Answering Our Detractors –
Argument in Support of Studies in Ableism as an approach to negotiating
Human Differences and Tackling Social Exclusion

Keynote for

Conference on Studies in Ableism
University of Manchester, 19 June 2017

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WORK IN PROGRESS
A note on reading this paper .....

This paper contain many dense and complex ideas and as such it demand a careful reading and will at times be difficult to take in. Modern reading/knowledge styles often insist on an instant understanding and comprehension instead of the art of reading which is in many ways is a deep meditation that requires diligence; in other words you need to spend time absorbing any new ideas, pausing and reflecting, looking up unfamiliar words and generally letting the ideas flow through you.

The paper was not written for a generalist audience; it was written in a style to suit the audience at the conference who I assumed had a working knowledge of social theory and also were familiar with my work. Of course I would write and have written differently for an audience made up of people from the grassroots – but this was not the moment for this paper. Intellectual thought has a place. We are part of a community where you can build upon my ideas, dialogue and apply them in your own work. I am happy to be able to in this paper offer up some possibilities for developing methodological tools that provide interventions into ableist processes in applied research.

May I suggest that you read the paper through once and then tackle each section in small portions, having a decent dictionary on hand. My own experience suggests that by doing this you will always find new insights and points of recognition. You may wish to refer to other work of mine to fill in any gaps about how I have approached the study of ableism. Various papers can be found at: https://dundee.academia.edu/FionaKumariCampbell

Expression of Interest: Studies in Ableism Research Consortium

To work on theoretical refinements as well as to ‘test’ various methodological devices in applied disability research.

If you are interested in participating in this proposed consortium please email Dr Fiona Kumari Campbell at f.k.campbell@dundee.ac.uk

A consortium by its nature requires a range of skills and interests but also needs to be workable in terms of participant numbers.

When sending your email, could you put in the subject line: ‘Studies in Ableism Methodology Consortium’.

1. In the body of the email please indicate in around 100 words what your interests are and what ways you believe you could contribute to the group.
2. Please attach an up-to-date CV.

Thanks
Introduction
This keynote builds upon a decade of work around developing the concept of ableism, its nuances and theoretical application in the lifeworld of people with disability. My work has drawn upon a diverse range of theoretical approaches and intellectual traditions from the global South especially the Indian sub-continent; in particular Rada Iveković’s work on translation, a Buddhist theory of dependent origination (pāṭiccasamuppāda)1 (following Joanna Macy) and Conflicted/Proliferating Thought (papañca) and global North knowledges of actor network theories of John Laws and Bruno Latour, and Ervin Laszlo’s General Systems Theory. I extend and reappraise the theoretical scoping developed in my major work Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Abledness (2009), around matters related to relationality – causality, progressive change and social exclusion. I first discuss the role of theory and thinking theoretically and secondly I move onto a cursory discussion which requires more concentrated research on the pedigree of the terminology of ‘ableism’ and ‘ableist’. Third, I outline my thinking to date on the presuppositional foundations of systems of ableism in terms of processes and practices and finally there is a presentation of a methodology that engages with a theory of ableist relations that can be utilised in applied research.

In our present moment we live with a situation where some researchers think that you can conduct research not underpinned by any form of conceptualisation (epistemology). This is a delusion, as research activity is already buttressed by theorisation – it’s just that this theorisation may be veiled, invisible or unarticulated. Our tasks as critical disability studies scholars is to unveil foundational presuppositions, to expose them and then critique. In recent work there has been a suggestion that Studies in Ableism particularly and Critical Disability Studies generally, is self-preoccupied and too obtuse to deal with the lived experiences of disabled people (Vehmas & Watson, 2014) or that whilst admirable, the theorization of ableism “does not have any legs to it” and forms a monologue encompassing the breadth of life (Goodley, 2014: 155). Dan Goodley recently pointed out to me the irony, which may be lost on some, of the mischievous deployment of ableist representations in his comments. In this section I want to expose hegemonic ways of thinking about difference which construct ways populations are governed in western modernities.

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1 I am indebted to the work of Joanna Macy (1976; 1991).
**Challenges to Thinking Theoretically: From Object to Process**

There has been an assortment of ways to think about and designate disability and corporeal difference. We are perhaps familiar with the biomedical approach (a first wave approach to disablement) and more recently the concept of the social model of disability (the second wave of disability) which links the designation ‘disability’ to capitalist economy and social organisation. Hence both the first and second wave of studies towards disability operates along the lines of a linear unidirectional causal paradigm where there is a proximity linkage between exact causes and extant effects. The rehabilitation model, architectural design, the economy or the adoption of prognosis diagnostics is indicative of a paradigm that proposes that “similar causes yield similar effects, and that different effects derive from difference causes” (Macy, 1991, 9). An exemplar of this manifestation is the rise of actuarialism and nosologies of disease.²

What is going on here? Linear unidirectional causal paradigms are predicated on what Santos (2014) refers to as abyssal thinking where there visible and invisible distinctions - distinctions based on dualist differentiations with the invisible element or signifier acting as the foundation of the visible category. Later on I will discuss this abyssal line with reference to ableist relations that are premised of the idea of a constitutional divide. For now we can say that that this abyssal line, this constitutional division as a form of objectification is savagely policed within neoliberalism with its obsession with extreme precision and the fetish of categorisation. The drive towards precision finds expression in fundamentalist positivism and the separation of epistemology from ontology and subject-object relations.

Linear unidirectional causal paradigms are attractive for the government of sentiency in its insistence on categorical thinking which is deemed to be stable, changing only inasmuch as knowledge is refined and often this mode of knowledge formation is reduced to a theory of comparisons based on preset binary modalities. This become an obdurate problem for researchers, in that comparisons rely on some declared common denominators or absolutes which have not necessarily been acknowledged or agreed upon by stakeholders. Following on from the work of Rada Iveković (2000) it maybe more fruitful as critical researchers instead of

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looking at ontologised demarcations of comparisons between humans, and non-human actants to work with variables and processes that contrast.3

So the task then, is not to deliberate in terms of ‘this or that’ but to deontologise ontology. Abyssal thinking not only makes us contemplate, it launches our thinking in terms of evaluatively ranked comparisons that are caught up in an endless cycle of return to duality, which whilst producing excess inevitably generate and reproduce ‘wrong’ or misdirected research preoccupations and questions. Poor epistemology even if posturing as strong questions inevitably produce poor answers. As Santos puts it there “[is] a lack of credible and prudent knowledge capable of securing for us all … a decent life” (2014, 106). The litmus test of any social theory of difference (in our case disability) is that a theory’s explanatory framework needs to be able to incorporate absent and suppressed knowledges and knowledge formations need to be aggregated with the solidarity it creates, wherein knowledge practices attend to social practices. Drawing again from Santos who appends cognitive justice to social justice, he beckons us to make a civilizational choice:

The idea of cognitive justice points to a radical demand for social justice, a demand that includes unthinking the dominant criteria by which we define social justice and fight against social injustice. It implies, therefore, going to the roots of such criteria to question not only their socio-political determinations but also their cultural, epistemological, and even ontological presuppositions (Santos 2014, 237).

I believe that critical disability studies has reached a point of conceptual exhaustion particularly as it relates to the social model of disability which has exposed the limits of neo-liberal parameters of tolerance that display ambivalence and reversals. In reflecting upon my ideas generated over the past sixteen years I have become aware of some of the seductions4 and pitfalls in abyssal thinking that have created some confusions between the layers of ableism’s building blocks5 (foundations) and the entry points into ableist practices and processes. As much as I am hindered by my poor vocabulary due to a poor education, I hope that you can make sense of the terrain of my developing thought that is unfolding.

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3 Iveković points out that that in the activity of contrasting it is sometimes difficult to adopt some degree of comparison even if this comparison is by way of disavowal. (Iveković, 2000)

4 Santos, himself falls into the pit of such abysmal seduction in his advocacy of an adversarial politics of solidarity. He asks whose side are we on, and suggests that if there are no enemies there can be no friends. The problem with this checkerboard approach is that these characters are endlessly changing their positions and markers making it difficult to know ‘who’ is ‘what’.

5 What ableism says it stands for (pun intended).
Maybe due to the saturation of binarisms within hegemonic Western intellectual traditions; some of my community of thinkers have suggested that aspects of my work has at times lapsed into binary thinking. Thankful for this observation, after reflection, I don’t believe that I am doing that – but what I realised was that there were still some missing pieces of the theoretical landscaping that needed to be attended to, to become more precise in denotations and connections, least I be misunderstood. We need to acknowledge the depth of abyssal thinking and the efforts required to overthrow sovereign knowledges, the *epistemicide* of these thinking systems that literally kill us! Although it was already in front of me, in the shaping of other conference papers, the conceptual elephant in the room-present but not seen; was exposed in the production of my research on Sri Lanka, disability and Buddhism. Almost by accident, in reviewing some Buddhist concepts relating to dependent origination (more on that later) I revisited the concept of *papañca* which I will call *Conflicted/Proliferating Thought* and so one of the missing pieces in rendering ableist landscapes emerged.

‘*Papañca* (conflicted thinking) objectifies the self and reifies binary categories. The Buddha insists that *papañca* is instead a source of conflict and pain (*Majjhima Nikaya* 18; *Digha Nikaya* 21) as the categories and perceptions arising out of *papañca* are what cause conflict’ (*Majjhima Nikaya* 18; *Digha Nikaya* 22). *Papañca* occurs when a person’s thinking takes them, the thinker, as its *object*. This move towards objectification produces binary categories such as self/not-self, human/non-human, here/there—from the ontological signifier, ‘I am’. The fact that the issues surrounding this mental label can multiply so quickly and spread so far gives some credence to the idea that *papañca* is proliferation. Buddhist understandings of existence converge with these ableist processes as thinking through a prism of *papañca* means we apprehend ourselves and the world in which we live, in terms of *objects* rather than an alternative dependant - originated view, where *events* and *processes* constantly shift and are

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6 Bethany Stevens, a long-time colleague had the nerve to point this out and suggested that I write in a way that was more embodied.

7 Since the proliferation of my own work (Campbell, 2009, 2012) I have developed a heightened awareness of the great responsibility to try to aim for clarity and my formulations as being correctly, or otherwise applied to other forms of conceptual development and sites of study.

8 A concept developed by Santos (2014, 92) which refers to the “… murder of knowledge” [where] … unequal exchanges among cultures have always implied the death of knowledge of the subordinated culture”.

9 Specifically the *Madhapindika Sutta* (The Ball of Honey).

10 Specifically the *Sakka-pañha Sutta* (Sakka’s Questions).
unstable. An ablest system of relations for those designated according to the illusionary matrixes of ‘disabled’ or ‘abled’ produces ambivalence. The Tanha Sutta captures this sense of cateristic proliferation well in its listing of the Eighteen (18) ‘craving verbalizations’. In terms of this illusive ‘interior’ thinking, the thinker conjures:

There being ‘I am,’ there comes to be ‘I am here,’ there comes to be ‘I am like this’ ... ‘I am otherwise’ ... ‘I am bad’ ... ‘I am good’ ... ‘I might be’ ... ‘I might be here’ ... ‘I might be like this’ ... ‘I might be otherwise’ ... ‘May I be’ ... ‘May I be here’ ... ‘May I be like this’ ... ‘May I be otherwise’ ... ‘I will be’ ... ‘I will be here’ ... ‘I will be like this’ ... ‘I will be otherwise.’ (Anguttara Nikaya, 4:199).

And papañca in the context of ‘externalised’ being, these craving-verbalizations proliferate in the pursuit of ‘normative shadows’ (c.f. Overboe, 2007) through such thoughts as:

There being ‘I am because of this (or: by means of this),’ there comes to be ‘I am here because of this,’ there comes to be ‘I am like this because of this’ ... ‘I am otherwise because of this’ ... ‘I am bad because of this’ ... ‘I am good because of this’ ... ‘I might be because of this’ ... ‘I might be here because of this’ ... ‘I might be like this because of this’ ... ‘I might be otherwise because of this’ ... ‘May I be because of this’ ... ‘May I be here because of this’ ... ‘May I be like this because of this’ ... ‘May I be otherwise because of this’ ... ‘I will be because of this’ ... ‘I will be here because of this’ ... ‘I will be like this because of this’ ... ‘I will be otherwise because of this.’ (Anguttara Nikaya, 4:199)

As we can see, the source of misapprehension, derived from a wrong conception of the self, induces the “emotion of conceit, vanity, inferiority feelings, certain forms of depression, desolation and such ego-related emotions.” (De Silva, 1992, 98.) Craving (tañhā) for, and attachment (ragā) to, ‘ability’ due to ignorance (Avijjā) contributes to the formation of an internalised ableism (Campbell, 2009), or bhava-tañhā, wherein we believe that “‘[t]here is something wrong with me and I have got to make it right. I have got to become something else by getting rid of these bad things, these wrong things about me’” (Sumedho, 2014a, 149). Again the testing of the operation of those concepts against the lived experience of disabled people is required.

‘Abled’, ‘Disabled’ is not a thing, a noun or indeed an adjective. To hold such a belief is to engage in Conflicted Proliferating Thought that takes the subjectivity of ‘I’ as its object, starting and return point. To pursue the endless question of who is deemed ‘disabled’ and ‘abled’ becomes redundant. Instead there is a need for both signifiers to be understood as a practice, as a process which is an aporia. An aporia is a double edged problem which cannot be solved because it pre-
exists in the first place. The question of differentiation is proposed in such a fashion, on such terms that there can be no conclusive solution, except the infinite reiteration of the question itself which endlessly proliferates according the conditions of its temporality and space. This why questions of the demarcation of ‘disabled’ and ‘abled’ are futile. Ableist aporias disrupt and becomes a problem for those preoccupied with universalisms. The aporias of ableist processes should be central to our thinking about difference. A focus on ableism in terms of processes and as a practice prompts new preoccupations and questions such as: how do ‘I’, mindful of deontologisation, come to be in this moment? How I am interpolated and how I interpolate that interpolation? And what are the conditions of a signifying practices emergence? This reorientation will be outlined and explored in the next sections.

**Ableism, Confusions, Conceptual Rigour and matters of Pedigree**

What is meant by the concept of ableism? The literature suggests that the term is often used fluidly with *limited definitional or conceptual specificity* (Clear, 1999; Iwaski and Mactavish, 2005). Ableism is deeply seeded at the level of epistemological systems of life, personhood and liveability. Ableism is not just a matter of ignorance or negative attitudes towards disabled people; it is a trajectory of perfection, a deep way of thinking about bodies, wholeness and permeability. Bluntly, ableism functions to “inaugurat[e] the norm” (Campbell, 2009, 5). As such integrating Studies in Ableism (SiA) into social research represents a significant challenge to practice as ableism moves beyond the more familiar territory of social inclusion and usual indices of exclusion to the very divisions of life (species/ism). Ability and the corresponding notion of ableism are intertwined. Although ableist relations purport to operate out of a binary modality. This interpenetration is more complex and multi-faceted than mere binary relations would imply. Compulsory ablebodiedness (c.f. McRuer, 2006) is implicated in the very foundations of social theory, religious systems, medicine and law; be it in terms of a jurisprudence of deliberative capacity or in cartographical mappings of human anatomy.

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11 Rising star of critical sociology, the cognitive justice movement, Boaventura De Sousa Santos is a case in point. Santos in *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (Santos, 2014) acquiesces to ableist thinking. Not only does his book display a remarkable absence of women authors and scholars reflecting an ‘Asian standpoint, this work is littered with ableist metaphors denigrating ‘blindness’ and ‘disability’, in such as phrases as “disabled global North” (19); or “mutual blindness- the blindness of practice [and] .. the blindness of theory” (35), to cite a few. Moving beyond the metaphysical to an episteme of a *characterological* nature; Chapter 5 is titled “Towards an Epistemology of Blindness” (136) and a later sub-heading reads as “From the Epistemology of Blindness to the Epistemology of Seeing” (154) establishing the localisation of Santos’ thought within the realm of ableism reasoning. A cursory
In terms of pedigree, 1981 appears to be ableism’s groundhog day, with the signifier first used to delineate negative stereotypes towards disabled people in a themed ‘women with disabilities’ issue of the journal *Off Our Backs* (11.5) written by disabled women activists in the US who championed ableism as the source of social exclusion. In the following decade, work referring to ableism emerged within the fields of black and feminist studies. From around 1998, the concept of ableism remained underdeveloped within disability studies research. A first definitional attempt by Raucher & McClintock (1997) postulated ableism as a system of discrimination and exclusion. What was missing were any nuances about processes and predilections of such ‘systems’. In 2001 I provided a crude attempt to locate ableism as an epistemology: “… A network of beliefs processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human” Campbell (2001: 44). Since the publication of *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Abledness* (Campbell, 2009) there has been a plethora of journal articles, an occasional book and an abundance of blogs that purport to extend and apply various conceptualisations of ableism.

Despite pointing to the conundrum of ableism’s “...limited definitional or conceptual specificity” (Campbell, 2009, 5) in disability research, this challenge has not been fully addressed and concept stabilisation has not been achieved. Indeed, whilst Goodley (2014) identified the two main conceptual strands in research of Ableism, namely Wolbring’s ‘Ability Studies’ (Wolbring, 2012a,b,c; 2008, 2007) and Campbell’s ‘Studies in Ableism’ (Campbell, 2017; 2014; 2013; 2012; 2011; 2009, 2008 a,b; 2001, ), there has remained a paucity of research that interrogates the presuppositional foundations and differences in Wolbring’s and Campbell’s works. Instead these nomenclatures have been extended to ‘Critical Ableist Studies’ and ‘ableism’ has entered

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reading of Santos’ reference list indicates that he has not engaged with critical disability studies, let alone studies in ableism. This is unacceptable.

12 Aldrich; House, 1981; Rae, 1981.

13 As a reviewer of several draft journal submissions I am often frustrated by a writer’s lack of clarification of the way/basis in which he/she uses the term ‘ableism’; even in articles purporting to engage centrally with ableism as a concept. So as a reader I have no idea how they are using the term and the lineage of argumentation they are adopting.
into the vortex of social networks sites as a signifier of rebuke, akin to accusations of racism and transphobia.

The utility of ableism to interrogate new sites of subordination has occurred in management studies; counselling, law, racism, immigration studies and political theory. In attempting to develop conceptual clarity and work on developing Studies in Ableism as a research methodology, I ‘revised’ my definition of ableism, as a

... system of causal relations about the order of life that produces processes and systems of entitlement and exclusion. This causality fosters conditions of microaggression, internalized ableism and, in their jostling, notions of (un)encumbrance. A system of dividing practices, ableism institutes the reification and classification of populations. Ableist systems involve the differentiation, ranking, negation, notification and prioritization of sentient life. (Campbell, 2017: 287 – 288).

Studies in Ableism is at a crossroad, slippery and imprecise delimitations and deployments of the concept has meant that analysis of implications of theorisation for praxis have become hamstrung and vexed due in the main to a lack of conceptual rigor, hence there are ensuing difficulties in addressing critical questions of our time.

**Studies in Ableism**

As a referential category to differentiate the ‘normal’ from the ‘pathological’, the concept of abledness is predicated on some pre-existing notion about the normative nature of species typical functioning that is trans-cultural and trans-historical. Ableism does not just stop at promulgating the ‘species typical’ which is assumed to be demarcatable, stable and self-contained. Any examination of these differentiating practices need to transcend the type of object relations differentiation which is presumed in Conflicted/Proliferating Thought processes. An ableist imaginary tells us what a healthy body means – a normal mind, the pace and tenor of thinking and the kinds of emotions and affect that are suitable to express. Of course these ‘fictional’ characteristics of corporeality are promoted as an ideal.  

An abled imaginary relies upon the existence of an unacknowledged imagined shared community of able-bodied/minded people, held together by a common ableist homosocial  

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14 Some ideals become so hegemonic that they are assumed to be universally ‘natural’ and hence unchangeable.
world view that asserts the *preferability* of the norms of ableism. Such ableist trajectories erase differences in the ways humans express our emotions, use our thinking and bodies in different cultures and in different situations. Corporeal Otherness is rendered sometimes as the ‘disabled’, ‘perverted’ or ‘abnormal body’ instead of the more neutral designation ‘variable’ bodies. A critical feature of an ableist orientation is a belief that impairment or disability is *inherently* negative and at its essence is a form of harm in need of amelioration, cure or indeed exculpation. Studies in Ableism (SiA) inverts traditional approaches, by shifting the gaze and concentration to what the study of disability tells us about the production, operation and maintenance of abledness inclusive of morphologies of ‘difference’ in sentient life forms as well as the terms of theoretical engagement from *Object* relations to *Process* relations.

It would be easy to construe SiA as merely the study of non-disabled identity, given its shift in focus on non-disability (Carlson, 2001; Loja *et al.*, 2012). However to stop analysis at ‘non-disability’ would be to miss the critical insights of ableist relations; namely that the concept of ableism examines the production of mutually constitutive categories of disability and abledness (Campbell, 2009; Hughes, 2008; Kafer, 2003; Runswick-Cole, 2011; Williams and Mavin, 2012). SiA is about contestations over abledness and not the rather vacuous categories of non-disability or ability. By adopting an analysis of *papaña* (proliferated thinking) into research interrogations, it become possible to appraise the sources and flows of proliferation of different states of human variability and how some of these variations as figured as ‘differences’. In exploring the nuances of abledness we need to continually ask what does the non-disabled, the par excellent unencumbered body ‘stand-in for’—what kinds of sentiency are privileged and what other kinds are demoted or subordinately ranked? How do these hierarchies effect social practices and the limits of tolerance? What effect do these understandings have on social policy interventions especially the interpretation of notions of ‘risk’ and ‘accessibility’ or ‘inclusion’?

**The Building Blocks of Ableism**

Although it is hard to pin systems of ableism down because these systems are a series of permeable practices, it is possible to argue that a characteristic of ableist systems is that they create the illusion or fabricate a world-view that is unidirectional, reifying ‘cause’ and ‘effect’, where the uncertainties and leakiness of the body dis-appear within a teleological narrative of ‘progress’.
The formation of an ableist epistemology occurs on the basis of relationships shaped by binaries that are mutually constitutive. For example I propose that it is not possible to have a fully inclusive notion of ‘health’ without a carefully contained understanding of not-health (we call this disability or sometimes chronic illness and refigure health as harmony). Central to a system of ableism are two elements, namely the notion of the normative (and normal individual) and the enforcement of a divide between a so-called perfected or developed humanity (how humans are supposedly meant to be) and the aberrant, the unthinkable, underdeveloped and therefore not really-human. The ableist divide can also capture asymmetrical relations based on differences of sex, (not white) race, and animality which in different ways, in epistemology and social practices has been constituted as sites of aberrancy or disability. There are two features that produce ableism relations:

1. The idea of normal (normative individual); and
2. A Constitutional Divide - a division enforced between the ‘normal’ and the ‘aberrant’ enacted through the processes of purification and translation.

What Normal? Whilst it might be easy to speculate about the kinds of people that maybe regarded as disabled and their interior life, when thinking about the essential aspects pertaining to able-bodiedness this task becomes difficult and elusive. Ableist ‘logic’ tells us being able-bodied is always relational to that which is considered its opposite, whereas disability involves assigning labels to bodies and mentalities outside of the norm. Hence relations of ableism are based on an ontology of negation or absence but still are situated within an ontological paradigm. As a practice, ableism demands an unbridled form of individualism that is pre-occupied with self-improvement and corporeal enhancement that struggles with the reality of illness, disability and misfortune. Ableism is married to a sense of permanency, a sense of the unity of the idealised and stabilised human form. With the development of enhancement technologies (cosmetic neurology and surgery for instance) the notion of the norm is constantly sliding, maybe creating a larger pool of ‘abnormal’ persons who because of ‘choice’ or limited resources cannot improve themselves and hence lapse into deficiency. A relational, counter-ableist version of impairment might explore what the experience of impairment produces and

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15 As detailed in Contours of Ableism (Campbell, 2009).
ask how does disability productively colour our lives?

The second feature is a constitutional divide between the normal and pathological at the “levels of ontology, materiality and sentiency” (Campbell, 2009, 7). We may suspect the existence of these divisions, even if we have not had a name for it, or find the language of constitutions a bit bristly. Constitutions are related to the structure or attributes of an entity which shapes a characterisation. Constitutions are concerned with jurisdiction and boundaries between persons, things and actions (typical of Roman civil law) and the ways that each of these elements assemble and interpenetrate (Mussawir, 2011). As such constitutionality is linked to cosmography and order the terms of relations. Constitutions (rule matrices) establish the terrain, the ground rules for governance, processes for clearance and right relation (samma ditthi, (Pali) literally ‘view’), and how things are or how they are meant to be. Whilst constitutionality and codification are the default inference of jurisdiction, an alternative rendering is to conceive of jurisdiction and constitutional divides as a “relation that is immanent, practical and ‘lived’” and hence shifting (Mussawir, 2011, 6).

Divisions of constitutionality requires people to identify with a category – ‘are you disabled or not?’ ‘Oh, no I am not disabled, I am ill or depressed!’, or ‘I am able-bodied.’ For the ease of conversation we often feel the need to minimise any confusion. The carrying of an Enumerative or Diagnostic Passport is blatant propaganda that supports the argument developed by philosopher Bruno Latour (1993, 10 - 11) who states “…these two independent practices of normalising and pathologising] ... must remain distinct in order for them to work/function.” If the definitions of abled-bodied and disabled become unclear or slippery the business of legal and governmental administration would have problems functioning. Alarm would arise due to uncertainty as to how to classify certain people and in which category.

Social differentiation produces difference: the abled and disabled which in turn are products of our ways of looking and sensing, that is it is not merely comparative “but rather co-relationally constitutive” (Campbell, 2009, 6). People are made different by a process of being seen and treated as disabled, as outlawed disability or abled (Lawson, 2008, 517). Western political theory attest to constitutionality divides. As Campbell (2013) notes “The political concept of
people enshrined in the documents of the French Revolution and subsequent human rights instruments foreground two different conceptions – people as a whole, the social body cast against multiple excluded bodies (the aberrant) or in the alternative, an inclusive whole without outsiders.” Already embedded within these divisions are “fundamental bio-political fracture[s] [In other words] ... what cannot be included in the whole of which it is a part as well as what cannot belong to the whole in which it is always already included” (Agamben, 2000, 31.12).

Clarification of this perceived ‘uncertainty’ is achieved through a division called Purification, the marking of distinct archetypes. Ableism assists in the government of disability ensuring that populations that appear dis-ordered (maybe even causing social disorder) become ordered, mapped and distinct. The notion of inclusion is not all that it seems, for normative inclusion to be enacted one must have a permanent under-cohort of the excluded. As Campbell (2017) remarks “Claiming one’s own identity must be done always in reference to that from which one is distinguished [hence negation]. The queered project then must also develop potentialities of shame as part of its genealogy.” Purification is essential to be able to count populations even if this counting and classifying does not reflect and in fact distorts reality, in any event demeanours and lives are judged according to constitutional arrangements (Altman, 2001; Mussawir, 2011). As impairment effects are relational, disability is not always present in the environment and within the realm of an individual’s subjectivity.

Turning to the realm of tacit knowledge gained from social relations, the second aspect to enforcing a constitutional divide is Translation. Let’s take a look at this. No human is self-contained and our lives are constantly changing and (trans)formed through the context in which we move. Humans are endowed by their relations with technologies (cars, clothing, implements, time, communications devices, prosthesis and drugs etc.). Relations between human and non-human entities (actors) are already hybridised and made up of changeable aspects neither are they obvious or self-contained. Our relationship to context (people, environments, mental and bodily changes) means that human typologies are endless and shifting. The character of impairment can change through interfaces with behaviour modifying drugs and the use of apparatus (speech, hearing and mobility enhancing). Most of us rarely fit into the definitive classifications of Purification – yet such confusion or ‘grey zones’ of daily life are neatened up

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16 Stewart, 1951.
into zones of distinction ~ he is ‘this’ and she is ‘that’. Enshrined in ableism is a metaphysical system which feeds into an ethics of disability and the erasure of variability and changeability.

**Interventions: A New Paradigm of Practice?**

A relational understanding of ableist formations is built around bringing together and adapting General Systems Theory (GST) and the Buddhist doctrine of *patīkkasamuppāda* (dependant origination). System literally means ... patterning, ‘synhistanai’ (from the Greek), ‘to place together’. Systems are enclosed or are enclosed by other systems (Laszlo, 1972; McMahon, 2008) as all elements are part of a vast network of being. GST’s lead theorist Ervin Laszlo (1972) has developed the concept of *interdetermination* to express the elusiveness and changeability of life systems. This relational understanding of ableist relations rejects the idea of static, identifiable ‘enemy’, the source of the problems as this kind of theorisation needs to have a person/group that is objectified and suggests the necessity to shift to studying processes and practices.

Accordingly the universe (a relational frame) is described as “an interdetermined network of mutually qualifying causes and effects” (Laszlo, 1972, 246), where each causal action is reciprocally transmogrified by the effect it produces. Hence autonomy and resistance is dispersed ‘to particular entities in processing their inputs (‘prime causes’) and producing outputs (‘reciprocal causes’)” (Laszlo, 1972, 247). Interdetermination is a useful binder in the study of ableist relations and can assist in the plotting of often elusive relations of perfection and aberration. Supplementing Latour’s (1993) refusal of the nature/culture division through his study of the work of purification, Laszlo argues for the abolition of the subject-object distinction as a frame for a hermeneutics of experience, as ‘experience’ itself as a referent is shifting, changing, moving: “[experience is] ... a continuous chain of events, from which we cannot, without arbitrariness, abstract an entity called ‘organism’ and another called ‘environment’ (Laszlo, 1972,63).

Within Buddhism, the concept of *anichcha* (impermanence) naturalizes the implications and manifestations of impermanence including all variable bodies which are subject to change and leakiness. Adoption of *anichcha* to studies in ableism enables an epistemological shift of the positioning of impairment from abnormality to reality – where we all are born, change, experience illness, become ‘aged’ and die (Nānananda, 2004). As Dharmasiri (1989, 145)
explains: “Because my existence is dependent on the rest of the universe, I naturally owe a debt and an obligation to the rest of the universe. Therefore, my attitude to others and other objects should be one of respect and gratitude.” In Buddhism, all phenomena are dependently arisen (patițcasamuppâda). Patițcasamuppâda extolls that conditions that arise at the atomistic level and absences produce cessation. As such, embodied existence is unstable, uncertain, tentative and conditional (Jayasuriya, 1988). Ying Shen provides an excellent summary of the presuppositions underpinning mutual causality:

The belief is that everything, mental and physical, comes into being owing to certain conditions, and disappears when the conditions disappear, so nothing is independent. Reality is viewed as a dynamically interdependent process. Everything exists in a web of mutual causal interaction, and nothing, whether mental or physical, whole or part, is immutable or fully autonomous. ... A cause can only produce an effect given the right conditions (Ying Shen et al, 2007, 171).

Buddhist embodiment is an unstable assemblage of mutually dependent aggregates (Rahula, 1974; Ching, 1984; Bodhi, 2005a, b), a process rather than a fixed entity (Remon, 1980). This process precludes binary divisions of inside/ outside, self/ other, as it is the inter-dependent interaction and contact between Name and Form (including ‘external’ objects) which leads to conscious existence (Muzika, 1990). The arising and conditioning of phenomena has its own texture and conditioning and these two aspects depend upon specific conditions. These conditions produce specific types and relate to structures: “…the texture of being is through and through relational. Whatever comes into being originates through conditions; stands with the support of conditions, and ceases when its conditions cease.” (Bodhi 2005a; 2, emphasis added).

Buddhism offers an additional field for the investigation of the conditions that induce ableist relations in examining the dependent condition and how it originates (samudaya), its source (nidana), processes of generation (jatika), how being emerges (pabhava), is nourished (ahara),

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17 Our bodies are a dynamic mix of leaky substances, in process, change and decay and are referred to as the five khandhas: body, feeling, perception, volition and consciousness. What distinguishes Buddhism from other Indian belief systems is the belief in Anattâ, the realization of not-self.

18 According to Ajahn Sumedho non binary thinking leads to deathlessness and Buddhist thought offers a powerful invective against this tendency: “With conventional form there is only separation. There will always be men and women, and innumerable religious conventions. These are all on the level of sense-perception, which is always discriminatory and separative. It cannot be otherwise. Yet if one is mindful, those very conventions take one to the Deathless, where we merge. There is no ‘you’ or ‘me’ there... [Deathless means] that which is never born and never dies. [Deathless is synonymous with] non-attachment to mortal conditions” (Sumedho, 2014b, 91).
how the condition acts foundationally (upaniṣa) and induces a flow (upayapeti) (Niddesa Mahaniddesa S.XII, 11, 23, 27, 66, 69).

The system this presentation is observing and mapping relates to ableist relations and GST would indicate that is it not possible to escape the system but that our capacity to continually refuse, resist, shape through interventions, interpolations or mimicry and provide counter codes that modify the ableist environment is possible. Systems theory can fill in the gaps and create space for glimpsing the somewhat elusive dynamic of ableist relations. From this perspective input into the network is from the Environment (E) by way of Suppositions (S) which act as hermeneutical drivers. S’s are in turn decoded through the lens of a Systems Code (C). These ableist systems involve the Differentiation, Ranking, Negation, Notification and Prioritisation of sentient life and synthesises messages “from noise through [modalities of discernment] which order sensory apprehensions and through constructs which permit conceptual apprehension” (Macy, 1976; 26). In the circulation the system, the network acts upon the environment (E), to produce subsequent S’s, through its output or Response (R). Figure 1 is an attempt to plot ableist relations within a system relating to the issue of Access.

Figure 1: Ableist Systems Relations (environment, suppositions, systems code, responses).

S – We might ask the question what is ‘access’19 or ‘accessibility’? There are certain

19 Entomologically, access or accessibility, come from the Latin accedere (to approach, go into, come near or enter upon) whilst accessibilis combines the verbal adjective ‘accede’.
presumptions in this question which shape and form the basis of the environment (built environment, cognitive, attitudinal, and juridical). Responses relate to notions of differentiation between and among humans: described as non, partial or full citizens. The hermeneutic filters of S give rise to the consideration in E of whether there is unlawful, lawful or indeed no discrimination. E refers to the nature of the world – how is it?, how is it to be? The interpretative lens of S occurs in the system code, an ableist ethos (C). The code is informed by such aspects of Conflicted/Proliferating Thought, e.g. Differentiation, Ranking, Negation, Notification (legitimating regulations of law and diagnostic prescriptions) and Prioritisation (basis for the allocation of resources), which are interpenetrated by Conditions. In the swirl of C, our systems response (R) suggests some possible responses:

(1) there is no social exclusion, or the exclusion is at least arguable and there is no need for response involving change, except the response of affirming the status quo;
(2) responses of exceptionality, to allow for parallel approaches or differential access (e.g. special facilities, restricted access to toilet facilities for women);
(3) a resistant response which is suggestive of the need for norm and code changes, by way of example law reform. In the presentation of any of these responses there will be some kind of remedy even if that remedy comes in the form of recapitulation.

Much of Figure 1 is speculative as there is nothing predetermined in the game of causality, there is always choice and a specificity of events. These systems are animated when conditions converge, when matter, information and energy are exchanged that create the environment and ensure its sustainability (Macy, 1991; Ying Shen, 2007). This approach to theorising incites the inquiry and micro analysis as to what is the nature of conditions present that produce ableist relations? My own work has identified that at ableism’s core is a form of ontoviolence that demands a compulsory sameness. (Campbell, 2012). This causality fosters the conditions of microaggression, internalised ableism and in their jostling with notions of the (un)encumbered person.

There is a particularised relationship between conditions and the ‘types’ of phenomena or modalities that emerge to configure bodies and subjectivities. In their emergence, clipping and unfolding patterns are formed (actions/reactions). Indeed ableist relations of co-dependence can involve co-nascent conditions (sahajata paccaya) whereby disability and abledness are animated in mutuality and presence. Work undertaken by Skyttner (2001, 59) around systems indicates that systems environments exist in a space and it is in that space that a micro focus can be adopted to study the workings of ableist relations more closely.
The concept of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is quite specific in that the shaping of conditionality arising corresponds with *specific conditions* or typologies. As Macy remarks “...there is no immutable essence other than that definitive of process itself; no realm or entity stands over against the process of change. All is in motion, all is subject to ceaseless flux and transformation, arising and passing away” (Macy 1976, 22). We can then propose that one of these structures or patterns that emerge and effect can be called ableist relations or patterns which are also conditional and not necessarily repetitive replicas.20 Disrupting the round of existential suffering is possible by way of eliminating the causal force or conditions in their particular circumstance that sustain, such as through interventions to modify or introduce new conditions where there is the capacity to do so. As Bodhi explains: “...though the round has no first point, no cause outside itself, it does have a distinct generative structure, a set off conditions internal to itself which keeps it in motion”. (2005a, 3, emphasis added).

Figure 1 shows that there is no inevitability to how the system addressed the ‘access’ issue, with the introduction of different conditions disruptions can occur. This process could well be used to foreground the rising and declining of very specific ableist relations, which texture mental-materiality. As Macy notes it is not the input that determines its action, but what happens to the input within the system. This space of happening undermines the “linear concept of causality ... that similar conditions produce similar results and that different conditions will produce different results”. (Macy, 1991; 93). This generative effect is not dissimilar to that argued by Campbell (2009, 6 - 10) in her discussion of structures of ableist relations which simultaneously operate through the interfusion and interactivity of translation and purification replicating and fabricating points of illusion and ignorance about the perfected and dispatched entity.13 It is vital to drill down to the space of interactivity in translation, the interrelationality of cause and effect to “investigate what this interactivity clarifies and obfuscates’ (Campbell, 2009, 9). Indeed where there is a persistence of anomalies, discontinuities and mismatches in the codes, such changes in conditions interrupts incoming precepts destabilising the sovereignty of the system code as the principle hermeneutic.

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20 Such an insight is important in order to avoid paranoid readings or theorising.
Concluding Thoughts
Studies in Ableism is at a crossroad, slippery and imprecise delimitations and deployments of the concept has meant that analysis of implications of theorisation for praxis have become hamstrung and vexed due in the main to a lack of conceptual rigor, hence there are ensuing difficulties in addressing critical questions of our time. The utility of studies in ableism as a research methodology that can act as a tool for unveiling a politics of difference in the lives of peripheral and marginal peoples. In this paper I have discussed hegemonic ways of theorising which involve starting from the position of the ‘I’ as the object of thinking which lead to Conflicted /Proliferating Thought instead of the adoption an open ended conceptualisation that recognises system are inherently unstable, and are subjected to flows and hence the focus of theorisation around ableist should be on processes and practices. I then moved onto a discussion of the pedigree of ableism as a signifier and identified the lack of conceptual rigour about usage of terminology for ableism or ableist; noting that the productive effects of terminological usage within popular media has outrun its conceptual grounding. Finally I have ambitiously proposed one approach to developing studies in ableism as a research methodology. I conclude that what is necessary in the development of Studies in Ableism is a research consortium to work on theoretical refinement as well as to ‘test’ various methodological devices in applied disability research.

References:


