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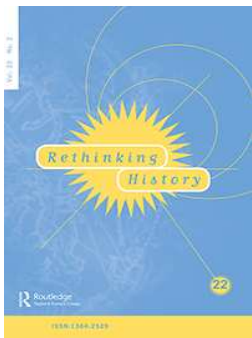
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# Critical disability studies, Brexit and Trump: a time of neoliberal–ableism

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## ABSTRACT

One feels light-headed even trying to decipher the actualities of the global political system and cultural order in light of the traumatic events of Brexit and Trump. One trope worth dissected is that of ableism as an obvious partner of neoliberalism. The concept of neoliberal–ableism captures the elision of key tenets of both processes that emphasise self-containment, autonomy and independence. Such ideas were key to the Trump and Brexit campaigns and now leave us in a dangerous space of isolationism. Trump and Brexit hail in a new kind of neoliberalism; one associated with the rolling out of ableist ideals. And while West might be correct in predicting the death of some elements of late capitalism, we know from history that ability and disability – or dis/ability – are used to restructure political orders. We will consider the rise of neoliberal–ableism as a key guiding ideology of both Brexit and Trump supporters and ask: what does this mean for disabled people? After considering these two historical events we will think of the future and consider some of the ways in which we may respond and resist.

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## Introducing critical dis/ability studies

We locate ourselves in relation to the burgeoning critical disability studies literature. In the final chapter of Goodley's *Disability Studies* (2016 second edition), he argues that while critical disability studies scholars start with an analysis of disability, they inevitably become interconnected with the politics of class, gender, sex/uality, race and ethnicity:

Such intersections are key to critical disability studies. While critical disability studies might start with disability they never end with it: remaining ever vigilant of political, ontological and theoretical complexity. Reflecting upon recent reflections (Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009; Barnes 2012; Shildrick

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2012; Goodley 2012; Vehmas and Watson 2013; Mitchell and Snyder 2015) my own understanding is that critical disability studies:

- Acknowledges the importance of analysing disability through materialism and is respectful to the building blocks of disability studies especially the social model of disability;
- Recognises that our contemporary times are complex as they are marked by austerity, a widening gap between rich and poor, globalisation of the guiding principles of late capitalism and therefore require sophisticated social theories that can make sense and contest these processes;
- Remains mindful of global, national and local economic contexts and their impact on disabled people;
- Adopts a position of cultural relativism whilst seeking to say some things about the global nature of disability;
- Recognises the importance of the constitution of the self in relation to others (and is therefore always attuned to the relational qualities of disability);
- Brings together disability to intersect other identities as a moment of reflection that Davis (2006c) terms as dismodernism;
- Adopts the practice of criticality in order to be critical of all kinds of disability studies (including critical disability studies);
- Keeps in mind the view that any analysis of disability should not preclude consideration of other forms of political activism.

Critical disability studies is not:

- A futile exercise that simply adds the word 'critical' to disability studies to suggest all previous examples of disability studies have not been critical;
- Just another approach to sit alongside traditional approaches like materialist social model perspectives;
- The insertion of a discursive preoccupation with culture that ignores the material realities of disability;
- Simply the study of disability or ability for that matter;
- An academic exercise without political commitment;
- Incapable of having values and ambitions that it wants to share with the world. (Goodley 2016, 192)

There are a number of emerging approaches including crip, discursive, new materialist, posthuman and Global South disability studies perspectives. This article emerges specifically from two emerging theoretical projects: critical studies of ableism and dis/ability studies. *Critical studies of ableism* has been pioneered by the disabled scholars Campbell (e.g. 2008a, 2008b, 2009) in

Australia (now United Kingdom) and Wolbring (e.g. 2008, 2009, 2012) in Canada. Wolbring and Campbell's work is highly interdisciplinary mobilising ideas from law, medicine, rehabilitation, sociology, cultural and religious studies. Each of these disciplines, they argue, is built upon the maintenance of the autonomous, rational, reasonable and healthy citizen. And in their work, they seek to reveal and destabilise the kinds of human being that are cherished – by ableism – and considered to be the kinds of personhood that society should desire. Their work has been incredibly influential to us in thinking through the relationship of disability to the wider world and leads us to our second approach, that of *dis/ability studies*. This is the title for Goodley's (2014) text that sought to bring together critical disability studies with studies of ableism. As good poststructuralists, we already knew that disability relied on its opposite – ability – in order to exist. But the work of disability and ability scholars pushed us to embrace a necessarily bifurcated consciousness that acknowledged the push and pull of disability and ability upon one another. Disablism was something that people with sensory, mental, physical and cognitive categories of impairment endured. Thomas' (2007) now classic work had made it very clear – that just as people of colour face racism, women are subjected to sexism, working-class people to class oppression and LGBTQ folk bear homo, bi and transphobia – so people with impairments endure disablism. In contrast, ableism is something everybody (and every body) endures (though there will be differentiation throughout the population). Acknowledging the split term 'dis/ability' requires us to think simultaneously about the processes of disablism and ableism and how each nurtures the other.

So, following Goodley (2014), ableism accounts for the stifling practices associated with a contemporary society that increasingly seeks to promote the species typical individual citizen: a citizen that is ready and able to work, productively contribute, an atomistic phenomenon bounded and cut off from others, capable, malleable and compliant.

This species typicality is at the heart of both Wolbring and Campbell's work: drawing attention to the societal idealisation of a normative idea of what it means to be *homo sapiens* (the Latin words, by the way, for 'wise man'). Ableism breeds paranoia, confusion, fear and inadequacy. Ableism is an ideal that no one ever matches up to. As McRuer (2006) carefully puts it, compulsory ableism is to disablism what compulsory heteronormativity is to homophobia. 'Ableism provides just the right amount of temperature and nutrient from which disablism can grow' (Goodley 2014, 78). Hence, disabled people come to occupy a crucial role in the reproduction of ableism. Human enhancement, individual progression, cognitive advancement, economic independence and therapeutic growth are just some of the aims of an ableist regime. Disabled people are constituted as the perfect objects of these interventions; the lacking subjects who might (if luck holds out) be made better through ableist rehabilitation. But, at the very same time, disabled people are

cast as those damaged others who sit in stark contrast to the ableist imperative of economic, embodied, cultural and psychological self-sufficiency. The critical study of ableism plugs us into a key trope of the twenty-first century: autonomy and self-containment.

The discovery of modern societies' reliance on the sovereignty of the human subject is hardly news. The popularity of Foucault's (e.g. 1977, 1978) work has grown over the last four decades because of its fit with the increased emphasis on the human subject as the object, subject and carrier of advanced capitalism. Modern societies are characterised by individual citizens internalising their own sovereignty. Neither God, government nor monarchy will govern the modern subject: he is free to govern himself (Rabinow and Rose 2006). This emphasis on self-governance fits perfectly with the rise of neoliberal thinking in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Neoliberalism is the latest stage in capitalism's global hegemonic domination (Ong 2007). For Cooley (2011), the beginnings of neoliberalism were associated with talk of free enterprise, the 'American way' and working for one's family. More contemporaneous iterations of neoliberal discourse would indicate that we are entering a cultural epoch where such a vision of human development automatically inducts each and everyone into what Jakobsen (2009) describes as 'a relational structure that provides for privatized resource-provision'. Or, in short, you do not have to be self-sufficient to work here but it helps. In Goodley (2014), it is argued that ableism is wrapped up in the machinations of neoliberalism: '[t]he way I would like us to think of this relational structure is this: *neoliberalism provides an ecosystem for the nourishment of ableism; which we can define as neoliberal-ableism*' (34).

Let us unpack this concept a little more. It is customary to acknowledge that there are many forms of neoliberalism. This feeds into the main analytical thread of this article: that neoliberalism is a cunning little fox (perhaps more a chameleon) capable of morphing and changing to maintain the key aims of its project. So, what is this project? Or perhaps more specifically, what is one of the defining projects of neoliberalism? A response is offered by Soldatic and Chapman (2010) when they conceptualise neoliberal capitalism as a time of flexibility, casualisation, work readiness and productivity. The rationality of market rule – and the rolling out of marketisation as the way to organise social life – interpolates a particular kind of citizen: an adaptable, self-sufficient, autonomous labouring individual. Here, then, we find the pull of the logics of ableism as a complementary ideology that fits perfectly with the contemporary globalised neoliberal capitalist epoch. It is not the case that ableism appears *because* of neoliberalism: more the case that ableism is drawn into the economic, political and cultural vortex of neoliberalism precisely because such a system feeds off the empty carcass of the ableist citizen. Ableism is empty in the sense that it is stripped of the human qualities of humanness, mutuality, vulnerability and dependence. The ableist citizen is a limited entity for all its proclamations of

strength and fitness (Martschukat, in this issue). And neoliberalism and ableism merge together as a deeply inhuman complex. If neoliberalism provides the economic conditions for the makings of the contemporary citizen, then ableism provides the psychology. Gammon (2013) argues that neoliberalism is akin to a narcissistic neurosis, obstructing identification with others, and manifests itself in a dispassionate social destructiveness. To live a neoliberal-able life is to live alone. Atomised. Self-serving. Never needy. Closed. Bounded. An 'I' in a deeply individualistic and individualising world. A self never in need of others. A psyche entrenched with the discourse of individualism. And ableism, because of its isolationism, invites new iterations of homophobia, xenophobia, nationalism, racism, sexism alongside disablism as ideological positions of prejudice that fit the logics of ableism.

The concept of neoliberal-ableism brings with it a consideration of the centrality of ability (and its counter disability) to the theorisation of late capitalist neoliberal societies. And while many recent observers have celebrated the death of neoliberalism, our sense is that obituaries are premature, not least because they ignore the strengthening discourse of ableism in these advanced days of neoliberal capitalism. We are not convinced by claims of Post-Truth proponents who suggest ideology is dead, killed by emotional soundbites of the online generation and booming dismissive voices of messers Trump and Farage. While we do acknowledge the changing political and techno-cultural landscape, we fiercely assert that there is, without doubt, a preferred citizen lying at the heart of policymaking and political discourse. And we agree with Harnish (2017) that Trump and his supporters (and we would add Brexiters) make ready use of the discourse of ableism in order to, ironically, appeal to those citizens who have already been demoralised by global neoliberal capitalism. Demoralised people might be. But we should not confuse this with the end of neoliberal capitalism. Let us start, though it hurts, with Brexit.

### **Them and us: brexit and the logics of neoliberal-ableism**

On 24 June 2016 at 7.20 am, our mobile phone rang. It was our daughters Ruby and Rosa. They had rung to tell us about the results of the European Union (EU) referendum. We were half asleep. We were nursing headaches from a heavy night in the fields of Glastonbury festival, a major British music event that we have been lucky enough to attend for a number of years. Our daughters were not with us for the first time in years: their school's head teacher refusing to give them authorised leave to attend the festival because this would mean them 'missing crucial parts of the curriculum'. We will leave a critique of British education for another paper. But suffice to say this narrow understanding of proper learning only taking place in schools (rather than in fields) is but one other element of ability studies. For now, let us get back to the phone call, where everything was about to change.

Ruby exclaimed, ‘You will never guess what they have done ...’ 52% of the British voters had chosen to leave the EU. Our other lovely daughter, Rosa, wrote on her prescient Facebook update:

I feel totally let down by the people who have not thought this decision through. I’m not glad to say our country has the same view as Donald Trump either.

But what does Ruby mean by ‘they’? And who exactly does Rosa have in mind when she talks about ‘the people’?

Well, as we slumped back in our camping chairs, we understood these people as others to our own community. Them and us. The latter group – at least for our family and friends – are Remain: this is but one way in which we have come to view ourselves over the few years. It has become, as Bauman (1994) would have it, a marked identity. We are Remain. We are Our People. And in finding this commonality, we inevitably flatten distinctions and obscure differences of opinion. We have talked about the problems of the EU. We are good students of British socialists such as the late great British socialist Labour man Tony Benn who rejected the capitalist monster that was the EU. And we loved Tony (and still do). But we certainly knew that we did not relate to them: those Leave people.

The then chairperson of The United Kingdom’s Independence Party (UKIP) Nigel Farage is just one of those people that Rosa describes. He has made the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU his life’s work and was prone to adopt any tactic to get his message across, however crude. He was, for example, responsible for the use of a poster during the EU Referendum which depicted a snaking line of mostly non-white migrants and refugees (probably Syrian refugees) with the slogan ‘Breaking point: the EU has failed us all’ (Stewart and Mason 2016). But, and it is important to acknowledge this, not everyone who voted to leave the EU is like Nigel Farage. That would be a gross simplification of the complexity of the issues at stake (if not potentially libelous). Some seemingly considered, moderate and thoughtful people voted to leave. In total, 52% of Britain cannot be mindless xenophobes (as some of the left media wanted to depict). Decision-making behind each individual’s vote was complex, personalised and idiosyncratic. One suggestion that many agree upon is that the seeming simplicity of the referendum’s question (are you in or out?) failed to account for the many varied reasons behind individual’s voting behaviour. Voting out (or in) meant many different things to different people. Brexit was not simply a vote against immigration. Brexit for some was a cry for help and recognition. In poor parts of the United Kingdom, where communities felt disenfranchised by austerity and the collapse of the British manufacturing industry, a vote for Brexit was a vote against career politicians based in London who were deemed to be ignorant about the everyday concerns of working people. In other parts of Britain, such as the fishing communities in



the North East and South West of England, voting for Brexit was a blow against a faceless EU bureaucracy that seemed to have put other nations' fishing before Britain's. While acknowledging these complexities, attempts by the left (and their media) to make sense of Brexit resulted in the production of a number of common tropes. These included:

- We are now Little Britain;
- This is the final nail in the coffin to the death of social justice;
- Brexit is a cultural vent for the rise in racism and xenophobia;
- We are witnessing the expression of opposition to the bureaucratic machine of the EU project;
- This is one more sign of the move to the right in democratic politics;
- People are suspicious of immigration.

But what does Brexit mean for disabled people, disability politics and disability studies? And, as importantly, what does Brexit tell us about British society and the values that underpin this society? What would happen to a reading of Leave if we were to think of it in terms of a decision that directly reflected a particular kind of guiding discourse or ideological narrative? Brexiters have defended their vote to love the EU in terms of the following tropes:

- Standing alone;
- Reclaiming our independence;
- Being self-sufficient;
- Seeking autonomy (economic, cultural and national);
- Self-rule over our national concerns;
- Maintaining our sovereignty.

These statements are familiar to those of us who work within critical disability studies. They are our bread and butter. Because we know that these concepts are consistently fused together in order to articulate the logics of ableism. We should acknowledge that ableism is a psychoemotional and global economic project. And ableists are prepared to do deals with others who associate their practices with normalcy (including whiteness, heteronormativity, anglocentric and malestream takes on the world). And ableism, as we are witnessing with Brexit, is at the heart of British national discourse. Is this a claim too far? Are we in danger of over-theorising Brexit? We think not. Because even seemingly benign ideas like national pride, celebrating one's independence or upholding one's personal achievements might well reveal implicit assumptions associated with the kind of global citizen preferred by the locality of Britain. As Goodley has written previously:

For many of us, ableist expectations are impossible: and are set as impossible dreams for many. And, as a snowball effects, ability picks up speed, expands in nature, drawing into it cognitive, economic, cultural factors to become a monstrous entity: a great ball of ability. One might say that in its beginnings ability emerges as a seemingly objective concept. We all want to have abilities of some kinds in order to live. But when ability grows in scope and reach and remains fundamentally linked to the valuing of distinct individual traits, qualities and characteristics then it becomes an individualising and anti-social phenomenon: wary of anyone or any practice that gets in its way. (2014, xx)

Clearly, Brexit pins down ableism as *the way to live a responsible life*. Alone. Segregated. Bounded. Fixed. Immovable. Static. Dead (or at least dead to the needs and demands of others). Brexit is the writing large of ableism: the ideology that assumes independence lies at the heart of what it means to be a good British citizen. Brexit marks the nation state of Britain as an ableist ideal: capable of governance and trade devoid of reliance on interdependent relationship with other European nations. And crucially a nation state with non-porous borders. Where non-European others are cast as threats to British ideals. Where now, as Farage would have it, non-Europeans (especially those of colour) threaten to create Breaking points.

Ruby: They...

Rosa: The people...

... are the neoliberal citizens of this brave world of self-sufficient independence. These individuals are the treasured subjects of austerity. Working hard. Shopping enough. Delighting in their lack of need to pull down resources from the welfare state. Standing alone. Pulling themselves up by the boot-strings. In this together. But only with others that they resemble. With similar boots. And similar ways of marching in those boots.

The timing of Brexit and austerity are not coincidental. What we have witnessed over the last four years is a fundamental rewriting of the British citizen's relationship with government. The government rolls back and individual responsibility rolls in. Brexit should come as no surprise. It is merely another example of the neoliberal-ableist individualism that marks our communities. Why would anyone want dependence, mutuality or interconnection with the European project when we are all austerity subjects now? So, where does this leave us. What hope can we offer in these dangerous times? And what about us? The Other to the dominant them? The 48% remain? And more importantly what about those Others that have literally been cast as outside of this new British neoliberal-able project? We will come back to responses later in the paper. For now, let us turn to the horror show that was the 2016 American election.

## Trump: a logical consequence of neoliberal-ableism

On the day of announcing his election win, Donald J Trump tweeted:

**Donald J. Trump** @realDonaldTrump 9 November 2016

Such a beautiful and important evening! The forgotten man and woman will never be forgotten again. We will all come together as never before.

Here was a Billionaire with no political experience announcing himself as an elected Man Of The People. Trump achieved what he set out to do: a Brexit plus plus. It seemed too easy for opponents to claim that Trump was unfit for office (a point President Obama made strongly during the campaign, see BBC News, 3 August 2016). The reality was very different: Trump was deemed very much electable especially by particular sectors of the voting population. According to an analysis of the BBC News website:

The poll suggests that 53% of men voted for Mr Trump, with 41% voting for Mrs Clinton – those proportions are almost exactly reversed for women. Among white voters (who made up 70% of voters), Mr Trump won 58% to Mrs Clinton's 37%, while the Democratic candidate won the support of a huge majority of black voters – 88% to Mr Trump's 8% – and Hispanic voters – 65% to his 29%. Looking specifically at white women, they favoured Mr Trump, with 53% supporting him compared with 43% for Mrs Clinton. (BBC News, 9 November 2016)

What does this reveal? A few days after the result Cornell West wrote:

The neoliberal era in the United States ended with a neofascist bang. The political triumph of Donald Trump shattered the establishments in the Democratic and Republican parties – both wedded to the rule of Big Money and to the reign of meretricious politicians. The Bush and Clinton dynasties were destroyed by the media-saturated lure of the pseudo-populist billionaire with narcissist sensibilities and ugly, fascist proclivities. The monumental election of Trump was a desperate and xenophobic cry of human hearts for a way out from under the devastation of a disintegrating neoliberal order – a nostalgic return to an imaginary past of greatness. White working- and middle-class fellow citizens – out of anger and anguish – rejected the economic neglect of neoliberal policies and the self-righteous arrogance of elites. Yet these same citizens also supported a candidate who appeared to blame their social misery on minorities, and who alienated Mexican immigrants, Muslims, black people, Jews, gay people, women and China in the process. (West 2016, np)

It is tempting to read Trump's election as the end of neoliberalism. However, such a reading fails to attend to dis/ability studies and ignores the use of neoliberal-ableist idealisations at the heart of the Trump campaign. In order to make our case, let us analyse three key Trump slogans *Make America Great*, *Repeal Obamacare* and *Drain the Swamp*.

First let us explore 'Make America great again'. In November 2015, Trump was attacked for ridiculing the physically impaired journalist Serge F. Kovaleski

(BBC News, 26 November 2015). For many, this was further evidence of Trump's disdain for minority groups in the United States. A month later, Trump called on his website for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States 'until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on' [*sic*]. He has referred to Mexicans as 'drug dealers, criminals and rapists' (BBC News, 31 August 2016) and is actively involved in lawsuits brought against him by women claiming that he sexually harassed them (BBC News, 18 November 2016). Trump has indicated that he will help overturn the 1973 *Roe v Wade* decision and allow states to ban abortion (thus putting the health of many young women at risk; Dent 2016), while one of his first appointments as President Elect was the Alt-right advisor Steve Bannon as chief strategist (BBC News, 9 January 2018. Bannon is infamous for being the driving force behind the right-wing US Breitbart News website). This preference for white men with Hawk-like tendencies was replicated time and time again as more members of his administration were revealed. When Trump talks of making America Great Again, one should ask, what kind of American citizen he has in mind? Wolbring defines ableism as 'the favouritism for certain abilities', for example, cognition, competitiveness or consumerism and the often-negative sentiment towards the lack of favoured abilities (see his 'Ableism and Ability Ethics and Governance' webpage <https://ableism.wordpress.com/ableism-glossary/>). Trump's forgotten citizen is signified as one ready and able to work – a white working man that can be found in the redundant manufacturing towns of the rustbelt (see BBC News, 26 July 2016)<sup>1</sup> – who is then through racist images and proclamations set in counter-distinction to dangerous, deviant or idle others, such as Mexicans and disabled people and people of colour (for further discussions, see Wilton and Schuer 2006; Delgado Wise and Márquez Covarrubias, 2008).

A further reading of Trump is that he appealed to certain constituencies of the American population, most notably according to Harnish (2017) the rural, white working class. And these voters were firmly behind Trump, sharing his ableist ideals because 'the culture of rural America remains independent, rooted in family and contemptuous of the costs and diversity of the metropolis, scornful of social investments' (Harnish 2017, 2). Trump's campaign played with the idea of these forgotten wo/men: but held on to strong tropes of ability, work readiness, whiteness and heroic sentiments associated with being a True American. These idealisations sit in stark contrast to his use of hate speech with many minority groups. This is a point developed by Harnish (2017, 2) who suggests that Trump used

ableist rhetoric to court rural, working-class whites; his repeated use of metaphors equating bodily difference with weakness and failure played to a fear of disability that is deeply embedded in rural, white working-class culture. This fear has been magnified by the damage to working-class communities wrought by

technological change and the neoliberal policies of deregulation, entitlement 'reform', and disinvestment in the welfare state.

Harnish draws attention to the title of Trump's policy guide book, *Crippled America: How to Make America Great Again* (Trump 2015), which 'offers the ugliest example of what became a pattern of ableist language over the course of his campaign' (Harnish 2017, 2). And tied to this is a further entrenched position occupied by Trump. As Coates (2017, np) contends, 'it is often said that Trump has no real ideology, which is not true', he goes on:

his ideology is white supremacy, in all its truculent and sanctimonious power ... To Trump, whiteness is neither notional nor symbolic but is the very core of his power ... Barack Obama delivered to black people the hoary message that if they work twice as hard as white people, anything is possible. But Trump's counter is persuasive: Work half as hard as black people, and even more is possible.

Just as Trump (and Brexit) played with the 'society is in crisis' rhetoric, this recognised that white middle and working classes were being hit with the stark realities of capitalism: a reality that non-white and disabled people have experienced as simply everyday life for decades. But this attack on society was not a refusal of capitalism: in contrast, it was a reformulation of neoliberal capitalism drawing in the potency of ableist logics.

In order to develop this last point, let us briefly expose Trump's attempts to repeal Obamacare. Marans (2016) reported that many disabled activists have expressed concern at Trump's plans. These include repealing the Affordable Care Act (or Obamacare as it is often known), rolling back the health-care expansion of Medicare (which includes some 10 million disabled people who are insured through this policy) and reducing Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) enforcement (ADA which seeks to recognise the rights of disabled people in work, education and other institutions). These measures will put many disabled people at risk: worsening their already precarious position in society. A shrinking state has been described as a by-product of neoliberalism (Williams, Cloke, and Thomas 2012, 1480), as the state rolls back (Sothorn 2007). The removal of big government from health care is yet another example of what Tickell and Peck (2002) terms the neoliberalisation of space, and there is already ample evidence to suggest that these reforms disproportionately affect disabled people.

... the rhetoric of individuality, personal fulfillment and entrepreneurial responsibility under which these neoliberal reforms were sold serves to deny the particularity and irreducibility of the disabled body thus making disabled bodies rhetorically invisible even while their physical and discursive presence is foregrounded. The perversity of this argument is that, in the claim that the disabled body 'is just like everyone else', its difference is at once marked in relation to the norm (everyone else) that it reproduces even while

the specificity of its difference is effaced (the political claim of being ‘just like’). (Sothorn 2007, 147)

Plans to dismantle the safety net of Obamacare reveal a distrust of the place of government in the personal lives of citizens. Trump emerges as the child of Reagan and Thatcher, a natural successor to their belief in the market over welfare. And we agree with Harnish (2017, 2) that Trump’s ‘ableist rhetoric, capitalizing on an ableist culture, will increase the structural ableism that already obtains in the United States’.

Third, and finally, ‘Draining the Swamp’. The Trump campaign made a big noise about cleansing American politics, removing corrupt politicians and ensuring outside interests did not influence the political ambitions of senators in Washington, D.C. The #DrainTheSwamp twitter hashtag became increasingly popular with Trump’s voting base: supporters interpreting the phrase in different ways with varying meanings, from removing greed in local and federal government, to imposing term limits on politicians serving in Congress so as to reduce the domestication of corruption (see Breger Bush 2016). This sloganeering sets up Trump as an anti-establishment, non-career-politician to whom the working man can relate (unless they are female, disabled, Mexican or a Muslim one might assume). In reality, however, Trump is a billionaire businessman entering the White House with numerous legal cases hanging over his head. One might suggest that he is hardly draining but further populating (and polluting) the swamp. The American political scientist Breger Bush (2016, np) asserts that ‘Trump’s election is in some ways a neoliberal apex, an event that portends the completion of the U.S. government’s capture by wealthy corporate interests’. Similarly Grossmann (2016) writes that Henry Ford and Donald Trump have much in common, not least in their appeal to self-styled triumphalist entrepreneurialism. These individual qualities are the same sovereign qualities that were hailed in neoliberal discourses in the latter decades of the twentieth century. We agree with Breger Bush (2016, np) who writes,

Trump’s election does not signal the beginning of a rapid descent into European-style fascism, it appears to be a key stage in the ongoing process of American democratic disintegration. American democracy has been under attack from large and wealthy corporate interests for a long time, with this process accelerating and gaining strength over the period of neoliberal globalization (roughly the early 1970s to the present).

Trump embodies a neoliberal commitment to private property rights, market-based solutions to social problems and a rejection of big government intervening in the private lives of citizens. Since winning the election, Trump’s conservatism has been further revealed through his questionable

use of social media. The first Twitter President continues to publicise his thoughts on national and global affairs through 140 or fewer characters:

**Donald J. Trump** @realDonaldTrump 2 January 2017

China has been taking out massive amounts of money & wealth from the U.S. in totally one-sided trade, but won't help with North Korea. Nice!

**Donald J. Trump** @realDonaldTrump 16 December 2016

Thank you Florida. My Administration will follow two simple rules: BUY AMERICAN and HIRE AMERICAN! #ICYMI-

This isolationism and nationalism harks back to a bygone age of Fordist manufacturing in the early twentieth century. Moreover, for Breger Bush (2016), Trump's political capital was built upon a naïve but clearly sellable idea of *national neoliberalism*: America will be made great again through the sweat and toil of the forgotten working majority in a revamped and successful national market economy.

### **Responding to neoliberal-ableism: a call to community**

On 12 November 2016, Nigel Farage's team tweeted a photo of him and Trump shaking hands in Trump Tower. He was the first British politician to meet with the President Elect. This sickening alliance reflects a broader ideological meeting of minds one which we have described as developing a neoliberal-able model of citizenry. In order to survive the current socio-economic climate, it would appear that one needs an armour of nationalistic self-governance and isolationist sovereignty. So, how might we respond to this latest iteration of neoliberal life?

We are of the opinion that we need to maintain and re-energise our networks. If our analysis was beholdant to Foucault, then our political resistance is aligned with Deleuze and Guattari. Listening to the words of Ruby and Rosa, we need to re-find us. Our people. And here disability has much to offer. Disability often sits as the monstrous Other to 'the people' and the 'them' described by Ruby and Rosa. Disability, we would argue, does not fit readily into the rationalist discourse of neoliberal-ableism. Consequently, disability has the potential to be the focal point for our political commons: a community of activists and scholars that work to understand and contest the workings of ableism. So, we conclude this paper with some calls for – and examples of – urgent analytical work that we must undertake.

First, we must confront neoliberal-ableism's psychological, social, economic, cultural character. This is a mindset that privileges able-bodied and minded-ness, creates social spaces only fit for normative citizens, leads to institutional-bias towards autonomous bodies and minds and encourages

an economic dependence on the marketplace. We must oppose those who seek individual growth over community expansion.

Second, we must expose the possessive nature of neoliberal-ableism that clings to its own and expels others who are considered to be outsiders. We must deconstruct its logics: the politics of normalisation of the human subject which creates the desiring of sameness: of work, wealth and consumption as the only markers of valued personhood (Richardson 2005). We must expand our horizons and our conceptualisations of what it means to be human. Philosophically, we will always contest the 'post-Cartesian entrenchment of the notion that the self-possessive inviolability of the bounded body grounds the autonomous subject' (Shildrick 2007, 225). As humans, we are more than this. We should be anti-individualism. We must reject those that argue politics is about one's home and not outside. We are not home alone. We are always together and with others.

Third, we need to think again about bodies, their fleshy nature and their materialisation in this latest stage of neoliberal capitalism. We need to ask which bodies are valued or debilitated by the dance of capital? As Vanderkinderen (2013) observes, the body is a key site of investment for neoliberal policies. The production of a viable and productive body politic is constituted and the able body and mind reconfigured. Neoliberalism's plausibility has become so compelling, in part, because in representing the world of market rules as a state of nature, marketisation has been naturalised (Peck and Tickell 2002, 382). And, similarly, the ideal able mind-body has become the stuff of nature rather than ideology. We must reveal these ideological formations. We must refute their naturalisation. We must reject the ideology of ability as the unquestioned preference for able-bodiedness, the baseline by which humanness is determined, setting the measure of body and mind that give or denies human status to individual persons' (Siebers 2006, 175, 8).

Fourth, we must resist the implicit theory that a successful human subject is an entrepreneurial subject. Neoliberal discourses on freedom, borne through entrepreneurship, 'reassert the ideas of self-actualisation and self-development as one of the many needs and aspirations of the enterprising self' (Masschelein and Simons 2005). Individual and societal progress are characterised as one's success as a producer-consumer in a (market) environment where everything has an (economic) value. Similarly, for Freeman (2007), we are witnessing the rise of the reflexive project of the self: the entrepreneurial, flexible, inventive and adaptable self. Ready to take control. We are told we are all entrepreneurs now: take control as Brexit and Trump told us. We must contest this isolationist view. We must ask how else might humanity be cherished outside of an entrepreneurial discourse? How might we think of humanity as giving back to others rather than taking for a single self?



Fifth, we must shed light on those historical, political and economic conditions that permit only a small minority (think: white, heterosexual, bourgeois and able-bodied male or Trump/Farage for short) to exercise the ‘material freedom to choose’ (Erevelles 1996, 523). Meritocracy is, of course, a limited and limiting definition of citizenship. It is also bullshit. Trump infamously started his business empire with a ‘small loan’ of a million dollars from his father. We have to expose the moral bankruptcy of those that cling to the lies of meritocracy.

Sixth, we need to demonstrate that the self-serving autonomous individual so highly valued by our contemporary times is actually an ‘abandoned citizen’. This concept, taken from the work of Vanderkinderen (2013), relates to the ways in which citizens are abandoned in the sense they are cast off if they feel to meet the neoliberal imperative. But, following Goodley (2014, 4), we can also ‘turn the concept round on to the ableist self: the citizen is abandoned, set afloat in the sea of ableist signifiers, to find and contain themselves’. We must discard this desire for abandon and reclaim our communities.

Finally, we need to recover the human that has become lost in our political times. In times when self-sufficiency becomes the leitmotif, we must attune ourselves to the related production of disability as a difference that is naturally excludable (Titchkosky 2016). Disabled people risk becoming the collateral damage of neoliberal–ableism: justifiably excluded because they simply cannot survive the demands of everyday living. In contrast, we would argue that disability is a starting point for thinking again about humanness and as a vehicle for challenging two logical consequences of late capitalism: Brexit and Trump.

## Conclusions

The truth of Brexit and Trump is that we have all lost. Even some Leave voters have now expressed their ‘Bregret’ as we are plunged into psychological and economic uncertainty. The reality of Trump is that his meritocracy will only benefit a few and will dehumanise whole groups of humans. One source of hope is found in critical disability studies: and specifically the urgent need to deconstruct the logics of ableism and neoliberalism that continue to do damage even in these so-called Post-Truth times. We assert that far from being times of Post-Truth, we are witnessing, yet again, neoliberal capitalism’s ability to refashion itself. *And ability is a key element of this refashioning.* The latest iteration of neoliberal capitalism is written through appealing to the logics of ableism. Who does not want to be autonomous, self-governing and self-sufficient? Who could contest support for the forgotten working class? Why would anyone challenge the idea about national sovereignty? Clearly, one of the biggest opponents of the assumptions held in these questions are disabled people, their political organisations and their critical disability

studies. It is crucial, then, that any agitation and activism against the times of Trump and Brexit foreground the politics of disabled people.

## Note

1. In which, Jamie Coomarasamy captures the growing republican vote among the American rustbelt.

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