communities and the earth. Scales of ethical concern from the extraction of the earth to the extraction of the body formulate both a literal and metaphorical framework for understanding capitalist consequences on body minds. It is within this particular labour context that this paper sits.

The disabled body is not vulnerable to these processes, it is exploited by them, and to a higher degree by the embodied ideology of exhaustive labour that architectural workers are expected to undertake in order to fuel the proliferation of development. In response, this paper will explore themes of extraction, maintenance, disablement, and resources through the lens of the human body, as a site of geological extractivism that manifests in domestic isolation and bodily exposure. Focusing on Frantz Fanon's widely discussed metaphor regarding amputation, viewed as a refusal to a particular colonial orientation, I reflect on Fanon's refusal for amputation to stand for nothingness – asking: what does it mean to negate biogeographical breakdown as a similar form of absence? Alongside theorists such as Jasbir Puar, David Gissen, Marta Russell, Tanya Titchkosky and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and my own experiences, I hope to offer a new imagination of how the disabled not only reflects these systems of exploitation, but provides new ways to critique and intervene with(in) them.

Accessible ‘workplaces’: Assistive technology, disability, and the changing working landscape in Japan – Jenni Schofield (SOAS, University of London/University of Tokyo)

This paper is an introduction to my research project, which explores experiences of disability in the Japanese workplace by conducting a series of space inquiries within the ‘workplaces’. The aim of this project is to highlight the lived and embodied experiences of disability in the Japanese workplace in order to both influence policymakers and employers to improve the accessibility of their workplaces and inspire disabled people to create their own workplaces should an appropriate option for them not already exist.

I use an interdisciplinary approach to produce a more holistic view of the issues surrounding disability in the Japanese workplace, with a focus on anthropological and ethnographic research methods, to allow the individuals and communities I am researching to share their own voices when speaking about their personal experiences. My methodology includes a literature review to establish the field and to determine what technologies are already in use and currently being developed; ethnographic space inquiries exploring the digital world of disabled Japanese influencers and in-person workplaces such as Dawn: Avatar Robot Café; and interviews conducted both within the space inquiries, as well as with organisations such as CoCo Diversity Entertainment.

The paper represents an overview of my research thus far, with an exploration of the difficulty in finding secure work as a disabled person in Japan, and a definition of what a ‘workplace’ is in the Japanese context, with an analysis of how this has changed in the last decade, the influence that nationwide job insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic, among other factors, has had on the working landscape, and what this means for disabled people.

Session 5: : Theoretical Framings 1 – Marxism(s) and Disability

Dismodernizing the Working Class, after the Pandemic Lumpenproletariat – Arianna Introna (University of Stirling)

My paper sets out to explore the concept of ‘dismodernizing the working class’ as opening a possible avenue for the development of theories of disability that avoid ontological essentialism, and for the centering of disabled people within the working class as subjects of struggle that can originate specific modes of anti-capitalist resistance and solidarity. The starting point of my analysis will be a critique of capitalism as a system of relations of production normatively centred as what the working class must have some connection to, whether in the form of engagement in waged work or of performing labour that reproduces productive labour. Work as the centre of capitalist production performs the role of a universalist institution (Balibar 2020) which disperses across society a series of universals: the position of productive labour as the hinge of both society and class struggle, the othering of subjects which entertain a non-relation to the sphere of production, and the subsidiary position social reproduction fulfills in relation to production. Amongst the ‘others’ produced by these universals are the socioeconomic and political

phenomena of the lumpenproletariat and disability. Materially and symbolically marginalized vis-à-vis capitalist relations of production, the lumpenproletariat and disability exist as life at ‘the edges of capitalism’, where collective survival is best pursued through ‘relations of mutual aid instead of market competition’ (O’Hearn and Grubačić 2016 p.147). My presentation will explore a perspective of struggle internal to disability, as well as the lumpenproletariat, as the others of capitalist society to interrogate the work-based universals that haunt Marxist theories of class struggle. In doing so, it will pursue a disability politics that develops from outside the working class and, through the symbolic universalization of disability, operates a dismodernization of the working class.

Building on the UPIAS Social Model's Legacy: The Collective-Materialist Approach to Disabling Capitalism – Ioana Cerasella Chis (University of Birmingham)

In this paper, I make the case for the need to address Vic Finkelstein's, Mike Oliver's, and Paul Abberley's calls for a theory of disability. Here, I make tentative suggestions for how a theory of disablement that builds on the UPIAS-inspired social model could be articulated. In the first part of the presentation, I explore the framings and uses of the UPIAS-inspired social model of disability as a 'tool' for transformative action, rather than a theory of disablement. I then suggest that the development of a theory of disablement is a task that still needs to be undertaken. Then, I highlight attempts at developing a social theory of disablement as oppression by other scholars and activists, followed by acknowledging the repeated calls for the UPIAS-inspired social model's revival.

In response to such calls, and inspired by post-'68 Marxist literatures, I propose -what I call- *the collective-materialist approach to disablement* as one potential theory of disablement to accompany the UPIAS-inspired social model of disability. In short, the approach is 'collective' due to its concern with agency manifested through collective struggle for enacting change against structural disablement, and 'materialist' due to its roots within the materialist political tradition and methodology of Marxism

(materialist anarchist approaches could also be fruitfully drawn upon).

To this end, I propose that a theory of disablement:

- **approaches disablement as a fundamental feature of capitalist exploitation and oppression, and critiques - what I call- 'disabling capitalism';**
- **is embedded in collective struggles against-and-beyond disabling capitalism, and for autonomy and Independent Living;**
- **takes a collectivist approach to politics;**
- **upholds an anti-productivist perspective, and**
- **moves beyond essentialist approaches to identity.**

Any theory of disablement and disability that avoids the difficult task of analysing and mobilising resistance to structural disablement and capitalist social relations, I posit, cannot claim to be emancipatory.

The 'Illusion' and Ideological Construction of Disability: A Speculative Marxist Reading – Paul Reynolds (Open University)

In this paper I want to explore the 'naming', conceptual construction and application of the discourse of disability in capitalist industrial societies and its consequences. I start by making some remarks about the emergence of disability as a category that begins to be of interest to state authorities, capital, welfare and social communities and collectivities. This is not to say that ideas of disability were not present before, but my focus is on how capitalist industrialism, spreading slowly and globally through the 19th and 20th Century, requires a particular concept of disability that becomes hegemonic. This conceptualisation reinterprets difference in different ways towards deficiencies and pathologies. This is the root of problems with a positive naming of disability. It also constructs both hierarchical and homogenising categories within disability and creates some of the linguistic terminologies that disability scholars struggle with.

It also constructs a distinction between disability and able-bodied to support a notion of the productive and efficient body that is constituted with capabilities that are instrumental to capitalist production. It fetishises and idealises 'able-bodies', disciplines discursively to work – and progressively to work more or be disciplined by medical discourse and illness/disability deficiencies crosscutting discourse of age in the life course. Thus

disability is part of a discursive means by which ALL labour, and ALL populations, are sustained in their exploitation, oppression and alienation

Whilst disability as discourse is politically important in recognition and redistribution, and the maintenance of care, support and critical recognition within the context of both production and remuneration –To each according to their needs, from each according to their abilities. The implications of that challenge the category of disability as what is built upon it moving towards communism.

Session 6: Theoretical Framings 2: Self, Other, Totality: Interrogating Matter and Materialisms

Disability as Subordination: Towards an Ameliorative Account of Disability – Liam Livesley (University of Southampton)

In social philosophy, Sally Haslanger’s accounts of gender and of race – on which genders and races are defined in terms of positions in hierarchies of subordination – have become increasingly influential in recent years. These accounts are ameliorative – that is, they are revisionary proposals about the concepts we should be using, rather than descriptions of our current concepts. Given Haslanger’s influence, it is surprising that little attention has been paid to whether a similar approach might be fruitful for giving an account of disability. In this paper, I sketch a Haslangerian account of disability and suggest that such an account might be an improvement over the social model.

On my account, to be disabled is to be systematically socially subordinated in virtue of being believed to have bodily features that are taken to be evidence of having a defective body, and of a societal ideology that says that people with defective bodies merit subordination. I argue

that this gets us the part of the social model that we should want – the idea that it is social arrangements that disadvantage disabled people, not how their bodies are. However, in dispensing with the notion of impairment, my account gets us this without having to admit that there really are such things as defective bodies, as I suggest that the social model forces us to do.

Finally, I flag a potential problem for my account: that it does not count cases of “invisible” conditions or passing as cases of disability. I argue that this is not, conceptually, a problem for the account since ameliorative accounts need not respect the extensions of our ordinary concepts. However, since who counts as disabled matters for things like organising the Disability Rights Movement or prioritising testimony, we may need a more inclusive account in such contexts.

**New Materialisms as Intersectional
Approximations to the Onto-Epistemologies of
Decolonial Disability Theorizing and Critical Cross-
Coalitional Movement Building – Alexis Padilla
(University of Missouri Saint Louis)**

Through the lenses afforded by my positionality as a disabled activist and scholar of color born and raised in the global south, in this paper I (1) interrogate the viability and strategic significance of rhizomatic new materialist ontologies as potentially relevant for the advancement of a relational onto-epistemology of decolonial disability; and (2) present illustrative cross coalitional movement building strategic approaches which elevate intersectional subalternities in global south and global north contexts. Decolonial disability theorizing is still very much in a formative stage (Padilla 2021a, 2021b; Afeworki Abay and Soldatic Forthcoming, 2023). I thus use Carroza-Athens and Grosfoguel's (2023) decolonial framing who distinguish between decoloniality and postcoloniality. Their conceptualization is not connected to disability. Nevertheless, they emphasize links between coloniality and modernity and foreground political economy and materialist elements of decolonial transmodernities. In the concluding portion, I examine critically the viability of bridging the uniqueness of global north and global south contexts in terms of decoloniality and intersectional disability dimensions through the onto-epistemological lenses afforded by new materialisms in conjunction to

sentipensante/global south epistemologies toward cross-coalitional movement building explorations relevant to intersectional subalternity.

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The Right to Ease: The “Radical” Rest of Contemporary Womanism as a Model for Chronic Illness Inclusion in Disability Rights – Hannah Tate (Indiana University)

The exclusion of chronically ill members of the disabled community has long been a critical downfall of the U.S. American disability rights movement. Efforts to resist the medicalization and individualization of disability have in turn sidelined members of the community in need of access to treatment within the medical sphere, and held back consideration of differing bodymind experiences in disability theory, a gap that remains pervasive in practice and, arguably, theory. This paper turns to a new model for chronic illness inclusion: the hard-fought rest and ease of Black liberation movements, frontlined as a revolutionary cause alongside — indeed, often in advance of — other practices of revolution like protesting and publishing.

Building on a historical ethic of community stability championed by Black women within liberation movements like the Black Panther Party, prioritizations of Black ease find their contemporary apex in womanist and Black woman-led initiatives. A long list of activists like Rachel Cargle, Tricia Hersey, Ebony-Janice Moore, and others use their work and writing to position rest and wellness as priorities of revolution rather than tools thereof. In this project, I look at how similar investments might increase inclusivity for chronically ill folks within the disability rights

movement by holistically rejecting the policing of disabled bodies just as the Black liberation movement rejects the policing of Black bodies. As I will show, the assertion of a disabled right to ease as opposed to access rejects the historical drive to prove the “sufficiency” of the individual disabled body to a normate audience. As such, this right to ease situates an alternative revolutionary priority that allows for new articulation of chronically ill bodymind experiences, the prioritization of community healthcare as a revolutionary cause, mainstream discussions of access, and the critical inclusion of queer and trans experiences of gender-affirming healthcare as part of the disability community.