

THE CO-PRODUCTION OF AUTISM IN THE FILM,

WRETCHES & JABBERERS

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Abstract

This paper asks why the autistic subjects in the film, *Wretches and Jabberers*, feel they must prove their intelligence. I examine the words of the film's subjects, Larry Bissonette, Tracy Thresher who cross the globe to Sri Lanka, Japan and Finland to connect with fellow non-verbal, autistic typists, while also questioning the mechanisms of normalcy that impel non-verbal individuals to communicate in ordinary ways. Utilizing the framework by which the film was assembled – a co-production between autistic adults (wretches) and non-autistic academics, film-makers and support workers (jabberers) – this paper examines the dominant discourses that perpetuate a notion we name autism that are raised in the film.¹ I draw upon feminist, affect and phenomenological theory, as well as autistic autobiography and recent literature, to unpack the way viewers may misappropriate the experiences of the autistic subjects and how autistic people may appropriate normative meanings about autism and their lives, thereby suggesting that communication and identity are mutually constitutive.

¹ I am also motivated by the way in which neo-liberalism/late-capitalism galvanizes clinical, care and research practices by characterizing autism as a series of lacks. I agree with Nadeson (2005) who also examines the social and cultural constructions of autism as a “contemporary matrix of practices and institutions used to identify, label, and therapy autistic people,” and how this “contributes to the production and interpretation of the behaviours, self-awareness, and “other” awareness of people understood as autistic” (Nadeson, 2005, 5).

Wretches & Jabberers: A Preamble

A bell-like sound introduces the credits to *Wretches & Jabberers* – a film by Geradine Wurzburg – about two communication-impaired autistic men, Larry Bissonnette and Tracy Thresher. They travel to redefine their purpose and change the way autistic people are viewed and treated in society. Against a black screen and silence we read:

Until the 1980s most children and young adults with autism were excluded from normal schooling. Some were placed in mental institutions.

The letters dissolve into the black screen with a long pause. Larry's voice breaks the silence. "Eeeeeee," he chimes with a corresponding smile, and we hear laughter. At this point, the film is black and white. Larry has gently nudged Tracy across the stomach as if to urge him to also smile before the camera, or perhaps as a gesture of camaraderie. They are posing in front of a photographer that the film audience cannot see. Off to the side, our point-of-view, would be the video camera. In the background behind Larry, we see Tracy's assistant, Harvey, smiling and arms folded. Underneath this image, the text reads:

Like many children with autism Tracy Thresher and Larry Bissonnette grew up
unable to speak.

“One more time with feeling!” says a voice off-camera. Larry nudges Tracy again in the same manner.

“Eeeeeee...”

“Tracy you’re the man,” says another unseen male voice.

They faced a future of isolation in adult disability centers.

“Move close for me guys. Get a little closer,” says a male voice we presume to be the photographer.

When Tracy was 23 and Larry was 34 their lives changed when they learned to communicate by typing.

Larry’s *Eeeeeee* now morphs into the more decipherable and melodic “Cheeeeese!”

“Can you put your arms around Larry?” says a female voice off camera. Both men are beginning to look fatigued, but oblige her. Tracy steps behind Larry and places both of his hands on Larry’s shoulders while he keeps his camera-ready face. Everyone laughs louder.

This is Tracy and Larry’s story.

The music begins with a jocular melody and rhythm indicating movement and the beginning of a journey. Larry is now seen behind a Polaroid camera in black and white,

taking a picture of Tracy while he repeats, “Cheeeese!” Tracy looks into the camera and blinks at the flash. His black and white image on film turns to colour.

Next we see Tracy speaking into a microphone speaking in a forceful tone, which seems to require extra effort, “I’m...Tracy...Thresher...from...Barre...*Ver-mont!*” Then, in another clip, we see Pascal, Larry’s assistant, taking a picture of Larry with the Polaroid camera and Larry also turns to colour as he squawks delightedly. The next clip switches to Larry in front of a microphone at a conference. He speaks each word deliberately, his voice higher-pitched than Tracy’s.

“My...name...is...Larry...Bisso-*nnette.*”

A Finnish film-maker, Timo Vierimaa, then asks in the next clip, “I’ve heard that you travelled around the world but what is the purpose of this world-tour you’re doing?”

Tracy replies, “to move people’s knowledge of disability to a more positive *place.*” Next we see Tracy shaking hands with someone, then Larry moving around and among people, and then Chammi typing on his own, his hand flicking in between each typed letter.

As the cinematic assemblage of images and “voices” move quickly, we hear a male voice ask, “What is it that you want people to understand about you?” In response we see a fragment of computer screens, one which reads: *that we each...an individual...unique in our own way...not a label.* We are unable to read the full screen as it focusses only on a few salient words. Harvey reads Tracy’s words, “I was so excited to hear that the film

was actually going to happen. I brainstormed the idea and here we are.” Then we hear a robotic text-to-speech device read aloud, “So, any questions of Larry or me?” Tracy has invited us into the world² of autism. He has also indicated his handiwork in conceiving the idea of the film.

A Sri Lankan journalist for *The Sunday Times*, Smirit Daniel, is seen asking, “I’d like to know what it means to you to have autism?” The clip changes to Tracy at a Japanese conference, typing. His computer is seen in part again, the words dissolve and reappear on the film: *poor motor control of impulses movement...high pitched grating*. Then we see Tracy reading his own words forcefully: “I was trapped in a body that didn’t work right and was not be able to let people *know*.”

Next, we see Chammi from Sri Lanka running back and forth, flapping his hands, then Naoki jumping up and down making sounds and flapping his hands more furiously. Antti is flicking his fingers at his ears and then in front of his eyes, and then Henna backs away frightfully from Larry’s approach.

There are others like us all over the world.

The subjects of the film are now seen calmly typing with their assistants and we hear a Sri Lankan woman ask, “Do you think any autistic child can start communication... any autistic child?”

² Autism is often referred to as a separate or alien world.

Larry is seen typing a response, *people all want communication*, which is read over by his assistant Pascal, while Tracy and Naoki are pictured touching hands in greeting and Larry walks into to a Vermont coffee shop where the cashier greets him, “Hi, Larry.” This cinematic collage is intermixed with a variety of voices – from Tracy and Larry, to Pascal’s voice reading Larry’s words, and the unknown authors adding text beneath the images which set up the film. The end of this introduction shows Larry looping his finger in the air. Thus, we are introduced now to the subjects of the film, Larry and Tracy, their assistants Harvey and Pascal, and the people they meet along their journey. Their Japanese guide, educator Maho Suzuki, speaks to others in a room. “You are telling us our assumptions are wrong,” she says forcefully.

Larry’s voice slowly reads, “*more... like... you... than... not,*” while we see a clip of Henna gazing out the window deep in thought, and Naoki exercising with another person. As an end to this introduction, Tracy and Larry stand on a ferry looking out on the water, maybe the horizon, suggesting dreams, hopes and possibilities. A ball, that is a globe, is tossed out into the water denoting exploration, journey and discovery. Contrary to how autistic people are said to prefer to be alone, Tracy and Larry are seen by us standing side-by-side, as co-explorers on their journey to move people’s knowledge of autism to a “positive place” (Thresher, 2010) and we learn that they, with their assistants Harvey and Pascal, have “worked together for ten years to change attitudes about intelligence and abilities of people with autism. Now we take our message to the world” (Thresher, 2010).

Introduction

The film, *Wretches & Jabberers* raises issues regarding self-advocacy for non-verbal autistic individuals on autonomy, authorship and intelligence (Biklen, 2003; Cardinal, 1996; Cartwright, 2008; Erevelles, 2008; Erevelles in Tremain, 2005). The film's title was conceived by Antti Lappalainen, an autistic³ from Finland and the idea to do the film came from Larry Bissonnette and Tracy Thresher, two autistics from the United States. *Wretches* represent those who are autistic and cannot talk while the *Jabberers* are the neurotypical society who can. The film shows the subjects at conferences, in interviews and with fellow autistics in Sri Lanka, Finland and Japan.

Erevelles (2002, 2005) suggests that Biklen, the Dean of Education at Syracuse University and harbinger of Facilitated Communication within the disability community in North America, and another co-producer of the film with Geradine Wurzburg, succumbs to a need for proof of authorship in the book *Contested Words, Contested Science* (Biklen and Cardinal, 1997) after he asks that we *presume competence* of those people without a typical language system (Biklen, 1997). Temple Grandin, an autism self-advocate/woman with Asperger's also recently discussed non-verbal autistic individuals,⁴ Carly Fleischman and Tito Mukhopadhyay, as independent non-verbal autistic typists. "We know they have authored their own work," denoting an important

³ Through this paper, I will make reference to people with the autism label as autistics, autistic people. Please see Jim Sinclair's essay on *Why I Dislike Person-First Language*, 1993: <http://aaspire.org/?p=about&c=languagehttp://autisticadvocacy.org/identity-first-language/>. And also a piece by the Autistic Self Advocacy Network on Identity-First Language: <http://autisticadvocacy.org/identity-first-language/>.

⁴ CBC News Interview, *The Autistic Brain*, on *The Sunday Edition* with Michael Enright, June 9, 2013.

point; Grandin's work seeks ways that autistic people can contribute within a market economy (Grandin, 2006, 2012), and this proof of independence, and competence, remains important within it.

Yet, many people with autism and other neurological and cognitive disabilities cannot be independent without support. Although the Neurodiversity movement has pushed for the acceptance of autistic bodies in society, Gil Eyal (2010) suggests that it also supports a normative framework where autonomy, independence and contribution are highly regarded human characteristics that are required for activities such as advocacy (Eyal, 2010; Sarrett, 2012).

This leads to a deeper problem when regarding autistic individuals in society and self-advocacy as reflected in the film, *Wretches & Jabberers*. Erevelles asks, "Are people who have been identified as cognitively disabled competent (or incompetent) to represent themselves? Is it possible that these people can have observable, physiological, cognitive, or behavioral disabilities, but also exhibit behavior and thinking that could be termed 'normal,' that is, 'rational?'" (Erevelles in Tremain, 2005, 46-7).

Her adroit question represents the crisis of how disability is conceptualized, especially present in autism where functioning levels among autistic individuals remains broad and diverse – where bodies that whoop, flap and move in otherwise *erratic*⁵ ways are often deemed aberrant and incapable of completing the normative task of economic production (Erevelles in Tremain, 2005). The autonomous citizen is the ideal, compliant body that

⁵ I would argue that this would be the manner in which the *jabbere* would characterize these movements and behaviours.

fits within the framework of competence and capacity as it is currently defined; it is conceived as *rational*, and freedom exists so long as we remain within legal and social boundaries (Arendt, 2000; Ford, 2010; Sarrett, 2012).

This interacts with the socio-political status and advocacy of the autistics in *Wretches & Jabberers*. Baker states, there is “no tension is more central to modern disability policy development than the choice to pursue or redefine normalcy” (Baker, 2011, 111). Autistic self-advocates seek to redefine autism but collide with the principles of social and neo-liberalism (Prince, 2012), thus problematizing autistic bodies and experience. Autistic and disability activists have questioned the dominant discourses purporting concepts of normality and the mechanisms that support it (Lawson, 2008; Klar-Wolfond, 2008; Albrecht, Sleeman et al, 2001; Amudson in Albrecht et al, 2000). Using the film as my case, I examine the dominant discourse of the *pathologization* of autistic experience (by the *jabberers*) in the construction of *wretches*.

When Larry Bissonnette suggests in the film that his group of fellow autist-typists are a “critical mass of wretches” (2010), he summons the question of whether all kinds of autistic bodies are to be included and if society supports the autistic as a citizen⁶ – to support a specifically autistic way of being. “Personhood is often ignored and unrecognized in people with impairments...so it must be negotiated by people with disabilities, their parents, educators and caretakers” (Sarrett, 2012, np). This presents an uneasy relationship with the notion of co-production – between dependence and

⁶ I do not have enough space to enter into a discussion about what constitutes a citizen, but I use the term to refer to the need for autistic people to participate in society and to acknowledge their personhood as autistic people.

independence – when considering its relationship to neo-liberalism and normative performance.

Key Questions

Why do the autistic subjects of the film, *Wretches and Jabberers*, feel they must prove their intelligence?

This broad question was ignited by the quest of the autistic subjects in the film. To explore their motivations, I examine the assumptions made about autism and how it has come to be designed as a medical aberration, and how the subjects engage with the dominant discourses of medical pathologization⁷ of autism explained in typical language.

This leads to the sub-question:

Do the subjects reinforce normality or help us understand autistic experience?

The subjects state that their purpose is to “move people’s knowledge of disability to a positive place” (Thresher, 2010), which is the assertion of their intelligence in typical language. I trouble this by probing the concept of normative performance for the purposes of being seen and heard. I will also consider Larry’s statement, “autism not about abnormality of brain but abnormality of experience”⁸ (Bissonnette, 2010) to examine the malleable interpretations⁹ of his meaning. I am also taking on some of the

⁷ I refer to autism as pathology in the way empirical research characterizes autistic differences as deficits that require either recovery or cure.

⁸ I am quoting the subjects verbatim.

⁹ I refer to *malleable interpretations* based upon Majia Homer Nadeson’s chapter on *The Dialectics of Autism*, which suggests that there is a tension “between and across professional practices and bodies of knowledge on the one hand, and individual experience on the other hand.” (Nadeson, 2005, 177). Nadeson explores the ontology of disease and disability and suggests that “medicalized diagnostic categories can be both constraining and enabling for those

utterances of the subjects in the film such as “bad boy,” (Thresher and Higashida, 2010) and where autistic people may have appropriated disempowering characterizations. This leads us to ask, *Why this performance is necessary?* How does society expect autistic people to perform? How do the subjects want to be understood? What is the purpose of proof?

What is Our Current Understanding of Autism?

Until recently, autism came to be known as an impairment of communication, socialization and a manifestation of repetitive behaviour in the DSM IV¹⁰ published in 1993, although it was first characterized by Dr. Leo Kanner in 1943 and has been evolving in the way it is conceptualized and defined within the medical community. Autism is typically conceived as a spectrum, or a range of abilities and impairments, that has come to be known as high or low-functioning autism. The ability to communicate usually denotes one is higher-functioning and is able to meet the expectation of independence in work and society. In 2013, the DSM V was released and reframed autism to eliminate Asperger’s syndrome – this was conceived as the highest-functioning level on the spectrum primarily because of the ability to speak. Autism is defined by the medical model of disability which compares autistic communication and behaviour to normative standards, and positions autism as a medical pathology although there is no known cause for autism; it is diagnosed by observation. Various autism charities position

diagnosed autistic” and are thus not “neutral phenomena” (177). She discusses how these frameworks have repercussions for how others “see and interact with them,” and how “individuals designated as diseased are afforded socially produced identities” (178).

¹⁰ Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

autism as an epidemic, now affecting 1 in 88 people, and *Autism Speaks* states on its website that 25% of autistic people are non-verbal¹¹.

By the mid-2000s controversy began over causation theories of autism such as the MMR¹² vaccine and its preservative, thiomersal,¹³ which have been disproven.¹⁴ This points to a compulsion to position autism as an illness in society, as having an etiology, and this provides the purpose for charities like *Autism Speaks* to market and raise millions of dollars for scientific research. Many autism charities and research organizations like INSAR (*International Society for Autism Research*) have been criticized by autistic people for excluding or marginalizing them in their research, pointing out that most autism research and charities are led by non-autistic people. There is also political tension over the possible amelioration of autism which has enabled the formation of an autistic culture or community of autistics who fight to survive.¹⁵ By the mid-2000s, the autism culture and Neurodiversity movement¹⁶ burgeoned online. The *Autistic Self Advocacy Network* (ASAN) was formed at the same time as *The Autism Acceptance Project*¹⁷ (TAAP) in Canada. The latter has been acknowledged by the United Nations as one of

¹¹ <http://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism>. Also note that “non-verbal” does not always mean completely mute. Many children labeled as non-verbal may be able to speak a few words and phrases. Some autistic people are fully verbal one day and unable to speak the next, denoting the discontinuity of speech ability.

¹² Measles, Mumps, Rubella.

¹³ An “organicmercury compound” as noted by Eli Lily.

¹⁴ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/sciencebiz/2010/03/15/vaccine-court-ruling-thimerosal-does-not-cause-autism/>

¹⁵ <https://ollibeau.com/2013/04/22/autism-rights-human-rights/>

¹⁶ Which respects all human diversity. See next footnote.

¹⁷ www.taaproject.com. Please note that I am the Founder of this organization.

the “most important events in the history of autism acceptance.”¹⁸ These organizations were also facilitated by strong autistic predecessors within the autism community.

Methodology

This paper uses a feminist methodology that draws upon existing literature and autistic autobiography surrounding autism, rights, communication and my experience as an activist and a mother to an autistic son.¹⁹ Utilizing the framework by which the film was assembled, a co-production between autistic adults (*wretches*) and non-autistic researchers and film-makers (*jabberers*), I discuss the dominant discourse of autism as a medical diagnostic category (by the *jabberers*) and how this constellates social identities (Nadeson, 2005). Philosophies of embodiment²⁰ are ways I considered the experiences of the *wretches*. These are binary positions that represent the dialectical tensions that are appropriated by various stakeholders,²¹ by either adopting or resisting an ontology of disease and disability (Nadeson, 2005, 179). From these ontologies, I consider the implications of asking autistic people to type and communicate in normative ways for the

¹⁸ See: <http://autisticadvocacy.org/2012/03/autism-acceptance-events-and-their-history/>

¹⁹ While I have read and been involved in the movement which informs this piece, I cannot, due to space restrictions, take on the issues of autistic rights, although augmentative assistive communication devices and support would be among these rights, which I feel would be another area to explore with this film.

²⁰ Erevelles refers to this as “the carnal property of knowing,” or Merleau-Ponty’s “sense experience” (Erevelles, 2011, 8). I am also attracted to the post-structural feminist frameworks that help to understand the positioning of autism as a difference and the dialectics of power and repression when I often refer to autism as it is seen in a medical context. Foucault refers to this as bio-power. I follow Erevelles here in suggesting that this makes this power imbalance more apparent in considering *the construction of the wretch*.

²¹ I consider these stakeholders, for example, being clinicians, researchers, doctors, neurologists, non-autistic parents and those labeled with autism. Mostly, I suggest that autism and its experiential meanings, as expressed by autistic people, are misappropriated and pathologized, or seen as a series of problems or deficits.

purpose of proving intelligence and see this as a conflation between the ability to communicate with advocacy, socio-economic, and political emancipation and inclusion.²²

This section will explain the film analysis method I use, the theorists who were helpful in conceptualizing this exploration, a brief review of the social model of disability and the way I watched and analyzed the film.

Film Analysis Methodology

Wretches & Jabberers could be compared with other films on autism where autistic people are not subjects, but where non-autistic people frequently speak *for and about* autistic people. Instead, I only consider such representations as popular sense-making practices about autism – through Hollywood film and literature which often uses the autistic person as a narrative prosthetic; autistic people are often portrayed as demonic, prophetic, heroic, angelic or as geniuses (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000; Murray, 2008; Osteen, 2008). Mitchell and Snyder also state that disability is an interaction between many positions including author, text, culture and audience (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000, 27). “[As] a linguistic ‘signifier’ disability also incites discontent, for the rubric proves as slippery as any minority category imposed from without,” (43) and they question a monolithic representation of disability culture; this suggests a need for vigilance in how we think about autism.

²² Due to space constraints, I need to note that the concept of freedom is another area of exploration that this film can incite. I will only be able to remark upon it briefly as advocacy is another theme of *Wretches & Jabberers*. It is suggested that freedom (or inclusion as it is stated in the film) for autistic people who are non-verbal will be achieved through communication. There are many references to being free in the film such as being free from “autism’s death grip on our actions,” as noted by Thresher. Therefore, this theme can be studied in much greater depth by also touching upon the dialectical tensions that Nadeson raises in her book (2005).

The consideration of autistic communication and intelligence as a co-production must entail the acknowledgment that, “disability culture exists within the space of shared critique” (Mitchell & Snyder, 43). This constitutes the dialectical frameworks that are always interacting. Kisber (2010) suggests that photographic inquiry also requires us to consider the other players in the role of the film, which I considered as a co-production. Here, while Larry and Tracy are the speakers and self-advocates, the editors remain in the background, cutting and adding music in a cinematic assemblage about autism and intelligence, thereby disputing the notion that autistic people do not possess an inner life. It is important to note that Biklen and Wurzburg have also produced other documentaries with non-verbal autists: Sue Rubin in CNN’s *Autism is a World*; with Jamie Burke in *Inside the Edge: A Journey to Speech Through Typing*; and with Larry Bissonnette: *My Life As an Artist*, among other films listed at the University of Syracuse’s *Communication Institute* website, thus having created an oeuvre of FC documentaries that has also enabled the autistic rights movement.

Therefore, relationship is a theme in the co-production of autism and the (mis)appropriations regarding experience and identities may be inevitable, although they must be addressed. Discussing autistic communication also requires a resistance to essentialism, and a constant clarification for intention and meaning. Further, the power-imbalance expensed by autistic people, summons the historical construction of the *wretch*

as a dominant ontology of disability-as-undesirable,²³ and expressed as oppression in autistic autobiography.

In terms of the film analysis method I used, Stuart Hall (1992) combines the work of Barthes with Gramsci's concept of hegemony – suggesting that power and meaning are intertwined, and viewers choose to read the encoded messages in film or text either from:

- a) a dominant hegemonic position analysing a discourse framework that reproduces dominant ideologies;
- b) a negotiated position that acknowledges the dominant position or ideology while negotiating the understanding which would both challenge and accept the dominant codes and provide contradictory interpretations;
- c) an oppositional position which offers alternate readings of the dominant position (Hall, 1992).

In an effort to answer my question about why autistic people have to prove their intelligence, along with a critical approach of considering my role as a viewer who acknowledges the hazards of interpretation and the need for autistic people to self-advocate, I adopt the negotiated position.

Autistic Autobiography/Autism Rights Literature

I draw upon autistic autobiography for this paper to help answer my key question including those of Wendy Lawson, Tito Mukhopadhyay, Amy Sequenza, Birgir Sellin and Donna Williams, in addition to academics working in autism rights, philosophy, law, and language (Baker, 2011; Barnbaum, 2008; Biklen, 2005; Bogdashina, 2008;

²³ ...thereby conflating disability with disease or illness.

Davidson, 2008; Eyal, 2010; Kittay, 2012; Nadeson, 2005; Murray, 2010; Sarrett, 2012; Savarese; 2007, 2010, 2012; Stubblefield, 2011).

I am drawn to this approach, as only a few in the field seek to understand the needs and human rights of those labeled with autism, and our collective responsibilities. As I am suggesting, this constitutes the acknowledgement of autism as a socially co-produced construction. Autistic people tend to *exist*²⁴ within an empirical research model to find a neuro-biological cause, thereby perpetuating the ontology of disease. I believe this alternate area is ripe for further study in autism within critical disability studies, as at present autism is otherwise dominated by the behavioural and psych-sciences; new theories regarding co-production and ethical responsibility need to be explored.

Theories of Embodiment

Lisa Cartwright, in her book *Moral Spectatorship* (2008), develops a *theory of spectatorship* which is an intersubjective production of feeling, action and agency.²⁵ I am interested in the way this corresponds with the writings of autistic author, Donna Williams in terms of intersubjective relationships, care, autistic expression and ability. For example, she writes:

“Facilitated expression is another helpful technique. It is about hand-over-hand, shadowing their opening of the cupboard, their holding of the pen, their pulling up of the socks. It’s not about doing the activity for them but about allowing them, if necessary to attribute the responsibility for the action to your control. It is an interactive dance or responsibility” (Williams, 2003, 26).

²⁴ Or are acknowledged

²⁵ She draws this from psychoanalytic theory and object relations theory (Levinas, 1993, Mitchell, 1973 and Klein, 1957 in Cartwright, 2010),

Cartwright also refers to the way bodies borrow from one another in “co-presence of two hands,” also illustrated by the way the subjects of the film relate with their communication partners and surroundings.²⁶ This also extends to the viewer and the subject’s knowledge of being viewed, which is infrequently acknowledged in film reviews.²⁷ In film theory, Cartwright acknowledges that feeling is also suspect and has “not paid close attention to aspects of spectatorship linked to moral sentiment and affects expressed in the public sphere” (4).

Phenomenology and affect theories are also ways in which I considered autistic translation of experience into ordinary language, and in legitimizing autistic behaviour, sensory processing, synesthesia, animism, motor-planning issues within normative linguistic constructions that affect viewership and interaction.²⁸ I questioned the manner in which autism is popularly described and possibly appropriated by the autistic subjects of the film – for instance, to what end have we influenced the naming of autistic experience, inability to speak, or behaviour, as a *beast that needs to be tamed*²⁹ (Thresher, 2010): “It was always there trapped inside me like a caged animal wanting to be freed and the animal was a beast sorting through my emotions and thoughts,” remarks Tracy on language.³⁰ To this, Thomas Couser remarks that all bodies are defined within

²⁶ This is another way that assistants or support workers for typing are referred to.

²⁷ I read multiple reviews about *Wretches and Jabberers*.

²⁸ Indeed, I would like to write more on these areas although am confined to the page-limitations of this paper; I’m suggesting that these are mutually constitute areas, and I outlay the problems regarding the dominant discourses about autism against the varying and, perhaps insufficiently stated, “different” needs of autistic individuals.

²⁹ This is also rhetoric used in clinical practice, in particular ABA (Applied Behavioural Analysis therapy).

³⁰ I have these sensitivities as such terms were used by the ABA parent lobby in Canada to dehumanize the autistic subject in order to have ABA (Applied Behavioural Therapy now called Intensive Behavioural Intervention in Canada) funded under medicare. This was a marketing strategy using the charity model to pathologize autism in order to receive funding. For more see Sabrina Freeman’s, *Science For Sale In The Autism Wars* (references).

the same standards,³¹ and that with all parallel binaries; “[T]he privileged position depends on its definition of the marginalized position; notions of health and illness, normality and disability, we might say are ‘co-dependent’ (Couser, 2009, 9). Biklen also writes, “[i]t is inherently challenging to do qualitative inquiry in a field as highly medicalized as autism, for most language in the field assumes a shared, normative perspective of an observable reality” (Biklen, 2005, 11). My theory suggests that autistic identity/self-referencing is produced through co-relationship, and I question the influence of dominant positions and discourse in this relationship.

I use Theory of Mind theory (ToM) (Baron-Cohen, 1999) referred to in autism to discuss the dominant discourse of the purported deficits of the autistic *mind*, and how this conflates with science,³² language and rationality³³ (C.F. Goodey, 2011, Baron-Cohen, 1999; Frith & Happé, 1999). As I am interested in autistic autobiography and “integrity,” (Barnbaum, 2008, 205), I am further lured by Merleau-Ponty (2012) and David Abram (1997), and the use of sensory-knowledge to understand what we may not be able to conceive (as non-autistics) about autistic experience as a result of these linguistically signified, dominant discourses (Derrida, 1995, 2010; Barthes, 1980; Erevelles, 2002, 2005). For instance, Judith Butler discusses the lexical construction of the body and its materiality, and the kinds of performances required to be deemed socially acceptable (Butler, 1993).

³¹ Which are normative standards.

³² Although it began as a philosophical theory, science seeks to find the cognitive origins for this purported deficit.

³³ I also consider the work of Barnbaum (2008), Kant and Spinoza to question autistic empathy, experience, and how this influences the concept of the moral agent. The empirical approaches adopted by autism researchers to rectify the purported intentional, or ToM, deficits of autistic people, “has stunning repercussions for the application of the best interest standard,” states Barnbaum who argues why there are ethical problems to biomedical and therapeutic approaches used on persons with autism (Barnbaum, 2008, 193).

As such, feminist theory in terms of abject bodies, the notion of what constitutes a *valid experience* (Butler, 1993, 2005; Caverero, 2002; Grosz in Coole & Frost, 2010; Shotwell, 2011; Stefan, 1993; Wendell, 1996), helped me to consider an empathetic methodology for this paper, and which I believe is requested by the film-subjects themselves; I am naming this methodology *empathetic* when it does not assume what a person or their experience is because of their label, but rather asks a person about themselves.³⁴ Adriana Caverero says we are, “[e]xposed to one another’s vulnerability and singularity and that our political situation consists in learning how to handle and honor this constant exposure.” She goes on to say that, “I exist in an important sense for you” (Caverero in Butler, 2005, 32). I then considered Hanna Arendt who presented the notion of a relational politics whereby ‘the exposure and vulnerability of the other makes a primary and ethical claim on me’ (Arendt in Butler, 2005, 31).³⁵ Val Williams applies these concepts, although not citing them directly, through a conversational analysis between therapists and intellectually disabled subjects in *Disability and Discourse* (2011). She suggests that, “people with intellectual disabilities were frequently not speaking for themselves in participation forums, but were prompted, guided and molded by supporters who did not have intellectual disabilities” (Redley and Weinberg, 2007 in Williams, 2011, 12). She further writes about the collective political responsibility for self-advocacy: “Participation in public affairs is associated not only with power, but also with collective power that people have when they come together and campaign for their

³⁴ In other words, I am referring to individual subjective experience, but also I am concerned with the formation and experience of an autism culture which I only allude to in this paper.

³⁵ Also I could explore this importance in my position as mother to an autistic child and feminist materialisms and economics in terms of social policy, law and care, but I cannot do so within the space limitations of this paper.

own rights” (Williams, 2011, 11). *Wretches & Jabberers* is also about autistic-self advocacy that requires the normative communication *performance*, and the proof of intelligence is another theme surrounding self-advocacy. Loxley notes that Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “absorbed the deconstructive lesson and applied this retooled concept of performativity,” to dominant identities to form theoretical insights in cultural politics. “Such illumination of the ways in which we ‘act’ our identities also had radical implications for how we might think about the relation between theatrical performance and the apparently real or serious world offstage” (Loxley, 2007, 3).

Tracy asks Senator Scott – when he behaves, let’s say for now, *autistically* – to “ignore the man behind the curtain” (Thresher, 2010). Tracy is aware of how his autistic way of being is scrutinized. Therefore, I understand the *affect of expectation* as normative linguistic and behavioural performances (that society expects) for advocacy and rights purposes. I consider the extraneous lengths (and time) by which autistic people learn how to type in order to be heard for political and socio-economic inclusion, as well as for human connection – or as Larry states, *fellowship feeling*.

The Working Body and Neo-Liberalism

Neo-liberalist theories have come to define the *competent citizen* who is able to fulfill the social contract. David Harvey writes, “[o]bligated to live as appendages of the market and of capital accumulation rather than as expressive beings, the realm of freedom shrinks before the awful logic and hollow intensity of market involvements” (Harvey, 2005, 185).

Nirmala Erevelles also troubles the notion of independent, privileged bodies that fulfill capitalist demands by proposing that:

“[c]apitalist ideologies justify the exclusion of particular populations from the world of work by claiming that these individuals lack particular social and technical characteristics that are desirable for the economy...Moreover, these ideologies have been further ratified through the construction of a biomedical etiology of ‘deviance’ from which have been derived diagnostic techniques to identify these ‘deviant’ populations” (Erevelles in Tremain, 2005, 60).

Michael Prince sees neo- and social-liberalism as mutually supportive concepts, and suggests the disability movement struggles to deal with the material issues of “employment, accessible education, and income security or to the exclusion of governmental issues of [autistic] participation in policy making” (Prince, 2012, np).

Russell and Malhorta, however, suggest capitalism is seen as a direct contradiction of disability (Russell & Malhorta in Galer, 2012) which problematizes freedom of expression and being.³⁶

In this, I considered Tom Shakespeare who argues that disability pride movements seek to universalize difference, and risk creating a “master class of disabled” (Shakespeare, 2006). This is important in considering the film as an advocacy piece and in the formation of an autism culture when Naoki remarks that he has “never had a conversation with people who communicate the way I do” (Higashida, 2010), or when the group is seen typing around a table, “talking” and organizing. Lennard Davis names this, “universalizing marginality” (1997). He uses the example of how deaf culture came to be

³⁶ See footnote 73.

formed through language and began the modern ideas “about public symbol and information production, and how the deaf person became an icon for complex intersections of subject, class position and the body” (1997, 110). As many autistic people use technology to communicate, one could probe further into the notion of the purpose of technology.³⁷ Shelly Tremain suggests using them among disabled communities can be normalizing when they focus on self-improvement and rehabilitation³⁸ (Tremain, 2005, 8).

The Social Model of Disability

Conversing with a class from the Graduate School of Education in Japan, Tracy asks the group what they think of the “paradox in front of them” (Thresher, 2010). He is asking about the dissonance between his disabled appearance and his ability to communicate by typing. A student expresses how that comment makes him “sad,” and that he never thinks that talking fully expresses what people are thinking on “the inside.” Tracy responds, “Yes, society has cloaked us with this paradox,” (Thresher, 2010) and we question the social construction of autism as a deficit of empathy and intelligence.

In 1976, the *Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation* released a landmark statement that provided the beginnings of the social model where “disability is a situation caused by social conditions...[d]isability is something imposed on top of our

³⁷ I acknowledge this as another separate area I could research, and only wish to suggest it here as a background. In fact, technology is an equalizer among all of us who have the funds to access technology.

³⁸ Olga Bogdashina writes, “there are risks to pushing children with autism too hard, when the constant stress of ‘autism-unfriendly’ situations may lead to nervous breakdowns. Besides, it is important to let them not only ‘appear’ but also to ‘be’ what they are. It is vital that they have their individuality and identity unaltered during the process and are allowed to remain autistic” (Bogdashina, 2005, 260).

impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society (UPIAS, 1976, 14). This model was developed in response to the pathologization of disability found in the medical and individual model – the latter which suggests that something is wrong with disabled people. Oliver contends that normalizing this “wrong” constitutes the oppression of disabled people in capitalist society and that:

“[t]he hegemony that defines disability in capitalist society is constituted by the organic ideology of individualism, the arbitrary ideologies of medicalization underpinning medical intervention and personal tragedy theory underpinning much social policy. Incorporated also are ideologies related to concepts of normality, able-bodiedness and able-mindedness” (Oliver, 1990, 44).

The social model of disability has been problematized in recent years, having been appropriated by charities. The largest autism charity, *Autism Speaks*, for instance, has posted the blogs of autistic people,³⁹ even though it lobbies for a cure for autism.⁴⁰ Other autistic people volunteer to work at the charity in order for an opportunity for their voice to be heard. Oliver refers to this as “disabling corporatism” and suggests that many disabled activists have found their way into politics and charity groups because they accept the political and economic realities of their circumstance and concurs with Shakespeare who stresses that the “focus of our rage and our action should be the structures” in our society (Shakespeare in Oliver, 1996, 174).

³⁹ This included my blog without our permission. Autism Speaks does little to support autism programs within communities but rather raises millions of dollars to seek a cure for autism (See my quote of Ari Ne’eman from ASAN later in this paper).

⁴⁰ Many autistic activists, including Michelle Dawson in Canada, will remark about the tokenization of autistic people, where autistic people on the other hand are trying to gain voice within these organizations for their inclusion and accommodation in society. See Dawson’s QT board or her website, *No Autistics Allowed*.

Autistic self-advocates attempt to address these structural problems by forming a cultural movement, as suggested earlier in the reference to deaf culture. Davis discusses the emergence of this culture: “[W]ithout a sense of group solidarity and without a social category of disability, [the deaf] were mainly seen as isolated deviations from the norm” (1997, 111). Douglas Baynton suggests that “deafness is a cultural construction as well a physical phenomenon” (in Davis, 1997, 128) which parallels the way in which an autism culture has formed, particularly through online activism and typed communication.⁴¹ The autism acceptance and Neurodiversity movements⁴² have also adopted this *universalizing of difference* for rights, and position communication technology as a language right. In terms of politics that Val Williams suggests must be collectively supported, Michael Oliver problematizes the personal and the collective in the disability movement as having derived from the feminist movement and “black struggles” (175), and cites that when a social movement “becomes more successful, so the leadership become more prominent,” (175) and questions these prominent personalities as a threat to the movement.

My concern regarding the co-production of autism rests on how this implicates the way we view and enact autistic rights as allies, and more verbal autistic leaders; this continues to be a polemical discourse. *Autism advocacy* remains a politically-charged term which can, as Caruso (2010) and Baker (2011) acknowledge, support the right to cures, medical treatment and normalization therapy, *or* can mean the right to be autistic, with

⁴¹ In this, one could say that many autistic individuals share a common language – technology – where deaf culture uses sign language that formed a culture.

⁴² These are not necessarily separate movements, but these terms are used interchangeably.

accommodations and support.⁴³ The issues revolve around the diversity of advocates and conflicting agendas. Also, there should be concern for the possible homogenization of autistic people through organized platforms, and continued questions about the autistic people who may be absent from autistic advocacy, particularly when verbosity draws the most attention.

Analysis

I watched the film over a period of six months. I also attended a panel discussion about the film in Syracuse, New York, to hear the subjects speak of the film themselves. Online YouTube videos were also watched with respect to how the subjects felt about the film, and to shed deeper perspectives on the notion of autistic *voice* in the making of the film.

By the fourth viewing, I transcribed the film, beginning to focus on key themes and asking about the meaning of purpose. I made a few notes on the music and the way it was used to punctuate the words of the subjects, or their movement, but felt I did not have enough space within this paper to discuss the aesthetic aspects of the film, except to convey the unique assemblage, at the beginning of my paper, as a mimetic reflection of interrelationship and co-production in the film's own introduction – how the communication of the *wretch* and the *jabberer* interact, are translated, and how each member is an important component in how we may all communicate about autism. I

⁴³ This is why this paper was difficult to write within a 65-page parameter. The notion of support is one that covers rights, human supports, technologies, economics, and motivations.

honed in on this as a critical theme as it is an area of contention with regards to Facilitated Communication, and also invites empowering possibilities.⁴⁴

This is the frame by which I analysed the relationship between *wretches* and *jabberers* in comparing dominant discourses about autism through language – between the historical construction of intellectual disability, and the experiences of the subjects. This film is also a co-production between Douglas Biklen, Dean of Education at Syracuse University,⁴⁵ and Geradine Wurzburg, the film’s director, the support workers, Pascal Cheng and Harvey Levoy, parents, conference attendees (non-autistics), and Tracy and Larry and their friends (autistics). This reflects the necessary, albeit controversial, partnership in terms of autonomy; it is this co-production that signifies the corporeal whole – the body of work, the message, the bodies working together, the embodiment of autistic advocacy, and the audience. This makes for a messy arrangement in terms of conceptualizing autonomy in that Charlton’s *nothing about us without us* (1998) rallying cry for the disability movement, also adopted by *The Autistic Self-Advocacy Network*; it calls for autistic independence and leadership where, in many forms and instances, this needs to be supported with non-autistic allies.

I then viewed the film under the lens of autistic self-advocacy literature and critical disability theory with the key question of why the autistic self-advocates feel they have to

⁴⁴ Stiker states, “This maneuvering space around hierarchized positions does introduce real possibility for participation in common life. The hierarchical model, because it has its point of departure in difference, is not capable of permitting a modern form of integration and inclusion” (Stiker in Albrecht, Bickenbach, et al, 2006, 499). I am interested in these alternate spaces in between or around binary notions. The notion of *around* attracts me, as it is expressed by Tito Mukhopadhyay in this essay; describes his somatic knowledge, and this was suggested also by essayist, Ralph Savarese (2010).

⁴⁵ He is retiring this year (2013).

prove their competence in order to be a citizen, and to research the themes of purpose, productivity, intelligence and proof of competence as “moving people’s knowledge of disability to a positive place,” as stated by Tracy Thresher. Here, I realized that there are a number of themes in the film that intersect, and which I felt needed discussion at the same time, not as singular themes. This proved to be challenging – I scribed over 300 pages for this paper and realized these were the themes suitable for a book, not for a 65-page MRP.⁴⁶ I then struggled to focus this paper to dominant discourses of the *lower human*, as this is how non-verbal autistic individuals are conceived and labeled; this seemed suitable in the characterization of *wretches*. I was worried about being redundant, but then I reconsidered that it may not be so common in literature about autism specifically – where dominant research repeating the concept of the *lower human* predominates in this field, there is reason to keep writing about this topic.

The Construction of the Wretch

“People all want communication” – Larry Bissonette

While Erevelles critiques a post-structural analysis of the body⁴⁷ in her book, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling A Transformative Body Politic* (2011), she says in an earlier article that, “language is constituted by a play of multiple signifiers” (Erevelles in Tremain, 2005, 47). In reference to Derrida and Barthes, she suggests that the humanist subject may exist only by the system and rules of language. In other words,

⁴⁶ Master’s Research Paper.

⁴⁷ She discusses this as the “carnal property of knowing” or “carnal sociology.” She reminds us of the issues facing subjective individual experiences as potentially suggesting that, in this case, autism, doesn’t exist. In this, language as a cultural medium can be deconstructed. I find the language deconstructions useful for the construction of the *wretch* by the *jabberer*, and phenomenology useful for further understanding the experiences and accounts of the *wretch*.

the way we envision ourselves is co-created with others typically within language.

“Language has always had the power to define cultural groups. The words used to refer to a group of people are important,” states Beth Haller (Haller, 2010, 49). It is also important in how the autism community comes to be defined: “The language used in stories about disability...helps shape what the public understands about the disability condition” (Haller, 2010, 49).

A brief look into language, and how it confines autistics as *proto*-humans, as *lower functioning* humans (Szasz, 1974)⁴⁸ may be a way of illustrating how autistic people are described as lacking communication skills although report being highly aware, that is, when they are able to communicate.⁴⁹ “Autistic individuals emphasize that all autistic people have a form of inner language if they cannot communicate through conventional systems such as typing, writing or signing” (O’Neill, 1999; Williams, 1996 in Bogdashina, 2005, 33). Wendy Lawson, an autistic author asks, “Is it normal to use only spoken language as the accepted currency for exchange of interests? It is certainly usual or normal for talkers to talk, but if you are not a ‘talker’ you might use other methods to converse,” (Lawson, 2008, 61).

Stepping back, the concept of autism has recently achieved its own ontological status from social constructionism, resulting in biological determinism (Nadeson, 2005) as the label of autism becomes reified by the research and medical community – described as a disease that affects neurological and cognitive processes, and autism is typically cited as

⁴⁸ I am using a linguistic hierarchy of proto and meta language in how we conflate language and “low” functioning autism or “proto-human.”

⁴⁹ I would argue that autistic people are aware without language.

an aberration in the pre-frontal cortex (Baron-Cohen, 1994; Dawson, Meltoff, Osterling, et al, 1998; Mundy, 2003). Thus, a reading of autistic being and identity is influenced by this status and charities are set up to raise money for a medical cure.

Empirical research seeks to prove autism as an abnormality, perhaps inadvertently providing reasons why autistic people cannot be considered agents, thus fuelling concern if not fear about morality, criminality and autism.⁵⁰ As suggested earlier, social identities are influenced by scientific theories (Nadeson, 2005). In terms of such theories, Barnbaum, suggests that there must be mutual agreement in helping to answer applied questions (Barnbaum, 2008, 9). Yet, mutually diagnosing autism has only been considered more recently;⁵¹ predominantly it is determined by non-autistic psychologists. To this, Thomas Szasz suggests that positioning conditions borne of the psych-sciences are made by observation of the Other, “is about as sensible as looking for the “etiology of English”” (1974, 123). The relationship between how people are diagnosed, and for what purpose, asks us to question the role of science in the market economy and for the purposes of producing bodies that *work* (Erevelles in Tremain, 2005), and indeed language plays multiple roles in the way we conceptualize autism for this purpose.⁵²

The question of possessing ordinary language as proof of an inner life is a main theme of *Wretches and Jabberers*, and personhood seems to be asserted by it – although as Antti says, “not having the ability to speak, doesn’t make our heads empty.” Merleu-Ponty

⁵⁰ Autism is diagnosed by psychologists and this is assessed by observation.

⁵¹ Indeed one Canadian autism researcher is autistic herself: Michelle Dawson. We are beginning to see more autistic people in research fields about autism, but this is nascent.

⁵² Nadeson argues that we assemble the concept of autism based on society’s fears and needs, suggesting that the social construction of autism is diachronic (Nadeson, 2005). These questions demonstrate the pliability of language and suggest the socio-political influences and injustices towards people labeled with autism.

expresses language as an empty envelope – speech is in and of itself a phenomenon and it congeals thought. Further, it is “an external accompaniment of thought” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 183). Merleau-Ponty suggests that speech, then, accomplishes thought and signifies the meaning of the person (or non-person), which makes us *rational*. He does not suggest, however, that speech is the sign of thought (2012, 187), which is reflected in the words of Tracy who suggests that his inner self was always there, but *tamed*:

“It was always there trapped inside me like a caged animal waiting to be freed and the animal was a beast sorting through my emotions and thoughts has been difficult and not pretty at times but the beast has been tamed opening up the world to me with learning, advocacy and purpose” (Thresher, 2010).

Tracy says that he had many thoughts that he was unable to articulate until he was taught to type. As suggested, the notion of taming an animal points to a prejudice about animals that we train to comply, and autistic people are generally considered to be savage. Yet, “[t]he subaltern, whether cow or gorilla or person with autism, is talking back in the language of the oppressor, but with a crucial difference. This language remains faithful...to a child’s sense of discovery...it does not congeal or colonize,” states Savarese of Dawn Prince’s writing - an autistic professor of primate anthropology (2010, 284).

Theory of Mind theory (ToM) in autism has denoted that autistic people lack an awareness of the intentions of others (Barhon-Cohen, 1999). Otherwise referred to as empathy, this has also been described as a "mode of observation attuned to the inner life of man" (Kohut, 1982, 396). This ToM theory suggests that autistic people are of lower

intelligence (McGuire & Michalko, 2013). Without empathy (ToM), Barnbaum undertakes the question of whether an autistic person can be a moral citizen, and invokes a Kantian analysis to suggest that you don't need to possess empathy to be one (Barnbaum, 2008). Even so, one has to ask why Barnbaum had to prove it by philosophical deduction; positioned as a philosophical argument that refutes Baron-Cohen's ToM theory, this shows how autistic people have dismissed (and disproven) the theory directly, and how the medical community nevertheless continues to purport it as an autistic deficit. Susan Wendell names this the "social and cognitive authority of medicine," where the patient's own views of themselves are invalidated (Wendell, 1996), and which Amy Sequenza reveals:

"Even the ones among us who have demonstrated their ability many times...who have succeeded despite all the hurdles that disability imposes, these successful cases don't seem to be enough to end the myths: that a non-speaking autistic cannot self-advocate; the so-called 'low functioning' cannot think by themselves and cannot have ideas or opinions" (Sequenzia, in *Loud Hands*, 2013).

Levels of social and cognitive functioning, then, are affiliated with moral status which implicates power-relations and human rights; the head is supposedly the area of reason, and this hierarchy – both literal and metaphorical – is reinforced by empirical science since the head is the primary site of study in autism (Baron-Cohen, 1994; Dawson, Meltoff, Osterling, et al, 1998; Mundy, 2003). The head, the site of awareness, denoted through speech, is a reflection of reason and "embodies the word at the highest point within the body itself – the top" (Caverero, 2002, 107). C.F. Goodey also discusses the history of intelligence, moral status and its relation to "civic ignorance" and power

imbalances (Goodey, 2011, 19). “In *The Republic*, someone who judges things by appearances and sense perception rather than apprehending their ideal forms is said to be suffering from simple-mindedness” (2011, 19). “This points to the difficult position of the head,” states Caverero. “It has claimed autonomy from the body” (107).

Tito Mukhopadhyay, a non-verbal autistic person, who also learned to type with assistance, has written books including, *The Mind Tree* (2000). In it, he uses the metaphor of the Banyan Tree to describe his body and mind. “My concerns and worries are trapped within me somewhere in my depths, maybe in my roots, maybe in my bark or all around my radius...but where does [the tree] keep its mind?” (174). Author Ralph Savarese mentions Tito’s writings regarding the tree:

“If the head has been dethroned by autism, or if the autistic body cannot be said to be conventionally discrete, at least in the way that it makes itself known, then mind is an entity linking all things. ‘The earth listens too. I am certain of it,’ the tree declares. ‘It listens with a great satisfaction as I can feel it under my deep roots’ (Mukhopadyhay,174). But the earth does not ‘show off’ its understanding. ‘Why should it?’ the tree asks. ‘When it is all around us, we take it for granted. We do all our deeds good and bad on its heart’ (174). The tree ‘wish[es]’ that its roots could go down below, further and further, till they touched the great heart,’ but concedes that it has ‘limitations.’” (Savarese, 2010, 281).

As Savarese points out, Tito makes us aware of the *radius of intelligence*, which is around him, that co-constitutes his somatic knowledge and experience. “On the one hand, the word tries to convey a very different experience of relational embodiment; on the other, it speaks of the pressure that both his imagination and his memory put on a stable positioning of the self or ‘presence’” (Savarese, 2010, 282). The autistic experience, Tito

implies, is a “different understanding and relation to the world” *around* him (Savarese, 2010, 283), with political repercussions, and limited by ordinary language; Tito also recognizes an injustice when he notes that the earth doesn’t have to “show off” its understanding.

Spinoza writes in contrast to the Cartesian split of mind and body, or an anatomical hierarchy where, say, a hyper or *hand-flapping* body may imply an incompetent or savage mind. In *Ethics* (1677 in 1996 translation), he describes the interconnectedness of the body and mind:

“By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections...The human mind does not perceive any external body as actually existing, except through the ideas of the affections of its own body” (70).

Despite autistic self-representation and Tito’s account of himself and his own body, however, the pursuit to make the autistic-person to speak, persists. Perhaps this is more popularly traced to the first behaviourist, Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard who abandoned the Wild Boy of Aveyron⁵³ (later named Victor) after years of instruction. Itard considered Victor his failed experiment because, despite Victor learning and understanding text, Victor could never learn to speak. Instead, the doctor favoured oralism, a term used in deaf culture referring to the method by which they were forced to use speech. This can be

⁵³ He was considered savage, and was captured from the forest near Aveyron, France in 1800. The interest in instructing feral children took course during the Enlightenment and Rousseau’s ideals about the Noble Savage.

viewed as the equivalent of Verbal Behaviour⁵⁴ in autism therapy which is designed to teach the non-verbal child to speak.⁵⁵ For Itard, Victor remained the untameable savage which still reflects the current status of the non-verbal, autistic individual. Today, Larry reveals this continued lack of recognition, as his personhood goes unacknowledged before he came to ordinary language:

“Nothing I did convinced people I had an inner life until I started typing. Knowing my intelligence was a matter of self learning through CNN and powerful impulses towards growth and the beast disappearing” (Bissonnette, 2010).

The beast he refers echoes the previous comment by Tracy which I describe as the non-conformative body which society continues to medicate and segregate, and this suggests the annexed characterization of autistic identity in such naming. Yet, I would like to rethink that the beast exists in what we call typical language in shaping and constricting, if not judging, autistic experience and possibly influencing autistic people to appropriate these terms in order to be seen.⁵⁶ Behavioural therapy that insists on keeping “hands down,”⁵⁷ where Tito asserts that he needs to do it to feel his body in space, thus asserting and reminding himself of his very *presence* (Savarese, 2010), could be interpreted in this sense as *beastly*, unjust, and an act of erasure (Stiker, 2009). The references to beast and other are examples of *negative* or disempowering value statements inflicted upon the

⁵⁴ Developed by B.F. Skinner, speech is subject to the same controlling variables for any operant behaviour, which is mediated by other people.

⁵⁵ It is significant that Itard’s work is recognized and still used today in behavioural normalization techniques, but not for its importance in alternative communication rights.

⁵⁶ As if coming to language is to become human.

⁵⁷ This is a common way to command autistic children who flap their hands, to put their hands down in order to focus on the instructor, or to stop “odd-looking” behaviour.

autistic being.⁵⁸ These values may be reflective of the way autism has been characterized by medical discourse that could be assimilated into autistic self-identity: “I know I’m causing trouble to others...so don’t call me a bad boy...There must be many people like me who have inner worlds but no means to express them” (Higashida, 2010).

This is a contentious area in clinical practice where the purpose is to remediate the autistic person rather than empowering the autistic person to function as they are *and*⁵⁹ with support. The cause, namely autism, is the perpetrator resulting in purported dysfunction.⁶⁰ Yet:

“[w]hat they don’t see is the real cost of normalization, which can be very high indeed. Autism runs all the way through. It is a deep neurological difference. It can be no more ‘stripped away’ or cured than our gender or race can be ‘cured’ or taken away. It’s that central to our being” (Winter in *Loud Hands*, 2013, 116).

Larry echoes this in the film when he responds to a Sri Lankan journalist, even though he picks up on Tracy’s “beast” analogy:

“Let’s say I haven’t changed...plentifully autistic in my behaviour but getting more motivated to understand autism is the world...you would not venture out reporting this thirty years ago” (Bissonnette, 2010).

Here, Larry implies the obligation of society in trying to understand autistic being and culture. Yet, Davidson (2008) recognizes that there exists a lack of reciprocity in the

⁵⁸ Susan Stefan in her piece, *Silencing the Different Voice: Competence Feminist Theory and Law* states, “Even the suggestion of incompetence operates to profoundly disempower the person so labelled...It is the hierarchy that defines what difference matters, not the other way around...the powerful voice, the voice at the top of the hierarchy, always defines the difference between competence and incompetence” (Stefan, 1993, 506).

⁵⁹ I believe support is needed in order to live in a majority culture of normates.

⁶⁰ Augmentative Assistive Communication.

manner of communication and interaction with autistic people that perpetuates marginalization of the autistic body and its struggle to translate this experience in normative ways:

“To be able to ‘keep up’ and take part, to use language in ways meaningful for others, depends less on ‘definition’ than context, on shared expectations and understanding...Performance in mainstream environments is restricted and restrictive by definition, and autistics have long felt pressure to study and copy majority social skills they do not ‘naturally’ possess (Davidson, 2008, 795).

In terms of teaching to communicate, then, do we ethically teeter between empowering the autistic person to come to ordinary communication (albeit different because it is not rendered through speech but through typing and AAC⁶¹), or do we support the citizen only when the social contract can be fulfilled (in normative ways)? Does this risk the altering, or shaping, of autistic identity?

The onus of transformation still lies upon the autistic body, not in the way society treats autistic people, or its attitudes and relational interactions. Psychology and the behaviour sciences typically use this notion of alterity to construct knowledge of autism as maladaptive and to replace behaviours that many autistic people cannot control; it seeks, literally, “to make autistics indistinguishable from their peers.”⁶² This inflicts human rights injustices by subjecting autistics to confinement and isolation *until* they are remediated to normalcy.⁶³ Can we accept, or recognize that autistic experience, and therefore intelligence, may exist outside of ordinary language in order that we may

⁶¹Assistive Augmentative Communication – usually used to describe communication devices and support.

⁶²ABA rhetoric.

⁶³This was mentioned in the case of *Moore vs. British Columbia* as reverse effect discrimination [39].

become a more accepting and empathetic society? Can we accept autistic people without typical language?⁶⁴

Alexis Shotwell suggests that language is an, “attempt [that] gives specific form to an inchoate but pressing bodily sensation, shaping it, delimiting it, fixing it into the emotion or emotions that have been named or expressed” (Gould in Shotwell, 2011, 22). Using Sue Campbell’s theory, she notes that “systems of signification might structure our very feeling” (23). This implies the limits within which dominant language may be ineffective in translating autistic experience and shaping it. I began to question this in the way Tracy conceptualizes his expression within the linguistic hegemony:

“My life has been an interesting journey starting as a boy with no means of expression **who acted out to reach out to my world with little success**. Now I travel the world educating people about autism movement differences and intelligence” (Thresher, 2010) [bold mine].

In the midst of his typing, Tracy seems impatient with himself as if he is unable to get the words out fast enough, repeating “bad boy” while he types. Even describing his experience as a *movement difference* (Donnellan & Leary, 2012) seems incomplete, although reframing it as a difference as opposed to *abnormal defect* better situates him for advocacy and human rights purposes. So, his utterance begs the question: where might Tracy have appropriated the notion that he is, or was, a “bad boy?”

⁶⁴ Amanda Baggs, an autistic self-advocate writes, “Autistic people who are stable in language or concepts have formed many of their own communities,” and goes on to describe how, as she is non-verbal, these communities have never felt “quite right.” (in *Loud Hands*, p. 385). This implies that there are people left out of autistic self-advocacy and that while many wish to make connections, people do so in ways that befit them, not necessarily in normative ways – even with technologies.

Larry also discusses his experience:

“Not living at home as a teen, institutionalized then, I missed my sister Sally. I was 8 years old when I was put in the institution. **I had no idea what I’d done wrong.** Placed in chains of conformity. After 15 years I was released. Ten years later I began to communicate by typing. I am 52 now. **Lesson is autism is not abnormality of brain as much as abnormality of experience**” (Bissonnette, 2010)[bold mine].

In dominant medical discourses, this is taken up as abnormality – sensory deficits or cognitive delay, symptomatic of disease – and not as intelligible knowledge as Tito Mukhopadhyay says he needs to flap his arms to *feel* his body’s *presence* in space, or how movement may aid perception for adaptation to stressful environments. One might think this would deserve serious consideration, accommodation and respect (Mukhopadhyay, 2005). Instead, there are a plethora of therapies to abate this aberration.⁶⁵ I suggest that the construct of normativity may lead us to believe that Larry’s comment has to do with his own *abnormality of experience* as his own problem and onus to overcome. Thus, this construct reinforces the individual model of disability.⁶⁶ We might neglect to consider, however, that Larry *might* mean that the abnormality of his experience may reside in the way others have identified his mind as the maladaptive site of his behaviour – and the *abnormal experience* of having been institutionalized for it.

⁶⁵ On the other hand, these same sensory differences are seen as deficits and strengths at the same time – one area of cognitive deficit leads to magnified enhancement which is taken up by neuroscientists as savantism (Frith and Happé, 1999; Baron-Cohen, 1999) and arguments against cures and therapies sometimes question the effect of curing or tampering with this positive autistic attribute.

⁶⁶ ...as something wrong with the individual.

One has to consider then, just how far audiences may reconsider how they view autism through language, and that language – a one-way neuro-normative street, if you will – can be a disabling barrier to expressing autistic experience, and to *being*. “The kind of knowledge expressed in the body’s knowing is paradigmatically tacit – it is enmeshed and thoroughly incorporated cultural understanding” (Shotwell, 2011, 14). In this, the autistic body can be viewed as culturally co-produced, which can be considered alongside a history of maltreatment and pathologization imprinted within the memory of the autistic person, and the way they have learned to be in the world.

“[P]eople, places, selves and spaces, are mutually constitutive...they come into being relationally, produced and performed in interaction with each other (Kitchen and Dodge, 2002: 342 in Davidson, 2008, 793).

The way we signify autism in normative language may be explained further by Tito when he says, “my school is the doubt in your eyes” (Tito in Savarese, 2011, np). This doubt comes from the way autistic people behave. When I attended *The Communication Institute* in Syracuse, there were autistic people who bit their wrists, made noises, and had to get up and move in the middle of conference presentations. Larry had to leave the room many times repeating “noise.” My son Adam made his happy noises, sometimes bouncing up and down in his chair while watching his autistic adult comrades around him rocking and making gestures with their hands. Mark Utter, an autistic adult who made the film, *I Am Here* (2012), used his hands in the air as if to draw a contained speech balloon

following the completion of his typed thought.⁶⁷ For me, it was a relief to be with this group, as Adam and I are relatively isolated where we live in Toronto as an autistic family. In Canada, we are bombarded by messages of normalcy, with watchful eyes and probing questions, and schools abound with “doubt in their eyes” and a mission to fix Adam. As I sat among it all, I wondered what the researchers and experts who want to fix *these* people would do there among us; how abnormal and dysfunctional they likely would have characterized the autistics, and how delusional they may have diagnosed us as parents and support workers in believing in our children.

Linda Tuhiawi Smith discusses colonized peoples as having “been compelled to define what it means to be human because there is a deep understanding of what it has meant to be considered not fully human, to be *savage*” (Smith, 2007, 26). I believe this is part of the pressure that both Adam and I feel⁶⁸ – to have to prove otherwise, to have Adam act like other people. In this, learning to communicate can be a *qualified* freedom.

Yet, is communication not *free* when it is willed by the body?⁶⁹ We feel a bride’s (gracious) discomfort when Tracy makes loud animal-like sounds that echo in an elegant hotel lobby in Sri Lanka. We seem to understand this as the body acting uncontrollably against the will of the autist, and this is presented by the subjects in the film as “autism’s death grip on me” (Thresher, 2010). Or, when Larry has a meltdown at a Sri Lankan

⁶⁷ Mark wrote the script to this film himself and is assisted in his typing. His film shows himself in daily situations where he appears one way to the outside world, and then he shows what he is thinking on the inside with an actor who plays his alter-ego.

⁶⁸ I cannot feel it like Adam, but I feel it for Adam.

⁶⁹ I acknowledge the extent to which freedom can be discussed. I am specifically thinking here of Hanna Arendt’s essay, *What is Freedom?* (in Peter Baehr’s edition). She undertakes many issues surrounding political freedom, or what might be demeaned by my suggestion of bodily freedom as animal, automatic, or savage which then denotes that there is no freedom beyond serving the social contract.

temple he explains that it is due to noise and “poor long history of low barefoot tolerance” (Bissonnette, 2010). Of his breakdown he states, “mostly it’s my autism” (2010). Yet, what of the *radius of communication* in echoed lobbies, spaces, or even the probing eyes of others? Donna Williams explains the ways of coping with stressors within the environment and the *affect of expectation*⁷⁰ in the production of such movements and sounds. “Perfect movements...A learned handshake...And a gut full of despair and aloneness...In a world that applauds the ‘appear’...At the expense of the ‘self’” (Williams, 2003, 9).

The Film and the Question of Purpose

“My greatest anguish...”

Tracy and Larry meet Monk Hogen at the Mitsuzoin Temple in Japan, and it was Tracy’s idea to visit two Buddhist temples along their journey. “My greatest anguish is not having a purpose in life,” he writes to the monk. The monk thinks carefully, then responds to Tracy:

“What we teach in Buddhism is that the person who can set a purpose in your life is you. You are the only person who can set the purpose of your life. You are born in the United States or you are born as a male, but it’s beyond your control; you don’t think about that, you just accept the fact. And after you accept the fact you search for the meaning or purpose in your life and that will be the purpose of your life from Buddhism perspective” (Hogen, 2010).

Earlier, back in Sri Lanka after visiting another temple, Larry has some difficulty with his shoes. He is asked to take them off and Pascal attempts to untie them. “Leave the boys

⁷⁰ I enjoy using this term to suggest how normative expectation may affect autistic people.

alone!” yells Larry. “Shoe stinks!” In the temple, he has difficulty typing and concentrating, and we see his stress rise further with the loud sound of drumming inside. “Get out of the temple!” he yells, although Pascal tries to get him to type his thoughts. Larry then runs out and covers his ears – he is in visible pain. When his shoes are back on, he says, “Happy!” and the next scene all four men, Larry, Tracy, Harvey and Pascal, are seen seated around a table.

Tracy: “Larry I wish you could have relaxed and enjoyed yourself.”

Larry: “Sorry. Would listen better if my lasering in on kidlike sleppish stuff didn’t get this worry wart in me.” While Larry is typing he keeps repeating, “*the shoe!*”

Tracy: “I would like you to think about gratitude and molding of the Buddhist way of thinking.” Chammi’s mother had discussed earlier how the Buddha sat under the Bodi tree, and discovered gratitude.

Larry: “Mostly it’s my autism. I am still someone knowing God’s values,” he types while repeating, “*the shoe!*” “Tracy I am positively excited about your spirituality.” Tracy wants to type fast but he has difficulty, gets frustrated and hits his head.

Tracy: “I hear you and we have this really frustrating thing to deal with autism’s death grip on our actions.”

The shoe and temple scenes throw us into the centre of questions about autistic inner life, empathy and purpose. Tracy and Larry indeed have much empathy for each other – it is seen on Tracy’s face regarding Larry’s stress and in his acknowledgment of the

“frustrating” nature of his and Larry’s actions. This raises a question about frustration also as a co-production – is this the demand of having to behave and communicate normally, or the body’s fault? Must we parse autism as either a frustrating disability that requires medical amelioration, or as a way of being – a neurological difference? Or, can we accept the two may exist together, and would this help autistic people to feel better supported and accepted? Pinchevski’s view, that “the impossibility of communication is what gives birth to its possibility” (Pinchevski, 2006, 180), attempts to move us beyond binary entrenchments – between normal and aberrant experience – where new spaces could be made for autistic people and the way we regard autistics in society.

To return to the shoe scene, this empathetic view is not considered typically of those who cannot talk, or who manifest severely autistic behaviours, and this perhaps further illuminates why Tracy responds to Hogen, “Yes we are in training to learn about life with autism. Larry and I are working on how to be patient and understand why we are autistics.”

“So it might be easier to be patient when you think about purpose” replies Monk Hogen.

“That might make it easier.”

“I completely understand and that makes so much sense I have decided that my purpose in life is to show that people like me are intelligent and that is how I came to this place and time meeting with you has now brought me life force,” and Tracy concludes by thanking Hogen. In this, Tracy refutes the medical notion about disassociation (ToM theory) and the autistic *condition*. Larry does so by stating that he is “more like you than

not” (Bissonnette, 2010), thus using the “construction of a unifying identity” analogy seen in autism advocacy as an “ethos of inclusion and equality rights” (Sarrett, 2012, np). This is asserted in the Neurodiversity movement as having different abilities, challenges, neurologies, communication styles, experiences, **but also** as belonging to the same human species, with the same desires for relationship, purpose, rights, learning, compassion and acceptance.

Indeed, having a purpose in life is important and gives us all a reason to live, and it is another unifying human quality. Yet, for many people with severe disabilities, this purpose must be assisted – it cannot be fully independent. Monk Hogen suggests that we are given a circumstance which we may choose to accept – we may invoke a purpose in life within our set of circumstances, which is also the premise of the autism acceptance movement. The other purpose of the autism community, according to the autistic subjects and co-producers, is to “create a new story about autism,” (Ayashiro, 2010) and indeed these are the ways in which the autistic rights agenda has gained momentum.

Later, a Finnish film-maker, Timo Vierimaa asks Larry and Tracy, “I heard that you traveled around the world. What is the purpose of this world tour you are doing?”

“I am pleased to be here today,” writes Tracy. “We are traveling the world to move people’s knowledge about disability to a positive place; seeing the intelligence rather than inability.” In the next scene we are introduced to Antti Lappalainen, entering the Suomenoja Daytime Activity Center.

“Antti spends each weekday at a facility for young adults with disabilities. An empty routine for an aspiring writer,” we read on screen. Antti is seen arranging his PECS⁷¹ schedule that consists of chores, break, lunch, etc. His assistant is seen closing a binder and blandly points to his schedule, “We’ll go straight to getting snack ready at this point,” she says. He is next seen creating the order of activities that are made available to him at the centre with his picture schedule, and his assistant points next to, *towel folding*.

“Antti, don’t they know you can read?” asks Geradine Wurzburg, who is off- camera.

His speech therapist, Sinikka Liimola, assists Antti to type, supporting at the elbow lightly. Antti’s index finger is soft and slow as he hits the keys. “I think they are too scared,” he types. “Language is everything I am; completely different than my misunderstood appearance.” The next scene shows the subjects walking with educator Eija Kärnä to board the train to visit Henna Laulainen at the Hirvisuo Group Home.

Anita, Henna’s mother, is barely supporting Henna with a mere touch on her upper back.

Wurzburg reads a passage from Henna with her permission, “I want my life to be more than cleaning, cooking, and sauna. Is it wrong to want more?” We next see Henna typing, “I would like to live my life as others my age live. My life hasn’t changed very much so far. I suppose it won’t change” (Laulainen, 2010). Later, at her family cottage, she is asked by Tracy to travel to Vermont. Henna is seen in tears beside her mother and we assume it is because she has never been asked before. (She indicates she has never left the

⁷¹ Picture Exchange System.

confines of her *autistically*⁷² organized life). In fact, a connection develops between Tracy and Henna, and he suggests he would like to move to Finland, to Harvey's surprise. In contrast to the notion that autistics prefer to be alone, we also see Antti, Henna, Tracy and Larry typing with each other at a table. Tracy asks:

“What should we type about?”

Antti answers, “I'm interested in talking about our current existence; how we have changed as people.”

Tracy: “My thoughts have moved from being shut inside my head. Getting my real voice through typing has dramatically change how I think about myself.”

Antti: “I think now is a good time to bind the strings of friendship between us strong people who will pass the message.”

Larry: “Posting your issues in permanent print Antti creates an audiencing for inspecting your intelligence rather than your disability. Typing to educate people is our purpose.”

The Purpose of Survival

Naoki asks Larry and Tracy, “I want to ask you what we need to do so that we can survive for future?”

“Mobilizing letters, expressing patterns of thoughts, like proud autistics we are,” responds Larry.

⁷² I use this ironically, as autism is defined as preferring to be alone. Yet, autistic people are forced into isolation and confinement, or isolated by means of being forced into groups.

Larry's grammar is metaphorically rich, and the way he expresses experience as "patterns of thought," suggests an alternate processing strategy and perception. It also implies a means to translation which takes time to learn, notes Henna, "I've cried and sweated to get here." Chammi notes that it is "killingly hard to figure out the pattern of movement I need to type my thoughts," because he often has to get up during the process. These *patterns of movement*, and the time it takes to communicate, are generally not accepted during fast-past meetings or classrooms. This implicates legal rights, self-advocacy, belonging to organizations and inclusion in society. It also effects the way autistic people are (or are not) supported, and how.⁷³

Naoki, the young and budding advocate, further asks his autistic friends by typing swiftly and independently (which is not consistent among all autistic people), "I've been thinking about the meaning of our lives with autism. Why do you think people like us were born?" In contrast, Larry replies to Naoki slowly by typing with one finger, with his assistant Pascal sitting to his side, and his hand lightly touching Larry's shoulder. When Larry finishes, Pascal reads his sentence: "Mankind expresses itself finely in variety. We are one branch of many on a long lots of leaves diverse and wonderful beauty tree" (Bissonnette, 2010).

The question posed by Naoki alludes to the devaluation of disabled persons and the purpose of an autistic life, and at the same time, indicates the formation of a culture of

⁷³ Disability policy attempts to reframe these tensions with the different and equal, or the substantive equality approach, in the legal context where differential treatment is seen as a means to achieving equality through accommodation and support (Rioux and Frazee, 1999), and Kittay and Turner propose models of human rights based on dependence and fragility (Sarrett, 2012).

people who share traits and experiences, namely a communication method, a disability, societal exclusion and oppression. Larry's answer embraces the concept of diversity. The quality of difference or diversity has found its way into the autism spectrum of language and rights discourses (Ne'eman & Robertson, 2008, 2011, 2013; Sarrett, 2012, Baker, 2011), and ways of describing autistic character known as Neurodiversity.⁷⁴

This film can be contextualized, as expressed by Larry, within the Neurodiversity movement regarding autistic self-advocacy. Little has been written about how non-verbal autistic people are involved in self-advocacy organizations, as public figures, or as *valid* political activists. Autistic people, however, are active on blogs and autistic-run organizations like *Autism Network International*, *Second Life*, *The Autism National Committee* and *The Autistic Self-Advocacy Network* and in Canada, *The Autism Acceptance Project*.⁷⁵

The Purpose of Support

Autonomy is typically defined as the ability to make one's own choices in relation to freedom (Szasz, 1989). Grosz defines freedom not as the ability to make a choice, but rather:

“Freedom is...not primarily a capacity of mind but of body; it is linked to the body's capacity for movement, and thus its multiple possibilities of action. Freedom is not an accomplishment granted by the grace of good will of the other but is attained only through the struggle with matter, the struggle of bodies to become more than they are, a struggle that occurs not only on the level of the

⁷⁴ I argue that the movement its apex, or awareness as a concept by the autism rights movement, in the mid 2000's with the dismantling of the New York Child Study Center's, *Ransom Notes Campaign* by online petition. The campaign positioned autism as a kidnapper of children (Broderick, 2011; Klar-Wolfond, 2007; Kras, 2010).

⁷⁵ See list in bibliography for other references.

individual but also of the species...Life is not the coincidence of the present with its past, its history, it is also the forward thrust of a direction whose path is clear only in retrospect” (Grosz in Coole and Frost, 2010, 152-3).

Grosz further suggests that a feminist version of freedom is not about oppression from power and patriarchy but about expanding the variety of activities available to women, “including the activities of knowledge production” (2010).

Indeed, motion is represented in the film as Tracy and Larry move across continents to create new relationships and understandings, as autistic people with others around the globe: “Plenty of lovely people makes me look at going like Japan as building new lines of communication between people of meaningfully lasting temperaments” (Bissonnette, 2010). But this *movement*, in the sense of rights and physical ability to visit others in order to assemble and advocate, would not likely have occurred if it were not assisted. Thus, it points to an economic as well as human rights need for support workers; their knowledge may not be presented, or evident, if it weren’t for film-makers, assistants, parents, publishers and academics. This implies the need for the support of all purpose and knowledge. Further, if social identity is firmly associated with purpose as a work-based identity (Titchoksky, 2003; Charmaz, 1995; Abberly, 1996 in Galer, 2012) then what is an autistic person’s right in order to be supported in order to fulfill the social contract? Unfortunately, says Galer, “[d]isabled bodies are unjustly seen as unproductive in an industrial capitalist paradigm where the ratio of labour costs to profit margins favour those least burdensome by employers” (Galer, 2012). Support is often viewed as

an economic burden in terms of social support policy,⁷⁶ and limits the freedom for autistic people to *produce* their knowledge. The notion of freedom as a struggle between bodies, and with one's own body, perhaps reflects the challenges we face in the support of autistic people – not out of good-will, but as a right.⁷⁷ It suggests the ethical issues we all face in the co-production of autism as it is understood in its variety of forms.

Butler discusses the materiality of the body and the tenuous nature of constructivism as a possible constraint – “is it still possible to raise the critical question of how such constraints not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies?” (Butler, 1993, xi). When the “abject” autistic body cannot be cured, the logical step, in the medical model, seems to be to recover autistic people to the best of our ability (with charity), which has resulted in stigmatization and social isolation.

Larry also understands himself as abject: “People all want communication... Like lots of autistic people, Larry needs good support in not sometimes acting badly” (Bissonnette, 2010). Perhaps we have to consider the realms of knowing beyond language – that conceives the autistic body as irrational or unintelligible, and the socio-economic exclusions constellated by these views. In contrast, Savarese considers the autistic body differently: “The body presents a form of engagement, whether we recognize it or not, and always lyrical, whether we see it that way or not” (Savarese, 2012, np). He positions

⁷⁶ Autism costs the US economy, according to the charity *Autism Speaks*, \$137 billion per year as reported in this article: <http://www.disabilitycoop.com/2012/03/30/autism-costs-billion/15286/>.

⁷⁷ Instead, autism is seen as a disease or disability deserving of charity, which is the “disabling corporatism” which Shakespeare refers to that I cite earlier.

an alternative way to view the autistic body that help us to open up beyond our (dis)abled conceptions, beyond the notion that autistics are “acting badly.”

The Purpose to Prove Intelligence

In response to Larry’s comment that we are each a leaf on a diversity tree, Naoki states, “I know each leaf has a value and a meaning to the life of itself so **our mission is to prove it**” (Higashida, 2010) [bold mine]. It is this notion of proof that keeps repeating itself and sustains the desires and needs of the autistic subjects, although it also asks us to question how proof is being used in normative ways. This would cover rights, inclusion, acceptance, friendship and connection. If these are lacking and autistics are compelled to communicate by typing in order to achieve it, what must we do?

As one could see intelligence denotative of identity, Val Williams (2011) describes it as “something that emerges because of the way people talk together” (2011, 47). This has complex implications for how autistic people come to view themselves and create self-narrative in supportive care, by virtue of the thrust to remediate (and the history of institutionalization). Williams also addresses the role of supporters, or allies; the susceptibility of autistic people in particular to prompt dependency, and their lives as being positively and negatively reinforced⁷⁸ through behaviour management therapies, raises concern about how self-advocacy, and voice, may or may not be influenced (Redley and Weinberg, 2007 in Williams, 2011, 12). Yet, she also notes how individuals also resist identities “in indexical, creative and unpredictable ways” (Antaki &

⁷⁸ These are behaviourist and clinical terms.

Widdicombe, 1998a: 3, 14 in Williams, 2011, 47), which can be seen in Larry's and Naoki's art.

“Self-advocate through art because ordering through art means you find me personally worth knowing and want to listen to my artistic voice and not my autistic voice” (Bissonnette, 2010).

Larry asserts his personhood through his art work. Similarly, Naoki suggests his freedom achieved through his art: “I am very happy when I draw. It is as if drawing fills holes in my heart. My goal is to paint pictures that go with my writing so that I can convey my whole world” (2010). One could say that the act of drawing for Naoki in conveying his *whole* world is an act of freedom and an assertion of his *presence* as much as Larry's art wishes to be free from scrutiny. It is through their artistic endeavours that the autistic subjects seem to be most free.

Still, while Larry and Tracy venture out into the world to connect with others like themselves, as well as a broader public, we are still made aware of their exclusion *despite* proof of their intelligence – *despite* them meeting the demands of a prejudiced society. At 16, Naoki has written 10 books and yet is not included in school; Chammi states that he is an outcast in Sri Lankan culture despite that he and his mother created the Open Education Institute; Tracy sits outside of the system and has no permanent place to live despite being an activist and speaking with his state senator on a regular basis; and Larry has the more fortunate circumstance of living with his sister after being institutionalized for over 15 years. This indicates the power dynamics (Foucault, 1974), “structural violence,” and the “economic, political, legal, religious, and cultural [factors] that stop

individuals, groups and societies from reaching their full potential.” This results in the, “disparate access to resources, political power, education, health care, [as well as] legal standing” (Galtung in Erevelles, 2011, 16).

The Purpose of Self-Advocacy

In the film, Vermont State Senator, Phil Scott, tells Tracy how important advocacy work is to change the power dynamics that shape the system that excludes him, but again, this expects typical communication and behaviour, such as one’s physical presence and interaction. This implies the role of advocacy, voice, and the assertion of negative rights, or public assembly, that the system supports which is a challenge for many autistics (Kittay and Carlson, 2010; Sarrett, 2012; Williams, 2011). Tracy is more able than most because his assistant in Harvey Lavoy is able to calm him down when he begins to feel overwhelmed and upset about the possibility that his disability support will be decreased by budget cuts; Tracy looks at Harvey who understands he is upset, and Harvey suggests a walk. “No, no!” shouts Tracy, and Scott looks as if he’s coolly suppressing his discomfort. Tracy’s hands stiffen and waggle, his body rocks. We watch him gather himself; his hands slow down and his right hand moves toward the keyboard – he begins typing before Harvey is able to support him. Tracy then writes, “please ignore the man behind the curtain,” and he is seen shaking Senator Scott’s hand in a cordial farewell. Why does Tracy feel he needs to justify his autistic movement or denounce his autistic body? Is it in order to make Scott listen and believe Tracy’s worth; is it to get his respect?

Despite his advocacy work, Tracy's living situation remains tenuous: "I sleep in two or three different places a week. I am unable to live on my own. I depend on people who are paid to take care of me." Harvey is seen leaving Tracy at the home of Dotty who makes space for Tracy to stay the night. Tracy lies on the couch reading a newspaper.

"Nice room, Trace," Harvey remarks as he leaves. Tracy seems to sigh and consider his nice, but temporary, room for the night, and puts down his paper despondently.

"I have no permanent place to live and it really sucks and I have no permanent place to hang my hat." He is upset and begins to hit his head. "I've lived in twelve different places...some nights I end up in a county facility for people in crisis." Tracy bangs hard on the keyboard when talking about advocacy or the precariousness of his situation.

This theme of isolation and insufficient support, despite achieving normative communication, is common to all of the subjects in the film. When Smirit Daniel, the Sri Lankan journalist asks, "I'd like to know what it means to you to have autism and how has that experience has changed?" Tracy writes, "Well that is a completely gyrating question," and he starts to repeat *hurry up, hurry up* as he's typing his answer.

"I have always been very angry about my autism. It didn't get seen as intelligent... I am 42 years old now. So it is hard to remember when I was young. My family loved me. But I really had no education in school because I could not speak. Our classes were isolated. In high school I sat in a room all day doing puzzles. When I was 23 years old I started typing. Slowly I showed my true intelligence and I was able to accept the gifts God gave me although I'm still prone to acts of intense anger" (Thresher, 2010).

Justice and rights, despite positive rights achieved with the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (Robertson, 2008) still have to be enforced by the *proof* of value and worth, and this seems to come at a great cost to and endurance by autistic people who must perform or “pretend to be normal” (Holliday-Willey & Attwood, 1999; Sarrett, 2012). “One avenue used to express humanness and ensure civic and human rights is through self-representation and advocacy” (Sarrett, 2012). Demonstrations of capacity and competence, which I refer to as normative *performances*, continue to determine an individual’s freedom or institutionalization (Stefan, 2001).

“Performance in mainstream environments is restricted and restrictive by definition, and autistics have long felt pressure to study and copy majority social skills they do not ‘naturally’ possess.” (Grandin and Barron, 2005 in Davidson, 2008, 795).

This positive aspect of autism as difference and an acceptance of *impairment-as-a-challenge-to-be-accommodated*, constitutes the formation of a culture with political rights (Ne’eman and Robertson, 2011). It can be problematic, however, to use the terms “positive” because of its normative and empirical contexts. The autistic self-advocacy community, rather, seeks *empowerment*⁷⁹ (Charlton, 2000). “People should move me away from psychologically negative space to a jovial state of mind using humor, motivation to stay calm, and loosening my tension with ice cold Budweiser,” states Larry of the negative affective experience of stress, and of expectation, denoting the impact of

⁷⁹ <http://www.autismempowerment.org/>: “We believe in the power of positive collaboration and welcome the opportunity to develop ongoing relationships and partnerships with autism, educational and special needs related organizations globally.” ; <http://autisticadvocacy.org/projects/> : “Our projects seek to improve public understanding of autism, to involve the Autistic community in research that is relevant to the community’s needs, to empower Autistic people to take leading roles in advocacy, and to promote inclusion and self-determination.”

attitudes about his behaviour. In this, a positive attitude about autism seems necessary. Yet, the terms *positive* and *negative* in political discourse may also reinstate questions about the moral status of the autistic subject, and binary entrenchments about what is a good (and appropriate) working body and what is not.

The Language Prejudice

Shotwell writes by quoting Gadamer that prejudice “operates at a level we do not notice,” that is “based in unquestioned assumptions and therefore it may require active work to bring prejudice into view” (2011, 17). Erevelle’s question – if a cognitively “incompetent” person is able to represent themselves – persists in terms of discussing disability, communication and intelligence, and whether these can be reconciled in public imagination and policy. This also calls attention to the arguments that entrench the autism community and points to the limitations of economic mechanisms; we can problematize autistic self-advocacy and inclusion in terms of who is valued and who is not (an economic agent). Part of the problem in autism discourse and self-advocacy remains the reappearance of the question itself, reflecting the lack of reverence we have for any human being regardless of (dis)ability or contribution, and how a person must contribute or be productive. There is a lot of literature and time invested in these questions of autistic competence (and incompetence) – in relation to personhood, human rights and in the context of medical defect – and this implies that we need to push the boundaries of understanding the disability we name autism, and to support autistic people in helping us do so.

Dawn Prince, an autistic professor of primate anthropology, suggests that the way in which we regard the *wretches* is affected by “the language prejudice” (2010), or we can imagine it as a linguistic hegemony. David Abram also names this a linguistic prejudice that commodifies nature and structures our thinking (1997). In other words, language, intelligence and purpose conflate and are limited to the boundaries of an inanimate reality. However, it may be more important to realize how language is used against autistic people as much as the subjects may need to learn normative language to help others understand them – to “pass the message” about autistic competence in normative ways (Lappalainen, 2010). It seems pleasing to the subjects of the film that they are able to communicate, to be “inspected” (Bissonnette, 2010) for their intelligence rather than perceived as thoughtless. The film shows how autistic people are also expected to change, as reflected in Antti’s words: “how we have changed as people.” In this, we can view coming to communication as empowering. To this, Tito writes:

“Learning to write was the most important skill I acquired because it helped me to be a storyteller. I had my words and I had my stories, which flowed between me and the mirror. Some stories were absorbed behind the secrets of my shadow through the transparency of my flapping hands” (Mukhopadyhay, 2008, 157).

Similarly, Birgir Sellin writes, “Love language more than anything; it links people; a language gives us dignity and individuality; I am not without language” (Sellin, 1992, 154).

Also unsettling is the notion, though, that autistics are not persons without ordinary communication, without this proof of competence. Donna Williams writes, “my

motivation to interact was to prove my sanity and avoid getting locked up in an institution” (Williams, 1992, 68). This beckons concern about how these messages of normality are appropriated in the formation of autistic identity, which also invites dangers in the way autistic people are remediated and also how we may think of emancipation. “I knew very early on in life that if you happen to be born with autism, you will need to give plenty of proofs to doctors, psychologists, teachers, therapists, disbelieving uncles and neighbors, and who knows who else?” (Mukhopadhyay, 2008, 157).

In Finland, we see all the autistic typists in the film sitting around a table at a restaurant, communicating and enjoying the connection with each other. Noaki also suggests that he has never conversed with others “who communicate the way I do” (2010). Although the method is atypical, it is presented in a normalized way – socializing at a restaurant and discussing the formation of a political movement of *wretches*. It is an empowering scene and one which I suspect most viewers want to encourage; yet, a neurotypical view of technology as a solution for the communication problem might be of concern.

Technology is not a “panacea for societal prejudice,” notes Michael Oliver (1990). He highlights the “double-edged nature” of technology (Oliver, 1990) and the way it can “be both oppressive and emancipatory, depending on the social uses to which it is put” (Gleeson, 1999, 104).

“Every new technology is invariably hailed as a saviour for disabled people, as a way of minimising their ‘deficits’ and thus making them less dependent on other people. This despite the fact that dependency on others is a part of life for everyone, and may well be preferable to dependency on unreliable technology.... It is clear...that technological systems must never be pushed onto

people as a sticking-plaster solution to deeper social problems (Sheldon, 2004, 156).

In response to FC as an empirically-proven method and the controversy which surrounds therapies and treatments in general,⁸⁰ Lisa Cartwright states about FC that, “my concern is not whether the method ‘really works,’ but how it works – that is, what, besides speech, is produced in the *relationships* that form *around* facilitated writing” (2008, 159) [italics mine]. She further writes:

“The FC debate offers a well-documented controversy about the coproduction of voice belatedly in the previously speechless child. It allows us to consider the role of desire, authority, physical touch, and identification among coproducers of child voice in a context where the politics of dependency and the ideal autonomous speech and/as agency loom large” (Cartwright, 2008, 159).

The focus on relationship and reciprocity further highlights the interdependent support that many autistics need in order to participate in society as autistic people, but this is not where services and rights are focussed – academic inclusion with support or assistants is often denied because academic institutions demand independence.⁸¹ But relationship is not just about support; it is about love and acceptance which is the root of all purpose.

The power possessed by many researchers and charities has not listened or supported autistic people in this, due to economic reasons. As Ari Ne’eman notes, they raise money

⁸⁰ In this, I suggest that every therapy has a danger of using normalization as a premise, or goal. Every therapy and educational method or tool must be considered as either helping to support autistic people as they are, or for this remediation to normalcy, which autistic people argue, cannot be attained. Autistic people in the Neurodiversity movement ask for acceptance as they are as well as the medical supports they themselves suggest they might need – which are varied for each autistic individual.

⁸¹ This premise was used in the case of *Jaffer vs. York University*, although the legal method by which the litigants argued was not a human rights claim through the Human Rights Commission, but a tort claim.

for cures and normative concepts for inclusion through remediation (Ne'eman in *Loud Hands Speaking*, 2012) “In many instances, the answers are not yet apparent for us.” Ari continues:

“...particularly in realms like communication, which poses one of the most pressing and important areas of challenge for our community. However, our existing autism advocacy and research agendas have not placed finding solutions to these issues high on their agendas, preferring to focus on environmental or genetic research aimed at providing for ‘cure’ or ‘recovery’” (Ne'eman, 2013, 94).

Ne'eman reminds us how the focus of autism research is guided but also how communication is a high priority, and who gets to set the political agenda. Is achieving the normative path the only means to self-advocacy? In taking this on as their purpose to prove autistic intelligence, what is now incumbent on society in the manner of supporting and accepting autistic people, as they are?

“I really want to get back into pleasant human society and have everyone accept me. It’s nonsense about me being autistic; it’s the others who are; they’re hemmed in by massive educational measures, horrible laws and concepts” (Sellin, 1992,152).

Conclusion

Naoki also recognizes this power imbalance and eugenic overtone of how he is viewed as an autistic person when he asks Tracy and Larry, as advocates, “What do we need to do to survive?” The concept of survival by self-advocates arranges autism as an oppressed minority culture that must inscribe a new narrative for its preservation and provenance in both economic production and the human community.

Thus, we question the nature or purpose, productivity, the unique contributions, and abilities of autistics and how they can participate in society as autistic people. Is there space for the transgressive performance, the non-compliant body? Abram himself wonders about the “lack of awareness in other animals...[if this is] an inability to clearly see, or focus on anything outside the realm of human technology or to hear as meaningful anything other than human speech” (1997, 27). Here, possibilities utilize creative approaches to being autistic, (inter)dependent, or different, in society. “I believe that a focus on independence...yields too much conception of citizen as ‘independent and fully functioning’” (Kittay in Shakespeare, 2996, 141). Sutherland says, “A more radical approach is needed: we must demolish the false dividing line between ‘normal’ and ‘disabled’...and attach the whole concept of physical normality” (Sutherland, 1981, 18).

Human value, and access to education and tools to adapt, is assessed by the potential to contribute to society in economic ways. Here I would like to trouble the notion of *contribution* as it is typically conceived, and suggest the other valuable contributions that remain unaccounted for, or unrewarded, in our culture. Further, my argument contends that this is the prejudice that runs rampant in our society; instead of asking *what is possible?* we tend to ask autistic people if their communication is *valid* and rational before we consider them a valuable person. Doubt fuels the empirical (and economic) question and places pressure on autistic people to prove their humanity, while we may in fact have to question the very lack of it among those considered the neurological majority.

While it has been mentioned that the film notably features autistic people rather than non-autistic people as its subjects and speakers, converting the traditional position of power into autistic self-advocate hands, these privileged positions must be considered in research methodology, passive/active viewership, attitudes, and interactions. In fact, *what kinds of actions?* undertaken *after* the audience has viewed *Wretches & Jabberers* might be the next step in research about autistic self-advocacy films and autism acceptance. To this, I turn to the autistic subjects to help me conclude this paper:

Tracy: Can you believe two bald green mountain men made it to sushi land?

Larry: Is eating sushi the highlight for us?

Tracy: For me it was meeting the monk in his temple and the sushi was the icing on the cake.

Larry: Plenty of lovely people makes me look at going like Japan as building new lines of communication between people of meaningfully lasting temperments so more about people than food.

As they say goodbye to Naoki in a hotel lobby Naoki writes, "I did my best...these memories give me courage and I'm so moved...I will continue my quest of how I want to live my life. It was great meeting you. I will be looking forward to seeing you again."

Larry: Larry loves your paintings...orders of leading art museums will come in so like a meteor take off on lettered moonbeams of night lit like neon lights in Tokyo. Powerful potential."

Pascal struggles to translate Larry's poetic pattern of thought.

As they linger over their goodbyes, Naoki's mother is in tears while inching her way to the elevator. "Thank you ...thank you very much," she says bowing repeatedly. There are many goodbyes in the film that make us wonder what the future will bring for autistic people, and these goodbyes illustrate the pain and isolation that many autistics and their families feel. When Tracy and Larry left Sri Lanka, Chammi wrote, "feasting on stored up memories." After he wrote it and got up to move, his mother sighs and we remember Chammi's earlier words about his autistic experience, "It is lonely."

Antti was empowered as he came up with the name *wretches and jabberers* to describe the struggle and differences between those who can talk and those who cannot and the scene of them typing at a restaurant leaves a lasting impression of a culture of communicators and the importance of friendship, connection and purpose. This film asks us to reconsider the co-production of autism against a history of institutionalization to supportive communication and assistance, the latter which has enabled empowerment and purpose in life; in other words, the support of autistic rights and well-being.

As a mother to a non-verbal autistic son, I consider all the effort it takes to be included in society, to be heard, even considered as a sliver of normal, just to be granted the opportunity for friendship and inclusion. This might urge us to think how we can all support autistic people to live their lives as they want to live them, and continue to build community. Indeed, this writer believes that Tracy, Larry and their friends, have helped us to understand autistic experience, our web of interdependencies, and the humanity of

us all. In this, we are all a “critical mass of wretches” (Bissonnette, 2010). Now, how can we respond?

Tracy: “I think this has been a trip of a lifetime, Larry. I’m so happy we did it together.”

Larry: “Larry loops twice on that loving fellowship feeling.”

Appendices

Facilitated (or Supported) Communication

Technology and human support shape the interdependent features of Facilitated Communication (FC). The need of aides and other tools to assist personal autonomy and its lack of provision, is often viewed as a barrier to the right of independence and normalcy, and some people even view it as a “hoax”; that non-verbal autistic people are not able to possess their own thoughts, and any attempt for facilitators or aide workers to support autistic expression and choice represents the facilitator’s own desires and hopes, not those of the autistic person. The notion that one does not have an inner life unless it is expressed in normative, symbolic language (Harnad in Bogdashina, 2010) is viewed as one of the many givens in our society, and which Cherney (2011) names ableist – when a person or object achieves a reified status; an object rather than a subject. Sarrett notes that, “[h]uman rights theories, including the social contract, utilitarianism, citizenship and those based on freedom, have all been criticized by disability scholars for excluding certain individuals based on a set of abilities required to participate in some activity (i.e. governance) or maintain a certain level of autonomy” (Sarrett, 2012, np). In other words, the achievement of rights in a neo-liberalist, normative context, necessitates efficient, (fictive) independent and erudite communication (Sarrett, 2012; Goodey, 2011), all of which are challenging for most autistic individuals.

Facilitated Communication, which could be considered a differential treatment – and the main method by which the subjects of the film communicate – raises discussion regarding autonomy, vulnerability, freedom and the politics of care. While it seeks to support autonomy, making the autistic subject free by providing communication outlets and physical support when needed, this support challenges the traditional notions of autonomy and independence, or, how independence is intertwined with freedom of choice and movement. Independence and autonomy, questioned in empirical studies about Facilitated Communication in proving authorship (Eberlin et al, 2003; Shane, 1994a, 1994b; Todd 2009, 2012; Twatchman and Cullen, 1997; Palfreman, 1993), is critiqued as being another method to normalize autistic people (Erevelles, 2005; Eyal, 2010). FC opponents doubt autistic competence because autistic people are not communicating independently. This anti-FC critique suggests that facilitators do not presume autistic competence or else they would not have to assist the autistic person to communicate (Todd, 2011, 2012). The axiom for personhood, then, is independence.

Personal Concerns When Writing This Paper

As a mother to a son labeled “severely autistic,” some parts of the film were especially emotional for me - saying goodbye to friends in Japan was one, as well as the budding love affair between Henna and Tracy. This triggered in me the importance of connection with others who understand our isolation as both autistic people and parents, and what fervently drives us to help our children to communicate in order to form relationships. I began thinking of the self-advocate movement – also coined as the autism acceptance movement or the Neurodiversity movement – and the way in which autistic people are now gathering on and offline. I considered how important it feels to have others who share our experiences (mostly with language). I then began to question who might be missing from the movement and the language hegemony, as Sarrett (2012) notes, one needs language skills in order to belong to the advocacy world (as it currently exists). My hope is that this is the pathway to include and provide rights for all autistic citizens, and to pursue an ongoing resistance to homogenizing autistic people.

As I also teach my son to type, and have worked with Pascal Cheng and Larry Bissonnette for an event I organized in 2007 for *The Autism Acceptance Project*, I found myself struggling in my own life with these concepts of empowering voice and/or supporting normalcy and consider them mutually constitutive, which also led me to write this paper. Am I teaching Adam to type, to go to regular school, in order to normalize him, or am I helping him to translate his experiences into the dominant language of our

culture in order that he become less frustrated and more empowered within it? The latter explanation seems convenient and reasonable, yet it's my explanation and not Adam's. What might I be conveying to him when I teach him to type? What violence might I be inflicting on him by making him use his words and sentences, and what about school? Tito Mukhopadhyay wrote, "my school is the doubt in your eyes," (Mukhopadhyay in Savarese, 2010) and I believe every parent will attest to also having seen it. Choosing a school (or even to be in school) can be difficult, and these are complex issues for all parents and teachers to consider. I think everyday on how my concerns affect Adam's self-identity. For me, these are not just questions for a research paper. These are ethical, heart-wrenching questions that I wake up with every day; the way we co-produce autistic identity as maladaptive and "less-than" in our society is of importance to me as a mother to my autistic son.

I think it is important to state that I have not consulted with autistic people for this paper specifically, but instead look at the film's own methodology as a metaphor for interdependent support (co-production) as much as it could potentially reinforce normalcy, and I may unconsciously uphold it. I understand the hazards in positing this possibility precisely at a time when communication technologies are nascent for autistic people and are also at risk of being taken away from autistics. In this, the subjects of the film are indeed "brave souls," (Thresher, 2010) and further work must be done by autistic people and their supporters to explore methods which the autistic community may create for themselves, and which are taken seriously in all realms of society.

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I think it goes without saying that the greatest love in my life is my son Adam. I could relate to Adriana Caverero who said “I exist in an important sense for you” (in Butler, 2005, 32). I feel this complements Monk Hogen’s remarks about acceptance – that we don’t think about, in my case, being a white female living in Canada – we just “accept the fact” (Hogen, 2010). I believe these sentiments have lived in me all along since Adam’s birth. I found it hard to accept his diagnosis in the sense that everyone around him thought that something was “wrong” with him. I innately sensed from the beginning that there was nothing wrong with Adam, but with the way in which there is a lack of empathy towards people who have disabilities. Like most parents, I would not have had the opportunity to discover this empathy unless Adam was born. While I do not wish to place the burden on him of being my teacher, or my hero, I do *herald the labour day of his birth with my trumpeting heart* (if I may try to attempt Larry’s appealing manner of writing). I do not necessarily believe that being a *domestic citizen* is lower-level work – many parents understand the compassion and the time we need in order to sustain a thriving, inclusive social economy. If it were not for Adam, needless to say, I would not be writing this. I thank you, Adam, for your love and patience with me in completing my M.A. We exist most certainly for each other.

I believe Adam gives many people great joy and he is the reason for my blog, for founding *The Autism Acceptance Project*, and for trying to make his and the world a better place.

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Film Credits:

Director:

Cast:

Original Soundtrack:

Performances By:

A Production of:

Executive Producer:

Produced By:

Geradine Wurzburg
Larry Bissonnette
Pascal Cheng
Harvey Lavoy
Tracy Thresher
Naoki Higashida
Antti Lappalainen
Henna Laulainen
Chammi Rejapatirana
J. Ralph
Antony
Devendra Banhart
Paul Brady
Bonnie Bramlett
Vashti Bunyan
Martin Carthy
Judy Collins
Lila Downs
Vincent Gallo
David Garza
Ben Harper
Scarlett Johansson
Nic Jones
Norah Jones
Leah Siegel
Carly Simon
Stephen Stills
Ben Taylor
Bob Weir
State of the Art Inc.
John P. Hussman
Douglas Biklen
Geradine Wurzburg

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