

# LEARNING FROM TEMPLE GRANDIN, OR, ANIMAL STUDIES, DISABILITY STUDIES, AND WHO COMES AFTER THE SUBJECT

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Of the various contemporary fields of interdisciplinary cultural studies that have emerged over the past decade, two of the most philosophically ambitious and ethically challenging, I would argue, are Animal Studies and Disability Studies. Both often are taken to be the latest chapters in the academic assimilation of the so-called 'new social movements' (civil rights, feminism, environmentalism, gay and lesbian activism, and so on) that have fundamentally reshaped the study of society and culture over the past thirty years or more. Part of what makes these newcomers significant is that they pose fundamental challenges, as these earlier movements have, to a model of subjectivity and experience drawn from the liberal justice tradition and its central concept of 'rights', in which ethical standing and civic inclusion are predicated upon rationality, autonomy, and agency. And that agency, in turn, is taken to be expressive of the intentionality of one who is a member of what Kant called 'the community of reasonable beings' - an intentionality that is taken to be more or less transparent to the subject itself.

Now my aim here is not to offer, as I have elsewhere, a detailed discussion of this model of the subject, which I have glossed here, of course, far too schematically.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it is to suggest that both Animal studies and Disability studies show us something about the limitations of this model, and in doing so they call upon us to rethink questions of ethical and political responsibility within what I have sometimes characterised as a fundamentally posthumanist set of coordinates.<sup>2</sup> As a result, what we are compelled to confront in this new work is not so much a 'new and improved' theory of the subject (as rights-holding agent) as what comes *after* the subject (to borrow the title of a well-known collection of essays).<sup>3</sup> And it is in the wake of this 'after', I believe, that new lines of empathy, affinity, and respect between different forms of life, both human and non-human, may be realised in ways not accountable, either philosophically or ethically, by the basic coordinates of liberal humanism.

Interestingly enough, both of these fields - animal studies and disability studies - have intersected in what has recently emerged as a small subfield of its own: authors who claim that their disability has enabled for them a unique understanding of non-human animals and how they experience the world. The most famous of these is probably Monty Roberts, the famed 'horse whisperer', who was born with a severe form of colour-blindness called 'achromatopia' which allows him to see only blacks, whites, and a remarkably subtle scale of grays.<sup>4</sup> For that very reason, however, he developed early in

1. See chapter one of my *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003, pp21-43 and its discussion of the 'rights' model as deployed by animal rights philosophy.

2. Ibid. See in particular the concluding chapter, 'Postmodern Ethics, the Question of the Animal, and Posthumanist Theory'.

3. *Who Comes After the Subject?*, Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (eds), New York, Routledge, 1991.

4. I am indebted to Richard Nash for pointing out the link between Roberts's work with animals and disability.

5. See Lawrence Scanlan's discussion in his introduction to Monty Roberts, *The Man Who Listens to Horses*, New York, Random House, 1997, ppxxviii-xxix.

life a keen perception of movement that has allowed him to read the body language of horses with amazing subtlety and precision.<sup>5</sup> And then there is the case of Dawn Prince-Hughes, a sufferer of the form of autism known as Asperger's Syndrome, who claims that her disability enabled her to have an unusually keen understanding of the nuances of the social interactions and communications of a group of zoo gorillas. And as with Monty Roberts, this was crucial for the evolution of her own *self*-understanding, enabling her to move from being 'a wild thing out of context', living on the margins of society, to completing a Ph.D. in anthropology, and eventually to becoming an author and editor. Gorillas, she says, 'taught me how to be civilized'.<sup>6</sup>

And then, of course, there is the case I will be discussing here, Temple Grandin, who reflects on her life with autism in three books published over the past nineteen years. Grandin - an animal science Ph.D. who has designed one third of all the livestock-handling facilities in the US - insists that her experience with autism and its specific characteristics (the intensely visual rather than verbal quality of her mental life, the acute sensitivity to tactile stimulation, and so on) has given her a special understanding of how non-human animals experience the world, one that has enabled her to design animal holding and processing facilities that are far more humane for the animals involved. Grandin's story was first brought to national attention by Oliver Sacks in an article published in *The New Yorker* in 1994.<sup>7</sup> The opening lines of Sacks' foreword to Grandin's second book, *Thinking in Pictures*, gesture - but only gesture, I think - toward what makes her case so instructive for my purposes. Sacks calls Grandin's first book, *Emergence: Labeled Autistic*, 'unprecedented and, in a way, unthinkable' 'because there had never before been an "inside narrative" of autism; unthinkable because it had been medical dogma for forty years or more that there *was* no "inside," no inner life, in the autistic, or that if there was it would be forever denied access or expression'.<sup>8</sup>

That 'dogma' is founded in no small part on the too-rapid assimilation of the questions of subjectivity, consciousness, and cognition to the question of language ability - a dogma that is perhaps even more entrenched in the humanities and social sciences than in areas such as medicine. Indeed, as many scholars have argued - most lucidly, perhaps, Richard Rorty, in his exposition of 'the linguistic turn' in twentieth century philosophy that bridges figures as diverse as Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Quine, and Derrida - the shibboleth 'where there is reason, there is a subject' morphs, in the twentieth century, into 'where there is *language*, there is a subject'.<sup>9</sup> In this light, the title of Grandin's second book - *Thinking in Pictures* - would constitute an oxymoron even for some fairly sophisticated contemporary philosophers of consciousness and cognition, such as Daniel Dennett;<sup>10</sup> as she herself notes bluntly, 'I would be denied the ability to think by scientists who maintain that language is essential for thinking'.

Grandin's work is, of course, written squarely in the face of this dogma, and it is filled with examples of her ability to cross-reference her own experience

6. Dawn Prince-Hughes, *Songs of the Gorilla Nation: My Journey Through Autism*, New York, Harmony Books, 2004, p1.

7. Oliver Sacks, 'An Anthropologist on Mars', *New Yorker*, 27/12/1994, pp106-25.

8. Oliver Sacks, 'Foreword' to Temple Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures. And Other Reports from My Life With Autism*, New York, Random House, 1995, p11.

9. Richard Rorty (ed), *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method*, 2nd ed., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992. I discuss this topic in detail in chapter two of *Animal Rites*, and analyse its continuation in the philosophy of cognition and consciousness in my essay 'Thinking Other-Wise: Deconstruction, Cognitive Science, and the (Non)Speaking (Non)Human Subject', forthcoming in a special issue of *Oxford Literary Review* entitled 'DerridAnimals', Neil Badmington (ed), 2008.

10. For a critique of Dennett on this point, see Wolfe, 'Thinking Other-Wise,' *ibid*.

and those of the animals who are handled in facilities she has designed. She points out, for example, that because her mental life as an autistic is intensely visual, not verbal, she is acutely aware of how different a cow's visual experience is from our own. Because cattle derive from prey species (and because their eyes are mounted on the side of their head), their visual system is geared toward detecting novel movement in an extraordinarily wide field of vision. But the price they pay for this nearly 360-degree panorama is a very narrow frontal field in which they have good depth perception. This contrasts pointedly, of course, with the visual systems of predatory species - including the cats and dogs with whom many of us are most accustomed to interacting - whose eyes are mounted in front, enabling acute depth perception and the ability to gauge distance quite accurately.

One result of this visual specificity for cattle is that they 'are frightened by high contrasts of light and dark as well as by people and objects that move suddenly'. Grandin observes, 'I've seen cattle that were handled in two identical facilities easily walk through one and balk in the other. The only difference between the two facilities was their orientation to the sun'.<sup>11</sup> And not surprisingly, cattle respond very sharply to small visual stimuli that humans don't even register - a length of chain dangling from a feedlot fence, a reflection in a puddle of water on the runway to a dip vat, a crumbled white plastic bottle teetering in the wind (*TinP* p143).

Grandin insists in her most recent book, *Animals In Translation*, that 'being a visual thinker was the start of my career with animals ... because animals are visual creatures, too. Animals are controlled by what they see. When I say I'm a visual thinker', she continues, 'I don't mean just that I'm good at making architectural drawings and designs ... I actually think in pictures. During my *thinking* process I have no words in my head at all' (*TinP* p17). In fact, she often characterises her mental processes in terms of a videotape library or CD-ROM that she scans for specific images, which then get 'language'd' and narrativised in a second-order process. 'My mind is like a web browser', she writes in one article. 'When I lecture, the language is mostly "downloaded" out of memory from files that are like tape recordings. I use slides or notes to trigger the opening of different files ... I look at visual images on the "computer monitor" of my imagination, then the language part of me describes those images'.<sup>12</sup>

Grandin's books are full of such examples, and what is most interesting about them is that here, visual prowess - instead of being stereotypically expressive of the humanist *ability* to survey, organise, and master space that finds canonical expression (as many scholars have noted) in tropes ranging from the Renaissance theory of perspective, to Freud's parsing of the evolutionary sensorium in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, through Sartre's discussion of the Gaze, to Foucault's panopticon, and much else - is instead offered here as a figure of *disability*. Even more interesting, Grandin's *visuality* is implicated in what are, for humanism, two ontologically opposed registers, both of them radically inhuman or at least *ahuman*: on the one hand, the

11. Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures*, op. cit., p22. Subsequent references to Grandin's *Thinking in Pictures* are cited in the text as *TinP* followed by page number.

12. 'My Mind is a Web Browser: How People With Autism Think', <http://www.grandin.com/inc/mind.web.browser.html>

general animal sensorium, within which sight is only one of the senses (and for many animals not the dominant one); and, on the other hand, the opposed register of the technical and mechanical: Temple Grandin as recording, storage, and playback device, mechanically scanning the visual field like Commander Data in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. In Grandin's story, in other words, visuality may be animal, it may be technical, but it is *anything but* 'human' - and that all the more so, paradoxically enough, for being so 'accurate' and acute.

A corollary of this - and I will develop this point in a moment - is that what we think of as 'normal' human visuality does not see - and it (necessarily) does not see that it does not see. Here, we might reference the various critiques of humanism's trope of visuality-as-mastery that I mentioned a moment ago, but we could also be more down to earth and simply note - alongside the enormous body of work on the autopoiesis of perception and consciousness in contemporary cognitive science and neuroscience - that this 'not seeing' is crucial to the human being's (and to any being's) organisation of an overwhelming flood of visual input into a field of meaning.<sup>13</sup>

We might recall in this connection Grandin's discussion of a well-known set of experiments exploring what is called 'inattention blindness' in humans. Daniel Simons, the head of the Visual Cognition Lab at the University of Illinois, showed test subjects a videotape of a basketball game and asked them to count the number of passes made by one of the teams. After the tape has been rolling for a while, a woman in a gorilla suit walks onto the screen, faces the camera, beats her chest with her fists, and then leaves. What is remarkable is that fifty percent of those watching the tape do not even register the woman in the gorilla suit; even when prompted later specifically about it, they have nothing to say. It's not that they don't remember seeing it, exactly; it's that they apparently never registered seeing it in the first place. But the point I want to stress is that this blindness takes place because of an entire framework of socially conditioned expectations about meaning and the visual field.<sup>14</sup> As Grandin summarises it, 'it's not that normal people don't see the lady dressed in a gorilla suit at all; it's that their brains screen her out before she reaches consciousness' (*AiT* p65). Moreover, research suggests, as Grandin puts it, that 'inattention blindness works at a high level of mental processing, meaning that your brain does a lot of processing before it allows something into consciousness' (*AiT* p66).

What we have here, then, are two *different* kinds of 'not-seeing': 1) the transformation, by 'normal' subjects, of an unstructured flood of sensory input into a semiotically organised visual field of meaning, which itself depends not only on biological constraints but also on an entire set of social-symbolic conventions, forms, and expectations that eventuate in a 'high level of mental processing'; and, by contrast, 2) Grandin's 'abnormal,' hyper-acute, almost photographic visuality that does *not* organise and harmonise objects in the visual field in terms of reason or a semiotic system - literally, their *ratio* - but instead gets mired, visually stuttering and hiccupping, as it were, in a

13. The literature on this topic is at this point immense, but see, for example, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*, revised edition, Boston, Shambhala Press, 1992, and Gerald Edelman and Giulio Tononi, *A Universe of Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination*, New York, Basic Books, 2000.

14. Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson, *Animals In Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behavior*, New York, Scribner, 2005, p25. Subsequent references to Grandin and Johnson are cited in the text as *AiT* followed by page number.

heterogeneous flotsam of particulars - puddles shocked with glare, wavering plastic cups, bright lengths of dangling chain - none of which becomes furniture for the eye as agent of *ratio* or *logos*.

This is precisely what Jacques Derrida will be interested in, in *Memoirs of the Blind*, in what he calls 'the ruin' of vision. For Derrida, *any* visual space, in being seen, is also and at the same time constituted by blindness, not least because any seen space is constituted by a consciousness that is not free-standing and transparent to itself, but is rather enmeshed in a socio-semiotic system constituted by *différance*, by the interplay of presence and absence, what it is and what it is not, that constitutes Grandin's 'high level of mental processing'. And in these terms, of course, seeing (later) that you didn't see (then) the woman in the gorilla suit will in no way render transparent the visual field. In fact, in Derrida's terms, it is the blind, the *dis*-abled, who 'see' the truth of vision; it is they who most readily understand that the core fantasy of humanism's trope of vision is to think that perceptual space is organised around and for the looking subject; that the pure point of the eye (as agent of *ratio* and *logos*) *exhausts* the field of the visible; that the 'invisible' is only - indeed, merely - that which *has not yet been seen* by a subject who is, in principle, *capable* of seeing *all*.

Over and against this, Derrida argues in his discussion of the visual that the invisible is 'not simply the opposite of vision,' not simply its negative image, the visible in waiting, as it were, already there but simply as yet unseen. Rather - and this is obviously derived from the general principle of 'spacing' in relation to writing as *écriture* in early texts such as *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference* - as he puts it in an interview on what he calls 'the spatial arts,' space is not 'essentially mastered by [*livré a*] the look'.<sup>15</sup> He elaborates the point in a difficult passage from *Memoirs of the Blind*, the opening gestures of which have particular resonance for Grandin's hypervisuality - a visual registration of objects that is so detailed and acute that the viewed object itself becomes strangely opaque. Derrida writes,

In order to be absolutely foreign to the visible and even to ... the possibility of the visible, this invisibility would still inhabit the visible, or rather, it would come to haunt it to the point of being confused with it ... The visible *as such* would be invisible, not as *visibility*, the *phenomenality* or *essence* of the visible, but as the singular body of the visible itself, *right on* the visible - so that, by emanation, and as if it were secreting its own *medium*, the visible would produce blindness ... To be the other of the visible, *absolute* invisibility must neither take place elsewhere nor constitute another visible, that is, something that does not yet appear or has already disappeared ... This nonvisible does not describe a phenomenon that is present elsewhere, that is latent, imaginary, unconscious, hidden, or past; it is a 'phenomenon' whose inappearance is of another kind.<sup>16</sup>

The invisible, then, remains '*heterogeneous*' to the visible, a 'spatialisation' of

15. 'The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,' in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts*, Peter Brunette and David Wills (eds), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p24.

16. Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self Portrait and Other Ruins*, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (trans), Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp51-2. Subsequent references are cited in the text as *MofB* followed by page number.

the visual that might also be described in the terms of contemporary systems theory and its analysis of the paradoxical 'blind spot' of any observation, the fact that the elementary cognitive or perceptual act depends upon a two-sided distinction (between figure and ground, inside and outside, and so on) whose paradoxical 'identity of identity and non-identity' (to use Hegelian terms) must be not-seen if the distinction is to be deployed *at all* in the services of cognition. For systems theorist Niklas Luhmann - and this is his version, I take it, of Derrida's contention that only the blind can see - this is why 'reality is what one does not perceive when one perceives it'.<sup>17</sup> Nor is it a coincidence, I think, that Luhmann acknowledges the Kantian resonances of his position ('we resist the temptation to call this creation', he writes<sup>18</sup>) while Derrida, in the passage just cited, refers to 'what we have here seen fit to call transcendental' of this nonvisible, one that 'is not unrelated to what Merleau-Ponty speaks of as "pure transcendence, without an ontic mask"' (specifically, in Merleau-Ponty's 1993 *The Visible and the Invisible*).

These dynamics are crucial, I think, for understanding not just the autistic's 'blinding' visuality, but also the fact that the 'normal' human is *doubly* blind, blind to its blindness regarding the radical asymmetries and heterogeneities among all the different life forms who see - and for that very reason, do *not* see - in very specific ways. After all, does it make sense to say that a ring-tailed lemur 'does not see' the object of the bat's echolocation? That a starfish 'does not see' the image in an insect's compound eye? Moreover, as Derrida observes, 'from its first words on, Metaphysics associates sight with knowledge' but 'we must also know how to hear, and to listen. I might suggest somewhat playfully that we have to know how to shut our eyes in order to be better listeners'.<sup>19</sup> This decentering of the sight is all the more important because, as he reminds us,

the modern dominance of the principle of reason had to go hand in hand with the interpretation of the essence of beings as *objects*, an object present as representation (*Vorstellung*), an object placed and positioned *before* a subject. This latter, a man who says 'I', an *ego* certain of itself, thus ensures his own technical mastery over the totality of what is ... The principle of reason installs its empire only to the extent that the abyssal question of the being that is hiding within it remains hidden (TPofR p139).

To reframe the question of the visual in this way - to cut it loose from its indexical relation to the human, to reason and the representational mastery of space itself, and set it adrift within the generalised animal sensorium as 'merely' the equal of the dog's sense of smell or the horse's sense of touch - is to appreciate more fully Derrida's observation that 'a de-hierarchization of the senses displaces what we call the real, that which resists all appropriation'.<sup>20</sup> And it provides a useful context for 'hearing' the philosophical as well as zoological resonance of Grandin's attention to the specificity and intensity of other forms of sensory experience as well. (For example, she notes that

17. Niklas Luhmann, 'The Cognitive Program of Constructivism and a Reality that Remains Unknown', in *Selforganization: Portrait of a Scientific Revolution*, Wolfgang Krohn et al (eds), Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1990, p76.

18. Niklas Luhmann, 'The Paradox of Observing Systems', *Cultural Critique*, 31, (Fall 1995): 45.

19. Jacques Derrida, 'The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils', in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, Jan Plug et al (trans), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004, pp130-31. Subsequent references are cited in the text as TPofR followed by page number.

20. Jacques Derrida, 'Others Are Secret Because They Are Other', *Paper Machine*, Rachel Bowlby (trans), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005, p156.

cattle have 'supersensitive' hearing, and in fact, she observes 'the sounds that upset cattle are the same kinds of sounds that are unbearable to many autistic children' (*TimP* p144)).

Even more interesting, given her claim that autistics, 'normal' functioning humans, and non-human animals exist on what she calls 'the great continuum,' is her discussion of spatial and tactile experience in animals and autistics. She notes, for example, that just as cattle have a 'flight zone' that varies from zero to over one hundred feet (depending on how tame the cattle are and how agitated they are at the moment), autistic children 'often lash out when they stand close to other children while waiting in a line ... Having another child accidentally brush up against them can cause them to withdraw with fear like a frightened animal'. But interestingly enough, for many autistics, even though 'a light unexpected touch triggers flight ... a firm touch ... is calming' (*TimP* p147).

This phenomenon is at the centre of one of the more remarkable discussions in the book: the 'squeeze machine' that Grandin invented when she was a teenager. She notes that it had long been observed, but not really understood, that autistic children often like to wedge themselves under mattresses or in tight spaces, or roll up tightly in blankets or rugs (*TimP* p62). She reports that as a child she often daydreamed 'about constructing a device that would apply pressure to my body. I visualized a box with an inflatable liner that I could lie in', like 'being totally encased in inflatable splints' (*TimP* p63). Then one day, while watching cattle on her aunt's ranch being held in the 'squeeze chute' for vaccinations, she noticed that some of the cattle suddenly relaxed when pressed between the large panels on each side. A few days later, after experiencing a severe panic attack, she actually got inside the chute and asked her aunt to close the head restraint bars around her neck and slowly squeeze the sides of the chute against her. 'At first', she writes, 'there were a few moments of sheer panic as I stiffened up and tried to pull away from the pressure ... Five seconds later I felt a wave of relaxation, and about thirty minutes later I asked Aunt Ann to release me. For about an hour afterward I felt very calm and serene'. The magnitude of the experience for Grandin is hard to exaggerate; she writes, 'this was the first time I ever felt really comfortable in my own skin' (*TimP* p63).

This extraordinary sensitivity to touch and pressure is a quite common phenomenon with autistics, Grandin reports, and 'even though the sense of touch is often compromised by excessive sensitivity, it can sometimes provide the most reliable information about the environment' (*TimP* p65). In extreme cases, autistics actually have severe problems locating the boundaries of their own bodies. One patient, in a book about her own famous case, reports that she could only perceive one part of her body at a time and had no sense of it as forming a whole unit, and she 'tapped rhythmically and sometimes slapped herself to determine where her body boundaries were'. In fact, Grandin suggests that the well-known behaviour of some nonverbal autistics of constantly tapping and touching things may be an effort 'to figure out

where the boundaries are in their environment, like a blind person tapping with a cane' (*TinP* p66).

The autistic's body boundary problem is at the core of another remarkable moment in *Thinking in Pictures*, which dramatises in an especially powerful way many of the themes I have been discussing thus far. Grandin was hired to redesign a very cruel system used for the kosher slaughter of cattle, replacing it with a chute that would gently hold the animal in a standing position while the rabbi performed the final deed. 'It worked best when I operated the hydraulic levers unconsciously, like using my legs for walking', she writes.

I had to force myself to relax and just allow the restrainer to become part of my body ... Through the machine, I reached out and held the animal. When I held his head in the yoke, I imagined placing my hands on his forehead and under his chin and gently easing him into position. Body boundaries seemed to disappear ... [T]he parts of the apparatus that held the animal felt as if they were an extension of my own body, similar to the phantom limb effect ... During this intense period of concentration I no longer heard noise from the plant machinery ... [E]verything seemed quiet and serene. It was almost a religious experience ... I was able to look at each animal, to hold him gently and make him as comfortable as possible during the last moments of his life ... A new door had been opened. It felt like walking on water (*TinP* pp41-42).

Now many, many things could be said about this passage: its echo (if only between the lines) of the ancient rites of animal sacrifice (which one might well gloss in light not only of Derrida's work but also Georges Bataille's *The Theory of Religion*); the rhetorical decision here to designate the slaughtered animal with the pronoun 'he'; the obvious ethical issues that present themselves around the unnecessary killing of animals - however comfortably or compassionately - for human consumption; the mechanisation of that process as part of the larger regime of factory farming and agribusiness. All of these we would surely want to explore in another context. But for the moment I would simply like to draw attention to how here, disability becomes the *positive*, indeed *necessary* condition for a powerful experience by Grandin that crosses not only the lines of species difference, but also of the organic and inorganic, the biological and mechanical, as well. In a kind of dramatisation of the category meltdowns identified canonically in Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto,' disability here positively makes a mess of the conceptual and ontological coordinates that Grandin's own rendering of the passage surely reinstates rhetorically on another level.

This realisation - that what we traditionally think of as 'disability' can in fact be a powerful and unique form of abled-ness - is a fundamental assumption, of course, for much recent work in disability studies.<sup>21</sup> Here, however, I want to interpret the significance of this moment in Grandin's work, and her case in general, in a way that diverges rather sharply from some of disability

21. For example, as leading disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes about Claude Monet and Chuck Close, 'they were great artists not in spite of disability but because of disability'. 'Disability and Representation', *PMLA* 120:2, March 2005, p524. Subsequent references are cited in the text as D&R followed by page number.

studies's dominant paradigms. At first blush, of course, the most obvious way for animal studies and disability studies to make common cause would be within a shared liberal 'democratic framework' which, as one philosopher puts it, 'counts on the progress of "the equality of conditions"' to gradually increase the sphere of legal rights and ethical recognition. On this view, non-human animals and the disabled would be seen as simply the latest traditionally marginalised groups to have ethical and legal enfranchisement wholly or partially extended to them in an expanding democratic context that entails what Nancy Fraser has called the 'politics of recognition'.<sup>22</sup>

But a fundamental problem with the liberal humanist model, as I have argued elsewhere with regard to the animal rights framework,<sup>23</sup> is not so much what it wants, as the price it pays for what it wants: that in its very attempt to recognise the unique difference and specific ethical value of the other, it reinstates the very normative model of subjectivity that it insists is the problem in the first place. In animal rights philosophy - drawn from the ethics of Kant (in Tom Regan) or the utilitarianism of Bentham (in Peter Singer) - animals end up being worthy of ethical standing because they are diminished versions of *us* (in their capacity to experience suffering, their status as what Regan calls 'biographical beings', and so on - all characteristics and 'interests' that 'normal' human beings possess in greater abundance).<sup>24</sup>

Now I am not suggesting, of course, that working to liberalise the interpretation by the courts of the Americans with Disabilities Act is a waste of time, or that lobbying to upgrade animal cruelty prosecutions from misdemeanour to felony status is a bad thing. But what I am suggesting is that these pragmatic pursuits are forced to work within the purview of a liberal humanism in philosophy, politics, and law that is bound by a quite historically and ideologically specific set of coordinates that, because of that very boundedness, allow one to achieve certain pragmatic gains in the short run, but at the price of a radical foreshortening of a more ambitious and more profound ethical project: a new and more inclusive form of ethical pluralism that it is our charge, now, to frame. That project would think the ethical force of disability and non-human subjectivity as something other than merely an expansion of the liberal humanist *ethnos* to ever newer populations, as merely the next room added onto the (increasingly opulent and globalising) house of what Richard Rorty has called 'the rich North Atlantic democracies'.<sup>25</sup>

Derrida is especially forceful on this point in a recent interview on what he has called 'the question of THE (so-called) animal.' 'For the moment,' he suggests,

we ought to limit ourselves to working out the rules of law [*droit*] such as they exist. But it will eventually be necessary to reconsider the history of this law and to understand that although animals cannot be placed under concepts like citizen, consciousness linked with speech ... etc., they are not for all that without a 'right'. It's the very concept of right that will have to be 'rethought'.

22. Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, Carol Volk (trans), Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995, p27. Regarding the politics of recognition, see, for example, Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, London, Verso, 2003.

23. 'Old Orders for New: Ecology, Animal Rights, and the Poverty of Humanism,' *Animal Rites*, op. cit., pp21-43.

24. Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983; Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, New York, Avon, 1975.

25. Richard Rorty, 'Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism', *Journal of Philosophy*, 80, (October 1983): 585.

Derrida's point here is not just the obvious one that we 'cannot expect "animals" to be able to enter into an expressly juridical contract in which they would have duties, in an exchange of recognized rights', but rather - and more pointedly - that 'it is within this philosophico-juridical space that the modern violence against animals is practiced, a violence that is at once contemporary with and indissociable from the discourse of human rights'. And from this vantage, it makes perfect sense to conclude, as Derrida does, that 'however much sympathy I may have for a declaration of animals rights that would protect them from human violence', it is nevertheless 'preferable not to introduce this problematic concerning the relations between humans and animals into the *existing* juridical framework'.<sup>26</sup>

In disability studies, the accent falls within a somewhat different vector of the liberal humanist framework. To borrow the distinction used by Italian philosopher Paola Cavalieri (which she borrows in turn from G.J. Warnock), if animal rights discourse typically focuses fairly exclusively on the status of the 'moral *patient*', disability discourse tends to focus more on the question of the 'moral *agent*'. As Cavalieri puts it, 'if the moral agent is a being whose *behavior* may be subject to moral evaluation, the moral patient is a being whose *treatment* may be subject to moral evaluation'.<sup>27</sup> In disability discourse, in other words, the emphasis falls on the right of the disabled to subjectivity of a very particular and circumscribed type: subjectivity as *agency*.

Against this background, we can more fully appreciate Cora Kaplan's observation, in a recent collection on feminism and disability, that 'human anomaly ... continues to trouble the rhetoric of liberal individualism, testing both its ethics of tolerance and its fetishization of autonomy and agency as conditions of human status and civic participation'.<sup>28</sup> 'Viewed from a long term perspective', she continues,

the continuing debate about the rights of citizens, and the price of increased agency for them, is itself a legacy of liberalism's historically mixed messages about autonomy and social justice, an ongoing paradox that remains as radically unresolved in the liberalisms that characterize late-twentieth-century social democracies as it did in the 'classic' liberalism of the nineteenth century (Afterword p304).

What Kaplan calls the 'fetishization of agency' endemic to the liberal concept of subjectivity is everywhere on display in a recently published collection of papers in *PMLA* from a high profile conference at Emory University in March of 2004 on *Disability Studies and the University*. In the introduction to the collection, for example, the authors trumpet the fact that 'we have the right to leave the hospital and travel the earth', that 'people with disabilities are on the move'; 'after years of being probed and studied, disabled people have begun themselves to probe and study', and now emerge 'not as objects of study but as knowledge producers'.<sup>29</sup> Here, obviously enough, the valences of the 'normal' liberal subject (active not passive, subject not object

26. 'Violence Against Animals', in Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow: A Dialogue*, Jeff Fort (trans), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004, pp63, 74-5. Subsequent references are cited in the text as VAA followed by page number.

27. Paola Cavalieri, *The Animal Question: Why Nonhuman Animals Deserve Human Rights*, Catherine Woollard (trans), New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, p29. It goes without saying that Derrida would object to the formulation of the problem that frames Cavalieri's book. In fact, Cavalieri's work is the subject of discussion (more by Roudinesco than by Derrida) in the dialogue just referenced.

28. Cora Kaplan, 'Afterword: Liberalism, Feminism, and Defect', in 'Defects': *Engendering the Modern Body*, Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum (eds), Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2000, p303. Subsequent references are cited in the text as Afterword followed by page number.

29. Michael Davidson and Tobin Siebers, 'Introduction', *PMLA* 120:2, (March 2005): 498-9.

of knowledge, producer not product, and so on) are called upon to validate and legitimise disabled subjectivity, and the rallying cries are taken from the playbook of liberal citizenship: 'access', 'rights', 'privileges', 'participation'.

This 'fetishization of agency' in disability studies is understandable, of course, for all sorts of historical, institutional, and strategic reasons. As participants in the Emory conference regularly note, the trajectory of disability studies in the academy has been very closely linked to the legal struggles of the disabled for basic needs such as access to public spaces, human services, and the like. At the same time, however, it is interesting to see that some of the participants call for disability studies to move beyond the familiar theoretical models and orthodoxies of its past. Activist and author Simi Linton, for example, argues that 'we need to grapple with the absence of an overarching term that subsumes everyone - the vector on which disability falls'. She suggests - after the divisive strategies of the past, which sought to stake out and hold onto the specificity of disability as a category (which would resist seeing obesity, for example, as a disability) - that we now 'need to find a new way of talking about the place of disabled people in the universe and to find the place of disability in some universal'.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Lennard Davis - one of the founding figures of disability studies in the academic humanities in the US - argues from a somewhat different vantage that the template of identity politics that characterised much early work in disability studies must be abandoned. 'If disability studies is to remain viable,' he argues, 'it will have to incorporate into its collective vision the kind of complexities with which post-identity theory is grappling'.<sup>31</sup>

What I have been suggesting, of course, is that Grandin's work on the relationship between disability and trans-species affinity directs us toward the possibility of taking up just this sort of project in a more profound and, I think, ultimately broad-based way: a way that we can begin to understand in light of Derrida's insistence that 'there is not *one* opposition between man and non-man; there are, between different organizational structures of the living being, many fractures, heterogeneities' (VAA p66). Returning to Jeremy Bentham's observation that the central question regarding the ethical standing of animals is not 'can they talk?', or 'can they reason?', but 'can they *suffer*', Derrida observes: 'once its protocol is established, the form of this question changes everything', because from Aristotle to Descartes and up to the present day, posing the question in terms of either thought or language 'determines so many others concerning *power* or *capability* [*pouvoir*], and *attributes* [*avoirs*]: being able, having the power to give, to die, to bury one's dead, to dress, to work, to invent a technique'.<sup>32</sup> What makes Bentham's recasting of the question so important - and so useful for getting outside the 'fetishization of agency' in disability discourse - is that now, as Derrida puts it, 'the question is disturbed by a certain *passivity*. It bears witness, manifesting already, as question, the response that testifies to sufferance, a passion, a not-being-able'. 'What of the vulnerability felt on the basis of this inability?', Derrida asks; 'what is this non-power at the heart of power? ... What right should be accorded

30. Simi Linton, 'What Is Disability Studies?', *PMLA* 120:2, (March 2005): 520.

31. Lennard Davis, 'Disability: The Next Wave or Twilight of the Gods?', *PMLA* 120:2, (March 2005,): 529.

32. Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', David Wills (trans), *Critical Inquiry* 28:2, Winter 2002, p395. Subsequent references are given in the text as The Animal followed by page number.

it? To what extent should it concern us?’ (The Animal pp395-6). It concerns us very directly, in fact - and in terms that bear precisely upon Linton’s call a moment ago for some ‘universal’ as ‘a vector onto which disability falls’ - because, in Derrida’s words, ‘mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to ... the anguish of this vulnerability and the vulnerability of this anguish’ (The Animal p396).

But the blockage in disability studies on this point - to return now to the papers from the Emory conference - is remarkable, to say the least, and that blockage short circuits the sort of project that both Linton and Davis, in their different ways, call for. In fact, in all of the essays collected in the special *PMLA* issue - they comprise one hundred and forty three double-column pages - *not once* does the relationship between disability and trans-species affinity in this broader ethical project come up, even though Grandin herself is mentioned at least once.

The most pointed irony of all, perhaps, occurs in Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s essay, where she observes that ‘although we value biodiversity in our environment, we devalue physical and mental variety’ (D&R p524). Here, Garland-Thomson would seem to echo Derrida’s contention, in the essay quoted above, that the problem with the phrase ‘*the Animal*’ is that ‘within the strict enclosure of this definite article ... are *all the living things* that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbours, or his brothers. And that is so in spite of the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee’ (The Animal pp402, 416). Similarly - or at least apparently so - Garland-Thomson argues ‘for applying the vibrant logic of biodiversity to humans’ (D&R p524). But even as she echoes Derrida’s reading of the significance of Bentham’s question ‘can they *suffer?*’ in her recognition that ‘our bodies need care; we all need assistance to live’, that ‘our society emphatically denies vulnerability, contingency, and mortality’ (D&R p524), she is unable to recognise that these ethical imperatives extend across species lines and bind us, in our shared vulnerability, to other living beings who think and feel, live and die, have needs and desires, and require care just as we do.

Most ironic of all, in this light, is one example she offers of recent, positive changes in images of disability in mass culture: a magazine cover of a stereotypical tall, slender, female model, dressed in evening gown for a night on the town, but accompanied by a German Shepherd service dog. She writes, ‘The juxtaposition of the elite body of a visually normative fashion model with the mark of disability forces the viewer to reconfigure assumptions about what constitutes the attractive, the desirable, and the livable life’ (D&R p526). Yes, but only at the expense of doing to non-human ‘differents’ what ‘normates’ have traditionally done to the disabled. Now I want to stress that my point here is not to play the oldest and most predictable trump card in the identity

politics deck - ‘my constituents are more marginalized and unrecognized than yours’ - but rather to suggest that, instead of seeing the non-human animal as merely a prop or tool for allowing the disabled to be mainstreamed into liberal society and its values, wouldn’t we do better to imagine this example as an irreducibly different and unique form of subjectivity - neither *homo sapiens* nor *canis familiaris*, neither ‘disabled’ nor ‘normal’, but something else altogether, a shared trans-species being-in-the-world constituted by complex relations of trust, respect, dependence, and communication (as anyone who has ever trained - or relied upon - a service dog would be the first to tell you)?

What I have in mind, then, is a different sort of project, one that is consonant with the suggestion - made by the editors of a recent collection on disability and postmodernism - that work associated with poststructuralism ‘can contribute an enormous amount to *the development of inclusive societies*, which is surely as important as the challenge to the hegemony of normativism’ that is more typical of mainstream work in disability studies.<sup>33</sup> As they rightly argue, ‘existing theories of disability - both radical and mainstream - are no longer adequate ... considering the range of impairments under the disability umbrella; considering the different ways in which they impact on individuals and groups over their lifetime’, and - particularly to the point for my purposes here - ‘considering the intersection of disability with other axes of inequality’ (MtT p15).

Such a project points us toward the necessity of an ethics based not on ability, activity, agency, and empowerment, but on a *compassion* that is rooted in our vulnerability and passivity - ‘this non-power at the heart of power’, as Derrida puts it. In this light, the ethical force of our relation to the disabled and to non-human others is precisely that it foregrounds the necessity of thinking ethics *outside* of a model of reciprocity between ‘moral agents’; indeed (as a range of thinkers from Levinas and Lyotard to, more recently, Zygmunt Bauman has argued), the ethical act might instead be construed as precisely one that is freely extended without hope of reciprocation by the Other. As Bauman puts it, the problem with an ethics based on reciprocity is that it implies ‘*calculability* of action’; ‘what more than anything else sets the contractually defined behavior apart from a moral one’, he continues, ‘is the fact that the “duty to fulfil the duty” is for each side dependent on the other side’s record ... It is, so to speak, in the power of my partner to set me (by design or by default) “free”, to “unbind” me from my duties’. But those duties, he reminds us, are ‘*heteronomic*’; ‘my relation to the Other is *programmatically* non-symmetrical, that is, not dependent on the Other’s past, present, anticipated or hoped-for *reciprocation*’. And hence, all ethical models based on reciprocity and contractualism ignore the fact that “we” becomes a plural of “I” only at the cost of glossing over the I’s multidimensionality’ - a multidimensionality everywhere foregrounded, as I have been arguing, in the specific embodiment of the disabled and of non-human subjects - and (it goes without saying at this point, I hope) of the ‘normate’ subject itself,

33. Mairian Corker and Tom Shakespeare, ‘Mapping the Terrain’, in *Disability/Postmodernity: Embodying Disability Theory*, Mairian Corker and Tom Shakespeare (eds), London, Continuum, 2002, p14. Subsequent references are cited in the text.

now returned to itself as *other* with a new sense of its own non-normative contingency.<sup>34</sup>

I will end, then, on a somewhat different note from what one typically finds in calls for animal rights and in disability discourse, one that returns us to the transvaluation of the trope of vision as an index of humanism with which I began. At the end of *Memoirs of the Blind*, Derrida writes,

We all know about the episode in Turin ... where [Nietzsche's] compassion for a horse led him to take its head into his hands, sobbing ... Now if tears *come to the eyes*, if they *well up in them*, and if they can also veil sight, perhaps they reveal, in the very course of this experience ... an essence of the eye ... The eye would be destined not to see but to weep. For at the very moment they veil sight, tears would unveil what is proper to the eye. And what they cause to surge up out of forgetfulness ... would be nothing less than ... the *truth* of the eyes, whose ultimate destination they would thereby reveal: to have imploration rather than vision in sight, to address prayer, love, joy, or sadness rather than a look or a gaze ...

The blindness that opens the eye is not the one that darkens vision. The revelatory or apocalyptic blindness, the blindness that reveals the very truth of the eyes, would be the gaze veiled by tears (pp126-127).

34. Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1993, quoted. in Wolfe, op. cit., *Animal Rites*, pp195-6. I discuss these issues, and my differences with Bauman's view, in much more detail in the concluding chapter of *Animal Rites*.