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Note from the Editors: The Internet

Robert Rozema
Grand Valley State University

Christopher Bass
University of Illinois at Chicago



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Note from the Editors: The Internet

The internet has become an essential tool for neurodivergent expression and connection. This journal, for example, exists solely as an online publication, which allows us to include a broad range of divergent expression without the constraint of typical print-based publications. The internet has also given autistics a space to identify themselves, share their special interests, and develop the foundations of autistic culture. As Martijn Dekker (1999) observed in his seminal paper on autistic culture, the internet enabled autistic individuals to connect with each other without the pressure of social encounters, enabling autism advocacy groups such as the Autism Network International (NI) to form online. Importantly, these online advocacy groups were run by autistic individuals—not by neurotypical parents, psychiatrists, or other medical professions. As a result, self-advocacy became an early theme of autistic culture.

Yet the internet is also a complicated space where autistic individuals are at risk, and where bullying and misinformation can lead to severe consequences for them. This issue of *Ought* explores the complexities of being autistic online.

Morgan Harper-Nichols explores how social media sites gave her the chance to both hide and explore her identity as a black autistic woman. In her autoethnographic essay, Harper-Nichols writes that “in a world that often places neurotypical expectations on autistic people and often expects Black women to fit a stereotype from Mammy to the Magical Negro, the internet has been a place to experiment with when, where, and how I might be able to be me.” Stephen J. Bedard examines how online the church services that came about during the pandemic created inclusive spaces that accepted all expressions of faith—even those that disrupted traditional church practices.

The internet has also mediated the production of new forms of art, music, and design. Sarah Shotts examines the “internet as a neurodivergent space,” telling how her year-long photography collaboration with another neurodivergent mother developed into an asynchronous friendship. *Ought's*

music critic John Bruni considers how David Byrne’s online post disclosing his autism demands a reappraisal of the Talking Heads’ 1979 record *Fear of Music*. Bruni applies systems and posthumanism theory to unpack the complex layers of communication in the critically acclaimed album. Autistic Instagram artist Shannon Genova adds her “abstract conjurings” of patterns and texture throughout the issue.

Finally, poetry from Archana Kadam and Bernadette “bird” Bowen offer divergent perspectives on autistic language and advocacy in digital spaces and in the material world. We hope that our treatment of the internet and autism amounts to what Bowen calls,

Framing
In gold,
What
Others
Still
See as
A slur.

—Robert Rozema and Christopher Bass

References

Dekker, M. (1999, November). On our own terms: Emerging autistic culture. In *Conferencia en línea*.