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Alice Wexler's *Autism in a Decentered World* offers a novel epistemology of autism that valorizes autistic ways of experiencing by celebrating the artistic expressions of self-identified autistic people. Wexler launches her project to valorize autistic experience by first deconstructing the narrative fiction upon which modernist conceptions of neurological normality, or neurotypicality, were founded. After deconstructing normality philosophically, Wexler sketches the experiential contours of autistic epistemologies and locates their expressions in the outsider art of self-identified people with autism. Wexler observes that her interest in the "less visible disability of the autism spectrum, the 'unusual minds'" differentiates her project from the more common focus on the more overtly visible markers of ability and disability (5).

Wexler opens her discussion by chronicling the self-conscious politicization of the category of "disability" as those labeled as dis-abled have seized the historically stigmatizing marker, re-coding it as their own in a deliberate effort to end the "era of objectification in which the disabled person can be spoken for" (1). Activists were successful in passing disability rights legislation that extended rights to those labeled disabled, but barriers to full inclusion remain today. Wexler's project fits squarely within efforts to understand and transcend barriers to full inclusion by re-coding disability in ways that are empowering, ending the era of objectification by giving voice to those marginalized by normalizing knowledge and practices that stigmatize and discipline differences.

Wexler explains that western science and medicine construct autism as pathology, a semantic codification that many within the autistic community reject. However, medical representations of autistic "deficits" and limitations are blind to their intrinsic assumptions about normality. Accordingly, the author deconstructs neurotypical normality, against which autistic deviance is positioned. Wexler demonstrates in the first two chapteres that the western neurotypical subject is predicated upon a fiction of cohesion and rational self-reflection codified in the Cartesian "I." This Cartesian I presumes the mind is fully transparent to itself, fully rational, and exercises full mastery over its biological body, as illustrated by the power of the master puppeteer over the marionette. Yet, this I is a delusion, as Wexler shows by drawing upon philosophical and scientific research documenting discontinuity in, and fragmentation of, the thought we understand as consciousness. The I is not biologically or cognitively self-identical, but rather is a fictitious and ephemeral construct that is constructed through language, the repository of cultural logics, interpretive frames, and social relations.

Language, in privileging the subject that produces speech, is the medium of constitution for the Cartesian I claimed by neurotypicals. The I constituted linguistically deludes because it offers a fantasy of detached mastery as it narrates experience and retroactively constructs cybernetic intentionality, especially in western culture. This western fiction of selfhood encoded in the linguistic I is the norm against which deviance has been measured since the Enlightenment. Women, people of colour, children, and those marked by physical or intellectual differences have all, across time, been cast as lacking this omniscient and enduring I.

The fictitious I at the heart of neurotypicality has been deconstructed in literature, psychology, philosophy, and art, among other fields of inquiry. In Chapters 1-3, Wexler addresses how its codification of normality and deviance operates to marginalize experiences

that cannot be reconciled with the fiction of Cartesian mastery. In particular, the author argues that what unites autistic people is their differential experience within language, their lack of suture within its neurotypical I: "Autistic perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and actions are not organized in a way that would accord the sense of coherency and continuity as they would in the neurotypical self" (34). Wexler suggests that autism is characterized by "excess" of the "bundle-like" quality of self (35) resulting from a lack of disciplined coherence and integration of experience. In other words, autistic people do not enjoy the fiction of the neurotypical I because the excesses of their experiences escape its harmonizations, homogenizations, and cybernetic protocols.

Wexler argues that these excesses are not intrinsically deficient, but rather are *epistemic*, that is, they are productive of alternative ways of experiencing self and others. Unfortunately, these alternative epistemologies typically escape neurotypical understanding and are therefore conventionally coded as noise, as non-meaningful static, as illustrated by Oliver Sacks's insistence that autistic people cannot produce art due to their defective consciousness. Wexler disputes this claim directly in Part II. Through a series of case analyses in Chapters 6-10, she examines how artists diagnosed with autism have constructed their identities through participation within art communities and cultures. Each autistic epistemology is unique, yet what they all share are atypical boundaries and relationships among language, memory, cognition, and the sensory system, which together produce the excesses that escape the fantasy of full integration and control. Autistic art, Wexler alleges, is intrinsically more experiential and open-ended than art produced by the more disciplined and normalized neurotypical mind.

Her genealogy of autistic art's emergence from anonymity reveals heterogeneous spaces and personas, illustrated here by the case of Dan Miller, a 53-year-old man on the autism

spectrum who produces art at Creative Growth, a studio that opened in 1974 as a part-time program for people with developmental disabilities. Drawing upon the work of Hans Prinzhorn, a German psychiatrist, Creative Growth founders leveraged art as means of self-expression and growth, launching artists whose productions are increasingly acknowledged and sought after by neurotypicals. Creative Growth aptly illustrates a heterotopia, as defined by the French theorist, Michel Foucault, a place that is utopian in its lack of conformity with ordinary institutional and cultural norms and expectations. Across Part II, Wexler's detailed genealogy of autistic art and artists compellingly deconstructs their marginalization and, in so doing, calls into question the politics of othering and the foundational assumptions of neurotypicality, particularly the assumption of self-possession (i.e., rational, cybernetic control over self) and the power of authentic/full representation. Her analysis also reminds us that efforts to define and delimit art are political, as illustrated by the encoded cultural distinction between high and low art forms and the differentiation of those capable of producing and/or appreciating the former. Wexler offers "*neurocosmopolitanism"* as an antidote to this type of cultural elitism, suggesting that neurotypicals who are willing to engage with autistic art will be richly rewarded by the richness and heterogeneity of autistic experience encoded within (140).

Perhaps *Autism in a Decentered World*'s most significant contribution is its sophisticated and conceptually intriguing way of thinking about autistic difference in relation to neurotypicality. For Wexler, neurotypicality is a phantasmic identification produced through language and inhabited corporeally. Although the neurotypical is chronically afflicted with metaphoric leaks (e.g., involuntarily bodily functions, forgetfulness, etc.), the Cartesian fantasy is, generally speaking, maintained. In contrast, the autistic person's relation to this Cartesian fantasy is less fixed, perhaps not at all. However, the excesses and heterogeneities of autistic

experience are epistemic; that is, they produce experience/knowledge that diverges from normalized understandings, disclosing reality in new ways with the assumption that this reality never be truly known, only experienced through our habitations. It follows from this logic that autistic art is not simply therapy for the disabled, but rather has the capacity to operate as a world-disclosing experience for the normalized and deluded neurotypical. Reframed using this logic, autistic art is, perhaps, even more worthy of the appellation than neurotypical art.

Wexler's monograph is sophisticated and intriguing. It raises interesting and ultimately unanswerable ontological and epistemological questions about human consciousness/perception, artistic difference and the politics of representation. It introduces readers to artists whose work has been under-valued because of othering. It politicizes art by emphasizing its world-disclosing capacities and elevates autistics as particularly suited for artistic production. The question as to whether Wexler inadvertently homogenizes and essentializes neurotypicality and autistic consciousness is tricky to address because what defines autistic difference is not sameness, but rather is represented by Wexler as excess. Wexler attempts to side-step essentialism by delimiting neurotypicality in terms of a fantasy of sameness and autistic phenomenology in terms of excess, but her monograph still raises significant existential questions worthy of further discussion and debate concerning the nature of our ways of being. *Autism in a Decentered World* is a must-read for those interested in these questions.