**A transcript of content from *(Critical) Blindness Studies : Current Debates and Future Directions***

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**Roundtable #3**

**Blindness and Being: Geography, Phenomenology, and Ecology**

Chair: Vanessa Warne

Moderator: Marion Chottin

Speakers: David Anderson (York University, Canada)

Devon Healey (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education; University of Toronto, Canada)

Dylan Sroussi (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, France)

**Marion Chottin** 00:00

Welcome to those of you who are joining us for the first time. I am, presenting it, to present myself and describe myself. I am Marion. I will be leading this third roundtable discussion. I am French nationality. I'm speaking from Paris. And I am a white woman, sighted woman, of about 40 years with mid length brown hair. I have a helmet, I have earphones, big black earphones and flower pattern blouse. Thank you to Celine who questioned me on this description part that we invited you to give before speaking up each of you, each of us being, insofar as our conference is regarding critical studies, regarding blindness, so ... it's welcome to criticize these little instructions. And I was listening to an exchange earlier on the importance of color or not, the relevance of color, of verbalism, and as an audio, an amateur audio descriptor, I mentioned colors because as Bertrand Verine knows himself, he who I understand does not situate himself in the nostalgia of light, isn't interested in light and colors, but we know that other non seeing people are interested in colour, even if they have never perceived them. Do nonetheless associate them with, like Helen Keller, Helen Keller, associate them with other senses than sight. When I say a white, when I call myself a white woman, I'm not white as in the sense of the color like black people are not black. But this is a way of assigning social designation and meaning, to say where we, from what viewpoint we are coming from. As for my flower blouse, flower patterned blouse, I hope that you can smell the perfume of the flowers, not just see the colors. So, blindness and existence, phenomenology and ecology. Vanessa is going to be leading us and we are going to be talking to David Anderson, Dylan Sroussi, and Devon Healey. So now over to Vanessa.

**Vanessa Warne** 03:02

Thank you very much, Marion. So hello, for those of you who are just joining us, my name is Vanessa Warne, and I will offer a colorful description of myself, only I offer few colors. I am a woman in my late 40s, who is white, I am wearing a boring black shirt. And I have black earrings. My hair is brown and I sit in a room with a bookcase behind me. I join you from Treaty One Territory, homeland of the Metis nation in what is also known as Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. And it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to Roundtable three of the (Critical) Blindness Studies conference. Roundtable three is dedicated to blindness and being, geography, phenomenology and ecology. And I think it would be fair to say that we have had already an extremely engaging and rewarding day. And I'm grateful to you for joining perhaps very late in the evening for you or in midday to participate in this conversation. Today's events give me great excitement for what is to come in the three days that will follow. So we will hear I am pleased to say from three scholars in this session, and I will introduce them one by one and I ask them to offer a brief statement of five minutes before turning to the next speaker. And we will look forward to a question and answer or what I hope will be a conversation that will follow and which will be moderated by Marion. So I will begin with David R. Anderson. David is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change at York University Toronto, Canada. His research argues for the Eco Crip political possibilities of non-normative sense making practices through the close reading of blindness and ecological memoirs. David's research engages Disability Studies, the Environmental Humanities, queer and feminist theories, and critical race and whiteness studies. And some of his recent work has been published in, among other forums, *Feminist Formations* and *Disability Studies Quarterly*. We welcome you, David. Please kindly describe yourself and then you have the floor for five minutes.

**David Anderson** 05:45

Thank you very, very much. Vanessa. And thank you, to you, Hannah and everyone else involved for making the conference happen. I'm really happy to be here. You can hear me okay?

**Vanessa Warne** 05:58

We hear you well, thank you, David.

**David Anderson** 06:00

Okay, great. So yes, my name is David. I'm a PhD candidate at York University in Toronto, Canada; Canada, otherwise known as Turtle Island, which is an in Toronto specifically as the traditional territory of the Huron Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississauga of the Credit. I am about six feet tall. I am burly. I'm a sis white man, 41, visually impaired, I have like brown hair, a trimmed beard and mustache, and blue eyes and I'm wearing a tank top and shorts because it's hot in Toronto. I know we're not supposed to start with apologies, is generally not a good form. But I will submit this to the website, my remarks, because I haven't gotten to that yet. And I apologize to everyone. And just to say that Maclear and Lanham are no longer part of this talk; they just didn't fit into the chapter. So my dissertation examines blindness through the close reading of memoirs on non-dominant sensoriums, and moments of ecological relationality. My work incorporates blind, crip, feminist, queer, ecological and Black Studies perspectives. And I employ an analytic of correspondence to think about how we use analogy, generosity, and a sense of responsiveness in our attempts to communicate with one another, not only between humans but also between humans and nature. I track correspondences in non-dominant sensoriums because they offer us different modes of knowledge making, of valuing life and experience, of relationality and hopefully a more just politics. Today, I'll just focus on one chapter, which for now is called Rearranging the Senses, in which I analyze the links between nature and blindness and as two broad questions. First of all, what can blindness as teacher, to quote Rod Michalko- What can blindness as teacher help us understand about our ecological politics and our relationships to nature, specifically ecological intimacy, loss, mastery, and mutual vulnerability? In other words, what is the blind ecology and how do we embrace it? And two- what can blindness as student learn from nature about non dominant sensoriums’ alternate forms of knowledge making and of kinship? In other words, what is an ecological blindness and how can we avoid it? These questions give me space to think about writing for, that is the way in which animals, for instance, do not write books, however, nature still manages to write itself in, on and through our lives. For instance, the year without a summer of 1816, in which Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* is a good example. The eruption of Mount Tambora, and the eventual drop in global temperatures during the following summer set the stage for the ghostwriting competition, which it must be said Shelley handily won. Thus nature and our vulnerability to it places its hand in all we write and indeed all we do, and yet we still find ourselves writing for those parts of nature, animals, plants and other more and more vulnerable ecologies that are running out of time for us to sense their precarity. In this chapter, I respond to and build from Rod Michalko's work *The Two in One: Walking with Smokie, Walking with Blindness*. And to egregiously oversimplify, Michalko argues two important things: that nature doesn't care about how we think about blindness and sight or about how we think of nature and society. And that, two, we must be critical of our common sense understandings of blindness in nature. I follow these arguments because they invite us to sense how there are multiple forms of blindness, and that when we pay attention to these different blindnesses, as Michalko says, our connections to animal kinships ... our connection to animal kinships, we begin to better notice how such intimacies can as he says, quote, unquote, rearrange our senses, both and how we can shift our way of using our senses to notice the natural world differently, but also how we can shift our political sensoriums about who counts or not in politics, who has a voice and who gets to speak, and who is speaking for who. So in one way, I think and I walk and I read carefully with Michalko and his guide dog, Smokie, as he relates to us his experience of going bind over and over again; issues of loss, kinship, trust, mastery, and the relationships between blindness and nature are highlighted. I argue that in this book of his we must return -Sorry, sorry- what I want to argue is that the *Two in One* is a book that we really need to return to in this moment of climate, global climate catastrophe, of extinction, and habitat loss. I worry that we have failed to bring his insights to bear on our current health. I also think, fly, and closely read with Helen Macdonald, the author, and her goshawk Mabel, in her memoir, H is for Hawk. Macdonald alerts us to the astounding differences in visual capacities between humans and hawks, and also how living with and during her mental breakdown, as a hawk, she came to better understand what it means to be human, to live in nature with animals, and how to think differently about our relationships to nature, especially through a reconceptualization of what it means to recover, or the recovery memoir genre. In the face of loss of all kinds, of loss of vision, loss of nature, loss of friends, I think we've all experienced many losses during COVID, or noticed loss even more, recovery must become something more radical is my argument, attuned to our ecological blindnesses, so how we all are, can be, blind to nature in the natural world, and also to the many blindnesses, which we have for too long neglected, neglected that might help us to see in a different way or otherwise. I'm very grateful for being here and for everyone's attention, and I look forward to the discussion. Thank you.

**Vanessa Warne** 11:50

We thank you, David. We turn down to Devon Healey. And Devon before I introduce you, I'll just say it's very nice to be in this space, sharing it with you. We met quite a few years ago in Toronto at the Canadian Disability Studies Association Conference, and this is our first opportunity to re-engage so welcome Devon. Devon Healey is an Assistant Professor of Disability Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. All of her work is grounded as a blind woman who is guided by a desire to show how blindness specifically and disability more broadly, can be understood as offering an alternate form of perception, and is thus a valuable and creative way of experiencing and knowing the world. I'm pleased to tell you that she is the author of a recently published book, *Dramatizing Blindness: Disability Studies as Critical Creative Narrative*. And I will also note in 2020, she was awarded a commission to both write and perform in *Rainbow on Mars*, a sensory reclamation of blindness. So welcome again, Devon. Please kindly describe yourself and you have the floor for five minutes.

**Devon Healey** 13:09

Hi, Devon speaking here. Thank you so much, Vanessa, it's a pleasure to be in your company again as well. Please excuse me if a cough or sneeze sneaks its way into my talk. I'm in the midst of recovering from COVID, as I'm sure many of you have experienced, but I do hope that there are some of you out there who have not. Given the hyper visual dominance of Zoom, I'm not going to reproduce that dominance through a visual description of myself today. I'd like to thank Hannah, Vanessa and Marion for organizing this conference, and for inviting me here today. Thanks to David and Dylan, and to all of you for joining us. My work explores the understanding that there is a distinction between blind and blindness. Blind is a life. Blindness is a culmination of the conceptions, understandings and attitudes that exist in our culture regarding what it is to live blind. Living blind then, is to live with blindness as culture. My research in the field of disability studies centers on sensory disabilities, particularly blindness. Conventionally, blindness is understood as simply the opposite of sight, as its lack. In contrast to this understanding, my work focuses on blindness as perception. This requires us first of all, to assume that the world is not always as we see it. This is one of the key features and advantages of blind perception. It allows us to live that assumption. When you are blind, you don't see what others, what sighted others do. Blindness is not only a way of being in the world, it is also a way of perceiving it. But it is not merely perception, merely a different way of seeing the same world. Blind perception then is neither a different way of perceiving the world, nor a new way. It is the act of not always accepting the world as it looks. In its most radical and critical sense, blind perception is an outright rejection of seeing the world only as it appears to sight. When sighted perception is understood as the only legitimate perception, and when what sight perceives is understood as the only thing to be seen, blindness becomes the critical moment for rejecting such ocularcentrism. Ocularcentrism, as blind scholar David Bolt suggests, produces a world that reproduces itself as the only possible one and reproduces sight as the only possible pathway to such a world. Blindness represents a pathway quite distinct from although connected to that of sight, and of a pathway to a world equally as distinct. Now, how to express this perception, this pathway, this world in ways other than visual remains at the heart of my research. I approach disability, including my own blindness, as the dynamic life of performance. As such, Disability Studies allows us to socially locate instances of disability in the theater of everyday life. Social actors, disabled and non disabled actors alike, participate in this theater to create multi hyphen version images of disability. My work aims at unraveling this multi hyphen image character of blindness in particular, and to reveal critical and creative ways of reimagining it; imagining blindness as perception, rather than distortion is one such example. I draw on the work of blind scholar and author, as David Anderson, mentioned Rod Michalko, as well as the work of the late great playwright, playwright and poet, Lynn Manning, and indigenous storyteller Thomas King. I make use of phenomenology together with various critical fields of inquiry, such as Indigenous Studies, Black Studies and Queer Studies, as a way to develop a performative and theatrical sense of disability. My recent book *Dramatizing Blindness: Disability Studies as Critical Creative Narrative*, thank you, Vanessa, for mentioning that, is one such example of how I do this. It's written as a play in five acts, and follows the main character, Aaron's journey into the beauty of blindness. After each act, there's a theoretical intermission that engages critically the drama of blindness in everyday life, as Vanessa also mentioned, I'm currently now in the workshopping stage of the play *Rainbow on Mars*, which is a sensory reclamation of blindness in the theater, both as performer, subject, and audience. And by subject, I mean, the storytelling, the story of the play, all of my writing, teaching and work incorporates theatre and drama studies, narrative inquiry and auto ethnography to and David, this is the shoutout to you, we're using the same quotes and I love it. As Rod Michalko writes, ‘to understand blindness as teacher’ and I think this is quite exciting that today we, we've all been engaging in both blindness as teacher and all of us as students. Thank you so much. I look forward to our discussion.

**Vanessa Warne** 19:36

Thank you very much, Devon. We appreciate that. And now we turn to our third speaker and welcome him. So I am pleased to say it is my great pleasure to welcome Dylan Sroussi. Dylan is a student in Philosophy at the University of Paris One, Panthéon-Sorbonne, and he is now preparing most excitingly for examinations in Philosophy. His Master 2 was co-directed by Jocelyn Benoist and my colleague here Marion Chottin and received the congratulations of the jury for which we congratulate Dylan. His dissertation on blindness is at the crossroads of disability studies and phenomenology. It mobilizes authors such as Pierre Villey, John Hull, and Georgina Kleege, one of our plenaries, on the side of blindness. And then on the side of philosophers, we have for example, Merleau Ponty, Husserl, Michel Henri. We welcome you, Dylan, we would ask you to, we would invite you to please kindly describe yourself if you choose and then you have the floor for five minutes.

**Dylan Sroussi** 20:53

Thank you very much for introducing me. First of all, I would like to say I was very enthusiastic by the presentations that were made, whether that was that of Devon or David’s presentation. I think about Rod Michalko, one of my preferred authors, especially when dealing with blindness as a feature and Devon, you mentioned blindness as being a critical point in time; it's one of my viewpoints. My name is Dylan Sroussi. I'm a white man, a French citizen working at the University, black hair [unclear] subtle nose and I shall present my work pertaining to blindness. As Vanessa said, it is at the crossroads of phenomenology and Disabilities Studies but also dealing with cognitive studies. And in order to present briefly my work, in five minutes, I would like to say that the main issue was the phenology- I had to understand blindness not only as a pre-established social order, which I thought was pretty obvious, but my aim was to understand the life experience of the people, not only through social experiences, but by the private individuals’ experiences. So, my research focused on commensurability ie. the experiences of sight and blindness. I wanted to understand blindness has a positiveness of experience and in the meantime understand how to interact perception with blindness so, we can move out from a schema which would be characteristic of sight, of light, as it was previously explained in the previous session. In other words, I had to move out from the phenomenology of light looking at this commensurability so, how we could determine the experience before we experience the possibility of the experience. So, the first part of my work focused on this *a priori* experience which led me to revisit the history of philosophy and think about Diderot, Molyneaux’s problem, and Locke’s. But also think about the debate undertook by Descartes, looking at the status of the blind people, the cane of the blind people. And my aim was to then look back at the phenomenology, with the transcendental aspect; for those of you who are not used to transcendentality, that is the basis on which you can define a determination of the experience, the possibility of an experience. And that led me to study philosophers such as Derrida and his very nice book *Memories of a Blind Person* and he considers blindness as a perception not as an interception and to understand those modalities, I would like to agree with what was said previously: the multi senses approach is important. So, I used the sense of touch, as being the original sense, that was used by mankind and that study, on the basis of that viewpoint, and then looked at this under the angle of the cognitive studies, so as to understand blindness in a multi-sense approach. I've also looked at a book called *Telling the non-visual aspects of life*. This first part led me to a second part, which allowed me to study blindness, not distinguishing to humanities, with different rhythm and I looked at the Michalko book, which is a book pretty exceptional, telling us about blindness as critical time with regards to phenomenology, how blindness can help reduce phenomenology, that time where vision is completely obstructed, so as to leave the room to another positiveness, which, which allowed me to define blindness not as difference of the sighted people but as its origin leading to the work of [...] and the methodological works, made by him, considering the possibility of invisible sphere. So that's what I did.

**Vanessa Warne** 27:30

Thank you very much, Dylan. And thank you to all of our speakers. I'm just having a technical issue. Translate translation into French versus English. So I think perhaps our translators are offering on the wrong line right now. Maybe it's taken care of? Thank you so much to our translators. And with great gratitude to our translators, I will invite all of us to speak perhaps more slowly than we normally would. I will find that very difficult, we all have so much to say. But especially at the end of this long day, if we may try to slow down that would be very accommodating for all involved, especially at this time in the day, as noted. So thank you all very much. It is my great pleasure to respond to what you have offered in writing and otherwise. And I will just note, for David who offered an apology, we embrace work in progress and no apology is needed. We are here to, to think together. And so please know that that is very welcome. To be part of the evolution of your work is a great excitement for us all. I would like to just say a few words about some connections, and then to address our important guiding questions. But I will just flag that I have a question for all of you regarding methodology, as I feel you've been very generous in discussing methodology. And I see an important connection to memoir, which is a topic we have already engaged in a previous session, today. So I will return to that. But I will just note that we have been hearing from three scholars who offer their thoughts on ways we might map spatially, through phenomenology, or relationally, experiences of blindness. And I think you will probably agree with me as audience members that we can sense their work is connected by a shared interest in the genre and, and the capacity of memoir of its importance to lived experiences of blindness, and also their interest in self- representation and creative or varied routes of self-representation. And also I think very importantly by relationships, relationships between people, between people and non-human animals, and between people and their environments, including their perceived environment. This, of course, includes natural spaces. I am struck that all three of you are referencing the work of Rod Michalko today, which is very exciting. I, I am proud to be Canadian at this moment. Interestingly, a strong presence from Canadian scholarship here, but we also sense the importance of work by John Hull to work that you are sharing with us. I'm grateful for what you shared. But I would like to begin if I might with this question of memoir, whether it is memoir as object of study, in perhaps your case, Dylan, most obviously, Devon, perhaps, memoir as method. And perhaps I might invite us to think about what Selina Mills so generously shared earlier today, regarding the way in which memoir has shaped and perhaps energized her engagement with the history of blindness. This seems to me a theme coming out of our conversation today. David, may I begin with you, because memoir has featured for you as an object of study. And then perhaps we could go in order to Devon and then to Dylan. David?

**David Anderson** 31:48

Thank you very much again, what a generous question. And I apologize to the translators. I so appreciate the work you've done and I apologize for speaking so fast. Yeah, it's a great question. You know, Helen Keller, in *The World I Live In* in the preface says something along the lines of all writing at one point or another is autobiographical. And yet she faces this accusation around, you know, either all we want to hear is about you. And then conversely, because all you can write if you can, right, we're not sure, is about you, you probably don't really have that much to say that we need to know. And I love that book, because of the way that she is making a response to these accusations and, and when I have been approaching them - as an object and kind of also as a method, partially too like, I think, I take her seriously that we're always autobiographically part of the writing, whether or not we're using a genre that distances ourselves from or, you know, appears to distance ourselves from the text. So for sure, it is an object. And for me, it's about a bit of a definition too, not kind of one that I made for myself is that I tried to select texts that may be do track a life or in like, say Helen Macdonald's *H is for Hawk* it is the year when her father dies, the loss and depression that brings on the madness and lunacy she talks about that it brings on or something larger, but for me memoir is always about bringing the world, in bringing the consequence in, bringing the reality of the material world into like to highlight it, in order to show how one, one individual life is connected to many others. And in this chapter I'm working on with the work of Michalko and MacDonald, again, it's because animals do not write. And we talked, the presenters spoke and answered questions in the last couple of sessions about writing, about definitions of blindness. And, for me, it was, you know, the blind, I think, share in a sense of being written for, like animals. And so, you know, animals can't write their memoirs, I guess, is what I'm saying. So, yeah, I think it's a fascinating mode of choosing objects. I also think it's very helpful as a method, you know, you know, Devon's work in terms of performance, right? And, and Dylan's analysis of Hull and looking at, you know, Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, different depictions of painters painting themselves. So I think it's a fascinating one. I, I always worry that you know, certain memoirs aren't always equal to others base they cleave more to autobiography a sort of unending laundry list of their day-to-day minutia, but not really connecting to the outside world. So for me, it was big ... I'm a literary studies scholar, but I'm very concerned about the material consequences say of, you know, the global, global climate crisis, for instance, racialized violence that has caused a spike in instances of blindness in racialized communities. So memoir to me was a good place to go as a balance between literature of all kinds, which I love, poetry, fiction, everything and, you know, the politics of our day to day work. I hope I'm answering that question.

**Vanessa Warne** 35:21

Yes. And thank you, David. And actually, you give us a very nice bridge to Devon, because Devon in the work that you shared, prior to our gathering today, you use poetry, as well as memoir to enrich and again, to make your engagement with blindness and lived experiences both deeply personal and powerfully theorized. Devon, could we turn to you now?

**Devon Healey** 35:53

Hi, Vanessa, thanks so much, Devon speaking here. I'm reminded of the words of Thomas King, where he says in his book, *The Truth About Stories*, and he says, quote, “The Truth About Stories is that that's all we are,” end quote. And I can't shake that quote, no matter how many times I think I've got it down, okay, I figured that out, the truth about stories, it comes back to me, it comes back to me when I think about my life, as a blind woman, and my life in blindness, and the interactions that I have with people, when we think about memoir and experience, and in particular lived experience comes up. I don't experience my blindness alone, we are never alone in our bodies, my blindness comes alive in the midst of others, and interactions with all of you here today, with sighted people and I'm gesturing to a window beside me on the street, as well as blind people on the street. And so what I find intriguing about memoir is that it is a snapshot of the culture within which we, we live and exist. And to, to enter into theorizing blindness, to pause in these moments, these snapshots, these stories of blindness, and to listen to our culture and to think okay, what is happening in this moment? How is my blindness coming alive? How is it being interpreted? How am I living blind and blindness? And so in, in my writing, I draw on experiences, not to suggest any sort of expertise in blindness, because I don't think that being blind provides that sense of expertise. In fact, I really questioned the notion of expert to begin with, but rather as a way to enter or perhaps to raise the curtain on this many stages of everyday life where blindness does make an appearance. And to theorize that and I just I feel when I'm talking about it, the excitement to me when, when we bring in memoir, or performance, blindness comes alive in ways that I did, I don't think I experienced in those moments of interaction. And so that's a bit of a methodological twist, Vanessa, I'm hope I'm answering your question that that I use. And of course, I'm following many blind scholars who have come before me, and I hope to add a little speck of my own blindness and my own sense of theorization to that. So I'm so grateful to have spent the day with all of you and now Dylan and David to hear you both because as King says, The Truth About Stories is that that's all we are, and now together, we're a part of each other's thanks so much, Vanessa.

**Vanessa Warne** 39:21

Thank you very much, Devon and Dylan as we turn to you on this question of memoir. I will go slowly for our translators here- I am thinking about the way in which the work of some contemporary authors memoirists, like Georgina Kleege, who joins us as a plenary at this event, their memoir work is almost like it is a response but a correction, a corrective to some of the work especially of the 18th century French philosophers and their you know, hypothetical, again, I draw on Georgina Kleege here, their hypothetical conceptions of blindness. So Dylan, I am very interested and excited about your work for you put into conversation the memoirist and the philosopher, when of course those things as we are being reminded, also overlap and do not have a clear barrier between them. Dylan, would you like to speak to this subject of your object of study, the memoir.

**Dylan Sroussi** 40:29

Yes, of course. For memoir, Georgina Kleege’s work, I will try to speak more slowly to try to understand- the critics made the correction she brought with regards by what was said, by the philosophers of the 17th century; she was angry against Descartes, who hypothesized the blind person, who would use just a cane, another sighted person. So her memoir of the blind person: the way she is staging herself in an autobiography is very interesting, because she is considering the way she is watching movies with the very little sight she still has. So she is considering the different pictures she has had in her life, and she is trying to build her own identity as a blind person. Then the issue of memoir, memory, is related to a past, the past of a person who was sometime a sighted person, sometimes a blind person, but in Georgina Kleege’s work, this issue exists but this issue is even more important in the autobiography of John Hull. This is a time where John Hull is talking a lot about his visual past - so we can distinguish early blindness or a late blindness such as that of John Hull, who is haunted by his visual past. The issue of the memoir here is very ambiguous, leading to more problems because one may wonder why this memoir is still a reality for John Hull. This visual memory is still haunting him and then his dialectic is much more complex, there’s a phenomenological point of view, there's still something in his memoir, which does not allow him to be positive as regards his blindness. And I think the issue of memoir is more than essential, it is instrumental. We can see that because memoir is not only that of our past, but it was also a memoir of our body, such as John Health's experiences on a daily basis, the memory of his body. That helps him to belong. That is the way that I will approach the subject.

**Vanessa Warne** 43:50

Thank you very much. This is very useful. I have a responsibility now to be sure to engage with some of our subjects, our guiding questions very directly. And if I might, I would like to begin with the question of Disability Studies. We have an interesting situation. Perhaps I can start with you, Devon. As you now have your academic home in Disability Atudies. And for you blindness studies seems to be part of a larger kind of umbrella, could we say, idea of disability studies. But one of the challenges we seem to encounter is the diversity of experiences of disability. And one of the questions many people will raise is what does the lived experience of blindness perhaps have to do with, say, a lived experience of intellectual difference? Or a lived experience of mobility limitation? And so Devon, may I start with you, and I should say, think of this perhaps as a lightning round, as fast, but to think about a comment from you first Devon on disability studies and/or blindness studies. Thank you.

**Devon Healey** 45:09

Hi, thanks, Vanessa. I think what is dynamic about Disability Studies is that it does not thing-ify disability as an object to be studied, but rather turns that gaze that typically, medicine has taken up to, to focus and question and solve and define the quote problem of disability- We turn that gaze to normalcy, and question how it is, this sense of normal is constructed. And I think that in particular, and I love that Vanessa, the umbrella term of blind studies, what all of us can offer, is that that sense of perception of perceiving the, the ways in which we come together, the ways in which we know our perceptions can offer a different sense of what it means to be human, and of how it is we come together. That that's my quick lightning round answer.

**Vanessa Warne** 46:20

Thank you. We appreciate that, Devon. David, I will turn to you next, if I could, because you work at the intersections also, of course, of, of animal studies, and of ecology studies. And so perhaps you have a perspective you would like to share about that, that idea of how blindness studies may relate to, differ from, belong as part of disability studies. So to you, David?

**David Anderson** 46:53

Yeah, I mean, disability studies from me, is something that just needs to be additive. I feel like a lot of what we find in disabilities is the is the outcome or consequence, not all the time, but of other, you know, colonial capitalist neoliberal issues that then can create situations where either we become disabled or debilitated or we encounter disability in terms of the physical environment, the social environment. So that's why I exactly I use eco crip theory, which is sort of a new burgeoning area of study, eco-crip theory. But I'm also really indebted to Black Disability Studies. And of course, you know, as I mentioned earlier, crip, queer and feminist disability studies. To me, Disability Studies, and then that's the project of blindness studies, if it's not really fundamentally engaged with these areas, it really loses out. In my .. when I teach with students, I often say, you know, blindness studies, they're like, is that a thing? Is it and I always make it an acronym? B S, which, as we know, pardon my language, but you know, could be bullshit, right? So how to make it not bullshit to me is about, you know, things that Devon mentioned, Dylan's attention to memoir and what it is capable of or not and how, how we read. To me, disability studies and blind studies need to be in conversation with these often oppressive forces, but also the work that's being done both academically, activist, in an activist way, and artistically to combat resist and reimagine them. That I think would be my, my response to that just briefly.

**Vanessa Warne** 48:44

Thank you very much, David. I think I'm not sure how this will translate into French but you remind us of the dangers of the silo, yes? And not only the silo between perhaps disciplines, but also the silo between creative work and academic work and also importantly and pressingly, I hope we will get to this in the discussion, social justice work, which is, of course, important, at the core of disability studies, but also of the work you have been doing in terms of ecological work. Dylan, can we turn to you now do you feel at home in disability studies? Is blindness studies something you seek to define? Over to you, Dylan.

**Dylan Sroussi** 49:34

Disability studies, above all, have been used in my work as a springboard and social analysis of blindness and its social construction. It's at that level that I use disability studies. Also in the manner in which disability studies have shown the fact that experience cannot be reduced to an overall group of sensations but that blindness is a witness and an actor. And that's what I'm trying to develop in terms of the way that the social field itself is an experience that is really phenomenologically experienced. And it is at the crossroads of those two fields of study that I was able to bring together the link between lived experience, as it is lived by blind people on a daily basis, and at the same time, society that is mostly not adapted to non-seeing people. So that's how I've been using Disability Studies, despite some of the voices that we hear. And I've been talking with Marion yesterday. The neo materialistic approaches of Snyder and Mitchell leaves me a little bit uncertain, less, less convinced than others as to the question of differences.

**Vanessa Warne** 51:19

And Dylan references there Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell's work, perhaps most famously synthesized in *Narrative Prosthesis*. You have all been so succinct and generous. I will turn to Marion, my colleague, in just two minutes, Marion. If our public, our audience, could begin to raise hands to share questions or comments, that would be great. But even now, a quicker lightning round, perhaps: what may I ask is the one thing you would like to see included in a definition or a mapping out of blindness studies? This is a tough question. And we have days to come to resolve it or to develop it. But is there one pressing thing that strikes you on this evening, on this afternoon that you would like to see incorporated in the definition of this field? Should that be the direction we go in as a community? I will to shake things up, if it's okay, I will I will reverse order, and Dylan, take a moment to think before we move on to the discussion period. But Dylan, is there something you think is for you urgent for inclusion in this definition?

**Dylan Sroussi** 52:42

I will confess I have never thought deeply about that. But you're talking about definition of blindness studies, in general, what they should involve in terms of discussion and dialogue. The discussion? A main one would be to know to what extent it must continue using sighted people's categories. One of the, one of the problems, obvious problems: to what extent can we continue to use a sighted vocabulary to continue studying this field? Should we build blindness studies around the duality of sighted and non-sighted? Or should we go the opposite direction? And talk about the positivity of blindness in all its field of experiences? It's a very difficult dialogue, a very difficult issue and maybe impossible to solve. But we need to talk about the risk. And that's something I'm going to be... I'm interested in my research.

**Vanessa Warne** 53:59

Thank you very much, Dylan, and that has wonderful connections to our first roundtable today, I think, and also, of course, to our wonderful plenary at first thing this morning from Corine. May I go to you now, David?

**David Anderson** 54:16

Thank you. So this is the question about the definitions that we use?

**Vanessa Warne** 54:21

This is a question, perhaps it is a difficult one, but I'm trying to ask what you would like to have included should blindness studies be defined as a field? What would you want? What is your thing you could not be without?

**David Anderson** 54:35

I see. Thank you. I love that. I mean, I really am interested. Just to riff on Dylan to add to that, the sense of the site of vocabulary. I'd be interested to think about Yeah, what could blindness studies and definitions of blindness do to complicate that. I guess for me, I'm thinking and thinking today a lot about what Bertrand mentioned about polysensuality. For me, it's like Kleege writes in *Sight Unseen* about how, you know, it's not that the blind have heightened senses, it's just that we use them differently. And, you know, the world is full of things to sense and feel and perceive, it's just about whether or not we pay attention to them. You know, since moving to Toronto, I've often found that as an also, like, I'm 41 years old, I'm a man, and my hearing is starting to go, and the less I can hear, you know, I, the blinder I feel, the more blind, that I am changing my relationship to that. And so for me, I think any blindness studies that we use to me has to be both intersectional in terms of what are the larger formations, especially oppressive formations that are shaping all of us all the time, but also the beauty and the opportunity and the risk, as Dylan also said, I like that word a lot, of you know the multi poly sensuousness available to us, the way that we are all sensing each other, we might not ever be able to share those perfectly. My sense of correspondence that I borrow from Helen Keller is really about, there's always a limit, you know, that's why she says there are not deaf blind terms, there are not deaf blind metaphors in the general parlance, the general vocabulary for us to use. And that's why she says I'm turning to sight metaphors to, so that you the sighted world can understand. But I think there's a great opportunity, as risky as it might be, to like really insist on that poly sensuousness. And that we all come to blindness differently, that it has to be these blindnesses, blindnesses as Michalko talks about. So I hope that answers the question. It's a good one. It's a tough one.

**Vanessa Warne** 57:02

It is. Thank you, David, and thank you for your generosity in answering it. And I hope we will return to this question of metaphor, which matters so much to conversations about blindness in Western culture in the contemporary moment, as it has for several centuries. Devon, to you, perhaps for a thought before we hand over to Marion for the discussion period.

**Devon Healey** 57:23

Thanks, Devon speaking here, Vanessa, I think my, my hope, for the definition of blindness studies is that we never reach one. I think that engaging with the mystery and the beauty of blindness and not pinning that down is, is quite honestly, I think, the power of blind perception. I know for myself that as soon as I think that I have blindness figured out, that I can do this, quote, blind thing, it changes from day to day. And so I'm constantly being introduced to blindness, to myself as blind. And so my blindness is always a work in progress. And I can never quite pin it down. And I hope that together and all of us, in blind studies, work to resist the pinning down of blind studies, but always to respond and to address the questions that, you know, definitions often, often raise. Thank you for that.

**Vanessa Warne** 58:32

Thank you very much for that; very provocative and important. So I will just in case, I do not have a chance: thank you all for this opportunity to be in conversation with you. I've enjoyed it very much. And now over to you Marion.

**Marion Chottin** 58:50

Thank you, Vanessa, thank you to all of the participants for what you've had to say. Philosophical, very convergent. Before I hand over to our friend Flavio, who puts his hand up, I want to point out that what is obvious from what you've said is that the multiplicity of not just of sensualities, but also the multiplicities themselves, of blindness itself. So far from the construction of its definition as a deficiency of sight that Corine Doria showed us this morning, I think you shared, all three of you, an apprehension in the sense of a concept, a non-monolithic concept, mobile and fluctuating concept of blindness. You've said it Devon and Dylan too all three of you I believe, approach of blindness as a mode of perception, alternative mode of perception and you have a joint of an intersection between all three of you. We talked of Michalko and John Hill. And those think of those pages that Dylan commented on in his work of the rain falling, that is represented, representative of what you've said in so far as the people who see, see the rain fall on the world whereas John Hull shows us how the rain falling makes the world as far as he's concerned. And I think it's an example of this same experience of rhythm. You both use the term something, that is philosophically based, that is experiential, as well as being present in the texts, the literature that we have seen earlier today. Thank you so much for all to all three of you. I'm handing over now to Flavio. And then there will be a question from Marion Ink and David Johnson. Let's listen to Flavio now. If you aren't ready, maybe Marion, you could you ask your question and we'll come back to Flavio later in a second time, later on.

**Audience Member**

It's a question to all three of you. But probably more to Dylan. I will talk about it more during the roundtable on Tuesday. I want to show how perception goes beyond understanding of sensoriality. As long as we stay with the sensory perception of reality there will always be ocularcentrism.

**Translator**

The sound is very bad I'm very sorry; I have terrible difficulty understanding the words.

**Audience Member**

This dimension, is this dimension something that you have already studied in terms of perception? Furthermore, it has been said in the works in philosophy and phenomenology, except that I feel that even phenomenologist who are persuaded of a practical and sensitive approach to perception in concrete terms, we are coming back to an extremely sensorially- centered on on on senses as conceiving perception as a phenomenon of the senses.

**Marion Chottin** 1:03:41

Dylan, can you answer Marion? Concerning this concept of perception based on the sense reality on senses and the vision?

**Dylan Sroussi** 1:03:46

I will answer in various pieces. I am in agreement with the issue. I do not know the practical sensitive concept, but that perception is a practice that is an education, a construct of life, that seems obvious in phenomenology; it's already been defended by contemporary writers. But I do feel, on the other hand that, what when you criticize phenomenologists […]

[The English translation feed was temporarily lost for this portion of the recording of this session].

**Devon Healey** 1:10:00

Hi, Devon speaking here; Flavio, thank you for your question. You're introducing me as well to a new field of study. So I've, I've taken note of a few of your comments. And I will look into them. So forgive me if this is not a full answer. But I think that it does tie into a little bit with Marion’s question earlier and Dylan, your answer in terms of phenomenology, and I'm thinking here of the senses in that: eyes don't see, people do. And so we interpret a world and make sense of it as a) there to be seen, and b) to be in and of that production of the world. And so, when you mention black holes, are these hyper objects Flavio- please correct me if I'm not getting that correct. But when you mentioned, objects, such as hyper, hyper objects, such as black holes, I'm sure they're quote “there”. But we interpret their there-ness as a black hole. And we endow that black hole with meaning. And we research that and we make sense of that together. So in terms of your question, can we do this with blindness? I think we're doing it now. I think that by merely asking these questions, we are engaging in that process of thinking how it is we come to say what we say and do what we do in relation to blindness, in relation to the world and, to quote Hull, I think he talks, about Jonathan Hull. For those of you out there who are more familiar with his work, jump in if I got this wrong, tell me but I believe he speaks of blindness as world hyphen building. And so I think we're engaging with that right now. And, and so, yes, I think that we can interact and engage and think of the senses as, as not static, but as something that we endow with meaning. We create that meaning, we enact that meaning we perform that meaning. And I do think Dylan I so enjoyed your answer earlier. So I'm really thinking alongside you right now. And if you've got something that you want to add Dylan or David not to put either of you on the spot, but please do jump in but, but I do think we endow that meaning and we're engaging in that process right now. Thank you so much, Flavio.

1:12:54

[The English translation feed was temporarily lost for this portion of the recording of this session].

**David Anderson** 1:19:33

Yes, I mean, sorry to interrupt there for a moment. Thank you for the very generous question. I was thinking when Flavio asked about the hyper objects, all I could think of was the scholar von Uexküll who talks about this idea that say you can have a meadow and there are bees in the meadow, there are flowers in the meadow, there are deer, people, trees, a breeze, all kinds of things. To me, you don't need a black hole to have what we might call, what Morton might call, hyper objects, because everything in that meadow experiences the meadow differently. And we can't really separate our senses from perception or our bodies. They're all one. Dylan was saying some really great things about how perception is practiced in education. And, and I agree with that. And so in my work with say, Helen Macdonald's *H is for Hawk*, what I really appreciate about her engagement- she's a very experienced falconer, she takes on a very difficult hawk to train, that is a goshawk, during a very difficult time in her life, and one of the moments that really jumps off the page is when she talks about how hawks’ eyes... if, for example, if they were as, if we had hawk eyes, as big as hawks’, our eyeballs would be like huge oranges sticking out of our head. They can see into the ultraviolet spectrum, they can see polarized light, so they can actually see hot and cold bands of air; they can detect the magnetic field of the Earth. And they can also see at great distances. In comparison, a human's talking about sight and blindness is kind of a joke. So for me, when blindness is a student to say ecology, it like as you asked to such a great question. This is sort of some of the things I think about-- is that human senses, we were having this conversation about sight and blindness, which I think we, I'm so excited about. I'm so grateful to be here, as many people have said, it's so nice to be with others who take these ideas seriously and really want to wrestle with them in generous ways. I also think if we don't learn to give much more presence, and I think Dylan mentioned something about spirituality or theology along with Hull and I know, Devon's work, like the idea of rhythm, and also I know she has a character and wonderful pieces, that sort of a, an imagined character, I guess there's something to me important around nature not as a place that we simply go for education, and then leave it behind, but that we, we take it with us and we give back and we form an ethical relationship to, and I think that's something that we can do through our noticing of how different our sensoriums are to other creatures, to one another. And yeah, maybe have more of a sense of spirit. You know, many indigenous scholars, Devon mentioned, Thomas King. I recently taught Eden Robinson’s trickster trilogy. There's, there's this way in which indigenous scholars and writers give equal, if not more weight, to say, the agency, the power, the, the active quality of different elements of making sure-- even stone. And I think that in a Western tradition of blindness because of the Enlightenment, that's not something we do, and I'm not trying at all to read appropriate or just to appropriate period, Indigenous knowledge. But just to point out that there are different ways of sensing in nature. And again, to come back to Michalko. He talks about rather than living with blindness as something we sort of begrudgingly put up with or living with nature and this binary, we set up about mastery and subordination -what if we lived in blindness? And I think Devon articulated that really beautifully today; what if we lived in nature? Not just with it. So I'm not sure if I'm completely answering your question, but to me, and again, with the idea of the recovery memoir, Helen Macdonald goes to nature, she raises a goshawk. She makes mistakes along the way. But she never... once she recovers in the way that she can, she doesn't just abandon nature and walk away. It's something that remains a part of her and she learns better about what are the limits of being human, but that's also what makes living a beautiful thing. And I was going to say one last point, just that, in terms of blindness for me, I think, I also think we need to include sighted folks and sighted writers, I would call it seeing otherwise-- there's a way that even though we may always have to fight with ocularcentrism, I think our earlier question was about this point, if we focus too much on the sensorium, we can't escape it. But there are different ways of using our eyes. There are different ways of as Dylan quoted Hull, that blindness is seeing with one's whole body. We can’t just erase language, but there are different ways we could use it. I hope I have answered your really great question, Marion.

1:25:00

[The English translation feed was temporarily lost for this portion of the recording of this session].

**David Anderson** 1:26:32

May I ask a question to Dylan in Devon?

**Hannah Thompson**

Oh, oh, yeah. So absolutely. I'm going, I'm going to lower my hand because my questions can wait till tomorrow.

**David Anderson**

If we're out of time, it's okay.

**Hannah Thompson**

I think it's okay. David Anderson for you to ask a quick question.

**Vanessa Warne** 1:26:54

This is Vanessa stepping in. Perhaps we have technical difficulties. We, we opened the floor to David Johnson, who has technical difficulties. And then to David Anderson. David Anderson, did you want to briefly ask your question in our remaining minutes?

**David Anderson** 1:27:15

Yeah, if I may. Thank you. And thank you both to Dylan and Devon. Really nice to present and the three Ds. I just I was like, that must be magic. My question is actually about magic. Dylan, I noticed in your written piece, submitted to the website, you mentioned something about a blind seer. Like the, that image of the blind person who can be kind of a prophet, whatever, but I felt like you were doing something reparative with that, and I was so curious to hear more. And similar question to Devon- just you know, is there some, like we get trapped in this thing about being you know, the super crip or having some sort of magical insight, but to be used by the sighted or as burden but is there, is this wrong question to even ask, is there something about you know... that there could be something magic about blindness that is outside of these binaries in terms of just the experience? I'm not trying to be flippant or... I don't know. I'm not trying to anyway, I apologize. That's my question. Just could we reappropriate the blind seer, the performance and the magic of blindness, the things it can do differently? I don't know yeah, that's my question and thank you again both for being on the panel with me.

[The English translation feed was lost for the recording of the concluding portion of this session].