



Autonomy, the Critical Journal of Interdisciplinary Autism Studies

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Introduction.

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In 'Hopi Culture and a Matter of Representation,' Lomayumtewa Ishii^[1] describes the excessive preoccupation of North American academic ethnology and anthropology with the Hopi tribe to the extent that the representation of 'hopiland', as he describes it, has resulted in a cultural archive (citing Said) that maintains and continues to perpetuate an 'intellectual colonisation' over the Hopi people. As editor of this journal, I cannot help but see the parallels with the scientific, and more recently, the disability studies world's preoccupation with autism, to the extent that in order to maintain our own academic credibility We find ourselves having to to cite outside "ethnographers" to validate ideas that had originally been introduced to this discussion by the autochthonous autistic community itself.

It is with this background in mind that 'Autonomy' has been set up by a small group of autistic academics under the auspices of the Outreach Press, an organisation formed for the purpose, which subscribes to the general principles of the Outreach^[2] group of autonomous organisations who share the common aim of promoting greater autistic autonomy, hence the title of this journal.

Indeed this mirrors the experience that Sinclair^[3] has described with the establishment of the Autism Network International (ANI) after the experiences of attending various academic conferences and meeting other autistic people, hearing time and again papers about them, but not written by them.

Often the only role we as 'Autists' play on this circuit is that of the subjects of research, either as volunteers or unwittingly when our autobiographic materials and many web sites and forums have been trawled by ethnographers and ethnomethodologists searching for readily available material.

I entered the academic sphere many years ago, as I wanted to contribute my voice to the world of research not, as Sinclair has famously described, a self narrating zoo exhibit^[4], but as someone who could contribute to the wider discourse of what it means to be autistic from within and to face the difficulties in restructuring the courses that are taught about us, in my department and others. I have since taken on the role of researcher seeking further to redefine that discourse.

I am however only one of many autistics contributing as researchers in a diversity of academic fields. Immediately I can bring others to mind such as; Dr Dawn Prince Hughes in primate research, Dr Temple Grandin in animal behaviour, Dr Stephen Shore in education and Michelle Dawson in cognitive psychology.

Nevertheless, most of us find ourselves insufficiently represented in the literature of scholarly publishing. This is no great surprise, as accessing the normative and not to say commercial values of academic publishing presents many barriers to an up and coming autistic student struggling with the social conventions of University let alone the strictures and esoterica of peer reviewed publishing. It seems time and again that we are swamped out by the non autistic researchers, beating us to press and dominating the conference scene.

That is why we have established 'Autonomy' as a peer reviewed journal upholding those same high standards of academic publishing, yet giving access to would be authors, to be reviewed by their actual peers, that is other autistic academics who inhabit the world within, in a way that goes beyond mere 'verstehen'.

It is also hoped that we will be able to give a second airing to existing material that has never had a proper academic outing and to provide a means by which the research world will be enriched by having access to properly citeable insider material from a great many academic fields.

To this end as an introduction to the genre I am republishing Jim Sinclair's seminal 'Don't Mourn for Us', accompanied by an early essay of my own, which I believe will demonstrate something of what is meant by the phrase 'critical autism studies'.

Notwithstanding the difficulties we face as a marginalised group making inroads into the academic disciplines, it is so often the case that those disciplines themselves exist within 'silos', failing to understand the contributions that other disciplines have to make on each other.

To that end we will include book reviews and paper reviews, giving the opportunity for academics and others to comment on material from the differing perspectives of our own fields of expertise. Perhaps a cognitive scientist will review a sociologically based paper and in return accept a response from an arts and cultural perspective, as I firmly believe we all have things to learn from each other.

With all this in mind, I hope this introduction will support the first call for papers to be issued this month

Works cited

- [1] L. Ishii, "Hopi Culture and a Matter of Representation," *Indigenous Nations Studies Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2002.
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- [4] J. Sinclair, "Re: Autobiographies <autism%94012300345553@sjvm.stjohns.edu>," *Bit.Listserv.autism*, 1994.