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**Julia Miele Rodas. (2018). *Autistic disturbances: theorizing autism poetics from the DSM to Robinson Crusoe* Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.
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Julia Miele Rodas offers *Autistic Disturbances: Theorizing Autism Poetics from the DSM to Robinson Crusoe* as a tome of resistant literary praxis. So that we might allow ‘disordered’ to claim poetic voice- that we might recognize the celebration of this voice in our culturally treasured texts, and rather than require retroactive diagnosis, we simply allow these voices to be recognized as worthy- and Autistic. At last, a text which explores autistic language: allowing for its ironies without claiming it to be paradoxical; giving shape to its cultural consistencies without constraining it to a pathologized rigidity; allowing for both meaning where a reader might suspect none and none where a reader might insist on inserting one; and all while refusing to stigmatize, pathologize, medicalize, problematize, or even to diagnose.

Rodas’ own non-disclosure is a powerful rhetorical move. In refusing to claim autism for herself, she ironically claims the space of Yergeau’s *Demirhetor*¹ anyway. Not Autistic. Not not. Rodas chooses demirheticity as a strategic position from which to crip the construct of situatedness as it is co-opted by readers as a marker of (in)validity. Just as Rodas refuses to diagnose the authors or characters in the texts she evaluates, readers are prevented from diagnosing or undiagnosing her in service of their own interpretive ends.

¹ Yergeau, M. (2017). *Authoring autism: on rhetoric and neurological queerness*. Duke, NC: Duke University Press.

Through an analysis of autistic language both in the research literature and from Autistic writers themselves, Rodas identifies six categories, or linguistic technologies, employed by the autistic: Silence, Ricochet, Apostrophe, Ejaculation, Discretion, and Invention. Silence represents both the involuntary mutism and the intentional withholding of information. Ricochet is Rodas's recoinage of Echolalia, but also an expansion of the technology of repetition for pleasure and purpose. Apostrophe stands for the info-dump, the professorial, the soliloquy. Ejaculation, a crass crippling of terminology from Kanner's original *Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact*, encapsulates the abrupt, unexpected, interminable expressions that the audience is often unprepared for. Discretion codifies the list, catalog, ordering, and taxonomy, and is not nearly as rigid as one might suspect. Finally, Invention represents the autistic tendency toward neologism, to concoct communication where previous technologies fail². Each of these technologies are permitted to be intentional and involuntary, to be meaningful and meaningless, to be nonsense, and to circle back into sensemaking again through absurdity- and to overlap with one another, to link, chain, converge, entangle, and explode.

Rodas then analyzes multiple culturally relevant texts for the ways in which they deploy these technologies. From the categorical, taxonomical, ordered, modularized, template of the DSM to the listical ricocheted poetry of Carver, Antin, and Perec, Rodas illustrates the subversive ways in which the categorical can serve to undermine the rigidity they are meant to exemplify. It is precisely in their imprecision that they prove their elastic explosivity. To claim the DSM as an autistic text when it is so often used by practitioners to abuse autistic people (both in naming and unnameing us) is a bit uncomfortable- something that Rodas does not deny. Yet there is something satisfyingly awkward about it. For autism as a diagnosable thing is

² Readers of this review should know that my efforts to make a concise summation of these technologies do not adequately reflect the nuance and respect Rodas shows to autistics and our history in her work.

constructed by the authors of the DSM, and thus it has a certain symmetry that it should construct itself in the same categorical routinized rigidity that they construct us with. All the while representing the potential, as Rodas points out, of “testing boundaries and definitions. A poetics of inclusion and possibility... taxonomy as interpretive, curatorial.” (p. 88-89)

Such uncomfortable narrative shifts characterize each of her readings. She begins each analysis with the ways in which the text might match more stereotypical, pathological interpretations of what it could mean to have an autistic voice. The reader is locked in suspense, unable to exhale, uncertain of which direction her demirheticity might finally discharge. It was hard to read ‘Nothingness Himself’ and interpret Warhol as a seeming defense of autistic as empty shell until finally, Rodas breaks the tension by exposing the cultural violence of “breaking through” a shell which may, in fact, be the substance -- "you have to treat nothing as if it is something" -- neurotypicals perceive nothing, a surface, a factitiousness, when a depth is neither excluded nor necessary (p. 106).

Rodas further explores the themes of Autistic Poetics in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. In each of these essays, the combinations of silence, ricochet, apostrophe, ejaculation, discretion, and invention are unique, elastic, plastic, explosive, and generative of new potentials- both for future literary works and for future understandings of the validity of autistic voice. Throughout the book, Rodas is accountable to the cultural bullying of autistic voice - “[a]n expectation of nonsense, of vacancy, of inhumanity creates a framework of nonlistening” (p. 74). Despite using these Romantic and Victorian era texts as examples of valued autistic voice, she gives equal reflection on cultural criticisms that resist(ed) the autistic qualities of these works, thus respecting autistic

(demi)rehetors who daily experience the disorienting disarticulation of “imperializing analysis” (p. 133).

To the topic of imperialism, attention must be paid to the domination of whiteness in the texts analyzed here. And though Rodas makes no claims to conflate whiteness with autistic voice, and acknowledges the lack of diversity in her analysis and her own inexpertise and cultural incompetency in analyzing texts from racialized authors, there is an unacknowledged danger in building the thematic categories of autistic voice from an equally whitewashed database of clinical study and de-identified blogtext. The cultural construct of autism is itself conflated with whiteness, historically, clinically, and in contemporary media. We are all responsible for how our work constructs the “nonlistening” for autistic voices of color. As we work collectively toward equitable futures, where access to both material and identity are not disproportionately withheld from autistics of color, may this foundational investigation into autistic voice be enriched by harmonizing and dissonant melodies.

Amidst misguided appeals to autism as essential to humanity via some neoeugenical superiority³, Rodas compels us to recontextualize autistic rhetorics not as distinct to diagnosable bodies, but as fluid and transformative technologies of human language- interrupting neurotypical desires to pathologize autistic voice as deficient- connecting (echo: linking, welding, tangling, weaving) autistics intractably to wider humanity- an interruptive connection (*squawk*).

³ <https://theconversation.com/how-our-autistic-ancestors-played-an-important-role-in-human-evolution-73477>