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S. Marek Muller, Z. Zane McNeill

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Toppling the Temple of Grandin

Autistic-Animal Analogies and the Ableist-Speciesist Nexus

S. Marek Muller

Florida Atlantic University

Z. Zane McNeill

Scholar-Activist, West Virginia

Abstract

In this article, we conduct an ideological rhetorical criticism of Temple Grandin's rhetorical texts. Using our lived experiences as actually-autistic scholars, our critique fuses rhetorical theory with critical autism studies and critical animal studies. We specifically assess the analogical necropolitics central to Grandin's portrayals of livestock and autistic people. We conclude that Grandin's complicity in the animal-industrial complex renders her status as an animal advocate questionable and her status as an autistic advocate dangerous. The discursive intersections of speciesism and ableism in Grandin's central analogies regarding autistic and livestock bodies renders both parties as subhuman, disposable, and potentially killable. We conclude with alternative ways of thinking about animality, autism, and the pursuit of multispecies justice.

An Autistic Introduction

We are two autistic people. We are two academics—one a university professor, and one an activist/scholar-at-large. We study discourses surrounding autism as well as the rhetorics of animal science, animal welfare, and animal liberation. Imagine our surprise when, upon revealing these traits to strangers, we are met with this response: “Oh, just like Temple Grandin!” No, we respond. Not *like* Temple Grandin, but *in response to* her. And in our response, we scrutinize and problematize Grandin’s central analogization of autistic humans to nonhuman animals used as livestock. We do so not on the basis that the former group is inherently superior to the latter but rather because Grandin’s deployment of those analogies in the name of advancing “humane” slaughter techniques is inconsistent with the necessary pursuit of intersectional, multispecies liberation.¹

Those unfamiliar with either autistic advocacy or the macabre processes and politics of meat production may be asking: “Who is Temple Grandin?” While she is something of a celebrity figure to the neurodivergent and the animal science-inclined, Grandin is not quite yet a household name. However, critical (and not-so-critical) scholars in animal studies assert the importance of studying the life, work, and rhetoric of Grandin. Rhetoricians Vasile Stanescu and Debs Stanescu argue that “to engage with Grandin’s work is to engage with the single most well-known and well-respected advocate for the entire factory farm system.”² We do not disagree with this assertion.

Thus, we are compelled to delve into Grandin’s life and discourse.

Grandin was diagnosed with autism at the age of two—a diagnostic rarity given that autism diagnoses are most typically ascribed to cisgendered white men.³ She did not speak until she was three-and-a-half, which she found frustrating and disabling.⁴ As a result, she describes her childhood self as temperamental and overwhelmed.⁵ Despite being dubbed as a “savant,” her parents argued over whether or not she should have been institutionalized.⁶ Since autistic people are prone to sensory overload and predisposed to trauma due to our cognitive differences, Grandin’s teenage years consisted of considerable anxiety and panic attacks.⁷ In spite of her social and academic challenges, however, Grandin graduated with a bachelor’s degree in psychology in 1970, a master’s in animal science in 1975, and a doctorate in animal science in 1989.⁸ She currently works as a Professor of Animal Science at Colorado State University’s agricultural college.

Grandin’s worldwide claim to fame occurred in the 1980s when she developed updated abattoir equipment that would restrain cattle during execution—known colloquially as her “hugging machine” (otherwise called the “hug box” or “squeeze machine”). As a “humane restraint device,”⁹ the equipment would tightly “hug” the cattle during the typical “stunning” procedure at slaughterhouses. The initial

idea came from her childhood. While staying at a relative's farm, she explains watching cattle being "branded." When the cows were put in a "squeeze chute," she claims the animals would temporarily calm down.¹⁰ Grandin herself went inside one of these chutes to stave off her own sensory overload as an autistic person. She found that the chute calmed her because of the pressure it put on her body—an extremely similar approach to how contemporary weighted blankets provide anxiety-relief for autistic people. As a result, at age 18 she developed her first iteration of the "hugging machine," not for cows but for herself. "Using the machine for 15 minutes," she explains, "would reduce my anxiety for up to 45–60 minutes. The relaxing effect was maximized if the machine was used twice a day."¹¹ Soon she developed similar technologies for livestock slaughter. She explains:

If pressure was applied slowly, many animals would remain passive and not resist. Squeezing in a smooth steady motion required less pressure to keep the animal still. This chute was equipped also with a head restraint yoke, which would rise up under the animal's chin after the body was restrained. Some cattle would fight the chin yoke by keeping their heads in a crooked position, which made it impossible to restrain them fully. Sudden bumping often caused the animal to resist. By gently pressing the yoke against them, I found that wild cattle would straighten their necks and place their chin in the curved part of the yoke.

When the animal moved into position, the pressure could be increased, and the head was brought up into the restrained position with very little pressure. None of these animals pulled their head out of the yoke or even tried.¹²

Put simply, using a combination of restraint and deep pressure, Grandin found that livestock animals struggled less when sent to slaughter. As a result, she became a "troubleshoot" for meatpacking plants struggling with "stressed meat."¹³

Grandin's hugging machine, among her other innovations in animal science, have been celebrated by scientists, journalists, animal advocates, and laypersons alike. To date, Grandin has published over sixty peer-reviewed papers on animal behavior and the humane handling of animals used for livestock, particularly cows. In response to Grandin's innovations in animal science, even the infamous animal liberation organization People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) published a story in the *Sacramento Bee* heralding Dr. Grandin as a celebrated figure in animal welfare.¹⁴

Ingrid Newkirk, PETA's president, explained that Grandin's work was "worth fighting for" as an animal protection issue.¹⁵ Grandin was subsequently awarded the 2004 "Proggy Progress" award as a "visionary" and "trailblazer." She has also received endorsements and awards by animal welfare organizations such as *Successful Farming*, *Scientists Center for Animal Welfare*, *Humane Ethics in Action*,

Progressive Farmer Magazine, the *American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*, and the *Humane Society of the United States*. Grandin has even been hailed as a “hero for animals.”¹⁶

In addition to her viral debut as the inventor of the slaughterhouse hugging machine, Grandin has extensively written about how her positionality as an autistic person has impacted her scientific career. Grandin has specifically argued that her neurodiverse image-based thinking system has made it easier for her to understand and empathize with animals.¹⁷ In doing so, she has challenged anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism, particularly the construction of the human itself as “natural and self-evident.”¹⁸ She claims that “animal behavior” was the right field for her specifically because “what I was missing in social understanding I could make up for in understanding animals.”¹⁹

Throughout her autobiographical texts, Grandin illustrates how metaphorically treating herself as a livestock animal allowed her to calm her over-active nervous system. She asserts that being autistic has made it easier for her to empathize with and understand the needs of farm animals—which she has described as having a “cow’s eye view”²⁰ of the world. Grandin is best known for making such arguments in her many autobiographical books in which she explores autism, neurodiversity, animality, and animal ethics. In one book, *Animals in Translation*, she rejoiced: “Half the cattle in the United States and Canada are handled in the humane slaughter systems I’ve designed. I owe a lot of this to the fact that my brain works differently.”²¹

Overall, Grandin is understood to be a generally positive source of mainstream autistic representation. As autistic rhetorician Remi Yergeau explains, she “has replaced Rain Man as the autistic du jour.”²² Whereas past depictions of autism portray autists as diseased, possessed, or simply weird, Grandin’s academic and professional prowess represents to neurodiversity “ways of being, thinking, and making meaning that are not in and of themselves lesser—and may be at times advantageous.” Lynn Worsham and Gary Olson contend that Grandin’s scholarly and public texts:

take us a long way toward understanding just what we have gotten wrong about animals and how we might correct our course, not only for the benefit of animals but also for the sake of realizing the humanity of human beings.²³

Why, then, do we—two autistic animal studies scholars—take issue with Grandin’s autistically-representative rhetoric to the extent that we would compose an essay such as this one? To be clear, the aim of our essay is not an attempt to “trash” a world-renowned animal scientist and fellow autistic academic.²⁴ As autistic rhetoricians, we seek to assess Grandin’s overarching arguments about

the links between autism and animality and those arguments' ideological consequences. Thus, our study goes beyond what is explicitly said in Grandin's texts and accounts for situated contexts.²⁵ Our main argument rests upon the premise that ableism and speciesism²⁶ are not only related but mutually constitutive phenomena. We assert that Grandin's continued reliance upon an autistic-animal analogy demonstrates our premise in practice. Thus, it is important to deconstruct in the interest of justice *in* and *for* a "more-than-human" world.²⁷

Rhetors within the factory farming industry have not pushed back against Grandin's claim that autistic people like herself are, perhaps, better suited to study and configure slaughter technologies than neurotypical people. Industrial rhetors have branded Grandin as something of an autistic sorceress, someone who "possesses almost magical powers, which allow her, uniquely, to translate between animals and humans."²⁸ Perhaps this is because the industry has mostly benefited from its association with Grandin's celebrity status. Her status as an "inspirational"²⁹ autistic person and a self-proclaimed animal lover are certainly at odds with an industry that primarily profits from a combination of unsafe labor practices, environmental degradation, and animal slaughter en masse.³⁰ Stanescu and Stanescu contend that Grandin's role in this "rebranding" of the agriculture industry as humane and welfare-oriented is not "premised on actually improving the lives of any animals but instead as simply shifting the optical function of power and control to create the appearance of animal consent."³¹ We argue that while Grandin's status as a renowned animal scientist is commendable given the personal and professional barriers she likely faced due to her neurodiversity,³² this does not absolve her of any figurative or literal animal blood on her hands.³³

Amidst Grandin's decades-long discourse on autism and animality, we identify a distinctive politic of slaughter that contradicts Grandin's status as an autistic animal advocate. Grandin uses her social capital to advocate for autistic acceptance while simultaneously asserting herself as a pioneer of animal slaughter technologies. This in and of itself would be benign were it not for one aspect: that Grandin primarily uses her autistic brain as a defense of these slaughter techniques. Specifically, she asserts that her *animalistic brain* makes her more attuned to the animals awaiting slaughter. In other words, we question Grandin's discourse not on the basis that she is too autistic to convey a message, but because her *central analogy*—the autistic human as nonhuman animal—is drenched in ideologies regarding whose life is worth living, for how long, and at what quality.

The crux of our critique rests upon the ideological intricacies of analogical argumentation—specifically, the analogical construction of autistic-as-animal. We do not suggest that Grandin intentionally condemns herself and her fellow autistic people to death by comparing herself to livestock animals. Neither do we make a broad, sweeping claim that comparing our autistic selves to livestock is

always and already wrong. What we *do* assess is the notion of *sufficient similarity* inherent in and constructed through Grandin's analogical reasoning.

We assert that Grandin's general argumentative script is as follows: Animals are difficult for neurotypical people to understand because their brains work autistically; autistic people's brains are difficult for neurotypical people to understand because their brains work autistically; ergo, autistic people ought to be able to understand animals better than neurotypical people because both sets of brains work autistically. Whereas Grandin argues that, by virtue of her autistic brain, she understands best how to soothe animals on the slaughter line, we identify different arguments bubbling beneath the surface: first, that livestock animals (by virtue of their being nonhuman) are disposable; second, that autistic people (by virtue of their similar animality) are not quite human. Put together the implied argument we identify within Grandin's prose is as follows: Livestock animals are disposable; autistic people are sufficiently similar to livestock animals; ergo, *both* autistic people and livestock animals are disposable.

While Grandin's textual corpus is vast indeed, our rhetorical critique focuses on her autobiographical texts, interpersonal interviews, and published guidebooks on farm animal welfare. It is in these texts that her analogical argumentation is most prominent and thus most representative of the ableist-speciesist thesis under critique. By drawing upon historic depictions of the autistic brain as semi-human and in need of extinction and the livestock animal body as morally less-than and in need of slaughter, Grandin discursively connects autistic humans to nonhuman livestock animals in a manner which *undermines both parties' statuses as moral subjects*. In the text that follows, we object to this depiction of autistic people on the grounds that the analogy is steeped in ableist, speciesist depictions of cognitive "difference" as both an admission of inferiority and an invitation to violence both psychic and physical.

Rhetoric, Autism, and Speciesism: Critical Intersections

Our critique combines insights from rhetorical studies, critical autism studies, and critical animal studies. At the crux of our essay is the intersection between the autistic and animalistic rhetoric as manifested through analogical argumentation. To study autism "critically" is to question fundamental norms and assumptions about what it means to be autistic and how autistic people should be valued in society. To study nonhuman animals critically is quite similar in that scholars should investigate the discursive construction of the Not Human and therefore address why, precisely, the arbitrary and ever-shifting categorization of the human (or the *homo sapien* species) is considered so valuable. At the crux of our *ethic*,

however, is a firm commitment to anti-ableism and anti-speciesism. Little has been written on Grandin from this dual perspective. And, of the exceedingly little scholarship that exists, almost none comes from autistic authors. Stanescu and Stanescu have accused Grandin of exoticizing the animal experience to become the sole voice capable of speaking for the mysterious livestock animal. As they say, “we do not need Grandin to ‘translate’ for non-human animals.”³⁴ We agree, but with this caveat: neither do we as autistic rhetors need non-autistic others to speak for us.

Rhetoric shapes how disability is understood. Cherney argues “ableist culture sustains and perpetuates itself via rhetoric.”³⁵ Ableism, for Cherney, is most visible when studied and explicated as a “mental framework” conveyed through “rhetorical devices” such as language and systems of representation.³⁶ Upon identifying this framework and critiquing its rhetorical tropes, rhetoricians have the opportunity to identify “corrective practices” and “realize new tactics” in the service of broader disability justice.³⁷ That ableism can be communicated rhetorically is hardly novel news at this point in disability studies. More novel is Paul Heilker and Remi Yergeau’s stance that “human neurology itself” is a “profoundly rhetorical phenomena.”³⁸ Ergo, there is not simply a *rhetoric of autism* but rather a distinct and profound *autistic rhetoric*. To be autistic is to have “a way of being in the world through language, through invention, structure, and style”—even when those ways of being are not considered desirable, ideal, or “*the* ways of being.”³⁹ To *author autistically* is, therefore, “to author *queerly and contrarily*.”⁴⁰

That said, prototypical research on autistic people and autistic communication is based on a view of autism as a medical disorder, one in which the difference in neurology is considered an inherent “lack” of something fundamentally human. These “deficit- and behavior-based diagnostic criteria . . . continue to locate communication problems within the autistic person.”⁴¹ Such master narratives on autism persist because of their rhetorical force. However, Yergeau warns those public arguments structuring social knowledges of autism are thus “grossly ableist, powerfully violent, and unremarkably nonautistic.”⁴²

“Actually-autistic” scholars, therefore, broadly advocate for de-pathologizing autism, moving from a model autism-as-deficit to one of autism-as-diversity. Non-autistic autism experts can have expertise in neurology, psychology, and other-ologies, but autistic people themselves should be considered the most promising “autism experts” since they alone possess the lived experience of being autistic. As Kristen Gillespie-Lynch et al. explain, “autistic people who have developed heightened understanding of autism may be particularly well-suited to teach other people about autism” since the positions they endorse tend to be less stigmatizing, less interested in making autistic people “appear more normal,” and more empathetic to the challenges of neurodiverse individuals.⁴³ Elevating and

listening to autistic voices could “radically revise what we think we know about autism, could fundamentally challenge some of our most foundational assumptions about autism and autistics.”⁴⁴ Our essay therefore responds to Heilker and Yergeau’s assertion that “every public text on autism is begging for a rhetorical analysis.”⁴⁵ As Heilker and Yergeau implore, we engage with the social justice-oriented tasks of “dealing with difference, of responding to issues of diversity, language, and identity.”⁴⁶ After all, “any approach to autism is an approach toward autistic people.”⁴⁷ The distinction between humanity and animality are at the heart of this conversation.

“Humanity” and “animality” are discursive constructions made manifest largely through biological rhetoric. Assessing such rhetoric requires a commitment to anti-speciesism through critical animal studies (CAS). CAS is an anti-capitalist, theory-to-activist approach to scholarship that takes total liberation as its guiding telos. Total liberation can be defined as broad, sweeping social justice that accounts for a more-than-human world. Achieving such a world requires a firm commitment to anti-racism, anti-cisheterosexism, anti-ableism, anti-classism, and anti-speciesism. A state of total liberation calls for, in other words, a “revolutionary decolonization,” which Sarat Colling, Sean Parson, and Alessandro Arrigoni define as “a method of decolonizing through self-transformation and revolutionary action” through “a politics of solidarity, not in shared beliefs but through a shared sense of struggle” and a “relationship framework.”⁴⁸ Put simply, our commitment to *total liberation* is based in the premise that human liberation is incomplete without a simultaneous and equally passionate commitment to *nonhuman animal liberation*. Animal liberation has many competing definitions and interpretations. However, under a critical studies framework, it is best defined as the human abolition of nonhuman animal subjugation and exploitation as far as is possible and practicable. As well, animal liberation is not achievable without a movement-wide orientation toward social justice causes including, but not limited to, the dissolution of anti-Blackness, xenophobia, cisheterosexism, and ableism. After all, human and nonhuman animal oppression are built on the devaluation of life vis-à-vis “the epistemic and material violence of a society built on domination.”⁴⁹

Solidarity under a total liberation framework moves beyond the inherently ableist and speciesist notions of being a “voice for the voiceless” (see, for instance, autism organizations like Autism Speaks, “speaking for” autistic people despite lacking any meaningful autistic leadership; or, animal liberation groups like Anonymous for the Voiceless, casting animals as silent in their very name). On the contrary, a politic of total liberation “moves beyond the simplistic politics of ‘speaking for those who cannot speak’ by actually trying to listen to those who are denied a voice and acting in concerted effort with them.”⁵⁰ A “compassionate and

fulfilling society” is achievable only through the destruction of oppressive hierarchies, inclusive of the “species hierarchy” that elevates human bodies—*particular kinds* of human bodies—over all other species.⁵¹

Furthermore, a total liberation paradigm makes manifest the intersectional nature of interspecies oppressions. After all, the human/nonhuman binary is always and already complicated by histories of marginalized human subjects having been defined as bestial. Constructions of “human,” “humanity,” “animal,” and “animality” have functioned to mark Otherized bodies as inferior. Syl Ko remarks in her scholarship on Black veganism that who counts as human “has been constructed along *racial* lines,” particularly through rhetorics of anti-Blackness.⁵² Disability scholar Sunaura Taylor adds that the very concept of ‘animality’ is intertwined with definitions of “inferiority, savagery, sexuality, dependency, ability/disability, physical and mental difference, and so forth.”⁵³ Ko further proposes that “the ‘human’ or what ‘humanity’ is just is a conceptual way to mark the province of European whiteness as the ideal way of being *homo sapiens*.”⁵⁴ Anybody (or any *body*) that does not fit into this normative understanding of the human, including Black and disabled bodies, is constructed as closer to the ‘animal’ and animality.

With these principles in mind, we adhere to Taylor’s call for disabled scholars to “assert our value as human beings without either implying human superiority or denying our very own animality.”⁵⁵ Taylor (who uses her lived experience as a physically disabled individual in her studies of animal liberation and social justice) offers a valuable paradigm through which to understand a total liberation framework. She writes that “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.”⁵⁶ After all, “ableism helps construct the systems that render the lives and experiences of both nonhuman animals and disabled humans as less valuable” because animals “have for so long been entangled in our categories of difference and our insatiable drive for order.”⁵⁷ Thus, to perform our type of scholarship not only involves *interrogating* the construction of animality as it is used to oppress disabled bodies but also *reclaiming* our own animality “as a way of challenging the violence of animalization and of speciesism—of recognizing that animal liberation is entangled with our own.”⁵⁸

Through a combination of rhetorical studies, critical autism studies, and critical animal studies, our essay is an example of how to simultaneously reclaim our own animality while also condemning processes of animalization that cast human and nonhuman animal subjects as disposable by virtue of their difference from a neurotypical human subject.

Rhetoric, Analogy, and Human Animality

Our critique of Grandin's autistic-animal analogy relies not on speciesist conceptions of animal-as-inherently-inferior, but rather on the rhetorical study of "sufficient similarity" through analogic reasoning. Although analogies come in many forms, a very basic analogy might take on the following structure:

M is P
 S is like P (due to having properties a, b, c . . .)
 Therefore, S is also P.⁵⁹

According to Andre Juthe, analogy is a form of abductive argumentation or "reasoning to the best explanation."⁶⁰ Although analogies need not be offered in the form of an argument per se, the ultimate goal of analogy is always inferential—the rhetor's audience is meant to reconstruct the rhetor's conclusion through the comparison of two supposedly similar subjects.⁶¹ Ultimately, explains, Juthe, "mostly analogical reasoning is about solving problems, describing something, learning or explaining things by extending our thought from things we do understand to things we do not, at the time, comprehend."⁶² Therefore, a "good" analogy has the same structure as a "good" argument—not morally good, but rather logically sound inasmuch as "the contents of the premises and the conclusion are adequately related, that the premises provide adequate evidence for the conclusion and that the premises are true, probably or otherwise reliable."⁶³ For any argument reliant upon an analogy, therefore, "the adequate evidence for the conclusion is in virtue of a correct analogy," meaning that "the analogy is then the crucial premise for argument by analogy."⁶⁴

What, then, makes a "correct" analogy? Generally, two objects are analogous if and only if there is some significant measure of "sameness" between the two, some kind of "one-to-one correspondence between the elements of the objects."⁶⁵ The critic determines this correspondence by virtue of if the elements comprising each object "share the same relation."⁶⁶ This "sameness of relation" between two elements is what makes analogy such a unique form of argumentation, since the act of making this sort of inference "never follows *solely* in the virtue of the semantic or the syntactical structure of the argument."⁶⁷ That is to say, analogy is a type of "imperfect reasoning" that leads only to "presumptive conclusions."⁶⁸ When objects S and P are compared to one another, they are *prima facie* understood to be different in some respects but the same relative to stated or unstated properties. Arguments by analogy, then, do not explicitly state reality but rather seek to *establish the structure of reality*.⁶⁹

It is in the audience's assessment of sufficient similarity, however, that the same analogical artifact is opened to polysemous interpretation. Sufficient similarity, after all, is premised upon some sort of group acceptance of what constitutes "sufficiency" (a sense of "good enough-ness") and what constitutes "similarity" (a sense of "like me-, you-, or them-ness").⁷⁰ Both of these terms are fraught with moral conundrums when analogies are made between humans and nonhuman subjects, particularly when those analogies are used to address historic and/or contemporary instances of violence and killing.

Literature in animal ethics and critical animal studies has questioned the idea of an *inherent* wrongness of human-nonhuman animal analogies. Much of this work notes how taking offense to being compared to an animal *solely because it is of a different species* relies on the implicit assumption that animality is inferior to humanity. While research in human *rights* decries the dehumanization of subjects through animal analogies, research into human *wrongs* against animals suggests that human-animal comparisons can sometimes be useful discursive anchors through which to assess the moral pitfalls of systems such as industrialized agriculture. There is certainly rhetorical power in the rhetoric of dehumanization. Rhetorically stripping disempowered human subjects of their *homo sapiens* status, through comparison to an animal, can be used to justify abhorrent behaviors such as genocide, slavery, and grotesque medical experimentation.⁷¹ However, scholars must also question the problematics of using exclusively "human" terms for abhorrent crimes when the victims are nonhuman subjects. Drawing upon the intertwined histories of the transatlantic slave trade and the development of contemporary agriculture systems, Marjorie Spiegel offers a nuanced (albeit controversial) argument in favor of the "dreaded comparison" of humans and animals through the usage of the term "slave."⁷² Robert Patterson's *Eternal Treblinka* similarly asserts that, due to the combined histories of human and animal maltreatment during World War II, the word "Holocaust" is appropriate to describe the contemporary animal condition.⁷³

That said, several other critical animal studies authors have countered that, while speciesism is certainly a *part* of why calling animals "slaves" or calling industrialized agriculture a "holocaust" is considered unsettling, Spiegel's and Patterson's arguments are toothless without an intersectional approach to systems of oppression. Claire Jean Kim, for instance, warns that while slave and holocaust comparisons might be admissible from select *moral* standpoints, it is often undesirable from contemporary *socio-legal* standpoints. This is because "the impact of analogies depends at least in part upon the answers to the questions of why, when, where, by whom, to whom, and in what context."⁷⁴ All too often, when animal liberation campaigns employ slave and holocaust analogies, these usages are not done in solidarity with currently marginalized voices still fighting against a post-

racial political system that frames such genocides as “in the past.” Given the ongoing battles against racism and antisemitism and their consistent dehumanization/animalization of both groups by fascistic rhetors, it is often unclear what benefit there is to this form of analogizing other than to elicit a negative, even antagonistic, affective response from an audience already predisposed to speciesism and looking for any reason to maintain its societal prevalence.⁷⁵

Perhaps the most relevant study of human-animal analogy for our critique is the so-called “argument from marginal cases.” This analogical argument, which has been used by utilitarian animal ethicist Peter Singer, suggests that if humans who are babies, comatose, or cognitively disabled are afforded equal consideration of interests, then animals should be afforded equal consideration of interests as well.⁷⁶ This argument rests on the fact that many speciesist arguments against animal liberation suggest that humans alone should have legal rights and/or be afforded equal consideration of interests because of their complex linguistic and reasoning skills. Human beings who cannot use advanced language or who cannot perform complex equations are not slaughtered for meat or skinned for jackets. To resolve this logical contradiction, either these humans *should* be exploited just like animal bodies *or*, more preferably, animals should be granted the same consideration as these humans.⁷⁷ The Nonhuman Rights Project, for example, uses this reasoning in U.S. American courtrooms when arguing for animal personhood for chimps, bonobos, dolphins, and elephants, claiming that their advanced cognitive skills (or “practical autonomy”) predispose them to the same legal rights as similarly advanced *homo sapiens* (since, of course, humans of inferior cognition receive those legal rights as well).⁷⁸

The analogical argument from marginal cases is particularly controversial from the standpoint of disability justice. Some of the controversy is, of course, speciesist—to be offended about animal comparisons *solely because* the comparison is to an animal rests upon a nonsensical anthropocentric bias. That said, there is a long and troubled history of state actors strategically dehumanizing disabled bodies to oppress them. The comparison of disabled bodies to animal bodies on the basis of each party’s *cognitive inferiority* to a supposedly able-bodied human subject has disturbing and eugenical roots. As Taylor explains:

If Singer [and others] had left his [and their] argument in its simpler form, with the principle of equal consideration based on sentience, *Animal Liberation* would have been a remarkably anti-ableist book . . . But he didn’t.⁷⁹

The U.S. American Supreme Court case of *Buck v. Bell*, for example, legalized the forced sterilization of cognitively disabled persons on the basis that, to quote Oliver Wendell Holmes, “three generations of imbeciles are enough.”⁸⁰

Through the usage of analogies and metaphors, disability studies scholars like Gerald O'Brien point to how the gradual extermination of "bad," "subhuman" disabled bodies has been portrayed as "altruistic" on the part of state actors. Eugenicists old and new portray disabled people as unable to properly care for themselves, as a burden to society, and as a class of people who ought not to be bred into civilized society.⁸¹ Critical animal studies scholars have also pointed to the similarities between early eugenicists' arguments about sterilization and institutionalization of the disabled and contemporary vegan abolitionists' arguments about the gradual "kind" and "compassionate" extermination of companion animals "for their own good."⁸²

The following analysis interrogates the consequences of Temple Grandin's particular mode of human-animal analogy. Unlike animal liberation activists who compare disabled persons to animals to advocate for animal liberation from human exploitation, Grandin compares herself to an animal to advance autistic peoples' social status and to promote "humane slaughter" methodologies. We critique her arguments on the grounds that marginal cases too often "create Marginalized Peoples."⁸³

Grandin's Analogical Necropolitics

Grandin's depictions of sufficient similarity between autistic and animal bodies are premised upon difference as deadly. The crux of Grandin's discourse on animal slaughter rests upon an autistic-animal analogy. Specifically, Grandin insists that her less-than- "normal" autistic cognition enables her to understand and translate for livestock animals because, like her, these animals' cognitive processes are not neurotypical. However, by not *fighting against* animal slaughter and instead *working on behalf* of animal slaughterers, Grandin not only casts livestock animals as killable but also augments ableist depictions of cognitive difference as morally less-than, and thus disposable. In other words, Grandin's analogical argumentation is fundamentally flawed inasmuch as the sufficient similarities she identifies are only "sufficient" to the extent that they justify the oppression and destruction of bodies not considered to be sufficiently human.

The construction of a person as a non-person, of a subject as an object, of a *homo sapien* as *homo sacer*, has largely been discussed within the context of state and other institutional actors applying discriminatory policies on the basis of race, ethnicity, class, ability, etc. The political strategies and tactics through which a subject is objectified is *biopolitical*—a politic of life itself. Its complement, the *necropolitical*, refers to the politics of death and slaughter.⁸⁴ It is this politic of *who* lives/dies and *how* one should live/die that constitutes the bulk of our rhe-

torical critique. At its core, necropolitical rhetoric is about persuasion, power, and *systems* of persuasion and power. These systems can be seen in contemporary discourses surrounding disability and animality—for instance, in the discursive animalization of disabled humans to deny them agency or the material disabling of farmed animals to better serve the hunger pangs of humans.

If Roberto Esposito is to be believed, the construction of a civilization requires the construction of some type of in-group community—or *communitas*. However, the construction of this group relies upon the simultaneous construction of an out-group. The community immunizes itself from the poison of the outsider through the negation of life—or *immunitas*.⁸⁵ When that negation displaces the out-group member's status as a subject, it designates them as an object; Giorgio Agamben designates this status as *homo sacer*, or bare life. Agamben suggests that being reduced to bare life is to be stripped of one's inherent value and political subjectivity (*bios*) and left only with *zoe*, the "simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)."⁸⁶ The ultimate express of sovereignty is therefore, as Mbembe argues, "in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who may die."⁸⁷ The unwanted presence of such out-groups makes clear the "excessiveness of biopower" through what Eric King Watts dubs "reactionary logics and practices" where, in extreme circumstances, "anyone whomever may be violently seized and made to pay penance."⁸⁸

To reiterate, we understand that *prima facie* determining an animal as morally "less-than" ourselves is not only *specious* reasoning, but *speciesist* reasoning. A human body is not "better" than any other nonhuman body purely because it can be categorized as a *homo sapiens*. It is therefore necessary to examine Grandin's consistent appeal to her autistic animality within ableist *and* speciesist cultural frameworks—that is to say, within a worldwide context of ableism against autistic bodies, speciesism against animal bodies, and the ways in which one's perceived able-bodied humanness is embedded in opposition to disabling animality.

A critique of necropolitical discourse is at its core a discussion of what Achille Mbembe calls "contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death."⁸⁹ J.D. Margulies explains that a biopolitical emphasis on life, wherein the "sovereign subject must be conserved for the state to go on," is always and already in a dialectical relationship with death, or "what is made killable." An understanding of the "human" not only as a species category but also as a discursive construction teeming with speciesist and ableist implications can explode scholarly conceptualizations of who can be considered a necropolitical subject. After all, warns, Margulies, "Being reduced to bare life strips humans of value, rendering humans as animal bodies, killable without a crime being committed, an act of violence occurring beyond the law."⁹⁰

Grandin is most famous for her “hugging machine,” which is said to calm cattle prior to slaughter. To defend her creation, she consistently refers back to her own autistic experiences. Grandin told *NPR*: “Many autistic children seek pressure. They’ll get under mattresses, they’ll get under sofa cushions . . . I got to where I could tolerate more and more, you know, being touched, and now I’m, you know, much more desensitized and can tolerate it.”⁹¹ She further explains how her experience with squeezing is very similar to that of cattle:

The reactions of cattle to being restrained in a squeeze-restraining device are very similar to people in the squeeze machine. Strong pressure initially causes cattle to relax, but will lead to struggling and discomfort when the animal habituates. Habituation occurs more quickly in cattle being held against unpadded metal surfaces. Pressure must be decreased if the animal is held in a chute for more than two minutes.⁹²

Grandin even contends that, since autistic individuals need to be “taught empathy,” she didn’t understand how to be kind *until* she experienced the squeeze machine.⁹³

We would note the irony of Grandin celebrating cattle being held down (or squeezed) in order to relax them in preparation for branding and/or slaughter. (She also invokes this metaphor in reference to ear tagging and vaccination.) Whereas the act of “gently squeezing” cattle and human bodies to calm the nervous system can result in similar, calming biologic responses, this analogy is incomplete without understanding the context of violently holding down cattle who, it is safe to assume, did not wish to be burned, scarred, and/or slaughtered. And, as autistic people all too familiar with our own fearful outbursts being treated not with compassion but with restraints, we already question the utility of this analogy. Applied behavioral analysis—a controversial therapy for autistic people—recommends using “positive behavior support” when an autistic child is having an aggressive episode. One of these supports is tightly restraining the child during a “meltdown” because “physical restraint can be dangerous to both you and your child, and can often increase your child’s anxiety.” However, autistic narratives consistently disavow this therapeutic mechanism as traumatizing and dehumanizing.⁹⁴

More troubling, though, is Grandin’s analogic appeal to autistic and animal brains. “The autistic/Asperger brain,” she asserts, “is like an office building where some of the interdepartmental communication systems are not hooked up.”⁹⁵ She is particularly interested in the comparative power of her (and other autistic people’s) frontal lobes. Grandin asserts that animals’ frontal lobes are “smaller and less developed” compared to *homo sapiens*, whereas autistics’ frontal lobes are “not working as well as they could be” compared to neurotypical humans.⁹⁶ Thus,

since autistic lobes are not working well and animal lobes are working as well as they can be, autistic people can think the way that animals think:

Autistic people's frontal lobes almost never work as well as normal people's do, so our brain ends up being somewhere in between human and animal. We use our animal brains more than normal people do, because we have to. We don't have any choice.⁹⁷

Therefore, explains Grandin, she explains that “as a person with autism, it is easy for me to understand how animals think because my thinking processes are like an animal's.”⁹⁸ In *Thinking in Pictures*, she further asserts:

Instead of growing normally and connecting various parts of the brain together, the autistic frontal cortex has excessive overgrowth much like a thicket of tangled computer cables . . . a basic problem in both autistic and Asperger brains is a failure of the ‘computer cables’ to fully connect together the many different localized brain systems.⁹⁹

Here, as in many other instances, Grandin depicts autistic brains as tangled, problematic, abnormal, and—to some extent—a failure of human evolution.

We would like to pause and draw attention to Grandin's usage of the word “normal.” These usages are not rare and, in fact, appear throughout her texts, even in seemingly empowering moments like this quote from *Animals in Translation*:

I always find it kind of funny that normal people are always saying autistic children ‘live in their own little world.’ When you work with animals for a while you start to realize you can say the same thing about normal people.

Certainly it would be unfair to condemn Grandin for not using autistic activists' preferred phrases “allistic” or “neurotypical” to refer to non-autistic people, since the original 1990's texts did not have that vocabulary available to them. That said, since the 1800's, “normal” has functioned as a highly political term fraught with ideas about what constitutes an idealized moral subject. Lennard Davis explains how the conception of normalcy is historically and culturally intertwined with perceptions of disability. Specifically, normalcy relies on a rhetoric of mathematization that deems society “outliers” to be “deviations” from some distinctly important “average.” Neurotypicality has largely been painted as this “average human” state of being.¹⁰⁰

Additionally, Black feminist theorists such as Sylvia Wynter have used phrases such as the “Overrepresentation of Man” to describe similar phenomena in relation to race and anti-Blackness.¹⁰¹ In short, whereas human differences *do* exist

and *can* be measured mathematically, it is human prejudice that marks these statistically significant differences as *morally* significant. Historically and contemporarily, societal “deviants” (that is to say, those who deviate from some measurable “mean”) have been cast not just as different, but as somehow “wrong.” Grandin’s consistent and at times absolutist casting of her autistic brain as oppositional to a “normal” brain therefore constitutes an act of Othering in which she does not depict neurotypicality as a median representation of human cognition, but rather depicts neurodivergence as an abnormal departure from the idealized human experience.

Indeed, Grandin at times implies that the acquisition of human knowledge and/or intellect is a sort of “cure” for autism, stating in *Thinking in Pictures* that “More knowledge makes me act more normal. Many people have commented to me that I act much less autistic now [than] I did ten years ago.”¹⁰² By contrast, in *The Way I See it*, Grandin repeatedly makes the distinction between a “normal” child and “wrong” child. Per Grandin, “It doesn’t matter if the child is not yet diagnosed, but something is obviously ‘wrong—’ speech is severely delayed, the child’s behaviors are odd and repetitive, the child doesn’t engage with people or his environment.”¹⁰³ Grandin continues, “they are often loners, with few friends, the geeks, the nerds, the socially odd individuals who never seem to fit in.”¹⁰⁴ The mere listing of symptoms is not in and of itself ableist—linguistic and social differences are, after all, common manifestations of autism. However, on Grandin’s writing, these children are described as needing intervention, to be generally fixed to reach a level of “successful functioning.”¹⁰⁵ Children with visibly autistic traits are to be pitied. When visibly autistic children develop into visibly autistic adults, Grandin blames their parents for not forcing their children into behavioral intervention programs:

As I see it, some of the problems these teenagers and adults exhibit—being constantly defiant and not doing what the boss tells them—goes back to not learning as children that compliance is required in certain situations . . . Parents hold primary responsibility in making sure their children learn basic skills that will allow them to function within society as adults. This may sound harsh, but there’s just no excuse for children growing into adults who can’t do even basic things like set a table, wash their clothes, or handle money.¹⁰⁶

Autistic traits are, for Grandin, abnormalities that lead to inexcusable deficiencies. Only through proper education can autistic children liberate themselves from their neurodivergent deficits.

That said, Grandin’s usage of a single word—normal—is far from enough to cast the entirety of her discourse into question. Perhaps Grandin’s (ab)use of the

term normal is an expression of internalized ableism,¹⁰⁷ and perhaps this internalization has complicated her ability to see the nuanced problems with her word choices, analogies, and ideologies. But perhaps not: we are not Grandin, so we will never know for sure. The word normal is, after all, quite “normalized” in mainstream discourse. What we suggest, however, is that the substitution of neurotypical for “normal” provides a useful entry point for a discussion of Grandin’s ideas about autism, animality, what it means to be fully human, and what treatment a not-quite-human should endure.

Stanescu and Stanescu suggest that Grandin’s depiction of herself as a professional animal translator is actually a cover for her exploitative *mistranslations*. By suggesting that only she as an autistic person can properly describe the animal experience, “animals are rendered so foreign and different that humans cannot possibly understand even their basic and universal expressions.”¹⁰⁸ Grandin, they explain, “exoticizes” the soon-to-be-slaughtered by “assimilating” them into the autistic experience. Acting as a translator of bad faith, Grandin falsely depicts “animal words” as “accessible and understandable” only to the neurodiverse expert. And, as such an expert, Grandin claims that the animals have somehow “agreed” to her “humane slaughter” processes.¹⁰⁹

We suggest that the Stanescus are correct, but add a caveat: Grandin not only exoticizes the animal experience but the autistic experience as well. We use the word “exoticize” as a verb pertaining to the Othering of a subject in terms of a politicized and moralized sense of normalcy. At first glance, Grandin’s portrait of the autistic-as-exotic is benign. She paints her neurodivergence as both Othering and advantageous in the workplace:

It took me a long time to figure out that I see things about animals other people don’t. And it wasn’t until I was in my forties that I finally realized I had one big advantage over the feedlot owners who were hiring me to manage their animals: being autistic. Autism made school and social life hard, but it made animals easy.”¹¹⁰

The act of acknowledging one’s differences from a prescribed social norm and embracing the advantages that go with those differences is hardly an issue. Grandin herself explains how autistic differences in sensory perception can be both animalistic *and* liberating: “There’s a great big, beautiful world out there that a lot of normal folks are just barely taking in. It’s like dogs hearing a whole register of sound we can’t. Autistic people and animals are seeing a whole register of the visual world.”¹¹¹ Grandin further emphasizes how animals and autistic humans naturally “think” differently than neurotypical humans. Specifically, Grandin addresses the autistic neurotype’s emphasis on images over the word itself. She explains that “Autism helped me understand animals because I think in pictures.

Since animals do not have language, their memories have to be sensory-based instead of word-based.”¹¹² This thesis, elaborated upon at length in her autobiography *Thinking in Pictures*, broadly states that autistic people’s memories are primarily visual compared to “normal” people’s logocentric memories.

The central problem here is that Grandin misses out on a valuable opportunity to question broader anthropocentric value systems specifically due to her own monetized relationship with the animals she sends to slaughter. Environmental communication scholarship has long emphasized that human language, composed as it is of phonemes, morphemes, and symbolic communication, may be unique, but it is not inherently superior to any other species’ modes of communication.¹¹³ What is more, human communication is not the only type of *language*. Grandin’s emphasis on autistic visuality calls into question the logocentricity of neurotypical culture inasmuch as she shows how thinking in pictures has allowed her to experience the world in a manner that has elevated her career success. However, this success has come at the expense of the very beings she claims experience the world as she does. Because Grandin thinks in pictures just as animals think in pictures, she once again connects herself to the being that, by virtue of its animality, deserves to be slaughtered.

Within the context of autism, Yergeau warns that many mainstream narratives about autism carry rhetorical force *largely* deriving from “the figure of the autistic as unknowable, as utterly abject and isolated and tragic, as a figure whose actions are construed less like actions and more like neuronally willed middle fingers.”¹¹⁴ We suggest that Grandin’s *particular means* of describing her advantages ironically reinscribes the image of autistic-as-inferior. Take, for instance, the following quote from *Animals in Translation*:

Autistic people can think the way animals think. Of course, we also think the way people think—we aren’t that different from normal humans. Autism is a kind of way station on the road from animals to humans, which puts autistic people like me in a perfect position to translate ‘animal talk’ into English.¹¹⁵

Once again, Grandin has utilized the word “normal” in conjunction with neurotypical. This time, however, she has connected the abnormal (the autistic) with the nonhuman (the animal). By portraying autistic people as a “way station,” she invokes a sliding scale of humanity not dissimilar from a Darwinian chart showing human evolution. In this view, autistic people’s translation skills come not from their cognitive differences but from their evolutionary deficiencies. They are literally not-quite-human inasmuch as they are not quite normal.

Grandin’s construction of the autistic body as not-quite-human because it is nearly-animal is invoked in more ways than one. “Autistic people,” she claims, “are

closer to animals than normal people are.”¹¹⁶ Her statement is clear, but she elaborates by claiming the opposite to be equally true: “I’d go so far to say that animals might *be* autistic savants.”¹¹⁷ She tells *NPR*:

It was easy for me to figure out how animals think and how animals would react because I think visually. Animals don’t think in language. They think in picture . . . and autistic senses and emotions are more like the senses of an animal.¹¹⁸

We do not take issue with the analogy because it ties together human and nonhuman animals. We *are* concerned, though, with the implications of such statements given Grandin’s history of casting *particular subsets* of autistic individuals as subhuman—specifically, individuals at the so-called ‘opposite’ end of the autistic spectrum. Called by Grandin and others “low-functioning,” these autistic individuals are better described as having intellectual disabilities, reactive behavioral issues, or who may be nonverbal communicators.¹¹⁹ In *Thinking in Pictures*, Grandin writes: “In an ideal world the scientist should find a method to prevent the most severe forms of autism but allow the milder forms to survive.”¹²⁰ This eugenic-adjacent rhetoric towards autistic individuals construed as low-functioning has led Grandin to come out against autistic young adults who are not working. Grandin has also described raising autistic children as similar to “taming a wild animal.”¹²¹ After all, she explains, autistic emotions “are simpler than those of most people. I don’t know what complex emotion in a human relationship is.”¹²²

Once again, we do not deny that there are definite ideological and material similarities between farmed animals and autistic people. Like autistic critic Daniel Salomon, we agree “autists have been oppressed by many of the same persons and institutions.”¹²³ And, like Salomon and even Grandin herself, we agree to some extent with how analogical arguments between autistic people and farmed animals draw upon a neurotypicality-as-superiority: “Neurotypicalism privileges a form of cognitive processing characteristic of peoples who have a neurotypical (non-autistic) brain structure, while at least implicitly finding other forms of cognitive processing to be inferior, such as those natural to autists and nonhuman animal.”¹²⁴

The construction of animal as inherently not-human and the construction of the autistic as inherently less-human are intimately intertwined in the politics of death. Indeed, scholars have already started discussing how necropolitics impact human relationships with the more-than-human world. Laura Hudson notes that because “humanness” is “a political, conceptual category rather than a biological fact, certain humans can be defined as no longer fully human or deserving of human rights.”¹²⁵ As critiques of ableism and the rhetoric of eugenics has shown

time and time again, it is only “certain kinds of human life [that] are deemed acceptable to exposure to death through their relation to animal life.”¹²⁶ Similarly, critical animal studies scholarship demonstrates how necropolitics “advances grappling with the position of animals as political subjects enmeshed in more-than-human contestations by directly engaging with the politics of ‘who must die’ when species meet.”¹²⁷

One might argue that Grandin is, in fact, an animal advocate because her work encourages industrialized systems of killing that provide a less painful and less stressful death for nonhuman animals. We posit, however, that conceptualizations of welfare premised upon offering nonhuman animals a “less traumatic death” is built on a faulty premise: namely, that within industrialized agricultural systems, there is a way in which one can (as Donna Haraway puts it) “kill well.” Haraway argues that “within the logic of sacrifice, only human beings can be murdered,” and that while killing can be morally wrong, that “the problem is to learn to live responsibly within the multiplicitous necessity and labor of killing.”¹²⁸ While there are moral, socio-cultural, historical, and ecological harms that can be associated with killing, “killing well” arguably takes these harms into consideration and mitigates these entanglements with the multispecies world. In contrast to Haraway, we argue that *all* industrialized human killing of nonhuman animals’ breaches those animals’ consent and thus their liberty. Animal liberation is impossible within a worldview that categorizes nonhuman animals as commodities which can be non-consensually slaughtered. Whether the animals are “killable” or their murder is “necessary” might be an interesting point of discussion in cases of pastoral nomadic husbandry or subsistence situations. But, in the clear-cut, mega-industrialized, hyper-capitalist circumstances in which Grandin has found her agricultural niche, such defenses of killing well fall flat.¹²⁹

Grandin’s discursive constructions of ‘animal welfare’ are further emblematic of how capitalism is entangled with speciesism, ableism, and other systems of violence. Animal welfare, through Grandin’s warped construction of killing well, is saturated in a very deep speciesism in which animal lives are viewed expendable and as less worthy of living. Within this speciesism lurks an ableism which justifies nonhuman animal exploitation on the basis of cognitive differences between species. Animal industries center this ableist-speciesist nexus because of the ease through which such arguments sanitize slaughter for capitalist profit. As Taylor explains:

Ableist values are central to animal industries, whether the dependency, vulnerability, and presumed lack of emotional awareness or intellectual capacity of animals creates the groundwork for a system that makes billions of dollars in profit off of animal lives.¹³⁰

To wit, in Grandin's *Guide to Working with Farm Animals*, Grandin describes animals as products within the capitalist system. Her interest in so-called 'humane handling' is grounded in what 'consumers' value of their product. She explicitly writes that "the bottom line: calm handling is supremely important for both animals and humane welfare, and for the economics of your farm" when addressing why animals should not be injured—not for their well-being, but because "every bruise directly affects meat quality."¹³¹ Ergo, while Haraway may view Grandin's 'humane handling' as an example of her premise of "killing well," we argue that the commodification and exploitation of these nonhuman animals is inconsistent with animal liberty.

We suggest that Grandin's phrases that *could have been empowering* become *disempowering* for autistic people by virtue of her *specific relationships* to the nonhuman animals central to her analogy. "Comparing animal brains to human brains," Grandin asserts in *Animals in Translation*, "tells us two things. Number one: animals and people have different brains, so they experience the world differently—and number two: animals and people have an awful lot in common."¹³² The problem here is that the "people" in her statement only includes autistic people to the extent that they can be used to mirror the brain differences of animals-to-be-slaughtered. By linguistically connecting the autistic neurotype to the agriculturally condemned, Grandin does exactly what Taylor warns against: using cognitive capacity as a metaphorical "yardstick" of a being's value.¹³³

That is to say, while Grandin's statement *seems* to address that humans and animals have notable similarities and differences, when put into a larger context, her thesis includes two different "types" of people. The "people" who experience the world differently than animals are neurotypicals whereas the "people" who experience it similarly are autistic. And, since Grandin has immersed herself in the factory farming industry and the speciesist view that the purpose of a cow is to live until a human deems it time to die, she discursively ties the autistic body—the Other breed of person—to death.

Concluding Thoughts

Let us conclude where we began: we two autistic scholars have a vested interest in social justice—specifically, a total liberation model of social justice that takes seriously the discursive constructions of "humanity" and "animality" in a more-than-human world. For this reason, we deemed it necessary to deconstruct, reconstruct, and subsequently offer alternatives to dominant narratives of autistic advocacy and animal welfare. Our critique of Temple Grandin's analogical argumentation was premised upon an anti-ableist, anti-speciesist *telos*. We sug-

gested through ideological rhetorical criticism that Grandin's tacit but omnipresent necropolitical orientation toward autistic people and livestock animals called her celebrity status as an autistic/animal advocate into question. We hope that other scholars might continue on our journey to assess the unspoken, taken-for-granted necropolitics inherent in analogical depictions of autism and animality—not because autistic people are not animals, but because we are *all* animals in a world that has historically cast the animalized as killable, disposable, and morally less-than.

Where, then, should rhetorical scholars interested in animal liberation and/or autistic empowerment go from here? First, we recommend elevating the voices of autistic scholars beyond the loudest and most famous. We further recommend taking Salomon's suggestion of a "linked oppressions" model of autistic and animal liberation seriously. This model understands the correlation between how autistic and nonhuman animal bodies are interpreted (and subsequently treated) by a neurotypical society. In doing so, the linked oppressions model treats disability and animal liberation as causes that are both "intricately linked" and "interdependent" upon one another.¹³⁴ Salomon adds that "neurotypicalism is fundamentally speciesist" inasmuch as it "conceptually both insulates and inoculates one from the lived reality and hence the needs of nonhuman animals, making empathy for and meaningful improvement in the quality of life for nonhuman animals difficult."¹³⁵ Despite urban myths about the robotic, emotionless autistic person, we are able to "profoundly empathize with the plight and needs of nonhuman animals" and "can provide unique insights into animal intelligence" by virtue of our own lived experience.¹³⁶

Further, we propose that rhetoricians interested in discursive dehumanization and animalization engage with critical animal studies. As Salomon reminds us rhetoricians, Grandin does not "have a monopoly on confusing love with killing."¹³⁷ In a world steeped in ableism and speciesism, everyone needs to assess their complicity in the control and (de)valuation of bodies. Taylor further explains, "when animal commodification and slaughter is justified through ableist positions," anti-speciesist scholarship and praxis becomes a "radical anti-ableist position that takes seriously the ableism embedded in the way we sustain our corporeality—socially, politically, environmentally, and in what we consume."¹³⁸

In other words, nonhuman animals are people, and human people are animals. Becoming-animal does not *have* to be bad, but without a critical interrogation of what animalization means within the context of ableism and speciesism, both nonhuman animals and autistic people are at grave risk. Autistic people are like nonhuman animals inasmuch as neurotypical humans ought to step back, leave their biases at the door, and *listen* when both parties communicate what we need—even when those needs are at odds with violent practices that have been

deemed normal, natural, and necessary in neurotypical human society. In the name of anti-ableism and anti-speciesism, in the name of de-centering anthropocentrism and neurotypical cognition, and in the name of total liberation, let us all listen carefully.

Notes

1. We would, of course, like to point out the obvious: namely, that there are multiple different visions of nonhuman animal liberation. In this essay, we differentiate ourselves from those who consider livestock animal (ab)use morally acceptable as long as these sentient subjects are comfortable prior to their untimely deaths (otherwise known as “welfarism”). For those interested in learning about the theoretical and practical divergences between animal “welfare” and animal “rights,” we recommend: Gary Francione, *Rain without Thunder: The Ideology of the Animal Rights Movement*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010); Marc Bekoff and Carron A. Meaney, *Encyclopedia of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare* (New York: Routledge, 2013); among others.
2. Vasile Stanescu and Debs Stanescu, “Temple Grandin, Humane Meat, and the Myth of Consent,” In *Disability and Animality: Crip Perspectives in Critical Animal Studies* ed. Stephanie Jenkins, Kelly Struthers Montford, and Chloë Taylor, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2020): 173.
3. Contemporary constructions of ‘autism’ are (mis)understood due to initial diagnostic research that centered how white, cisgendered, middle class boys portrayed the behavioral indicators of the diagnosis. See: Jolynn L. Haney, “Autism, Females, and the DSM-5: Gender Bias in Autism Diagnosis.” *Social Work in Mental Health* 14, no. 4 (2016): 396–407; Sander Begeer, Saloua El Bouk, Wafaa Boussaid, Mark Meerum Terwogt, and Hans M. Koot. “Underdiagnosis and Referral Bias of Autism in Ethnic Minorities.” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 39, no. 1 (2009): 142.
4. Staff, Tell Me More, “Tell Me More: Autism and Understanding Animals,” January 24, 2019. <https://now.tufts.edu/articles/tell-me-more-autism-and-understanding-animals>.
5. Ruthann Richter, “5 Questions: Temple Grandin Discusses Autism, Animal Communication,” November 13, 2014. <http://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2014/11/5-questions—temple-grandin-discusses-autism—animal-communication.html>.
6. David L. Chandler, “Temple Grandin: Look at What People Can Do, Not What They Can’t,” *MIT News*, March 18, 2015. <https://news.mit.edu/2015/temple-grandin-talk-0318>.
7. Anna Kelsey-Sugg and Bec Zajac, “How Temple Grandin’s Autism Gave Her a ‘Cow’s- Eye View’ of the World.” *ABC News*, September 1, 2019. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-02/temple-grandin-cows-eye-view-agriculture-film/11349668>.

8. Temple Grandin, "Biography: Temple Grandin Ph.D." Accessed January 8, 2021. <http://www.grandin.com/temple.html>.
9. Temple Grandin, "Teaching principles of behavior and equipment design for handling livestock." *Journal of Animal Science* 71, no. 4 (1993): 1065–1070.
10. Stephen Edelson, "Temple Grandin's Hug Machine," Accessed January 8, 2021. <http://www.autism-help.org/points-grandin-hug-machine.htm>; Temple Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures and Other Reports from My Life with Autism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008).
11. Temple Grandin, "Calming Effects of Deep Touch Pressure in Patients with Autistic Disorder, College Students, and Animals." *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology* 2, no. 1 (1992): 65.
12. *Ibid.*, 69.
13. Anne Raver, "Qualities of an Animal Scientist: Cow's Eye View and Autism," *New York Times*, August 5, 1997. <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/05/science/qualities-of-an-animal-scientist-cow-s-eye-view-and-autism.html>.
14. Ingrid Newkirk, "Temple Grandin: Helping the Animals We Can't Save." PETA, October 14, 2013. <https://www.peta.org/blog/temple-grandin-helping-animals-cant-save/>.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Anita Wolff, "We Salute Temple Grandin, a Hero for Animals." *Saving Earth- Britannica*. Accessed December 16, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/explore/saving-earth/we-salute-temple-grandin-a-hero-for-animals>.
17. Temple Grandin and Margaret M. Scariano, *Emergence Labeled Autistic* (Novato, CA: Arena Press, 1986); Toni Tarver, "Animal Welfare: Good for Livestock, Good for Business." *IFT.org*, August 1, 2018. <https://www.ift.org/news-and-publications/food-technology-magazine/issues/2018/august/columns/inside-academia-temple-grandin-keith-belk-humane-treatment-food-animals>.
18. Jenny Bergenma, Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, and Ann-Sofie Lönnngren, "Autism and the Question of the Human." *Literature and Medicine* 33, no. 1 (2015): 221.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Anna Kelsey-Sugg and Bec Zajac, "How Temple Grandin's Autism Gave Her a 'Cow's- Eye View' of the World." *ABC*, September 1, 2019. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-02/temple-grandin-cows-eye-view-agriculture-film/11349668>.
21. Grandin and Johnson, *Animals in Translation*, 7.
22. M. Remi Yergeau, *Authoring Autism* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 4.
23. Lynn Worsham and Gary A. Olson, "Temple Grandin, Translator: Sounding Autism, Seeing Animals, Making a Difference." *JAC* 32, no. 1/2 (2012): 27–28.
24. Furthermore, we do not claim to be morally pure or to have the end-all be-all answer to environmental and social justice. Rather, in line with critical rhetoric's call for a critique of freedom, we believe that our perspective and standpoint offer a necessary counterpoint to accepted standards of speciesism and ableism that, if taken seriously, might get us a little *closer* to a just world.

25. Philip Wander, "The Ideological Turn in Modern Criticism." *Communication Studies* 34, no. 1 (1983): 1–18.
26. Speciesism can be defined as the discriminatory idea that *homo sapiens* are more valuable than other forms of life solely on the basis of their species categorization. Scholars interested in animal liberation usually associate the term with Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, although the term did not first originate there.
27. David Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1996): 1.
28. Stanescu and Stanescu, "Temple Grandin," 171.
29. We would caution readers who automatically associate a disabled person's financial or social success with "inspiration" to read about the narrative of the Super Crip. See Amit Kama, "Supercrips Versus the Pitiful Handicapped: Reception of Disabling Images by Disabled Audience Members." *Communications* 29, no. 4 (2004): 447–466.
30. Jody Emel and Harvey Neo, "Killing for Profit: Global Livestock Industries and Their Socio-ecological Implications." *Global political ecology* (2011): 67–83.
31. Stanescu and Stanescu, 2020, 166.
32. Autistic people consistently have problems finding gainful employment due to a combination of factors including, but not limited to, difficulty interviewing with neurotypical interviewers, difficulty socializing with coworkers, and overstimulation in the workplace. See: Simon M. Bury, Rebecca L. Flower, Rossslynn Zulla, David B. Nicholas, and Darren Hedley, "Workplace Social Challenges Experienced by Employees on the Autism Spectrum: An International Exploratory Study Examining Employee and Supervisor Perspectives." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 51, no. 5 (2021): 1614–1627; among others.
33. We understand that absolutist moral stances on killing, nonhuman animal or otherwise, are problematic in a complex world. While it is outside the scope of this paper to dive into ethical quandaries regarding "lifeboat situations," cultural preservation, or subsistence hunting, multiple authors have explored these moral conundrums from an intersectional and anti-speciesist perspective. See, for instance, the works of Indigenous critical animal studies scholars such Margaret Robinson, "Veganism and Mi'kmaq Legends." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 33, no. 1 (2013): 189–196 and Billy-Ray Belcourt, "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)locating Animality in Decolonial Thought." *Societies* 5, no. 1 (2015): 1–11.
34. Stanescu and Stanescu, "Temple Grandin," 173.
35. James Cherney, "The Rhetoric of Ableism." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2011): 1.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. Paul Heilker and M. Remi Yergeau, "Autism and Rhetoric." *College English* 73, no. 5 (2011): 487.
39. *Ibid.*, 487–488.
40. Yergeau, 2018, 6., emphasis ours.

41. Kristen Gillespie-Lynch, Steven K. Kapp, Patricia J. Brooks, Jonathan Pickens, and Ben Schwartzman. "Whose Expertise is It? Evidence for Autistic Adults as Critical Autism Experts." *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017): 1.
42. *Ibid.*, 5.
43. Gillespie-Lynch et al., "Whose Expertise is It?" 11.
44. Heilker and Yergeau, "Autism and Rhetoric," 492.
45. *Ibid.*, 486.
46. *Ibid.*, 495.
47. Yergeau, 2018, 206.
48. Sarat Colling, Sean Parson, and Alessandro Arrigoni, "Until all are Free: Total Liberation through Revolutionary Decolonization, Groundless Solidarity, and a Relationship Framework." *Counterpoints* 448 (2014): 52.
49. *Ibid.*, 70.
50. *Ibid.*, 67.
51. *Ibid.*, 69.
52. Ko, *Aphro-ism*, 23.
53. Taylor, *Beasts of Burden*, 18.
54. Aph Ko and Syl Ko, *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters* (New York: Lantern Publishing, 2017): 23.
55. Sunaura Taylor, *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation*. (New York: The New Press, 2017): 110.
56. *Ibid.*, 20.
57. *Ibid.*, 59, 94.
58. *Ibid.*, 110.
59. Fabrizio Macagno and Douglas Walton, "Argument from Analogy in Law, the Classical Tradition, and Recent Theories." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 42, no. 2 (2009): 157.
60. André Juthe, "Argument by Analogy," *Argumentation* 19, no. 1 (2005): 3.
61. For this reason, literary devices such as "metaphor" and "simile" are also modes of analogical reasoning. Chaim Perelman describes metaphors as "condensed analogies." We therefore include analogical argumentation devices such as these in our analysis of Grandin's discourse. See: Chaim Perelman, *Realm of Rhetoric*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982): 137.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*, 4.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*, 5.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*, 24, emphasis mine.
68. Macagno and Walton, "Argument from Analogy," 156.
69. Perelman, *Realm of Rhetoric*, 137.
70. Fabrizio Macagno and Douglas Walton assert that two objects are analogous even though they are completely different so long as the two subjects can be subsumed under a common functional genus. Thus, when one compares autistics to livestock

animals, they do not assert that autistics *are* livestock animals, but rather that their sameness exists in certain categories such as age, relationship to humans, etc.

71. See Martha Solomon, "The Rhetoric of Dehumanization: An Analysis of Medical Reports of the Tuskegee Syphilis Project," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 49, no. 4 (1985): 233–247; Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills, "The Vermin Have Struck Again': Dehumanizing the Enemy in Post 9/11 Media Representations." *Media, War & Conflict* 3, no. 2 (2010): 152–167, among others.
72. Marjorie Spiegel, *Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (London: Mirror Books, 1996).
73. Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002).
74. Claire Jean Kim, "Moral Extensionism or Racist Exploitation? The Use of Holocaust and Slavery Analogies in the Animal Liberation Movement," *New Political Science* 33, no. 3 (2011): 311–333.
75. This is not to imply that emotional argumentation is invalid. Animal liberation activists have effectively utilized "moral shocks" to elicit attitudinal changes in audiences. But these pathos-based appeals must be done strategically to avoid alienating audiences further. See: James M. Jasper and Jane D. Poulsen. "Recruiting Strangers and Friends: Moral Shocks and Social Networks in Animal rights and Anti-Nuclear Protests," *Social Problems* 42, no. 4 (1995): 493–512. Corey Lee Wrenn, "Resonance of Moral Shocks in Abolitionist Animal Rights Advocacy: Overcoming Contextual Constraints," *Society & Animals* 21, no. 4 (2013): 379–394; among others.
76. Peter Singer is considered a "founding father" of contemporary "animal rights" discourse. However, as a utilitarian, Singer does not use the language of rights in his writing. Rather, he is concerned with the equal consideration of interests (such as a human or nonhuman animal's inherent interest in staying alive and/or avoiding pain) when measuring the potential benefits and harms caused in an action. See: Peter Singer, "Why Speciesism Is Wrong: A Response to K Agan." *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 33, no. 1 (2016): 31–35.
77. Daniel A Dombrowski, *Babies and Beasts: The Argument from Marginal Cases* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997).
78. Steven M. Wise, *Rattling the Cage: Toward Legal Rights for Animals* (New York: Hachette+ ORM, 2014).
79. Taylor, *Beasts of Burden*, 128.
80. Paul A. Lombardo, "Three Generations, no Imbeciles: New Light on Buck v. Bell." *NYU Law Review* 60 (1985): 30.
81. Gerald V. O'Brien, *Framing the Moron: The Social Construction of Feeble-mindedness in the American Eugenic era.* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2015).
82. S. Marek Muller, "For the Good of the Species: Gary Francione and the Omnipresence of Eugenics in Animal Rights Rhetoric." *Communication Studies* 68, no. 5 (2017): 588–606.

83. Daniel Salomon, "From Marginal Cases to Linked Oppressions: Reframing the Conflict between the Autistic Pride and Animal Rights Movements." *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* 8, no. 1/2 (2010): 47–72.
84. Achille Mbembé, "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.
85. Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and philosophy*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
86. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020): 1.
87. Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 11.
88. Eric King Watts, "Postracial Fantasies, Blackness, and Zombies." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 14, no. 4 (2017): 323.
89. Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 11.
90. Jared D. Margulies, "Making the 'Man-Eater': Tiger Conservation as Necropolitics." *Political Geography* 69 (2019): 15.
91. Quoted in Dave Bianculli, "Temple Grandin: The Woman Who Talks to Animals." NPR, February 5, 2010. <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/123383699>.
92. Temple Grandin, "Calming Effects of Deep Touch Pressure in Patients with Autistic Disorder, College Students, and Animals." *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology* 2, no. 1 (1992): 63.
93. Temple Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures*, 84.
94. "Aggressive Behaviour: Autistic Children and Teenagers." *Raising Children Network*, November 18, 2020. <https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/behaviour/common-concerns/aggressive-behaviour-asd>.
95. Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures*, 27.
96. Grandin and Johnson, *Animals in Translation*, 52.
97. *Ibid.*, 57.
98. Temple Grandin, "Thinking the Way Animals Do: Unique Insights from a Person with a Singular Understanding." Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.grandin.com/references/thinking.animals.html>.
99. Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures*, 27.
100. Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. (New York: Verso, 1995).
101. Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, its Overrepresentation—An Argument." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.
102. Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures*, 27.
103. Temple Grandin, *The Way I See It: A Personal Look at Autism and Asperger's*, (Arlington, TX: Future Horizons, Inc., 2008), 5.
104. *Ibid.*, 8.
105. *Ibid.*, 11.
106. *Ibid.*, 211.
107. Internalized ableism refers to disabled subjects' perception of themselves as inferior due to believing in ableist cultural standards. See: Fiona A. Kumari Campbell,

- “Exploring Internalized Ableism using Critical Race Theory,” *Disability & society* 23, no. 2 (2008): 151–162.
108. Stanescu and Stanescu, “Temple Grandin,” 173.
 109. *Ibid.*
 110. Grandin and Johnson, *Animals in Translation*, 1.
 111. *Ibid.*, 24.
 112. Ruthann Richter, “5 Questions: Temple Grandin Discusses Autism, Animal Communication,” November 13, 2014. <http://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2014/11/5-questions—temple-grandin-discusses-autism—animal-communicati.html>.
 113. See Caitlyn Burford and Julie Schutten. “Internatural activists and the “Blackfish effect”: Contemplating captive orcas’ protest rhetoric through a coherence frame.” *Frontiers in Communication* 1 (2017): 16; Emily Plec, *Perspectives on Human-Animal Communication: Internatural Communication*, (New York: Routledge, 2013); among others.
 114. Yergeau, 2018, 3.
 115. Grandin and Johnson, *Animals in Translation*, 6–7.
 116. *Ibid.*, 57.
 117. *Ibid.*, 6.
 118. Quoted in Bianculli, “Temple Grandin.”
 119. Scott Barry Kaufman, “An Interview with Temple Grandin on The Autistic Brain.” *Scientific American*, June 26, 2013. <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/beautiful-minds/q-a-with-temple-grandin-on-the-autistic-brain/>.
 120. Temple Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures*, 122.
 121. Quoted in Bianculli, “Temple Grandin.”
 122. Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures*, 91.
 123. Daniel Salomon, “From Marginal Cases to Linked Oppressions,” 47.
 124. *Ibid.*
 125. Laura Hudson, “A Species of Thought: Bare life and Animal Being,” *Antipode* 43, no. 5 (2011): 1664.
 126. *Ibid.*
 127. Margulies, “Making the ‘Man-Eater,’” 15.
 128. Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013): 78–80.
 129. A full-scale exploration as to whether killing an animal (human or nonhuman) is ever justifiable is far too complex a topic for one paper. We do not pretend to be the moral arbiters of life and death. That being said, we would note that while the industrialized mechanics of killing is the most egregious example of normalized violence towards nonhuman animals (as well as the human communities who work and live near the factory farms), other mechanics of killing nonhumans should not be *prima facie* justifiable. Scholars such as Andre Krebber remind us that in order for the concept of “killing well” to exist, then there must be logics that can make something “killable.” For those skeptical of nonhuman animals’ inherent or socially contracted “rights,” we would also note how, because nonhuman animals are consistently

regulated to the confines of the “killable” (so long as the killing is done “well”), this categorization has been used against humans who are subsequently constructed as “sub-human” (or “animal”). Black studies theorists such as Bénédicte Boisseron are particularly concerned with this connection. For further interrogation on the ethics and ramifications of naming animals as killable, see: André Kriebler, “Reengaging Voices of Animal Suffering.” *Food Ethics* 1, no. 3 (2018): 273–282; Bénédicte Boisseron, *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question*. Columbia University Press, 2018.

130. Taylor, *Beasts of Burden*, 59.
131. Temple Grandin, *Temple Grandin’s Guide to Working with Farm Animals: Safe, Humane Livestock Handling Practices for the Small Farm*, (North Adams, MA: Storey Publishing, 2017): 4–5.
132. Grandin, *Animals in Translation*, 53.
133. Taylor, *Beasts of Burden*, 128.
134. Saloman, “From Marginal Cases to Linked Oppressions,” 59.
135. *Ibid.*
136. *Ibid.*, 50–51.
137. *Ibid.*, note 12.
138. Taylor, *Beasts of Burden*, 201.

S. Marek Muller is an assistant professor of rhetorical studies at Florida Atlantic University. Their scholarship is at the intersection of rhetoric, critical-cultural communication, and environmental communication. Muller’s work on the discursive constructions of humanity and animality has appeared in outlets such as *Environmental Communication*, *Communication Studies*, and *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*. Their monograph, *Impersonating Animals: Rhetoric, Ecofeminism, and Animal Rights Law*, was published by the Michigan State University Press in 2020.

Z. Zane McNeill is a nonbinary scholar-activist from West Virginia who has published edited collections with Sanctuary Publishers, PM Press, and Lantern Publishing & Media. They were the recipient of the 2022 National Lawyer Guild’s Legal Worker Award for their labor and animal rights organizing and are a Board Member of the nonprofit, Rights for Animal Rights Advocates (RARA).