

Produced by and for Autistic people

The Spectrum

Edition **110** April 2022



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National
Autistic
Society

The Spectrum

The Spectrum is run by and for autistic adults (although some parents subscribe on behalf of their under-sixteens). The magazine is owned and run by the National Autistic Society, and aims to connect autistic people through their letters and articles and to share information so that they can lead more independent lives.

Please note that *the Spectrum* receives many letters each quarter so it is not possible to respond to every one, nor for every contribution to be printed. Discussions on editorial choices will not be entered into. The magazine protects the identity of contributors by not printing full names unless the writer asks for their full name to be used.

The Spectrum is available at

www.autism.org.uk/thespectrum

or by paying a subscription. To subscribe you, we need your postal address. Please subscribe online or contact the Goth for a subscription form. All contact details are below. Organisations requiring multiple copies: please get in touch.

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This magazine was founded as *Asperger United* in 1993 by Pamela Yates and Patricia Howlin, in association with the Maudsley Hospital, and Mark Bebbington and Judy Lynch of the National Autistic Society.

This was in response to a recognised dearth of services for people with Asperger syndrome and the potential for self-help and networking as a means of support for this group.

The provisions for editor's and sub-editor's post was to develop a publication that was truly the voice of the people it was aimed at. This post also provided the possibility of work experience and responsibility and has benefited those who have held the position. These are Richard Exley, David Wright, Martin Coppola, Ian Reynolds, John Joyce and the current editor, the Goth.

Pamela Yates provided support and advice to the editors until the publication was handed over to the National Autistic Society in 2000.

The name *Asperger United* was chosen by the group of original readers as the most "appropriate name" for the publication. This was suggested by Anna Kaczynski. The name *the Spectrum* was suggested by dozens of people and chosen in an online poll in 2018.

Please send all correspondence and subscription requests to:

Web: **www.autism.org.uk/theSpectrum**

and follow the link to the submissions form.

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Please note that the views expressed in *the Spectrum* are not necessarily those of the editor, the National Autistic Society or those involved in the publication of the magazine.

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The Spectrum is available in **large print** on A3 sheets (double the size of this page). If you need large print, please let us know using the email address or postal address above.

Contributions for the next issue should reach *the Spectrum* by **16 May 2022**

Welcome to the April edition of *the Spectrum*.

The choice of what to publish was again limited by having to choose from only those pieces for which I had permissions forms. I note that several regular contributors in previous years have not submitted anything recently, and I hope that this new way of doing things will seem less daunting with time. Please remember that the form doesn't change our agreement, just puts it explicitly in a signed contract.

So, again, like last time, this edition has a mix of pieces that contrasts with what used to be usual, in that there are more poems and stories but fewer personal letters and descriptions of everyday struggles. Book reviews have also had a strong showing, so I've held two over.

I shall look forward to the postbag.

Yours,

the Editor

the sensory edition — suggestion for next issue on page 10

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People watching

by S Bee

© S Bee 2022

“Excuse me. I don’t mean to sound awkward, but the council ask us not to feed the pigeons,” Nicola began.

She’d just finished her lunch, sitting on her favoured town-centre bench. Only today, she shared the bench with a bread-thrower.

The mature woman looked around. “Oh. Where’s the sign?”

“Over there.” Nicola pointed helpfully.

“Gracious. I’d better stop. I don’t want to risk being fined by the council.” The lady tucked the bread away in her bag.

Nicola didn’t like to tell the lady that she actually worked for the council — but in a different department.

The woman was a bohemian-looking type, sporting short red spiky hair, a colourful layered outfit and beads. She turned to Nicola.

“I’ve seen you here. This is where you have your lunch, Monday to Friday.”

Nicola nodded.

“I like to people watch,” Ms Bohemian chuckled. “Now, for alerting me to that sign, let me thank you. Do you have time for a coffee?”

Nicola was taken aback — yet she sometimes picked up a sixth sense about people. This told her that Ms Bohemian could be trusted.

“That’ll be a change,” she said. “I don’t like going into cafes on my own. I’m Nicola.”

She smiled. “I’m Molly.”

“Choose a slice of cake, Nicola. Young girls nowadays are skinny as rakes,” Molly said.

Nicola was amused at being described as a young girl at the age of thirty two.

“I shouldn’t,” Nicola said, as two lattes and two strawberry cheesecakes arrived at their table.

“Nonsense. What do you do, Nicola?”

“I’m a receptionist, dealing with calls on a main switchboard,” she replied.

“You don’t sound as if you like it.”

She shrugged. “It pays the bills. What do you do?”

“I have a private income. My late husband was a well-known painter. Baxter Grey,” Molly announced proudly.

As Nicola wasn’t an art buff, she hadn’t heard of him.

“What sort of pictures did he paint?”

“All sorts. Landscapes, portraits, still life. Google him when you get home.”

They chatted away, until Nicola glanced at her watch. “I must get back!”

“I’ve enjoyed talking to you. Meet me here, next week — same day, same time?” Molly asked.

Nicola nodded.

The following Friday, when she arrived at the cafe, Nicola found Molly waiting.

Nicola had been looking forward to seeing Molly — her company was a welcome respite from work stress, plus a tense conversation with her flat-mate Sarah had left Nicola feeling out of sorts.

Over a cuppa, Nicola had told her about Molly.

“What? An oddly dressed stranger whisked you away to a cafe?” Sarah’s tone was suspicious.

“Yes, but —”

“And she’s watched you, having your lunch there every weekday?”

“Molly’s not a stalker! She was just people-watching and happened to notice me. I have to go out for lunch, as there’s no staff room at work. Receptionists can’t eat at their desks like everyone else, as it’s the ‘meet and greet’ area, plus I feel self-conscious in a cafe on my own.”

“Right.” But Sarah didn’t sound convinced.

“I think Molly’s lonely and needs a friend.” Or maybe it was herself who was lonely, she mused. She’d never hit it off with prickly Sarah.

“If I were you, I’d stay clear,” Sarah went on.

Nicola waved a hand. “Oh, she’s harmless.”

“How do you know? She could be playing the part of a sweet, scatty old lady when the reality is, she’s a scammer. I bet you that next time you meet, she’ll spin you a sob story and ask you for money.”

Irritation pricked. “Molly told me she had a private income.”

“I’m just saying . . .”

“What sort of week have you had?” Molly’s voice jolted Nicola back to the present.

She forced a smile. “Not bad.”

“It seems to me that you’re spending eight hours a day in a state of utter boredom. Why not plough your energy into something worthwhile instead?” Molly challenged.

“Well —”

“Look, I have a proposition for you. I need someone to help catalogue my late husband’s extensive art work.”

Nicola had indeed googled Molly’s husband and discovered that Baxter Grey was very highly regarded. His art commanded many thousands.

“I want you for the job.”

“What? Are you sure?” Nicola gasped.

Molly nodded. “But it’s only temporary, just for a year. I’d check your references and there’d be a three-month trial.”

Wow. What a wonderful opportunity!

“Thank you! I won’t let you down,” she beamed.

“I want someone I can warm to. And I’ve warmed to you, Nicola.”

Tears pricked, yet her heart glowed.

Nicola had been right to trust her instinct about Molly. This was something cynical Sarah would never do.

After all, she thought, if it weren’t for Molly’s hobby of people watching, I’d be stuck in a “it pays the bills” job forever . . .

The oscillations

by **Kate Fox**

published by Nine Arches Press

ISBN: 978 1 91343 707 7

£9.99

review by **Hermione Cameron**, National Autistic Society Content Team

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The oscillations is a tale told in two parts. Through poetry, Kate Fox explores her experience of life “Before” and “After” the coronavirus pandemic. The poems are both uplifting and heart-breaking, and draw upon themes of hope, isolation, loss, and communication — or the lack thereof.

Kate Fox was diagnosed as autistic as an adult. Although she never explicitly mentions autism in *The oscillations*, allusions to neurodiversity are sprinkled throughout the collection. Fox draws parallels between social distancing in the age of coronavirus and the complexities of social communication. As she writes in her poem, *The distance*: “I was always clumsy and elliptical, unsure of the correct orbits. How close was too close? How far was too far?”

This idea is also particularly prevalent in the poem, *What could be called communication*. Fox tells us that the poem was inspired by her experience at Autscape, a conference organised by and for autistic people. It almost feels anthropological in tone, as though the poet is enjoying simply being an observer of humanity (referring to fellow autistic people as “them” rather than “us”). This language perhaps mirrors the way many autistic people may feel in social situations — myself

included. In an interview for our charity’s *Stories from the spectrum* series, Fox described her time at Autscape as “such an amazing experience. I really did feel like I was part of this autistic community and culture. I was seeing myself in other people.”

A comedian as well as a poet, Fox has a real knack for detail and wry observations. The writing shifts easily from humour to a more sincere tone. In *Returns* the poet discusses her love of bookshops and her hopes for returning there after the pandemic. She notes: “The plague books won’t be in yet, but the dystopia section will be well-stocked.” She goes on to describe in vivid detail: “the glossy wooden lecterns, the smell of new, the rash of woodcut covers in striking monochromes.”

Whether you are a keen reader of poetry or not, I would highly recommend *The oscillations*. The poems are accessible, yet thought-provoking. As the title would suggest, they oscillate easily between cynicism and optimism — as shown through poems like *Returns*. In a pandemic era, the book ultimately serves as a reminder to find joy in the little things — whether it’s going for a walk, meeting a friend for coffee, or browsing the shelves of a bookshop.

You can order your copy of *The oscillations* at:

<https://ninearchespress.com/publications/poetry-collections/the-oscillations.html>

The eight senses

by **Kayleigh Butler**

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We all know the five senses: taste, touch, sight, smell, and hearing. What you might not know is that there are three more senses that bring these all together and affect our everyday functioning. These are called interoception, exteroception and proprioception.

Interoception means the internal sense of body, such as thirst, hunger, feeling hot or cold, even feeling aches and pains.

Exteroception means the external sense of body, where you are in space and awareness of external stimuli such as being tapped on the shoulder or feeling clothes on your body. It is typically the most connected to the main five senses.

Proprioception is a combination of the two and involves the awareness of body movement. It affects things like being able to walk in a straight line without having to think about each movement. It is how you can lift your arm to reach for an item and how you know how to move around.

In Autistic people these senses can be impacted and feel either hyper- (overly sensitive/acute) or hypo- (under sensitive/less receptive to stimuli) -sensitive. This is typically known as a sensory processing disorder, or SPD. Some Autistic people are hypersensitive, and others are hyposensitive, but some are a combination of the two with different senses being affected in different ways.

Neurotypicals don't experience the world in the same way we do, they have more balance in their sensory, nervous, and vestibular systems. Sort of like their bodies work in harmony when for us (Autistic people) it feels a little more

chaotic like the wires are getting crossed with some working faster or more powerfully than others.

Personally, I have difficulty with my interoception: I don't often feel hunger or thirst, which means I can forget to eat and become dehydrated often. I am also hyposensitive to pain: I have been told I have a high pain-threshold when in reality my brain does not fully register my internal sense of pain, as though there is a partial block to my pain receptors. On the flip side of this I am hypersensitive to hot and cold temperatures and my body has extreme reactions in the way of violent shivering when cold and feeling nauseous and unbearably uncomfortable when hot. I also have trouble with my exteroception and proprioception: the best example of this is during writing this article, despite being able to see it and knowing where it was, I managed to knock my computer mouse onto the floor when reaching for it. I struggle to know where my arms and legs are in space and as I have reduced awareness of feeling in my fingers, I could not register I was touching the mouse in time to stop it from being pushed toward the edge of the table.

As Autistic people we tend to feel things in extremes, either too much or too little and very few of us experience our senses in a similar way to neurotypicals. I would recommend that if you are having difficulty differentiating between feelings and sensory inputs or if it feels too much then you should try speaking to an occupational therapist and researching some ways to find balance when you are feeling overwhelmed.

For more articles like this I also write a blog www.kayleighcreativeworld.wordpress.com

My nephew – the Taoist

by **Chris Pearce**

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The defining Boxing Day 2021 moment for me was the fleeting moment when Luke locked eyes with Eva, and she with him, brother and sister standing very close together in the hall, but not embracing, as he prepared to leave.

His eyes were fixed on Eva's with great intensity. Think of that climatic scene between Wind in his Hair and Dances with Wolves (in the eponymous film) when they and their worlds are parting: Wind in his Hair says, "Do you see that I am your friend? Can you see that you will always be my friend?" Substitute the words "brother" and "sister" in each question, and it gets closer, perhaps, to Luke's and Eva's unspoken Taoist "this-moment".

Before the intensity of his gaze struck me, my impulse had been to take a photo: it would make a stunning image of sibling bonds, I thought, in this case across a supposed cognitive and emotional divide. But was there a divide there?

Then it struck me it would be shameful to break the spell.

Later, I wondered, have I missed these intense moments many times before, on umpteen leave-takings on pre-covid weekend stay-overs? I'd seen them standing like that before. But never a "this-moment" before. Had long, covid-enforced absences somehow brought us closer, so that these moments became possible and observable? (Eva said, "No, that's always been his way.") Yet I'd not seen it before.

But more about Luke: he's a strapping thirty-year-old and is on the autism spectrum. He has few verbalisations, mostly approximate sounds of short words essential to his interests (bee, car, walk, food, party snacks, Christmas and so on).

He communicates in other ways too, gestures and facial expressions, of course, but also some Makaton signing and PECS images: small pictograms assembled onto a "story" page by Luke, or his carers, to ask or explain the day's (or week's) routines to reduce his anxieties.

His world is almost impossible for a neurotypical to imagine. (But understand that to us, his family, he is not "less than"). Although his verbal, and even his sign- and pictogram-language is limited (from a neurotypical perspective, at least) he has learned to communicate his needs, emotions, likes and dislikes increasingly well.

True, he cannot share his inner world with us (but can neurotypicals either, really?) and he will often choose to shut down (in different ways) in moments of absorption, or of challenge. The latter might be intense anxiety, intense excitement or over-powering sensations (we think). Don't let anyone tell you that people with autism cannot feel or experience emotions. They certainly have difficulty reading them in others, especially unpredictable neurotypicals.

It's hard to fathom his understanding of time. Certainly, he registers his daily routines, which must be markers for him. If there's a break in them, he's onto it, and it's likely to make him anxious — hence the PECS pictogram "story" pages. Week to week? Almost certainly he recognises markers there too. All of this, surely, frames Luke's sense of time.

Does he experience time passing, looking back or into the future? It's hard to say. But we have observed that in adulthood he has developed a proximate intuition for birthdays, Halloweens and, of course, Christmases (he's a party animal!).

an article (continued) and a film review

It's impossible to know, though, if he's picking up on visual or overheard cues around him. As you will have gathered, he understands a lot of what is going on. It's just that he can't convey that knowledge to others, possibly not to himself either, in a way neurotypicals could understand. (Unless they're highly evolved Taoists, who distrust words. I am not one such. Luke might well be.)

What we can say about Luke's sense of time is "this" and "that". Bear with me: "that" signifies covid restrictions. We were worried how Luke would cope with the abrupt end to his four-weekly weekend stay-overs, a decades-long fixture in his life. Also how he would manage walking less often and shorter distances (only in the home's large garden, rather than far and wide) in search of the next bumble bee to wrangle.

This is another facet of Luke: he is an expert bee-wrangler, his father says (bee-whisperer, I call it). Since childhood, he's been an adept at catching bees in flight in his bare hands! As if it were the easiest thing in the world. Imagine an alternative universe, in which it's an Olympic sport: he would be the Sir Steven Redgrave of bee-whispering, no question. A few years ago, by way of illustration, he had a handful of bumble bees (yes, you read right) which he was releasing and re-catching — a favourite game — first in the car (a little hazardous, but we're used to it) then at home. There he was sitting in an armchair, its back against a window, recapturing bees from the window behind him, head back, looking upside-down at them. Easy, if you're Luke.

Returning to the impact of the covid restrictions, he was unable to visit his family home for over eighteen months. (There have been weekly face-times, of course, but it's not the same.) Yet he navigated the challenges with few extreme reactions, by which I mean times when his anxiety levels rocket (provoking a "lepto" — his mother's name for a Luke-shaped nuclear meltdown) when self-injury becomes a serious danger. This is a tribute to Luke's growing maturity and to the excellent work of his care-

home carers (and his upbringing, I hasten to add) — the years of patient work with him in the pre-covid years, and during this long covid year.

What we can say about Luke's sense of time is "this": he lives largely in the moment. Sometimes they become "this-moments", reserved for a select few, in which he is paying full attention to his beholder, to the utmost of his being. Most of us have lost that ability. Not Luke. Even as a witness, it is humbling to behold. Something to treasure.

The mind benders

a film by Basil Dearden

starring Dirk Bogarde

review by **Paigetheoracle**

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The 1963 film, *The mind benders*, starring Dirk Bogarde, was about sensory deprivation experiments that started in that era. The script mentions that the end result is the dissolution of personality. It is set in a sensory deprivation tank, which I believe mimics being a baby in the womb. Having been in one myself, I know time as such ceases to exist because while you can remember the start and the end point, the middle portion of the experience has nothing to distinguish it as it is a continuum. What the film seems to teach is that interference patterns, from movement by ourselves and the rest of existence, creates the phenomena of 3-D existence. It also shows that we have to struggle out of this totally passive state, in order not to get stuck in a totally receptive condition that doesn't allow us active movement at all (coma or vegetative state). It is a bit like becoming a permanent member of the audience in life and not a participant on the stage of life at all.

a letter to the Editor, a notice and a poem

Dear Editor,

I just watched a video from the Royal Institution featuring Beronda Montgomery who is a plant biologist from the United States. She has an interesting idea about how to support people who are struggling. And I think this relates directly to the experiences of people with autism.

During her talk, Dr Montgomery gives an example of two genetically identical plants which develop very differently based on their environment. While describing the outcome, Dr Montgomery draws a philosophical conclusion which is that the environment is responsible for the success or failure of these identical plants.

This specific example involving plants demonstrates the large impact that the environment has on organisms. I think part of the problem that people with autism face is hostility. To some people, it might seem as though people with autism are not taking personal responsibility. I think it is important to understand that autism is not a moral failure. And I see the example of the plants as a non-threatening way to demonstrate that a good person can still fail if they are ill-suited for the environment they find themselves in.

Dr Montgomery's approach gives advocates a constructive way to evaluate their options. If we agree that people with autism deserve dignity and security. And we agree that people with autism are good. Then it would be helpful to

have a rule of thumb that can help us to select from among our options. Dr Montgomery's focus on the environment helps us choose. If we are faced with two options — one where the person must change or one where the environment must change — then we can choose the one focused on the environment. That is where I think we can do the most good. And it is the approach where we preserve the dignity of the person who needs help.

Dr Montgomery's talk gives me hope. I have an autism diagnosis. And I feel as though I've exhausted my personal talents and resources while trying to address my developmental problems. I feel as though a focus on the environment and on the dignity of those involved is what can help me now.

I think the change Dr Montgomery advocates can soften the view others have of people with autism and give advocates a way of evaluating their options which will be more productive. Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts and feelings with you today.

If you would like to watch the video, *Lessons from plants*, it can be found at the link below.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKIU4iYhgIc

Kind regards,

Michael Mientus

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If sufficient material is sent in, the theme for July will be **being yourself or fitting in**. Vote with your contributions: the more submissions on a subject sent in (from different people) the more likely that that subject will be the theme. Writing on any subject is still welcome as are ideas for new themes, small pieces to fill awkward spaces like this, and art. **Please fill in a permissions form** when you submit something, as all published pieces require a completed permissions form. Remember, if you want to see different content in *the Spectrum*, the best way to change it is to send something in!

Whisper

Whisper whisper
The truth is
Whisper whisper
I want to
Whisper whisper
Will you please
Whisper whisper
Let me speak

by Creator A

The hollow in the land

by **James Clarke**

published by Serpent's Tail

ISBN: 978 1 78816 352 1

£9.99

book review by **David**

The cover of the book shows the jagged edges of what could be the outline of a land, a nation, a people on a mythical, or, indeed, real part of the world. Something that could correspond to a man-made creation, or, historically attested to a known, or unknown, land mass. A piece of a jigsaw puzzle that would probably almost fit anywhere. A physical entity claimed by a people, or peoples, of homogeneous, or mixed, descent. It shows a colourful representation of sky and land, a silver sliver of a river, sliding away to the distant horizon. In the foreground, a reservoir (often abbreviated to the “res”) lies as flat as a mirror in the valley between hills of ancient grey rocks and the greens and browns natural to the place.

The whole suggests an inverted bowl that the characters the author describes are trying to crawl out of. They are stuck, for the most part, in dead-end jobs, dead-end lives. But in what could be described as cheerful stoicism, they embrace their fates. Even those who manage to escape are somehow tethered by the umbilical cord of remembrance; the tug of home; the familiar. Some of the tales are complementary. Characters in one appear in another. They may even travel to exotic places (Thailand) but still return.

A lot of the references are unfamiliar to me. I do not know what “Dubstep music” is. But I know these boys and girls, these men and women. They speak with somewhat of a thicker accent than mine — they are North Lancashire, I am

South Lancashire — and use words larded with Americanisms and the latest telly-speak, which I do not always understand. But for the most part, I understand them. The dialect is familiar. They are my class, my background, my folk. I’ve worked with them, spoken to them on a daily basis, interacted on many levels.

They survive in any way they can by working, skiving, on the dole, casual work, near or actual criminality, cascading through pubs, clubs, brothels, gambling dens. They are school and college drop-outs, hoping for the elusive break in music or sport.

James Clarke has written a brilliant live letter to his own background that should be read by all interested in the State of England in which we find ourselves.

The title of the book, *Hollow in the land*, has an obvious double-meaning.

“He tears a knee-high clump of grass out of the ground and cobs it, roots and all, onto a patch of scrub where it rests like a discarded know of scalped hair. What a scraggy patch of land this is. Hobbit Hill, where common mallow and cowslip grow; pink Himalayan balsam and probing tiers of bindweed. Not far are the remains of campfires, copses littered with cans, bottles, home-made bongos and all sorts of plastic wrappers. Once, Francie found a syringe here next to a scraped-out pot of KY jelly.”

The bumper book of things that nobody knows

by **William Hartston**

published by Atlantic Books

ISBN: 978 1 78649 074 2 £16.99

quasi-review by **Paigetheoracle**

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The following is based upon *The bumper book of things that nobody knows* by William Hartston, which made me wonder if it could be turned into a quiz on the lines of *Answers that other people thought of*. If you know the something through previous knowledge of the subject or have your own ideas about what the causes might be, please write in to the editor of *the Spectrum* and maybe he will publish some of them, if interesting enough.

Flowering plants seem to have suddenly proliferated after non-flowering plants dominated the planet for millions of years. Could this be down to insects and the start of pollination itself, in other words the symbiotic relationship we know of today?

If plants give off methane (Max Planck Institute study of 2006), could this explain why tree-ring growth in relation to climate change, seemed to come up with paradoxical results in later research of 2007?

With regards to Rupert Sheldrake's experiments with dogs, did he get the dog owners to come home earlier and later than normal or just film the reactions of the dogs and their masters when they would normally set off? If it is the latter the results could be flawed and indicative of an internal clock setting itself off (I can sometimes turn my wrist over and look at my watch at significant times such as 3.35 and 35 seconds and I know of others that can carry out the same trick). His experiment with commuters might have got better results too, if it hadn't been

used on stairs, containing passengers rushing to get connections. I think if it had been carried out on a platform instead with bored commuters waiting for trains (passive/receptive), it might have worked better.

Why do animals seem to predict and react to earthquakes? Is it because they are more sensitive to subtle vibrations than we are, including, possibly, high-pitched sounds from tectonic stress?

Could tardigrades exist all over the world because of their adaptability to whatever conditions they encounter and ability to survive, no matter what life throws at them? Is this simply why they have bred and spread? Also because they are small and light, could wind have helped move them from place to place, not deliberately like winged insects and birds but just accidentally?

Could bees fly, not through use of their wings alone but maybe because their bodies contain a lighter-than-air gas, turning them into a blimp in more than just appearance?

Could entropy explain why reproduction is necessary, to continue motion (life) but in unworn-out vehicles? I often wondered if you could help create the conditions for limb regrowth within a contained environment, similar to the womb as a chemical soup. I didn't realise it had already been done as an experiment until I read this book.

an article-cum-book-review (continued)

Stephen Jay Gould famously said that there are no fish in the sea. What he probably meant is that there are so many creatures called by this term that are totally unrelated biologically (starfish, jellyfish, shellfish and so on). In reality fish is a collective term for life forms that live in water, either fresh or sea water and has no scientific meaning.

Do fish feel pain? In my opinion the answer is yes. Why? Because pain receptors tell us we are in danger of physical injury and to move away from the source as quickly as possible or defend yourself against it in some way, if a deliberate attack by a predator. Without pain receptors in the body, we could be attacked and eaten with no response from ourselves, which makes no (survival) sense at all.

“Does yeast think?” is a scientific conundrum posed by Professor Seth Grant in Sydney’s Alumni Magazine, in 2009. This reminded me of a recent BBC4 documentary on slime moulds. It was stated that they think too. Looking at the situation it has to be taste and feeling as senses that guides them. Everything when presented with alternatives has to make a choice that we consider thought because we do it as larger organisms. Connection and communication solve problems in the mind and obviously also in smaller, single celled organisms as in the 2010 Tokyo Sudoku E-coli experiment (bacteria that can think collectively, that is, socially as humans do, as a team).

Why are brains growing smaller? Look at technology. Computers have shrunk to phone size. Televisions are no longer great big hulking things either, even if the screens have got bigger, the internal mechanism has shrunk. Mobile phones are no longer walkie-talkie size either. Complexity and new materials seems to shrink the need for large items and connections. Likewise telecommunications means no longer the need for great, big long cables everywhere as it is all invisible broadcasting through the airwaves. Perhaps broadcast power as envisioned by Tesla will become a reality but I digress.

Research shows that women on contraceptive pills are more likely to favour more effeminate men. Is this because they are simply trying to avoid getting pregnant and both these choices display that?

Heat fights the ability of the body to move, leading to frustration and anger because of this (aggression that cooler climates defuse — think of a car and the need for a coolant system, to stop the engine overheating).

Could paranoia from sleep deprivation be simply down to the organism realising something is killing it but not understanding it is itself?

If we talk, can we see at the same time? If we think does this stop us looking? Is this the cause of accidents in some cases, if not all?

Music leads to relaxation because of the way noise disrupts concentration and draws you into its rhythmic patterns. It is the same way that warmth leads us to drop off to sleep, with yawning being a precursor of that, indicating lack of danger in the surrounding environment (see also heat and anger as the conscious attempt to resist this urge).

The blue dress/yellow dress Internet sensation proved we don’t all see the same thing but is this because of our receptivity abilities, rather than what is there to be seen? How for instance can we know such things, if we all sense the same things? It takes disparity to notice that blanket reality isn’t true for everyone, everywhere or otherwise how else can you know difference exists outside your own perception?

In the Sorites paradox it is asked if a heap is still a heap, even when all the grains have been removed? You have the reality of the pile being reduced to zero and the word pile, which is not the same thing. You are counting numbers, not naming things as an act (a million to zero). In Zen the same point is made that words are not things.

With regards to Bishop Berkeley and his asking if a tree falls, does it make a sound, if

an article-cum-book-review (continued)

there is no-one to witness it? As a question it is about witnessing what exists, not existing itself (a tree exists for its own sake, not because of our wish to see it). Equally Schrodinger's cat is alive or dead according to its awareness, not an outside observer viewing a box ("I disprove it thus!" and Dr Johnson's argument with Alexander Pope).

Is an expert someone who tries to convince you that the unknown is in fact the known, even defying the known or supposed facts at times, making them sound no better than conspiracy theorists? For instance Plato said that Atlantis was located beyond the pillars of Hercules (Gibraltar and the headland opposite) yet some historians claim it is the isle of Santorini and the Minoan civilization, which is in the Aegean Sea, nowhere near where Plato placed it.

Why did Socrates say that the unexamined life is worth nothing? Is it to do with quality control or checking your own actions, rather than rushing off haphazardly after completion, without a second thought for what you have done? I have an instance of this in my own life, with regards to my last dentist. He extracted a tooth badly being a showman rather than a technician. He was trying to impress a student, so wasn't concentrating on what he was doing. The tooth suddenly broke in half and in coming away, it dislodged the tooth above. I expected residual pain but this lasted weeks. When I checked on the Internet, I realised what had happened and applied pressure to push the tooth back into position, which worked and saved it. As my next dentist said after the x-ray, it was fine.

Talking of Socrates, Plato's record of his death, which has caused controversy, leads to one of three conclusions in my opinion: either he didn't die of hemlock poisoning, Plato wasn't there or he lied (artistic licence).

How can you know if something really works in this world because you don't have an alternative way of measuring result? Why do we need alternative realities? If you are given

medicine and recover, only by having a parallel-universe self will you know if it worked or if it was spontaneous healing, by having a self that didn't take any medication at all. When you have several possible answers for the cause, for an effect, alternative worlds playing out the same scenario, would be a wonderful way to discover certainty wouldn't it?

If black holes are at the centre of galaxies, does this mean that they suck in stars in the same way water does draining down a plughole? Could it also explain stars spinning faster in relation to the size of the black hole, in galaxies (Viktor Schauburger talked of vortices as being one of the four forms energy manifests in the universe and this might explain Einstein and curvature of the spacetime continuum too)?

Angular momentum may explain disc-shaped galaxies and how the Solar System formed but could the planets and stars being round be down to something like a mini-black hole attracting material to it through gravity in a slower form of reality creation? Maybe it is like the way hail stones form around dust particles or pearls are created in layers and could the weightlessness of space have anything to do with it as a slow formation of structure?

If asteroids can get pulled into a planet's gravitational field, could this explain Venus and its retrograde rotation as the same possibility but on a larger scale (the billiard-ball effect as proposed for the possible formation of the Moon or the creation of the asteroid belt as another planet that didn't survive such an impact, in other words a large body pulled into the gravitational field of the Sun)?

Is Jupiter's red spot really a storm? Could it instead be caused by an object protruding above the surface or a hole beneath it, creating a whirlpool effect more like a liquid? Personally I think a storm is a misnomer because what storm stays in the same place for years? Conversely what whirlpool or maelstrom moves (Corryvreckin, Saltstraumen, Moskstraumen for instance)?

Strange and broken forms

by **Louise Wilding**

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I hear you. I hear everything.

The rain drumming the window. The buzzing of the
computers. The air-conditioning ruffling the paper on my
desk.

Your voice swims in a sea of distraction that my ears as nets fail
to catch.

I watch your eyes roll. Their derision scything the buds of
my confidence. And shrink in the shame of knowing I've
disappointed you.

Recoiling deeper into the shadows of myself, away from the
electric glare of your annoyance.

I bend my reality to fit your expectations. I squeeze myself smaller and smaller to fit within the confines
of my box. My place.

My body aches with the strain of it.

And yet, it's my exhausted mind that's expected to climb the hills of your incomprehension.

Why can't you bend your reality and pull me into the bright skies of understanding? Of your
understanding?

Why do you expect these tired arms to do all the heavy lifting, when they can barely traverse this
conversation?

You demand attention.

I request awareness.

Less able to comprehend your words when forced to stare into the iron grip of your gaze. Witness to
your dissatisfaction. Prisoner of your condescension.

Hauling yourself above me, using the derision of others to build a pedestal as all-encompassing and as
fragile as your ego.

Gilded in self-satisfaction. Raised by your own weakness you build monument to the thoughtlessness of
your words scaled by those forced to carve themselves into strange forms.

Unnerved by my resistance.

Terrified of the minor inconvenience assisting me may require.

You wage wars with those too terrified to resist. And calling that victory.

I am listening; I do hear you.

Everything you're not saying.

Hi,

I am an autistic writer and
would like to share a poem I
wrote as part of the Writing East
Midlands Beyond the Spectrum
writers group.

It's called *Strange and broken
forms*. I hope you like it. You can
see me and many others perform
these pieces via this link, I think
they are worth a look, especially
the younger ones.

[writingeastmidlands.co.uk/
projects/beyond-the-spectrum](http://writingeastmidlands.co.uk/projects/beyond-the-spectrum)

Louise Wilding

Working with autistic transgender and non-binary people

edited by **Marianthi Kourti**

Jessica Kingsley Publishers

ISBN: 978 1 78775 022 7

£19.99

review by **the Goth**

It is almost literally unique to come across a book that is about issues that affect a significant proportion of Autistic people that has been written entirely by Autistic people and edited by an Autistic person. I have confidence that the insights I gained from reading this book are reliable and not based on a faulty idea of the psychology of Autistic people.

This book is firmly aimed at professionals. Nevertheless, reading first-hand accounts of people coming to terms with their gender dysphoria or trying to make sense of their non-binary confusion will be useful to anyone who is struggling with these thoughts and feelings themselves.

Each chapter of the book is written by a different writer or writers, each tackling an topic which is personal to them or their area of expertise, or both.

Because it is aimed at professionals, the editor has chosen to put the most academic section first. Even if you are used to reading this type of prose — that is, sociology-speak — chapters 3 and 4 can be quite heavy going.

I, of all people, really deeply understand the concern of editors who want to maintain the voice of the writer, to give them a chance to say exactly what they want to say. I leave in some

dialectal phrases in the pieces I choose for *the Spectrum* — “he did me favourable” stays; I don’t edit the phrase to be “he did me a favour” or “he did me favourably”, because the point the writer is making is not obscured by the choice of words, and the writer’s voice comes through very clearly in the original.

If, as I imagine a lot of professional and Autistic readers would, you start at the beginning and keep going, then if you are at all deterred by the density of language in the first section you might give up, thinking the book was too advanced for you. This would be a huge shame, as the directness of the writing makes a huge step up at the end of section one, and some of the best writing is in section three. So I suggest that readers start with section two, and go back to chapters in section one only when they are referred to.

This highlights another beautifully crafted thing about this book: every writer seamlessly refers to the other chapters, both before and after theirs, so if you don’t read this book straight through you don’t miss out on any foundational ideas that came earlier. I wish many more textbooks would attempt to achieve this.

So, finally, a useful collection of essays about gender in relation to Autism, and by Autists, to boot. More please!

a poem with accompanying letter and a photograph

False belief

We may have something called false belief,
And if we do please don't give us grief.
It simply means that what is on our mind,
You will know too and that will be fine.
You may not have any way of knowing,
But we are sure of your mind reading.

So if we went to town together,
Of course it doesn't matter the weather.
If we parked on Station Road,
Then went to separate shops.
Then I realise my wallet is at home,
So back there I do hop.

When I get back my space has gone, So I park there on Church Street.
I will assume you will know where to meet,
No communication with you, in that scenario that is false belief.

It can prevent us from asking for help,
Even if we're not okay.
So we may be in poor health,
And unable to say.
Because even though it may not show,
We believe that you may know.

False belief is something that many people will not come across when researching autism at a basic level but you may do if you look at autism at a more advanced level.

False belief is when you believe that someone will know something that you know even if they have no way of knowing. It can explain why it may be difficult for us to ask for help sometimes. I have written a poem explaining false belief: it comes from my book titled *What is autism?* which contains poems all about autism and other things associated with autism, such as stimming, masking and meltdowns. The book is available as a paperback or e-book and one third of my royalties I am donating to the National Autistic Society <https://amzn.to/3G6Cvhh>

by **Damien Rist**
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From my recent visit to Tatooine

© Tom Veldman 2022



Spring defence

by **Paigetheoracle**

© Paigetheoracle 2022

I have finally clicked on something new just the other day, and that is odd symptoms that I had previously, but never connected with anything in particular: I now have. One of these is full-body stretching in bed, like you see kittens do in front of a fire. Another is itching in my right hip area. A further symptom is blood pulsing in my left ear as a noise and a feeling in my left instep. I put all of this down to Spring and coming out of semi-hibernation. Think of butterflies coming out of a cocoon and how they pump blood into their wings. The cocoon is Winter shelter as in war and how people seek protection underground. Look how flowers burst up through the soil or out of the hard wood of branches, when better weather comes (the warmth of the sun and longer days in which this is achieved).

I have also realized that this relates to getting older as some of this is painful or at least discomforting as tissues reinflate and blood is pumped into areas it was withdrawn from, in response to the cold. It is like when your hands get cold and numb then hurt like blazes when they start warming up again.

I have also realized that mucus build-up, like wax in the ears and so on, is a sign of substance intolerance and defence by the body in trying to shut out such unwanted material (pulling up the body's drawbridge and shutting the door on further invaders or hostile weather).

I wonder if sensitives like me may make good experimental subjects and whether hypochondriacs are like us but worried about the significance of their symptoms, instead of having a scientific curiosity about the causes? By the way, one year the weatherman on TV said that the Spring flowers had been caught out by the snow. This is not actually true as they react to the lengthening of the days, not the weather itself.

Mask

by **Sammy**

© Sammy Maddison 2022

I've been wearing a mask
To Look NORMAL
Informal
I Hide Everyday
Stop the rocking
The pressing of hands
Talking to Sam
Hear no voices
Look them in the eye
Don't cry
Go with the flow
If the mask slips
Don't let go Hold Tight
Have a beer
Keep your cover
Before they see
Take flight



stuff you might like to know about *the Spectrum*

The rules of *the Spectrum*

(contact information for *the Spectrum* is on page 2 and again on page 20)

- 1) *The Spectrum* is funded by the National Autistic Society and readers' subscriptions. We welcome submissions on any topic from people across the whole of the autism spectrum.
- 2) *The Spectrum* is quarterly, published in January, April, July and October. If you do not receive a copy when you expect to, please contact the magazine.
- 3) Pieces that appear in *the Spectrum* are credited using the author's first name only, unless the author requests something different. This is done to protect your privacy.
- 4) Book reviews are the most popular thing with readers of *the Spectrum*, so please consider submitting one. They can be about any book, not just books about autism. If you do not want your review to appear in other National Autistic Society publicity about that book, please make this clear.
- 5) When you send in a piece for publication in *the Spectrum*, you need to complete a permissions form. The online permissions form is at

www.autism.org.uk/spmagpermissions
- 6) The National Autistic Society promotes *the Spectrum* on social media using pieces taken from the magazine.
- 7) The National Autistic Society would like to keep in touch with you about National Autistic Society services, support, events, campaigns and fundraising. If you want to hear from the National Autistic Society, you can opt in to this on the National Autistic Society website. The National Autistic Society will only contact you in the ways you want.
- 8) If you subscribe to the paper edition and move house, please inform *the Spectrum* and include your old address as well as your new address. Even if you've paid for the Royal Mail forwarding service (or another forwarding service), you still need to inform *the Spectrum* that you have moved address.
- 9) You do not have to be a member of the National Autistic Society to subscribe to *the Spectrum*.
- 10) If you phone and leave a message on the machine, please speak slowly and clearly and spell uncommon words, as the line isn't very clear. Please give any phone number you leave twice for the same reason. Remember to give your postal address so that we can find your record.
- 11) You can sign up for an email notifying you whenever a new edition of *the Spectrum* is posted on line. Email
the.Spectrum@nas.org.uk
asking for the notification by email and please include your full name, postcode and let us know whether you want to subscribe to the the paid paper edition too.
- 12) If you want to unsubscribe from the paper version, inform *the Spectrum* and include your postal address. Or to unsubscribe from the email notification, include your email address.
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- 14) Although each issue is themed, submissions on any subject are welcome. Only some of the letters and articles will follow the theme. All submissions may be edited, especially for privacy, libel, and for fitting the space available.

Outdoor living project

Starts April 2022

for young neurodiverse adults (18-35 years) and a friend or supporter

notice by **Ruth**

Memory Gardens invites you to the re-start of this project.

(This will be a small group of no more than six people and supporters)

What we do:

Where:

- We make sculptures out of wood, we do large paintings and we work with clay. We build fires and water plants
- Also we do some movement activities as well as ball games
- Or we relax in the garden by the river Lea in East London — Hackney

Robin Hood Gardens
Spring Lane
London
E5 9HQ

When: every Friday morning 10am-11am

Cost: £3

Website:

www.handandskyproject.yolasite.com/Outdoor-Living.php

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Website: www.autism.org.uk/thespectrum



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