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## Note from the Editors: Autistic Aesthetics

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## Note from the Editors: Autistic Aesthetics

Several themes emerge from this robust collection of articles and artwork focused on autistic aesthetics—to my knowledge, the most sustained attention this topic has ever received in an academic journal. The first theme is that some behaviors and processes germane to autistic identity are also inherently *artistic*. The most notable of these is stimming, described by contributor Sam Metz as “an expansive activity that is, ironically, often conceptualized by outsiders in narrow terms. It is as much about viewing the patterning in the clouds and sensing the movement of the tides as it is about the stereotypical back-and-forth rocking movements of the body.” In their article and accompanying short film, Metz further theorizes that stimming allows him to interact with the surrounding environment in a way that is “porous,” erasing the boundaries between body and world.

Stimming is also part of the artistic process of Elinor Rowland, an autistic artist who supplies several short films and still images in this issue. Like Metz and other contributors, Rowland suggests that stimming puts her in more direct relationship with the natural environment, which in turn “. . . offer[s] a space for empowerment and resistance against mainstream norms that seek to ridicule, exclude, and render silent the autistic being.” It is clear that stimming, discussed by multiple autistic artists in this issue, plays a key role in creating, performing, and responding to art.

Other contributors examine the role of the autistic identity in aesthetic theory and artistic practice, a second major theme in this issue. Manuel A. Sánchez Peña interrogates how this identity influences aesthetic experiences, values, and judgments, particularly in relation to autistic communities and culture. Inga Hamilton posits that autism has given her a unique ability to understand the natural world—an “aesthetic of connectivity,” in her language—and provides provocative multimedia works that blur boundaries between human and non-human. In four experimental films, Sam Grant (with Ken Fero) illustrates that film can become “a means by which neurodiverse people can become the producers of their own cultural

meanings.” And Gerald Beaulieu laments how in his native Canada, autistic artists are still struggling to gain recognition and autonomy, limited by underdeveloped institutional supports reductive, commercialized definitions of art.

No issue on autistic aesthetics would be complete without original fine art. This issue features an abundance of such, in a variety of forms, including mixed media work by Shelley Wallace, photography by Emily Coghlan, paintings by Dylan MacKenzie, drawing by Eddie Delvaux, image-and-text explorations by Vikki Parker (Bibi Aya), glazed ceramics by Sam Lucas, sculpture by Gerald Beaulieu, and the three-dimensional creations by Inga Hamilton. This issue also links to short films by Sam Metz, Sam Grant and Ken Fero, Elinor Rowland, and soundscapes by Vikki Parker (Bibi Aya) and Elinor Rowland.

The issue is rounded about by neurocognitive research by James Hutson and Piper Hutson, reporting on their study focusing on autistic responses to sensory input. We also include two critical readings of canonical and contemporary literature. The first, by Abby Zwart, reconsiders Henry Higgins (Shaw’s *Pygmalion*) from the perspective of Critical Autism Studies. The second, by Rachel S. Anderson, finds neurodivergent themes in the science fiction series *Murderbot* by Martha Wells. Archana Kadam offers also offers a poetic perspective on neurodiversity, and first-time contributor Torri Blue wanders the poetic landscape of Mary Oliver. Finally, David V. Urban reviews *On The Spectrum*, a new memoir by Daniel Bowman.

All this is a bounty of work and thought on art and aesthetic experiences. Enjoy.

—Robert Rozema and Chris Bass