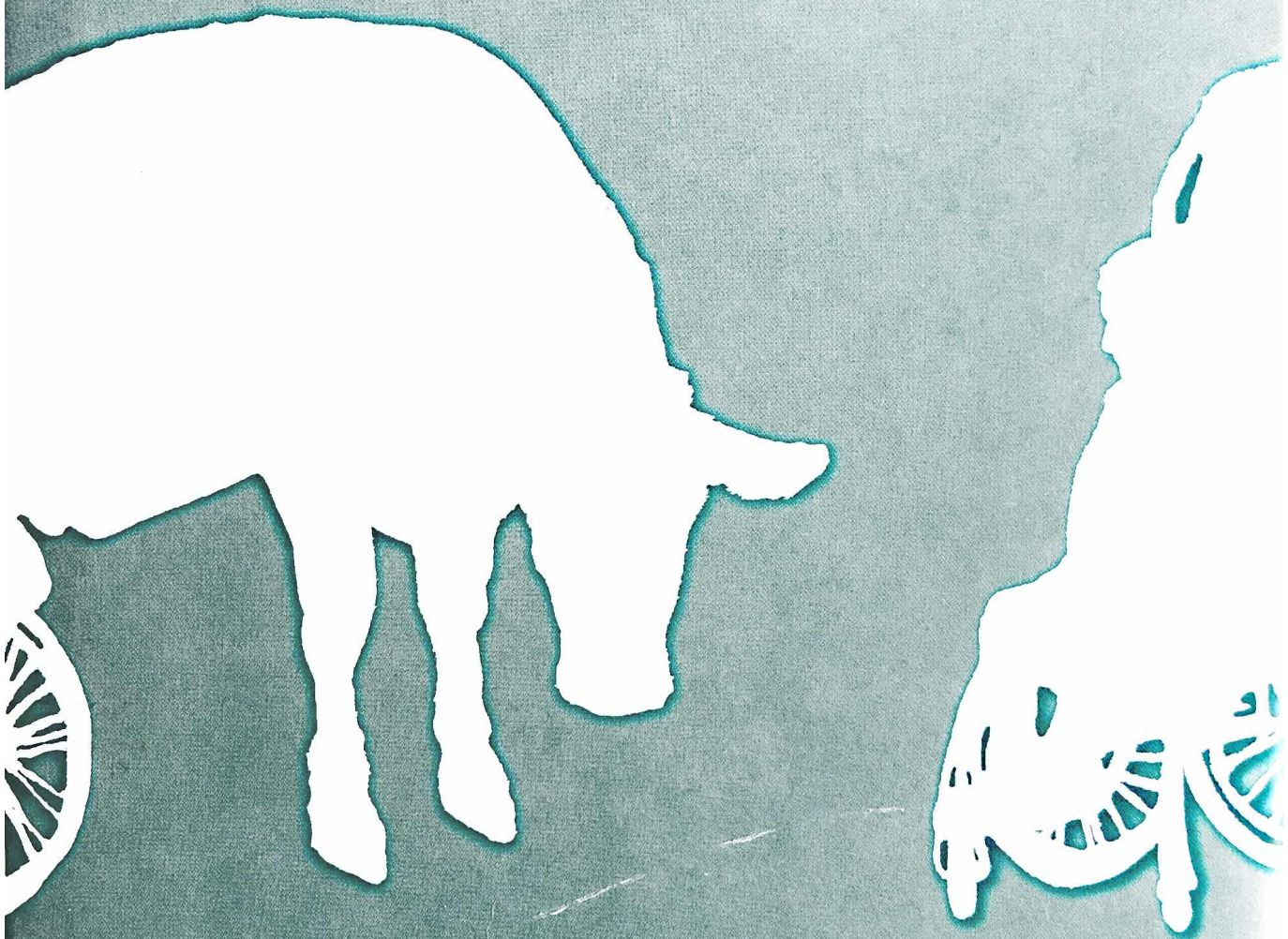


"Sunaura Taylor will turn your world inside-out." —REBECCA SOLNIT

# BEASTS OF BURDEN

ANIMAL AND DISABILITY LIBERATION



SUNAURA TAYLOR

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# I

## Strange but True

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I AM FIVE. It is the mid-1980s, my older sister's seventh birthday. Madonna's *True Blue* is blasting. Kids jump up and down, twirl in circles, bound across the room. I am filled with excitement. I want to dance. I have enough dancing energy inside my small body that the desire to boogie is enough to make me bounce chaotically around the room. But each time I pull myself up off the floor and begin to wiggle, I fall. I pull myself up onto the chair beside me, stand and take a step or two, start shaking in tune, and then . . . bump! I'm on the floor. The first couple of times it seems like an accident. Maybe I am just too excited. Maybe I am just losing my balance. By the third crash I realize something is wrong. I stop listening to the music and everything goes quiet. Flat on my butt, I stare at all the frantic dancers around me. "Oh," I think. "That's what handicapped means."

It's a year or two later and I am with my family on a vacation in Washington, D.C. While exploring the city my siblings and I come upon a table with information about animal rights. We rush to find our parents to inform them of the outrageous news we have just learned: meat is animals. We all have already agreed that if this impossible news is indeed true, we will never eat meat again. Our mother is pleased, having been a vegetarian on and off for most of her life. Our father not so much, but even he soon turns around.

The epiphany about meat remained with me longer than the epiphany about my own body. Being disabled since birth, I knew no other form of embodiment. I was so used to being me that the realization I had during that third crash to the floor quickly dissipated. Being physically different continued to be abstract—so abstract that on a conscious level it was of little consequence to me. I do remember getting my first wheelchair, briefly participating in physical therapy, convincing my parents that my hand braces were painful and unnecessary, but these were not visceral realizations of difference, whereas from the moment I learned meat was made from animals I was awakened to something hard to forget: cruelty.

Some may wonder whether the decades-long dedication to animal justice that followed is simply the consequence of being traumatized by the animal rights literature I was introduced to on that vacation. Perhaps this depends on your definition of trauma. I have no memory of violent images of animals being slaughtered. Instead I remember the power and the trauma of my suddenly altered understanding of the world. I had thought that I already knew about animals and food. Animals were our dogs Clyde and Mischief and our cat Sybil. They were the lizards and toads that were supposed to live outside but would sometimes come inside. They were Curious George and Winnie-the-Pooh. How could they possibly be in the same category as apples and sandwiches and birthday cake?

My siblings and I reinforced one another's dedication to not eating animals. None of us were ever the lone vegetarian in the family. Our convictions were strengthened by one another's commitment, especially in the beginning when our friends found us weird or our own dad tempted us with Burger King. In short, I had a community—even if a small one.

A community of disabled people was something I did not have as a kid. Disability community is something many disabled kids, and disabled adults, lack.

In her book *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Aabledness*, disability studies scholar Fiona Campbell writes, "From the moment a child is born, he/she emerges into a world where

he/she receives messages that to be disabled is to be *less than*, a world where disability may be *tolerated* but in the final instance, is *inherently negative*."<sup>1</sup>

As a child I was instilled with a narrative of what disability scholars and activists critically call "overcoming." Clearly my disability was a drawback, a *negative*, but I could *overcome* it. I wouldn't let it define me. Even in a radical homeschooling household with socially conscious parents and virtually no TV, ableism crept its way into my family's home and my own self-perception because it was embedded in the environment around me: in the stairs, curbs, and narrow pathways that perpetually reminded me that my body wasn't right and wasn't welcome; in people's sidelong looks or attempts not to stare that rendered me both hypervisible and invisible simultaneously; in the absence of knowing anyone resembling me in a position of power or living a flourishing life; and in people's low expectations of me and other disabled people.

Ableism is prejudice against disabled people that can lead to countless forms of discrimination, from lack of access to jobs, education, and housing to oppressive stereotypes and systemic inequalities that leave disabled individuals marginalized. Ableism breeds discrimination and oppression, but it also informs how we define which embodiments are normal, which are valuable, and which are "inherently negative." Although the moments in which I recognized my physical limitations (like my Madonna moment) were poignant and challenging experiences, the suffering I experienced in these moments was minor compared to the ineffable suffering I began to experience due to ableism. I had no language with which to articulate these feelings and no context from which to interpret them. Instead I internalized the prejudice that I often felt and distanced myself from anything and anyone that had to do with disability.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990, when I was eight years old. It was passed largely because of the disability community—disabled people coming together to protest, participate in direct action, and define for themselves and for policy makers what disability meant. I had no way of

knowing it then, but an entire other way of understanding disability existed—one that I wouldn't find for another thirteen years.

I was six when I first learned that animals are often mistreated and that there are people who protest this mistreatment because they believe it is wrong. I was able to articulate the ways in which animals are oppressed, and I wanted to help change the ways they are viewed and treated. It wasn't until I was twenty-one that I realized the same thing about disabled people.

## 2

### What Is Disability?

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VARIOUS STATISTICS SHOW that disabled people make up anywhere from 15 to nearly 20 percent of the world's population.<sup>1</sup> Disabled people are the world's largest minority.<sup>2</sup> But how can this be true? Where are these 900 million or so people? Even in Berkeley, California, the supposed disability capital of the world, I didn't bump into *that* many disabled people—not enough to tell me that we are the world's largest minority, anyway. Where are these people?

Fiona Campbell writes, "Unlike other minority groups, disabled people have had fewer opportunities to develop a collective conscious, identity or culture."<sup>3</sup> Disabled people are everywhere, and yet we are often isolated from each other. This "dispersal," as Campbell calls it, leads to the isolating impression that disability is a rare experience, an individual's unique challenge to overcome. Even when disability impacts a community, as when a neighborhood has high rates of asthma or congenital disabilities due to pollution, it is still too often treated as an individual's isolated medical problem. The sociopolitical challenges that disabled people face can thus often become individualized narratives of misfortune and strife.

We actually interact daily with far more disabled people than we think we do; we just don't *consider* them disabled (and they may not consider themselves disabled either). Being disabled is often profoundly stigmatizing, so it is no wonder that many people choose to "pass" as nondisabled rather than identify themselves with a

population that is largely considered to be unfortunate, broken, and burdensome. The general public usually associates disability only with those who have some clear marker of difference, such as using a wheelchair or crutches or being accompanied by a guide dog. But what about those who live with a chronic illness or have trouble walking long distances? What about people who are discriminated against and deemed unfit because of their weight?

Disability as a category of difference began to crystallize in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. With the rise of populations that were pathologized and deemed unemployable came a variety of charities, institutions, eugenic practices, and welfare regulations designed to categorize and segregate individuals perceived as unfit and dependent.<sup>4</sup> The modern meanings of the term “normal” also came into use during this period, as increasing numbers of people were organized and defined into various bodies of difference.<sup>5</sup> Of course this is not to say that something akin to disability did not exist prior to the nineteenth century. Ideologies of able-bodiedness and able-mindedness, concepts of fitness and unfitness, and assumptions about the vulnerability and dependency of bodies defined as crippled, blind, deaf, dumb, mad, lame, and infirm can be found in various historical and cultural contexts.<sup>6</sup> Similarly to definitions of race, gender, and sexuality, definitions of disability—of what counts as disability and what disability means—are constantly changing depending on a myriad of factors such as religion, political and economic policies, kinship structures, and so forth. Definitions of disability have also intersected with the shifting meanings of race, gender, sexuality, and class in mutually reinforcing ways.

That the category of disability is a social construction is evident simply by trying to define disability in the United States today. What disability is and isn't is far from clear-cut. Definitions of disability change from regulation to regulation within various organizations and government agencies, and this says nothing of the many meanings disability has culturally, socially, or within disability movements themselves.<sup>7</sup> As cultural critic Michael Bérubé writes, “Any of us who identify as ‘nondisabled’ must know that our self-designation is inevitably temporary, and that a car crash, a virus, a degenerative genetic disease, or a precedent-

setting legal decision could change our status in ways over which we have no control whatsoever.”<sup>8</sup> Many invisible or less visible disabilities go unnoticed by people in their daily interactions because most people presume abledness in others. Disability studies scholar Alison Kafer writes, “If it is this difficult to ascertain who is ‘disabled,’ then it is likely equally difficult to determine who is ‘non-disabled’ or ‘able-bodied.’”<sup>9</sup> The fact that disability is so hard to define is part of what has allowed it to play such a prominent role in shaping Western ideologies of difference and ability. In other words, disability is both a lived reality and an ideological framework that provides contours to fragile meanings of abledness.

Disabled people also don't seem to be out and about because many of us aren't. We are often segregated into separate classrooms, separate buses, separate waiting lines, and separate entrances. We may stay home either by choice (because it is easier than facing discrimination outside our homes) or against our will (because that is where our parents, spouses, caretakers, doctors, or benefit counselors want us to be, or because our homes are not accessible to leave). We may leave our homes only to be stopped by the end of a sidewalk with no curb cut. We may try our best to avoid inaccessible environments and to stay away from stores with physical barriers, such as stairs, or psychological barriers, such as gawking strangers. We may have such deeply internalized ableism that we don't leave our homes out of shame. Or we may be locked away in institutions.

In September 2003, having spent virtually no time with other disabled people up until that point, I participated in my first protest for disability rights. It was a decision made not out of a sense of political responsibility—I initially had only the vaguest idea of what the group was protesting—but out of desperation. I was a depressed twenty-one-year-old with two decades' worth of internalized oppression to unpack. Luckily I had a gut instinct that what I needed was other disabled people in my life—to learn from and to be in community with. A two-week disability protest march seemed like an appropriate way to make that happen.

There were at least two hundred protesters—more than I had ever imagined. And my God, were they disabled! Drooling,

limping, wheeling, grunting—my initial desire was to flee and scream for rescue.

Thankfully, I didn't. I stayed the whole two weeks, and, as frustrating as it sometimes was, it also changed my life in amazing ways. The event, a 144-mile march from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C., was organized by one of the disability movement's most prominent groups, American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT).<sup>10</sup> At the time of the march, ADAPT had been at the forefront of disability rights in the United States for more than twenty years, organizing powerful and often dangerous direct actions. They had been doing this for almost my entire life.

The march was in protest of what ADAPT called the "stolen lives" of the more than 2 million people who are currently warehoused, many for profit, in nursing homes and Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ICF/IIDs) versus being given the opportunity to live in their own homes where they can have more control over their lives.<sup>11</sup> America has more than sixteen thousand nursing homes, two-thirds of which are for-profit ventures. Nursing homes have become a \$116 billion industry.<sup>12</sup> The industry is a racket. The national average annual cost of a room in a nursing home is \$87,000. Although it is difficult to estimate the cost of home care, as government policies and health-aide salaries differ widely state by state, and disabled people need varying levels of care, it is clear that it is nearly always far cheaper for disabled people to live in their own homes—so much so that home care workers could be paid a living wage and it would still be cheaper than institutionalization.<sup>13</sup> The standard of services in nursing homes is also often shockingly low.<sup>14</sup> There is a high incidence of physical and sexual violence as well as negligence of hygiene and psychological needs. Even at the best institutions, individuals are stripped of countless freedoms that people on the outside take for granted, such as choosing when and what to eat, when to sleep, and whether to engage in consensual sexual intimacy.<sup>15</sup>

Disabled people's right to live in their communities instead of in separate institutions is constantly being threatened. California, often referred to as the home of the disability rights movement, has some of the largest nursing homes in the United States, and

year after year the state government tries to put essential services disabled people need to live in their own homes on the chopping block.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the fact that 2 million people are denied the privilege of determining where and how they live and who cares for them, the lack of press garnered by disability issues is not exactly a surprise. This is not to say that representations of disability are absent from the media—far from it. Disability as metaphor is deeply pervasive in the media, and as a human-interest story disability has almost mythic endurance. In these narratives disability is nearly always seen as a personal tragedy. Disabled people are supposed to find the courage to overcome their own personal limitations through strength of character rather than by overcoming discrimination and oppression. This has been dubbed the "super cripp" narrative by many disabled activists and scholars. Anything a disabled person does, no matter how mundane or remarkable, is seen as amazing and inspirational, from getting married, to going to school, to simply leaving the house or not wanting to kill themselves (or even the fact that they *do* want to kill themselves). This narrative does not inspire other disabled people to participate in their communities and demand equal rights but instead motivates an able-bodied audience to work harder and be more grateful. Through this lens, disability becomes a hyper-sentimentalized version of the familiar capitalist narrative of the poor man lifting himself up by his bootstraps.

As I began my journey as a disability activist, I went from feeling like disability was my own isolated experience to seeing it everywhere. I realized that disability's presence in U.S. culture is inescapable even on a rhetorical level. We say that "the economy is crippled," or that someone who feels incapable or unable to do something is in a state of "paralysis." We talk of blindness as if it means ignorance or naïveté; we describe things that we think are ignorant or unfair as "retarded." "Disabled" is used ubiquitously to describe things as broken or not working.

Such examples are often brushed aside as innocent figures of speech. But words are political.

Whether in language or imagery, the most common disability metaphors are based on stereotypes and a lack of knowledge

of disabled people's experiences. The figurative use of a word such as "crippled" reinforces the idea that crippled means broken, defective, and in need of fixing. Because the word is often used metaphorically, the actual lives of those who are crippled are simultaneously erased and stereotyped. "Crippled" is a particularly interesting example because of how the word "crip" (which comes from "cripple") has been adopted by disability activists and scholars in a way that is similar to how LGBT activists and scholars have reclaimed the word "queer." Many disabled people identify as crips, and to crip something does not mean to break it but to radically and creatively invest it with disability history, politics, and pride while simultaneously questioning paradigms of independence, normalcy, and medicalization.

During that first protest with ADAPT I was hesitant to identify so boldly as disabled. But as time went on, crip increasingly became a part of my identity. For disabled scholars, activists, and artists, crip has become an action, a way of radically altering meaning. We talk of crip time, crip space, crip culture, and crip theory.

Like antiracist and feminist scholars before them, disability scholars realize that words reinforce how we are treated socially and politically every day, and the same is true of other kinds of representations, images, and cultural narratives. There are countless ways that the lived experiences of disabled people are replaced with metaphors and stereotypes: from pity-mongering charity drives and sappy "super crip" characters in movies to representations of disabled people as scroungers, fakers, malingerers, or burdens in common political discourse. Disability is presented as pitiable, always in need of a cure, and a barrier to a full life, while disabled people are patronizingly referred to as "inspiring" and "special" and praised for "overcoming their disabilities." Other representations present disabled people as dangerous, violent, and ready to take revenge for their suffering (think of all the villains in movies who are disfigured or use a prosthetic). This is especially true for those with intellectual or psychological disabilities (consider the role mental illness plays in national conversations about mass shootings and other extreme violence). Such representations are not universal—they compound and shift across nation-

ality, racial, gender, and class differences—but these particular stereotypes are some of the most prominent in mainstream U.S. culture.

Representations of disability are often born from medicalization—the idea that disability is an issue best suited for the fields of medicine and rehabilitation. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries disability went from being largely a moral, spiritual, or metaphysical issue to a medical one. Where disability had once been understood as an intervention by God or as the price paid for a karmic debt, it was now understood as medical deviance. What disability scholars and activists refer to as "the medical model of disability" positions the disabled body as working incorrectly, as being unhealthy and abnormal, as needing a cure.<sup>17</sup>

The medical model of disability locates a disabled person's struggles solely within their own body: something is wrong with the disabled person, which makes them unable to fully function in the world. This perspective is taken for granted now as common sense or as proof of our advancement as a civilization. Of course the need for a wheelchair is a medical issue. What else could it be?

Over the past few decades disability advocates have tried to tell a different story about disability. Many disabled people argue that disability is not simply a medical problem; it is a social justice one. This is not to say that disabled people don't sometimes need doctors or medical contributions. Rather, it is to say that medicine is not the only, or even the best, framework for understanding disability. Disability activists and scholars have countered medicalization with other models of disability, the most established being "the social model of disability," which argues that disability is not caused by impairment, but by the way society is organized.<sup>18</sup>

Consider the simple example of our daily movements through our cities and towns, entering and exiting buildings, stepping over curbs, getting on buses. If someone cannot step up onto a curbside, is that marginalizing fact the fault of the person's body? What about a bus that is equipped with stairs but not a ramp or lift? What about crossing lights that visually signal that it's safe to move across the street but don't beep or otherwise signal it through



sound? Ableism encourages us to understand one technology as normal and another as specialized. We are so used to technologies and structures such as steps and staircases that they become almost natural to us. But curbs are no more natural than curb cuts, and blinking lights no more natural than beeping sounds.

Access is also a question of which cognitive characteristics are privileged and supported. Many simple things can give those with intellectual and psychological disabilities (as well as those with other kinds of disabilities, such as chronic illness) access to environments they would otherwise be left out of. In workplace and school environments such things as access to a paraprofessional, assistive technologies, extra breaks, more flexible means of communication (such as e-mail, telephone, online chat, or in-person meetings), changes in lighting, and scent-free and chemical-free policies can make the difference between a completely inaccessible environment and one open to more people.<sup>19</sup>

None of this is to say that access is simple or easy—access needs are vast and various—but it bears remembering that our environments have been built based on assumptions about whose bodies will be participating in them. Legacies of oppression shape the ways our social landscapes are structured. As disability justice activist Mia Mingus explains, the question of access is not unique to disability: “Accessibility is nothing new, and we can work to understand access in a broad way, encompassing class, language, childcare, gender-neutral bathrooms as a start.”<sup>20</sup> Access is intersectional. It’s important to consider who our societies have historically privileged and what kinds of bodies they have been built to accommodate. Our cities and cultures have not organically manifested themselves to reward certain embodiments over others. They are human made, with human biases and prejudices built into them, so we must ask why certain bodies have been presented as the standard against which others are compared.

Access isn’t only about physical space, it’s also about the economic and social systems that structure society. Disabled people are some of the most marginalized people on the planet. The connections between disability and poverty in particular are striking. Twenty percent of the world’s poorest people are disabled, and 80 percent of the world’s disabled population live in developing

countries.<sup>21</sup> Across the world disabled people are likely to live in poverty and are often among the worst off in their communities.<sup>22</sup> This is true of the United States, where disabled people are more likely than their able-bodied counterparts to live below the poverty line.<sup>23</sup> As the World Bank reports, “Poverty causes disabilities and can furthermore lead to secondary disabilities for those individuals who are already disabled, as a result of the poor living conditions, health endangering employment, malnutrition, poor access to health care and education opportunities, etc.”<sup>24</sup> This can be a vicious cycle for many people, as people who are disabled will often face additional barriers to accessing things that could help them get out of poverty, such as education and job opportunities. Additionally, while disabled activists often criticize the medicalization of disability, we are fully aware that access to health care is vital for people living with a disability—as it is, of course, for everyone.

The unemployment rate for disabled people around the world is also staggeringly high. According to a UN report, “In developing countries, 80 percent to 90 percent of persons with disabilities of working age are unemployed, whereas in industrialized countries the figure is between 50 percent and 70 percent.”<sup>25</sup> Even with disabled people in the workforce rising in recent years, only 37 percent of working-age persons with disabilities in the United States are employed.<sup>26</sup> All of these numbers are worse for disabled women and disabled people of color. Senator Tom Harkin has written that things aren’t looking up: “According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the disability workforce shrank by over 10 percent during the recession, five times faster than the non-disability workforce, which shrank by only about two percent.”<sup>27</sup>

Our actual physical or mental disabilities are often the least of our worries. People with physical and mental differences have been oppressed by extreme and violent measures such as sterilization, infanticide, eugenics, and institutionalization, as well as through systematic inequalities such as impoverishment and denial of access to housing, work, and education. Disabled people not only face institutionalization in nursing homes and psychiatric hospitals but are also disproportionately represented in U.S. prisons and jails.<sup>28</sup> Disabled people are more likely to be victims of

violence than able-bodied people, and hate crimes against disabled people are notoriously underreported and under-prosecuted.<sup>29</sup> For disabled individuals who are incarcerated, institutionalized, or unable to choose and hire their own attendants, violence and hate can be a daily occurrence.

Disabled people contend with stereotypes, stigmas, and civil rights infringements daily. We are some of the world's poorest people, some of the least educated, and some of the most likely to face violence. It is legal to keep us from participating in many social spaces through physical and attitudinal barriers and to segregate us into institutions and "special" programs. It is considered acceptable to talk for us instead of to us—or, in the case of those who are nonverbal and "severely" intellectually disabled, instead of to the people who know them and their interests best.

The profound systemic prejudice and discrimination faced by disabled people pervades nearly all aspects of society. Yet this prejudice changes with location, race, gender, class, and the nature of a person's specific disability. My own privilege as a white, middle-class, physically disabled American woman with no communication impairments and the means to live in my own home with assistants whom I choose and hire has often shielded me from the reality of many of these oppressions—realities that are inescapable for other people with disabilities.

Disability oppression and disability activism play out differently depending on place and experience. Individual populations face specific challenges particular to them. Further complicating matters is the fact that, as is becoming evident, the barrier between able-bodiedness and disability is far from clear-cut or permanent. Disability can be an identity one embraces, a condition one struggles with, a space one finds liberation in, or a concept that can be leveraged to marginalize and oppress. It can also be all of these things at once.

It becomes increasingly clear that disability is not only a lived experience that shapes individual human lives—it is also an ideology that plays a central role in forming our histories, politics, and cultures. Disability doesn't belong simply to the margins, or to medicine, or to a few specific historical events; instead, disability—like gender, class, and race—is a social force that

affects the world in a pervasive manner.<sup>30</sup> As historian Douglas C. Baynton notes, "Disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent in the history we write."<sup>31</sup>

This becomes starkly evident when we consider that ideologies of disability have been central to the development of the modern world. For example, scholars have exposed the role of disability in the creation of capitalism and labor relations, particularly in contributing to definitions of a "work-based" system versus a "needs-based" system of distribution, as well as in definitions of concepts such as independence, efficiency, and productivity.<sup>32</sup> Others have shown how ideologies of disability have been key to formulating U.S. immigration policies, as justifications for the exclusion of various racialized and classed populations have often stereotyped certain populations as "likely to become a public charge" or pose a public health threat.<sup>33</sup> Such examples of the importance of disability in shaping our society abound. Perhaps most telling, though, is the role concepts of disability have historically played in reinforcing and defining categories of difference.<sup>34</sup> Ideologies of disability have contributed to the pathologization of various populations by infantilizing them, declaring them weak, vulnerable, unintelligent, prone to disease, less advanced, in need of care, and so forth. This pathologization is intricately tied up with ableism, which asserts that markers of disability, such as vulnerability, weakness, physical and mental abnormality, and dependency are undesirable. Consequently, any physical or mental attributes that can then be associated (falsely or accurately) with these conditions are seen as biological, natural deficiencies that need to be regulated and controlled. These ideologies of disability have helped define whole populations as disabled through claims of intellectual and physical inferiority, as can be seen in racist stereotypes that posit black people as physically robust but intellectually inferior to white people, indigenous communities as in need of management and prone to disease, and upper-class white women as too delicate for rigorous intellectual or physical work. The legacies of such histories are far from buried, as can be seen in the work of scholars such as Nirmala Erevelles, who has shown that in the United States children of color are disproportionately

categorized as having disabilities, giving the school system a supposedly biological justification for segregating them into special (in other words separate) education classrooms.<sup>35</sup>

It's important to point out that when scholars argue that disability is central to structuring categories of difference, they are not arguing that disability trumps such markers of difference as race, gender, or class but rather that disability is mutually constitutive of various forms of difference. In other words, ideologies of race, class, sexuality, and gender form meanings of disability, just as disability forms meanings about them. These categories have developed alongside one another, shaping, impacting, and sometimes merging with each other. Disability studies scholar Ellen Samuels makes this point well in her book *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race*, particularly in her discussion of nineteenth-century anthropologists. She writes, "Physicians and anthropologists of the time did not in fact distinguish between characteristics ascribed to race and those ascribed to physical and mental ability as we do today." She explains that anthropologists of the day were not analogizing differences so much as actually "merging . . . [them] into a flexible category of mental immaturity and incapacity."<sup>36</sup>

Samuels's statement is a powerful reminder that categories that may seem distinct today have at times been inseparable from each other. Though often overlooked, the category of animal is also crucial to understanding this history and the frameworks that define us. Who is human versus nonhuman may seem clear-cut and uncomplicated today, but as we know all too well, at different points in time various human populations have been identified as bestial, more animal than human, or as missing links of evolution—classifications that were inextricably entangled with definitions of inferiority, savagery, sexuality, dependency, ability/disability, physical and mental difference, and so forth. Samuels's statement is actually in reference to the racist anthropology that consigned Native Americans to the status of evolutionary throwbacks, examples of a less advanced stage in human development. Such assessments operated in tandem with claims that intellectually disabled people were examples of a prior stage in human evolution. Such dehumanization and animalization of race and

disability can be seen in the work of nineteenth-century geologist J.P. Lesley, who argued human evolution was demonstrated not only by the discovery of so-called primitive or apelike populations (in other words, non-Europeans) but by examining the "idiots" and "cretins" of all societies:

Individuals scattered all over the world, through all the human races, with low foreheads, small brains, long arms, thin legs, projecting, tusk-like teeth, suppressed noses, and other marks of arrested development; to say nothing of millions of idiots and cretins produced by the same arrest in every generation of mankind, sustain the argument.<sup>37</sup>

The century prior, the 1700s, had seen the development of Linnaean taxonomy, the system of classification of different species that would lay the groundwork for the scientific classification system we still use today. This system helped position humans within nature, but it was also embedded in and representative of racialized and gendered debates over the categorization of humans, using assumptions about human difference to help name the boundaries between human and animal.<sup>38</sup> Systems of species classification have relied heavily on hierarchies that have placed humans above animals, and these hierarchies have always been entangled with constructions of human difference. My point here is not only to expose the importance of the figure of the animal to histories of categorization and dehumanization, it is also to make clear that the animal, and, consequently, the human, are complicated categories, socially determined rather than solely biologically.

Although such historical analysis is too complex to do justice to here, it's important to emphasize that histories of dehumanization invariably exposed Western understandings, assumptions, and bigotry; understandings that were bound up with racism, ableism, and prejudice toward animals (as can be seen in J.P. Lesley's work). In these constructs animals—a huge, unwieldy category that encompasses creatures as diverse as mosquitoes, jellyfish, dogs, and orcas—are understood to be unquestionably inferior creatures. In this anthropocentric view the world exists for "man"

(that is, some men), with animals existing completely separate from and lesser than this pinnacle of creation.

With such histories of animalization and pathologization in mind, it's no surprise that many people would wish to distance themselves from both disability and animality. As much as I recognize the drive and sometimes even the need for such distancing, in this book I want to challenge such impulses. As disability studies scholar Michelle Jarman writes, "The very real need to challenge fallacious biological attributes linked to race, gender, sexuality and poverty—such as physical anomaly, psychological instability, or intellectual inferiority—has often left stigma around disability unchallenged."<sup>39</sup> In many ways a similar thing could be said of animality: that there has been an urgent need among dehumanized populations (including disabled people) to challenge animalization and claim humanity. As urgent and understandable as these challenges are, it is important to ask how we can reconcile the brutal reality of human animalization with the concurrent need to challenge the devaluing of animals and even acknowledge our own animality. This book suggests that inattention to disability and animality (and to how they intersect) is a mistake, because both concepts are so deeply implicated in other categories of difference and in the many social justice issues that oppressed populations face—from poverty, incarceration, and war to environmental injustice—that they cannot simply be relegated to the margins. Unless disability and animal justice are incorporated into our other movements for liberation, ableism and anthropocentrism will be left unchallenged, available for use by systems of domination and oppression.

However, as Jarman and many others have pointed out, disability scholars and activists have too often neglected an intersectional approach, ignoring issues of race, class, sexuality, and gender and leaving white and class privilege within disability movements and scholarship unchallenged. A similar critique of mainstream animal rights movements is in order; too often issues of race, gender, and class are neglected while white privilege and patriarchy are maintained, with animal rights advocates neglecting issues of intersectionality and centering a white and middle-class model of animal advocacy. The disability justice movement,

which centralizes disabled people of color, poor people, and queer and gender-variant people, has emerged in response to the need for a disability movement that centralizes oppressions as inextricably connected.<sup>40</sup> In animal liberation movements, feminist and people of color framings of animal ethics have emerged to challenge traditional framings of animal rights by focusing on the interlocking oppression of humans and animals and by highlighting the concerns of communities that have largely been left out of animal rights discourse. This book is hugely indebted to such movements.

Many years after the ADAPT protest, and after I began identifying as crip, I realized in my art studio at UC Berkeley how important it is to think intersectionally about animals. As I painted the scores of chickens on the truck awaiting slaughter, I learned many things about animal industries and specifically about the hens in my painting—hens who I came to understand were virtually all disabled. I realized that ableism is a force that expands beyond disabled people. *All* bodies are subjected to the oppression of ableism. It helps form our cultural opinions and values as well as our notions of what it means to be independent, how to measure productivity and efficiency, what is normal, and even what is natural. In research for that painting, I learned that these values not only affect disabled individuals and the able-bodied population, but also the nonhuman animals with whom we share this planet.

## Animal Crips

A FEW YEARS AGO I found a story about a fox with arthrogryposis, which is the disability I was born with. According to the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre, a wildlife conservation and management organization, the fox was shot by a resident of the area because “it had an abnormal gait and appeared sick.” The animal, whose disabilities were quite significant, had normal muscle mass, and his stomach contained a large amount of digested food, which suggested to researchers that “the limb deformity did not preclude successful hunting and foraging.”<sup>1</sup>

The resident seems to have shot the animal out of pity (a sort of mercy killing) and fear (perhaps assuming the fox was sick with a contagious disease). People shoot normal foxes too, of course, but for less purportedly altruistic reasons. However, this fox actually seemed to be doing very well. Did the resident assume the fox’s quality of life was unacceptable? Did the person view the animal’s disabilities as dangerous or as a fate worse than death? The concept of a mercy killing carries within it two of the most prominent responses to disability: destruction and pity. The fox was clearly affected by human ableism, shot dead by someone who equated disability only with suffering and fear of contagion.

The assumptions and prejudices we hold about disabled bodies run deep—so deep that we project this human ableism onto non-human animals. They are subjected to some of our most familiar ableist narratives. For instance, the “better off dead” narrative,

which led to the shooting of the fox, is a common thread in discussions of pet euthanasia and animal farming. There is also the inspirational disabled animal who overcomes great odds, which is perhaps a more surprising narrative but one that seems to be gaining in popularity. Consider for example the 2011 movie *Dolphin Tale*, a true story of a dolphin who loses her tail and learns to swim with a prosthesis, or the animated fantasy film *How to Train Your Dragon*, which has a similar story line involving a dragon who gets a prosthetic tail. Then there are stories like that of Faith, a dog who was born with only her two hind legs and who has learned to walk bipedally. Faith has appeared on many television shows, including *Oprah*, and become an inspiration for viewers. “Cute” and “inspiring” disabled animal stories seem to be all the rage on social media these days, and various memes and websites tell the stories of disabled animals who “triumph” and “overcome” obstacles. Television shows are also beginning to catch on to this burgeoning market: a *Nature* episode titled “My Bionic Pet” aired on PBS in spring 2014, exploring animal prosthetics. Their promo declares, “Sometimes miracles do happen.”<sup>2</sup>

Clearly we project ableism onto nonhuman animals: do we also project the notion of *disability* itself? If the category of disability is a social construction, then what does it mean to say an animal is disabled? We have no idea how other animals comprehend physical or cognitive difference. Does a dog perceive that something is different about another dog if she has three legs? Can a monkey tell that she is different if she limps? Can animals know to help other disabled animals? Can animals recognize disability across species? The animal world is filled with such an incredible and seemingly infinite variety of difference that trying to assess the difference disability makes almost seems futile. And yet a lot of fascinating evidence suggests that some animals can and do recognize something akin to disability.<sup>3</sup> Primatologist Frans de Waal tells the story of Yeroen, the oldest adult male chimpanzee in the Arnhem chimpanzee colony. Yeroen hurt his hand in a fight with a young rival. De Waal writes that Yeroen “limped for a week, even though his wound seemed superficial.” The scientists soon discovered that Yeroen was only limping if he could be seen by

his rival. Did Yeroen think that faking a limp would make his attacker more sympathetic to him? Or does that interpretation too quickly read Yeroen’s actions through human assumptions about disability and the sort of response it should engender?

The meanings of the word “disability” are uniquely human, created and contextualized by human cultures over centuries. Despite this, I have chosen to use it here when discussing differences among nonhuman animals. I am drawn to the breadth of meaning the word has within disability movements, and I’m interested in what happens when we consider how disability as lived experience and as ideology impacts nonhuman animals. How do nonhuman animals relate to physical and cognitive difference themselves? How do human understandings of disability affect the ways we interpret what animals are experiencing?

That animal disability both inspires and horrifies people is clearly evident in discussions surrounding Internet sensation Chris P. Bacon. Chris is a pig who was born in January 2013 with very small hind legs that he cannot walk on. He “set the Internet on fire” when a video of him using a homemade wheelchair went viral. The tiny piglet, who was rescued by a veterinarian after a woman brought him in to be euthanized, has now gone through multiple wheelchairs and weighs more than seventy pounds.<sup>4</sup>

Many commentators on articles about Chris want him euthanized, saying it’s cruel to “make him live like that.” Others find him so heroic that he is invited to attend muscular dystrophy events for children. Chris is raising awareness—not about the plight of pigs, but about disability. After all, no matter how much Americans on the Internet love this pig, his name constantly reminds us what people think he really amounts to: bacon.

A telling example of the impulse to project human stereotypes of disability onto other animals can be found in the story of Mozu, a snow monkey (a Japanese macaque) who was born in Japan’s central highlands. Mozu was born with abnormalities of her hands and feet thought to have resulted from pesticide pollution. Snow monkeys spend much of their time moving through trees, which allows them to avoid wading through the thick snow that covers the ground in the winter months. Mozu’s disabilities meant

she was mostly unable to move through the branches; instead she traveled the nearly two miles that her troop covered every day in search of food by alternately walking on her abnormal limbs and crawling and sliding on the forest floor. When Mozu was born, researchers who had been watching this troop feared she would not make it past infancy. To their surprise, Mozu lived for nearly three decades, rearing five children of her own and becoming a prominent troop member.

In an episode of the program *Nature* featuring Mozu's story, she is again and again referred to as "inspiring," "suffering," and a "very special monkey."<sup>5</sup> The dramatic music and voice-overs that describe Mozu's struggle in vivid detail make it nearly impossible to watch her move across the snowy forest floor, a baby clinging to her belly and other monkeys flying by above her, without thinking, "Poor Mozu!"

At the same time, I am aware that the piece was edited to elicit this reaction. There are few shots in which Mozu is not struggling, and I question the effect the videographers had on her and the troop. In one scene her desperation seems to stem from being chased by the cameraperson. The music and voice-overs of course also add a sense of struggle to Mozu's story.

Yet I have no doubt that life was hard for Mozu, and I find myself desperate to know what she thought of her situation. Was her instinct to reach for the trees unquenchable? Was she always in pain, exhausted, or fearful as she moved slowly across the forest floor? Did she wonder why she was different from her companions? I cannot help but wonder, although I realize how similar these thoughts are to the tiresome questions I have been asked again and again about my own life, my own disability. My desire for Mozu's life not to be seen as one of suffering and struggle is also a projection, one that wishes disability empowerment onto my fellow primate. Our human perspective shapes how we interpret Mozu's experience.

Many of our ideas about animals are formed by our assumption that only the "fittest" animals survive, which negates the value and even the naturalness of such experiences as vulnerability, weakness, and interdependence. When disabilities occur, we assume that "nature will run her course," that the natural process

for a disabled animal is to die, rendering living disabled animals not only aberrant but unnatural.

How true is this? Mozu lived for twenty-eight years, raising children and grandchildren. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, author of the bestselling book *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals*, writes that "it is something of a cliché among animal behaviorists that wild animals do not tolerate disabilities, and that animals who are unfortunate enough to be born with a deformity or fall ill rarely last very long. I am dubious."<sup>6</sup> Recent research offers numerous examples of disabled animals surviving and sometimes thriving, as well as evidence that animals can recognize when another animal is different and needs support. There are countless stories of primates, elephants, dogs, pigs, whales, ducks, geese, and chickens helping their disabled companions. It is known, for example, that male silverback gorillas will slow down their troop so that elderly, ill, and disabled members can keep up. Other species, such as elephants and wolves, have been shown to do the same. What do we make of animals such as Babyl, an elephant who lived in the Samburu Reserve in northern Kenya? Ethologist Marc Bekoff writes that Babyl was "crippled" and "couldn't travel as fast as the rest of the herd," and describes how the other elephants in Babyl's group would wait for her instead of leaving her behind. The elephant expert Iain Douglas-Hamilton told Bekoff that the elephants had been doing this for years; that they "always waited for Babyl. . . . They would walk for a while, then stop and look around to see where Babyl was. Depending on how she was doing, they'd either wait or proceed."<sup>7</sup> The matriarch would even feed Babyl on occasion. Bekoff asks why the other elephants in Babyl's herd would act this way since there was no practical reason to do so: "Babyl could do little for them." The only conclusion Bekoff and his companions could draw was that the other elephants cared about Babyl. As important (and radical) as it is to suggest that animals who are not directly related can care for each other in such a way, from a critical disability perspective it is also important to keep open the possibility that Babyl did offer something useful to the troop—something that may be hard for us to recognize if we understand disability only as a drawback or limitation.

Such examples of disability survival, adaptation, and care in the animal world are not limited to elephants and apes or even mammals. Consider Baks, a large boxer who was blinded in an accident. Unprompted by humans, a four-year-old goose named Buttons began leading the dog around. Buttons became a veritable guide-geese, hanging on to the dog with her neck or directing his movements by honking at him.<sup>8</sup> Examples such as this are indeed the kind of sweet stories of companionship popular on the Internet, but they also raise critical questions about empathy, vulnerability, interdependence, adaptation, and animal experience.

De Waal suggests that animals go through a process of what is called *learned adjustment*: “Healthy members do not necessarily know what is wrong, but gradually become familiar with the limitations of their less fortunate mates.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, an animal may learn to recognize *over time* that the way another animal is moving or acting makes her more vulnerable to danger, supporting and protecting her, or treating her with less aggression because she is not seen as a threat. De Waal contrasts this to another response considered to be more complex, cognitive empathy, the ability “to picture oneself in the position of another individual.” Cognitive empathy allows us humans to understand what sorts of limitations another being has simply by seeing them, as we are immediately able to imagine ourselves into their situation.<sup>10</sup> Research into animal empathy is still young, but it seems likely that humans are not the only species capable of cognitive empathy, as numerous animals, including wolves, apes, and elephants, have been shown to have the capacity for empathetic response.

A reaction to learned adjustment could go in multiple directions—if animals learn that another animal is vulnerable they might take advantage of her, abandon her, help her, or accept her and learn to accommodate her. The concept of learned adjustment, however, and the distinction between it and cognitive empathy leave important questions unanswered. De Waal writes, “Special treatment of the handicapped is probably best regarded as a combination of learned adjustment and strong attachment; it is the attachment that steers the adjustment in a positive, caring direction.”<sup>11</sup> What is this attachment, then? Is it friendship

or love? Is it empathy? De Waal acknowledges the concept's limitations—for example, it does little to explain the care and protection an animal can have for an injured or disabled animal they have had no time to adjust to, as when a troop member suddenly becomes injured.<sup>12</sup>

To unpack these terms further it might be helpful to look at an example de Waal gives. He asks us to picture a human being who has lost his arms in an accident: “Just from seeing his condition, or hearing about it, we will grasp the reduction in physical ability he has undergone. We can imagine what it is like to have no arms, and our capacity for empathy allows us to extrapolate this knowledge to the other's situation.” He goes on to say, “Our friend's dog, by contrast, will need time to learn that there is no point in bringing her master a stick to fetch, or that the familiar pat on the back is being replaced by a foot rub.”<sup>13</sup> Again, because it involves being able to imagine oneself into the life of the other, cognitive empathy is deemed more complex than learned adjustment.

A critical disability analysis, however, exposes something troubling about the distinction between learned adjustment and cognitive empathy. In the scenario de Waal offers, he describes cognitive empathy as “grasping” what a body with no arms won't be able to do; we human beings are immediately able to imagine what is lacking for a person with no arms. But this imagining may not be accurate, and more important, it is only possible with disabilities and injuries with which we ourselves are familiar—ones that are diagnosable and recognizable within our culture. If we encounter someone with a disability or illness we have never heard of and know nothing about, our interaction with them would arguably be one of learned adjustment. Thus de Waal's description of cognitive empathy naturalizes disability as a predictable diagnosable fact as opposed to something that is inextricably situated in our own cultures and histories. In contrast, he frames learned adjustment as a process of learning how another being moves and acts without prior assumptions or stereotypes. The limits of these definitions and distinctions are evident in de Waal's assumption that someone with no arms won't be able to play fetch with his dog. The dog may learn that fetch can still be played, as her human companion may use his mouth or feet



to throw the stick. Which being—the dog or the presumptuous human observer—understands disability more accurately?

De Waal's framing shows how easy it is to assume an animal's behavior is less complex than a human's behavior. It also exposes how human assumptions about disability invariably shape the way animal behaviorists interpret it.

What stands out for me most, though, in the conversation about animal disability is how little it is discussed by those who study animal behavior. Perhaps this should come as no surprise, given that disability is often neglected as a legitimate area of study. What work does exist often focuses on the effect the disabled animals have on the able-bodied animal population of which they are a part rather than the insights into animal behavior offered by disabled animals themselves. We should be wary of this human tendency toward ableism, which assumes that it is the nondisabled population's response to disability that is most worthy of critical examination. Disabled animals are repeatedly presented as offering nothing back to their communities, but is this true, or are scientists neglecting to watch for more nuanced behavior because of their preconceived views on disability? We should also bear in mind that as tempting as it is to see disability engendering either compassion or neglect in other animals, these narratives also rehearse reactions common to disability in many human cultures. In these narratives disabled people are either perceived as inspiring compassion in able-bodied populations or as burdening communities and triggering animosity. This does not mean these narratives are always untrue, only that we should be careful not to simply read human stereotypes of disability onto other species. Disabled animals raise important questions about adaptation, creativity, and self-reflection. If scientists of animal behavior would look to disabled animals with an open mind—watching for more than what ableism teaches us to expect—than we quite possibly would find that disability plays a far more complex role in animal lives than has previously been thought.

Thus far we have thought mainly about wild animals, but what of those who are domesticated? What does disability mean to the domesticated animals we breed and profit from? As I learned

from the chicken truck photographs I spent so many hours with, disability is ubiquitous among animals used in food production.

Industrially farmed animals live in such cramped, filthy, and unnatural conditions that disabilities become common, even inevitable.<sup>14</sup> They are often crammed into cages with cement, wire, or metal-grated floors, covered in their own feces and kept in virtually nonstop darkness. But the disabilities that arise from these toxic environments are often secondary to the ones they are made to have from birth. Farmed animals are bred to physical extremes: udders produce too much milk for a cow's body to hold, turkeys and chickens cannot bear the weight of their own giant breasts, and pigs' legs are too weak to support them. Chickens, turkeys, and ducks are also physically harmed by processes such as debeaking—done without anesthetic—which can leave them prone to serious infection and make it difficult for the birds to eat or preen themselves.<sup>15</sup> And then there are the bruises, abscesses, sores, broken bones, vaginal and reproductive disorders, chronic illnesses, and psychological issues that farmed animals are commonly reported to endure.

Masson reports that “nearly a quarter of all commercially reared birds are lame and experience excruciating chronic pain.”<sup>16</sup> To satisfy the increasing demand for cheap meat and eggs, chickens have been bred to grow twice as fast as they usually would, leaving them with bones and joints that cannot bear the weight of their massive forms. A battery hen, whose sole role is to lay eggs, produces around 250 eggs a year, far more than the sixty or so her body is meant to handle.<sup>17</sup> The constant egg production combined with her complete inability to exercise make her prone to osteoporosis and broken bones. Scientists who expose such situations have been accused of being anthropomorphic.<sup>18</sup> The use of the word *anthropomorphic* is telling, as if acknowledging that humans aren't the only creatures who experience physical difference and illness brings animals too close for comfort. If humans can share this sort of vulnerability with nonhuman animals, what else might we share?

It is not only chickens who experience disabilities and illness on industrialized farms. At least 60 percent of dairy cows experience lameness, and 35 percent experience udder mastitis, a potentially

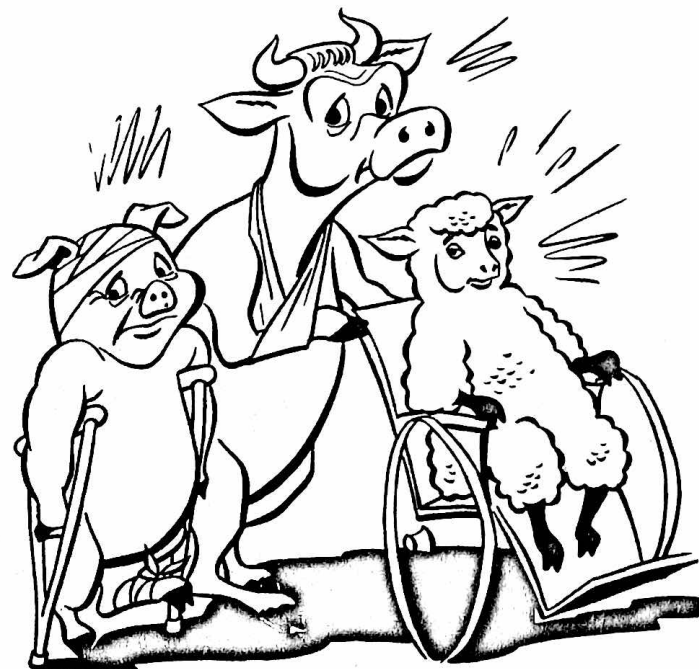
shocking about such mass killings was the way they openly and publicly displayed the complete lack of worth these animals are deemed to have. No longer having any market value, they were viewed not only as killable, but as discardable.

Industrial animal farms are widely acknowledged to be exceptional incubators for increasingly dangerous diseases like avian flu that can be infectious across species (including humans).<sup>28</sup> When thousands or even millions of immune-compromised animals are forced to live in tight and filthy quarters, viruses and bacteria spread like wildfire and have ample opportunity to adapt, especially with the widespread use of antibiotics in animal feed, which leads to increasingly resistant and virulent strains. Within these conditions any sort of contagious illness or sign of illness becomes a possible disaster with huge implications for profits.

As this discussion shows, any sympathy directed toward farmed animals is secondary to a concern for human needs—and these needs prove to be largely financial. The advice given to animal farmers to protect their animals from disease and disability is nearly always motivated by profit, and these profits and losses can be huge. In Iowa alone the avian flu cost \$1.2 billion.<sup>29</sup> We can again find parallels to human situations, for example in public health framings of disability in which disabilities are spoken of in terms of their cost to industry or society. In one instructional video I found on what to do with animals born with disabilities such as congenital blindness, “hermaphroditism,” or arthrogryposis (my own disability), there is no mincing of words: the advice is to “destroy” them before they contaminate your gene pool and damage your profits.

Profit has also been a leading reason given for why farmers shouldn’t abuse their farmed animals. No one wants to eat damaged or bruised meat, as evidenced by the fact that egg-laying hens are used largely in dog food or canned products and dairy cows for cheap hamburger meat, where their unsightly flesh won’t be visible. In a bizarre undated pamphlet by Swift & Co.,<sup>30</sup> this is made abundantly clear. The pamphlet, likely from the 1940s or 1950s, is really better described as a comic, and is filled with anthropomorphized, Warner Brothers-inspired drawings of smiling animals getting beaten by slaughterhouse employees—slapped, thrown,

## **ONE Bruise Is ONE Too Many...** **IT COSTS YOU MONEY!**



**So...It's Good Business to Remember...**

**When Handling Livestock...**

***"Easy Does it"***

Figure 1: The back cover of an undated pamphlet by Swift & Co., a meat processing plant, likely from the 1940s or 1950s. Its purpose was to warn employees to not use excessive force when handling the animals, because “crippling” and “bruising” cost the industry money. The pamphlet is filled with anthropomorphized, Warner Brothers-inspired drawings of animals getting beaten by slaughterhouse employees. Image Courtesy: Ethan Persoff, <http://www.ep.tc>.

prodded, and whipped. The first page reads, "Directly or indirectly, every pound of meat lost because of bruises and crippling costs you money."<sup>31</sup> The most fascinating page is the back cover (figure 1). A cartoon pig stands on two legs with a pair of crutches and his head wrapped up as if he has a head wound. Next to him stands a cow with a sling around her front leg (which resembles an arm, as she is also standing on two legs). With her uninjured hoof the cow pushes an old-fashioned wheelchair in which sits a young lamb. All three of them stare out at the viewer. No longer smiling, they look distraught and exhausted—but it's hard to imagine it's over the loss of profits.

Nowhere is farmers' focus on profit more clear than in the extensive debate over what to do with "downed animals." Downed (or "nonambulatory") animals are animals who are unable to walk, occasionally due to a serious illness but more often as a result of exhaustion, dehydration, weak and fragile bones, broken bones, complications after giving birth, or simply falling. Because there is a chance downed animals may be seriously ill, posing a risk to humans who consume them, controversy has emerged in recent years over the question of whether or not these animals can be sent to slaughter.

It is in the immediate financial interest of the meat industry to slaughter all animals they raise for food, so extreme and violent measures are often taken to get downed animals to stand up. Horrific videos by various animal advocacy groups including HSUS<sup>32</sup> and Mercy for Animals<sup>33</sup> have shown animals being dragged by a single limb or kicked and beaten in an attempt to make them stand and walk to slaughter. When an animal can't or won't walk, abusive measures are taken to discard of them. For example, another video shows "crippled" pigs being hung to death by chains. Other animals are picked up alive by human beings or by equipment such as bulldozers and thrown in dumpsters, where they are left to die in "dead piles." Often all these animals would need to recover is patience and water. *Vegan Outreach* reports that "the number of downer cattle on U.S. farms or feedlots or sent to slaughter facilities is difficult to ascertain, but estimates approach 500,000 animals per year."<sup>34</sup> Most of these are dairy cows, many of whom have just given birth.

Although the media does often mention the cruelty inflicted on these animals, it is the potential health risks posed to human beings that has driven interest in this issue. In 2009 President Barack Obama banned the slaughter of downed cattle in a large part because there is evidence that downed cows are more likely to carry mad cow disease.<sup>35</sup> Rather than be slaughtered, sick and disabled downed cattle are now supposed to be "humanely" euthanized, with euthanasia defined as a "single blow of a penetrating captive bolt or gunshot" or a "chemical means that immediately renders the animal unconscious with complete unconsciousness remaining until death."<sup>36</sup> But the Animal Welfare Institute reports that there are loopholes to these requirements: "Young calves 'unable to rise from a recumbent position and walk because they are tired or cold' may be held for slaughter. Because slaughter of these animals is permitted, slaughter plants have an incentive to attempt to get downed calves to rise, sometimes employing inhumane methods like kicking and the use of electrical prods." Currently there are no regulations for the treatment of nonambulatory pigs and sheep, or any animals during transport or at market. The institute notes that the federal ban on the slaughter of nonambulatory adult cattle "was enacted for reasons of food safety, not animal welfare."<sup>37</sup>

The public expresses some pity for these animals, but only at a distance and only if it is clear they will not mix with "normal" and "healthy" cows (who are actually neither healthy nor normal, thanks to the ways the animals are bred and the unhealthy environment wrought by factory farms). In the end they must be euthanized, a mercy killing that, like the shooting of the fox with arthrogryposis, allows human beings to continue to kill animals as we would anyway, upholding beliefs in human superiority over other species while also fulfilling two of the most prominent ableist responses to disability: pitying it and attempting to destroy it.

Disabled and ill animals bring up historical associations of disability with the fear of contamination. The downed, sick—or even potentially sick—animal becomes the symbol of what is unhealthy, dirty, and dangerous about industrialized animal farming. Ableism operates in such cases to create psychological

and emotional distance from disability through inciting fear of contagion. Separating out downed animals, like the mass killings of animals exposed to a contagious illness, creates the idea that safety, health, and even compassion are a priority on factory farms, despite the obvious reality that the industry itself is clearly the creator and perpetuator of these problems. Disabled, ill, and otherwise nonambulatory animals are hardly the reason that industrial animal agriculture is dangerous and harmful. Countless investigative reports and studies have exposed just how cruel, toxic, and terrible these industries are, not just for animals, but for the environment, workers, and human health overall. This is not to say that the viruses born of factory farms are not a serious public health concern—they are—but rather that the slaughter of millions of animals is not the solution—the solution is to shut down these concentrated animal operations.

It seems impossible to consider the disability that farmed animals experience as separate from their environments. The mother pig is made utterly immobile not by physical difference or disease but by the metal bars of her gestation crate. The hen suffers from pain, but whether that pain is due to a broken leg, overcrowding, complete darkness, or the death of her cagemate is impossible to know. The dairy cow is euthanized not because she cannot walk but because she has become a symbol of contamination. Such animals' environments clearly disable them even more than their physical and psychological disabilities do—a fact that supports the social model of disability.

Trying to pinpoint disability and disease in these environments is no less challenging than trying to ascertain what does and does not qualify as disability among human beings. What does it mean to speak of a “healthy” or “normal” chicken, pig, or cow when they all live in environments that are profoundly disabling? Indeed, when they are all bred to be disabled? The Belgian Blue is a breed of beef cattle bred for “double muscling” for more and leaner meat. They are so huge that they have a hard time walking, and the females must have caesarians, as vaginal births are impossible.<sup>38</sup> Even so-called heritage breeds are often bred for characteristics that in human beings would no doubt be labeled disabilities or abnormalities; consider the Tennessee fainting goat,

which “keels over when startled” and which Slow Food USA says “sounds more like a sideshow act than the centerpiece of a barbecue.”<sup>39</sup> The issue of breeding itself raises all sorts of complex questions about normalcy, naturalness, and the boundaries between disability and enhancement. These animals are simultaneously disabled and hyperabled—made disabled by the very enhancements that make them especially profitable to industries and desirable to consumers.

Disabling animals is not incidental to animal industries. It is essential for the work they do and the profit they create. Of the tens of billions of animals that are killed every year for human use, many are manufactured to be disabled, bred to be machine-like producers of meat, milk, and eggs. And we haven't even looked at other animal industries. According to HSUS, the animals who are subjected to lives in fur farms (foxes, minks, chinchillas, and numerous other species) “are inbred for specific colors . . . causing severe abnormalities—deafness, crippling of limbs, deformed sex organs, screw necks, anemia, sterility, and nervous system disorders.”<sup>40</sup> Animals in research labs, circuses, and zoos also experience a variety of conditions and problems that are due largely to captivity, poor care, abuse, or breeding. Circus elephants are prone to severe arthritis because they are forced to stand, often chained, in cramped cages and boxcars with little opportunity to exercise. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) reports that “foot disorders and arthritis are the leading reasons for euthanasia in captive elephants.”<sup>41</sup>

Huge numbers of animals from factory farms and zoos to research labs and circuses show signs of mental illness, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and madness, such as repetitive hair plucking, self-mutilation, biting the bars of their cages, pacing, regurgitation and reingestion (repeatedly vomiting and eating it), and repetitive head bobbing. Autistic writer and primatologist Dawn Prince-Hughes describes seeing her own symptoms of exclusion and marginalization in the animals she watched and studied at the zoo: “I would see this kind of behavior with gorillas in captivity. They had nervous tics similar, if not identical, to mine: hair plucking, picking at scabs, scratching, rocking, chewing on themselves, and other repetitive and

self-stimulating behaviors. One gorilla spun in tight, fast circles. Another bobbed her head up and down."<sup>42</sup> Such behavior is so common in captive animals that there is actually a diagnosis for it, zoochosis—psychosis caused by confinement.<sup>43</sup> In fact animals in zoos are regularly put on antidepressants and other pharmaceuticals. In her book *Animal Madness: How Anxious Dogs, Compulsive Parrots, and Elephants in Recovery Help Us Understand Ourselves*, science historian Laurel Braitman exposes the widespread use of pharmaceuticals to help animals cope with captivity in zoos, aquariums, and research labs. Not surprisingly, zoos try to keep this information secret, with zookeepers often required to sign nondisclosure agreements. After all, as Braitman writes, "finding out that the gorillas, badgers, giraffes, belugas, or wallabies on the other side of the glass are taking Valium, Prozac, or antipsychotics to deal with their lives as display animals is not exactly heart-warming news."<sup>44</sup> What we do know is that the animal pharmaceutical industry in the United States is booming (it brought in nearly \$6 billion in 2010).<sup>45</sup>

All of this raises profound ethical concerns about the ways nonhuman animals are treated—or, more aptly, mistreated—by human beings. It is hard even to begin to consider what disability means in these instances because of how inseparable it is from captivity, abuse, neglect, breeding, and, yes, suffering. What does disability mean for a hen in an environment where her every movement and desire is neglected? What does a physical limitation or difference mean when you are given no opportunity to move in your body, to explore it, because your environment is already limiting everything about you? Perhaps, as with many disabled human beings, these animals' physical or mental impairments are the least of their worries.

Unlike with Mozu or the fox with arthrogryposis, there is no disability empowerment projected here, not in these environments. Because as soon as I imagine these animals embodying their disabilities in ways other than suffering or imagine them fostering new ways of interacting or perceiving, I have imagined them out of the factory farm or research lab. This shows the extent to which the suffering and marginalization of disability is social, built, and structural.

But what happens to these animals when by some stroke of luck they escape or are removed from these environments? I asked Jenny Brown this question. Brown is founder of the Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary, author of *The Lucky Ones: My Passionate Fight for Farm Animals*, and a disabled person herself. The Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary is home to dozens of chickens, cows, pigs, turkeys, ducks, sheep, and goats who have been rescued from neglect, abuse, and abandonment. Like many other rescue homes for farm animals, the sanctuary cares for a variety of animals who limp, scoot, are blind, or are missing limbs, as well as those who need assistive technologies, including the occasional prosthesis. These disabled and often traumatized animals are rescued from large-scale farming operations as well as from small, family-run farms.

Brown explained that the answer to my question really depends on the extent and variety of the disability. Some disabled farmed animals adapt to their differences on their own or are supported by other nonhuman animals with whom they have bonded. Others are "put down," raising difficult questions about the ethics of animal euthanasia. Brown told me about Emmet and Jasper, two male baby goats who came from a goat dairy operation. They both were diagnosed with caprine arthritis encephalitis, which causes painful arthritic joints that can be debilitating. Jasper was eventually euthanized. Brown wrote me, "After pain meds and rounds of acupuncture we finally let him go because of the severity of his pain and physical debilitation." Jasper's brother Emmet has arthritis in one stifle and barely uses that leg, but he's doing well. Emmet has free rein around the sanctuary, because "when we did put these boys in with the goat herd, they would get rammed and taunted by the other, more dominant goats."<sup>46</sup>

Jasper's and Emmet's stories raise questions about accommodation and access. What are our responsibilities to accommodate and support these animals who we have made disabled? What does accommodation and access, or working to dismantle ableism, even mean for different species?

Brown also told me about Boon, a turkey at the Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary who was born with his tongue in his throat instead of in his mouth. Boon has difficulty eating, so the

sanctuary staff feed him a few times a day, away from the other birds. There are many examples, such as this, of animals who need simple accommodations to survive. Perhaps they need to eat their meals away from the group or be put in a living space with less dominant animals (even of another species), or perhaps they need to be fitted for some sort of mobility device.

As shows like “My Bionic Pet” attest, animal prostheses are becoming increasingly common. Prostheses have been made for elephants, dogs, cats, dolphins, cows, goats, turtles, alligators, and a variety of birds. At the Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary there is Albie, a goat with three legs who can be seen running about every day in the sanctuary’s fields, sometimes with a prosthetic leg and sometimes without.<sup>47</sup> Brown, an amputee herself, asked her own prostheticist if he would be willing to make a special prosthesis for the goat, and he obliged. The unique and innovative accommodations that are realized for these animals are all the more intriguing because of how similar they are to various common accommodations made for humans (prostheses, ramps, wheelchairs, and so forth). Yet in an anthropocentric world, accommodating farmed animals takes on a whole other meaning. The Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary is in many ways an accommodation in and of itself, as the vast majority of farmed animals don’t have access to environments in which they can go about their lives in species-typical ways, let alone thrive—regardless of disability. Instead they are forced into environments that limit and harm them. In this way we return to environment, to the ways in which these animals are debilitated by human domination and exploitation.

The disabilities created in these animal industries, disabilities born of speciesism (the belief in human superiority over other animals) and cruelty, have complicated my understanding of disability. I am left with questions about suffering, a topic that many people invested in a political understanding of disability have rightfully tried to move away from. Disability activists and scholars have worked for decades to challenge the equation of disability with suffering. Many of us have argued that much of the suffering around disability stems from ableism, such as the discrimination and marginalization that disabled people face.

While disability advocates have pushed away from narratives of suffering, it is everywhere within animal ethics scholarship. Animal activists have done a huge amount of work simply to prove that animals *can* suffer, and much more work has sought to explain why human beings should care about this fact. Suffering has become an inevitable part of conversations around animal industries, as well as around disability within these industries, and for good reason. But animals are too often presented simply as voiceless beings who suffer. Exploring their lives through a critical disability analysis can help us to ask who these animals are beyond their suffering. It prompts us to consider how the very vulnerability and difference that these animals inhabit may in fact model new ways of knowing and being. Thinking through these issues also pushes disability scholars and activists to address the uncomfortable question of suffering, opening up avenues of investigation that have too often been neglected by the field.

The title of this chapter is “Animal Crips.” To call an animal a cripple is no doubt a human projection, but it is also a way of identifying nonhuman animals as subjects who have been oppressed by ableism. Naming animals as crips is a way of challenging us to question our ideas about how bodies move, think, and feel and what makes a body valuable, exploitable, useful, or disposable. It means questioning our assumptions about what a cow or a chicken is capable of experiencing. And it means stopping to consider that the limping fox you see through the barrel of your rifle may actually be enjoying his animal cripple life. Animal crips challenge us to consider what is valuable about living and what is valuable about the variety of life.

In the end, it is not only disabled animals who could be called crips. All animals—both those we human beings would call disabled and those we would not—are devalued and abused for many of the same basic reasons disabled people are. They are understood as incapable, as lacking in the various abilities and capacities that have long been held to make human lives uniquely valuable and meaningful. They are, in other words, oppressed by ableism. The able body that ableism perpetuates and privileges is always not only able-bodied but human.

## 8

### Walking Like a Monkey

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"HEY! YOU WALK LIKE A MONKEY!" The voice comes from a girl who is sitting with a bunch of kids. They are giggling and pointing at me like a freak on a stage. I continue my short walk from my wheelchair to the bench and sit among some of my friends. I try not to let them know I'm mortified.

I'm in kindergarten at a public school in Athens, Georgia. I have friends, but still I regularly get teased for the way I move, especially the way I walk. Kids tell me that I walk like a monkey. Sometimes it's said as if it were a fact. Sometimes they want to make me mad.

Now it's recess, and I'm on the playground with a friend. My power wheelchair is bright red and moves quickly through the dirt.

"Come over here!" some kids yell at us. My friend and I head toward them.

One of them says, "Look. We made a fort."

"It's a club," declares another.

My friend and I look at it. The club just looks like part of the jungle gym to me, maybe with a few sticks added here and there.

"Cool!" both my friend and I say enthusiastically.

One of the girls who seems to be in charge gestures at my friend to come in. My friend walks into the club excitedly.

I park my wheelchair and begin to take a few steps.

"Oh no—" the girl in charge says. "This club is only for people who can walk. Sorry, Sunny."

I stop. "Why?"

"It's just the rule."

"But I can walk."

She looks at me sadly, as if she has no control over the matter.

"Sunny, you don't walk good enough. It's the rule."

I do my monkey walk back to my wheelchair. My friends are hanging out under the jungle gym.

"That's a stupid rule," I think to myself.

## 9

### Animal Insults

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IN MY LIFE I HAVE BEEN COMPARED to many animals. I have been told I walk like a monkey, eat like a dog, have hands like a lobster, and generally resemble a chicken or penguin. These comparisons have been said both out of mean-spiritedness and playfulness. I remember knowing that my kindergarten classmates meant to hurt my feelings when they told me I walked like a monkey, and of course they did. I wasn't exactly sure why it *should* hurt my feelings, however—after all, monkeys were my favorite animal. I had dozens of monkey toys. My parents recall that my favorite thing as a toddler was to go to our local miniature golf course to see the giant King Kong. But still I knew that when the other children compared me to a monkey, they were not doing it to flatter me. It was an insult. I understood that they were commenting on my inability to stand completely upright when out of my wheelchair—my failure to stand like a normal human being. I understood that being told I was like an animal separated me from other people.

The thing is, they were right. I do resemble a monkey when I walk. Or rather, I resemble an ape, probably a chimpanzee. My standing posture is closest to the second or third figure in *The March of Progress*—certainly not the last. This resemblance is simply true, as is the statement that I eat like a dog when I don't use my hands and utensils. These comparisons have a truth to



them that isn't negative—or, I should say, that doesn't have to be negative.

When I ask members of the disabled community whether they have ever been compared to animals because of their disabilities, I receive a torrent of replies. I am transported to a veritable bestiary of frog legs and penguin waddles, seal limbs and monkey arms. It is clear, however, from the wincing and negative interjections, that these comparisons are for the most part not pleasant to remember. One friend shared that while she was growing up her mother told her she had a camel walk. "This was her label for me walking with my hands and legs on the ground—with my bum in the air like a camel hump. It never bothered me, and I'd say I had camel pride." But then she went on to say, "I didn't like being told by my stepdad that I had arms like a monkey."

Perhaps nowhere are histories of disabled people being compared to and treated like animals more unabashedly on display, more brazenly explicit, than in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American and European sideshows. A populist extension of earlier wonders of the court, sideshows played out the various colonial and scientific dramas of their time. There was Mignon the Penguin Girl, Jo-Jo the Dog-Faced Boy, the What Is It?, the Missing Link, and Krao, the Ape Girl. In the spectacle that was the sideshow, animality was front and center—with the most demeaning of animal comparisons being reserved for people of color and for intellectually disabled people. In the sideshow animality was used to spark the imagination by transgressing common categories and distinctions with theatrics and spectacle, while also legitimizing scientific racism, imperial expansion, colonization, and fear of disability.

The story of Julia Pastrana, billed as "The Ugliest Woman in the World," is one of sideshow history's most harrowing examples of how the melding of pseudoscientific "educational" exhibits with consumable spectacle helped perpetuate the exploitation of people of color and the medicalization of deviant bodies through animalization. An indigenous woman from Mexico, Pastrana was born in 1834, with abundant hair on her face and body. Disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes that Pastrana was exhibited "as 'semi-human' with features having

a 'close resemblance to those of a Bear and Orange Outang.'" She was analyzed by doctors, anthropologists, and scientists who described her body as "hideous," "deficient," "extraordinary," and "hybrid." She was given exhibition names such as "Baboon Woman," "Apewoman," and "Bear Woman." Scientists and showmen alike would speculate over whether she was human or ape or whether she might be of African descent (which is where the racist science of the day imagined that a "missing link" between the two would be found). Her "feminine figure," small waist, delicate feet, "remarkably full breasts," and lovely singing voice were dramatically contrasted to her body hair, beard, and supposedly masculine and apelike facial features. Her gender contributed even further to her objectification, in that she was managed by her husband, Theodore Lent, a showman who married her after she became profitable. Lent treated Pastrana entirely as an object, one he had bought expressly to be put on display.<sup>1</sup>

Pastrana died in 1860 at only twenty-six years of age, several days after giving birth to a baby boy who also died shortly after birth. Insisting that their tour go on, Lent had both Pastrana's and their son's bodies embalmed. Lent toured with them until his death, and the bodies continued to be exhibited for more than one hundred years. As recently as 1972, her body toured with a circus in the United States.<sup>2</sup> She was finally buried in February 2013, 112 years after her death.<sup>3</sup>

As a disabled indigenous woman, Pastrana was marked by identities that had long been subjects of objectification, study, display, and animalization. These histories informed the ways in which Pastrana was animalized in her lifetime and in her death—an animalization that went far beyond a sensational promotional device and rendered her as someone who could be bought, sold, and completely objectified for more than a century.

Pastrana's story reminds me just how much my ability and desire to celebrate my own animal comparisons is a sign of my whiteness and class privilege. People with disabilities have not been animalized equally or in the same way. For some people animal comparisons are not simply insulting—they risk a loss of personhood.

As Licia Carlson describes extensively in her essay "Philosophers

of Intellectual Disability: A Taxonomy” and her book *The Faces of Intellectual Disability*, intellectual disability in particular has been viewed through a paradigm of animality since long before Peter Singer and the argument from marginal cases. Carlson writes, “Foucault has said that madness ‘took its face from the mask of the beast,’ and in many ways the same can be said of intellectual disability. . . . [There] were more than mere theoretical associations: institutional history of intellectual disability points to numerous instances where the treatment of persons with intellectual disabilities was justified on the basis of their animal-like nature.” Carlson notes the historic belief that “retarded” individuals “were insensitive to heat and cold” and so did not need to have their cells heated in the winter: “As late as a few decades ago . . . we find individuals with intellectual disabilities kept in conditions that can only be described as ‘subhuman.’”<sup>4</sup>

Consider the example of New York’s Willowbrook School, a state-funded institution that housed 5,400 intellectually disabled children. The overcrowded, filthy conditions of Willowbrook shocked the nation when footage of children living in dirt and rags went public in 1972. Abuse was rampant and some of the children had even been used as medical test subjects, deliberately injected with hepatitis. Even before the exposé Willowbrook was described by Robert Kennedy as “a snake pit” and “less comfortable and cheerful than the cages in which we put animals in a zoo.” With the passage of important federal civil rights legislation protecting disabled people, the nation has thankfully made headway since the early 1970s.<sup>5</sup> But disturbing stories of people with disabilities kept in dehumanizing conditions still emerge. In 2013 thirty-two intellectually disabled men were found to have been enslaved by an Iowa turkey processing plant for more than thirty years. For three decades these men were forced to live in squalor, at times padlocked into their bug-infested home, and at least one of them even repeatedly being chained to his bed.<sup>6</sup> One can also see troubling legacies of animalization at work in present-day behavior modification therapy for disabled children. In their article “Shocking into Submission: Suppressive Practices and Use of Behavior Modification on Nonhuman Animals, People with Disabilities, and the Environment,” scholars D.L. Adams and Kim

Socha report, “Behavioral modification techniques used to train dogs to stop barking, stay, and roll over are the same used in the modification of behavior in students with disabilities.”<sup>7</sup>

As these histories show, animalization has also been used as a tool to segregate and police disabled people. We can see this in the “ugly laws” legislation that existed from the 1860s to the 1970s across the United States, which made it illegal for “unsightly” or “disgusting” people to be in certain public spaces. These laws were often intended to get rid of beggars, and at times overlapped with laws designed to clean the streets of stray animals. In her book *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*, Susan Schweik, a professor of English and disability studies at UC Berkeley, describes how anxieties about disability, as well as poverty, class, race, gender, nationality, and animality, all intersected in these laws. In some instances, human beggars were compared to stray dogs or other animals, and Schweik suggests that “the threat of unsightly beggars who might spread disease or bite the hand that fed them got phrased at times as a problem of animal control.”<sup>8</sup>

The ways disabled individuals move when we “crawl” or “walk on all fours,” the ways we sound when we “screech” or “howl” or “make strange noises,” the ways we lack control when our bodies relieve themselves at inappropriate times, the way we transgress social etiquette by “eating like dogs,” the way we fail to stand erect on two feet—all of these things have been used to confirm disability’s perception as an “unruly,” “bestly,” and “animal-like” state of being.

Is it possible to reconcile my own identification with animals with the brutal reality of human animalization? Is it possible to reconcile an identification with animals given these histories? Is there a way to attend to the fact that animalization has contributed to unspeakable violence against humans, while also recognizing the violence speciesism inflicts on other species?

Scholar Mel Y. Chen writes that when humans are compared to animals, they are not being compared “to that class of creatures that includes humans but quite the converse, the class against which the (often rational) human with inviolate and full subjectivity is defined.”<sup>9</sup> Animals make powerful insults precisely because we have imagined them as devoid of subjective and emotional

lives that would obligate us to have responsibilities toward them. Animals are a category of beings that in the Western tradition we have decided that we rarely, if ever, have duties toward—we can buy them, sell them, and discard them like objects. To call someone an animal is to render them a being to whom one does not have responsibilities, a being that can be shamelessly objectified.

Animal studies scholar Cary Wolfe writes that “the discourse of speciesism will always be available for use by some humans against other humans as well, to countenance violence against the social other of *whatever* species—or gender, or race, or class.”<sup>10</sup> But as Schweik suggests, “Disability studies does not need to replicate this speciesism or repudiate the ‘animal’ in order to defend the dignity and humanity of people treated like dogs.”<sup>11</sup>

Returning to the sideshow we can see the entangled nature of human animalization and speciesism. The sideshow and the modern zoo both emerged in the nineteenth century, a century that saw a proliferation of various spectacular means of display for humans and animals—zoos and sideshows, but also traveling menageries, circuses, museums, world fairs, amusement parks, and ethnographic exhibitions or human zoos. The world’s most famous showman, P.T. Barnum, known for his dazzling ability to make entertainment and profit off of human and animal “oddities,” was an early target of criticism by animal advocates who saw his disregard for animals as an egregious example of the ways carnivals and zoos hid their cruelty behind a facade of family fun. In 1867 Henry Bergh, founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, began to criticize publicly Barnum’s caged menageries and trained-animal acts, which were often larger and more diverse than the collections of many zoos. Historian Diane Beers writes that Bergh “accused the showman of removing animals from their native environments; caging them in small, damp, unventilated pens; and forcing them to perform humiliating acts to ‘have peanuts and tobacco thrown at them by gaping crowds.’” In his defense Barnum declared that he loved his animals and, in a familiar argument that is still used today, that the animals had better and safer lives in captivity than they would if they were free in the wild.<sup>12</sup>

The exhibition of humans and animals has a shared geneal-

ogy, one embedded in religious, scientific, and colonial practices. From medieval collections of living oddities that represented the strength of the king, to nineteenth-century zoos, sideshows, and world fairs that were meant to display the triumph of Western colonial powers, the display of humans and animals, or so-called “colonial commodities,” has long been economically and culturally entangled. Figures such as Carl Hagenbeck, a nineteenth-century German merchant of wild animals, exemplify the shared history of human and animal exhibitions. Hagenbeck captured animals to sell to zoos and showmen like Barnum. He opened his own circus in 1887 and would help revolutionize the design of zoos to be more “natural.” He also displayed human beings, removing people from their native lands to be put on exhibit. During his lifetime Hagenbeck put on fifty-four ethnographic exhibitions, displaying people from various colonized communities, both as “natural people” and as “savages,” alongside “exotic” animals from the same regions. Many of these people died of smallpox, tuberculosis, or other contagious diseases, or they were unable ever to return home—despite promises—due to cost, or to the colonization and destruction of their home communities.<sup>13</sup>

Between 1866 and 1886 Hagenbeck also exported “around seven hundred leopards, a thousand lions and four hundred tigers, a thousand bears, eight hundred hyenas, three hundred elephants, 70 rhinoceroses . . . three hundred camels, 150 giraffes, six hundred antelopes, tens of thousands of monkeys, thousands of crocodiles, boas and pythons . . . and substantially more than a hundred thousand birds,” write Eric Baratay and Elisabeth Hardouin-Fugier in their history *Zoo: A History of Zoological Gardens in the West*. These figures could be doubled, however, since they don’t take into account those animals who died during the arduous and months-long journey from their homes to Europe; fatalities are estimated at about 50 percent. Nor do these numbers account for the innumerable animals killed during capture—for every live capture many others were killed.<sup>14</sup> In some cases whole species were completely decimated. For the individual animals who survived, life would be limited to tiny cages, staring humans, grueling performance schedules, and drastically shortened life spans.

What about these animals, who were trapped, taken from their

environments, kept in captivity, and trained violently to perform for gawking crowds? What about the animals who still to this day perform with circuses like Barnum & Bailey where rampant violence occurs or who are currently living their lives in zoos with little mental stimulation, performing a human idea of wildness for a perpetual audience? Do they deserve to be treated *like animals*?

It is undeniable that animals have experienced terrible violence at the hands of humans—violence that very often shares a genealogy with the violence humans inflict on one another. What if we saw the terrible acts they have suffered as an example of why they deserve not only our empathy and respect but also our acknowledgment that they are our kin? What if instead of demeaning us, claiming animality could be a way of challenging the violence of animalization and of speciesism—of recognizing that animal liberation is entangled with our own?

Carlson asks whether it is even possible to reassert our animality. She finds power in the idea but also cautions us by asking an important question: “Why is it that certain human faces call forth the face of the beast more readily than others?” She continues, “Can we speak broadly of a ‘reassertion of animality’ without attending to whose animality has or has not been emphasized and exploited? Without considering the fact that for some, it may be their humanity rather than their animality that needs to be (re)asserted?”<sup>15</sup>

Carlson urges us to remember that for many human beings an identification with animals or animality might not be possible or safe, even if it were in some way desirable. Speciesism doesn’t necessarily keep people from wanting to identify as animal; dehumanization does. Perhaps we need to ask how we can assert both our humanity and our animality. How do those of us who have been negatively compared to nonhuman animals assert our value as human beings without either implying human superiority or denying our very own animality?

## 10

### Claiming Animal

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PERCILLA BEJANO CONTROLLED HER OWN LIFE. Like Julia Pastrana some fifty years earlier, Bejano had thick dark hair covering much of her body. Born in Puerto Rico in 1911 as Percilla Roman, she was adopted as a young child by showman Karl Lauther, who by Roman’s own account treated her “like a daughter” despite putting her on exhibition. She was originally billed as “The Little Hairy Girl,” but someone soon suggested the title “Monkey Girl.” The name stuck. Like many sideshow performers, Bejano was paired with a trained animal—a young chimpanzee—to enhance the spectacle of her act. Little is known about the chimp except that her name was Josephine and that she rode a bike and smoked cigarettes.<sup>1</sup>

Although Bejano was animalized, she managed her own work and self-image in a way that complicates a purely exploitative narrative. At age twenty she fell in love with Emmet Bejano, a white performer from Florida who was known as “The Alligator-Skinned Man” because of his thick, scale-like skin. Bejano had also been adopted by a showman and grown up in the sideshow. The two eloped. In what I consider one of the most romantic stories of the century, the couple remained together until their deaths more than fifty years later. They went on to exhibit themselves as “The World’s Strangest Married Couple,” working together through the early 1980s as they led shows across the country, including one that they owned and ran. In a 2002 interview, after

the couple had retired, Percilla joked that she might “shave and dye her hair blonde and have a new look.” Emmet replied, “You do, and I’m gonna walk out on ya. I love you just the way you are.”<sup>2</sup> Emmet died in 1995, and Percilla passed away six years later.

I do not know if the Bejanos embraced or were offended by their animal names, but they controlled their labor and were adamant that they enjoyed the carnival life. In later interviews Percilla Bejano said that she loved what she did and that if she “wasn’t so old” she would still be out on the road.

The Bejanos were not an isolated case. Many individuals proudly declared that they enjoyed appearing in sideshows or were grateful for the employment they offered. In 1984 a black disabled man named Otis Jordan was scheduled to make an appearance at the New York State Fair. Like me, Jordan had arthrogryposis and would use his mouth instead of his hands for many daily activities. Due to his small, curved arms and legs, Jordan referred to himself as the “Frog Man” or “Frog Boy” and had been supporting himself by performing in sideshows since the early 1960s. He had managed to get an education in his youth with the support of his family and his two goats, who pulled him in a cart he had designed to meet his mobility needs. But Jordan was unable to find work after graduating. In 1963 he approached a showman at a local fair for a job, and he soon began performing acts where he would roll and light cigarettes with his mouth.<sup>3</sup> Like the Bejanos, Jordan was an active agent in his exhibition, often introducing himself at the beginning of his act instead of having someone else tell his story.

Nearly twenty years later, controversy broke out over Jordan’s act when a disabled woman was offended by his performance and went to court to have the sideshow banned. The woman was a disability rights activist and saw Jordan’s performance as antithetical to the progress that was being made in the struggle for equality. Jordan fought back and won, passionately arguing for his right to work. As Jordan put it, “I can’t understand it. How can she say I’m being taken advantage of? Hell, what does she want for me—to be on welfare?”<sup>4</sup>

In his last few years performing at the Coney Island sideshow,

Jordan was redubbed “The Human Cigarette Factory.” I asked sociologist Robert Bogdan, who wrote the book *Freak Show* and who had interviewed Jordan before he passed away, whether the name change was due to the animal comparison. Bogdan told me, “I don’t think Otis was sensitive . . . to the link to the animal. Whatever drew a crowd was fine with him.”<sup>5</sup>

Although oppression and coercion certainly take many forms—one of which is the lack of alternative employment opportunities for disabled people—it is too simplistic to assume that all freaks were (or are) exploited. Might it also be problematic to assume that all animal comparisons were or are demeaning? Might some performers have reveled in their animal names? Might some freaks have embraced their animal comparisons?

Consider contemporary sideshow performer Mat Fraser. A charming and provocative white man from Britain, Fraser was a thalidomide baby—he has, as he describes them, “flippers” instead of arms. He is a musician, an actor, a performance artist, and a burlesque performer. He is also the self-proclaimed “Sealboy.” Disability scholar and artist Petra Kupperts writes that “in the creation of ‘Sealboy,’ Fraser was searching for his historic role model, his roots, his heritage.” By doing so he was “designating the disability experience not as an individual or singular fate, but as a cultural minority experience.” By naming himself Sealboy, Fraser claims “freak” and the disability history that goes along with it, including the animalization.<sup>6</sup>

This is not to say that these performers were specifically identifying as or claiming animal—their identification had more to do with claiming a freak heritage (of which animalization played a role) than with animals themselves. Nonetheless they each reasigned meaning to animal insults, evoking wonder and community through their self-assigned animal names.

The Bejanos, Jordan, Fraser, and Pastrana also each experienced animalization in different ways and to vastly varying ends, and these differences often dovetailed with differences in race and ethnicity. As disability studies scholar Rachel Adams reminds us in her book *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination*, “In some cases, to live as a freak means to be accepted into a community unified on the basis of marginality. To be another

and use their bodies in beautifully strange and unique ways. I think of my roots, my heritage, and the crip community I call home. *And* I think of animals—pigs who root with their noses, birds who build nests with their beaks, and Bailey, my dog, who like so many other animals likes to make his bed. Bailey enjoys nesting, and since he doesn't have hands, he uses his mouth to create the perfect sleeping pile. He grabs the edge of his blanket in his teeth and pulls it this way and that. Sometimes he'll paw at it, but for the most accurate positioning he uses his mouth. Watching him do this, I feel a visceral understanding of his movements. It is not that I think I know what it feels like to be him, but rather that I recognize we share some similar gestures and perhaps also, despite our sensorial species differences, similar sensations—of taste, of sight, of smell. We are both animals.

## Part Four

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### All Natural