

kofflerarts

# What if My Body is a Beacon for the World?

Sensing with Neurodiversity

Directed by Adam Wolfond



with djs assembly

January 9 – 26  
180 Shaw St., Toronto

“Installation art”, a term coined to categorize much experiential art from the 1950’s onwards, is as old as humanity, or older. From the very first cave paintings in Maltravieso, Spain or Maros in Indonesia, we have been altering our physical universe in a non-utilitarian way in order to alter our perception of that same universe, enrich it, expand it.

At its heart, installation art releases the viewer from the binary “me/it” relationship that much static art demands. Boundaries become more fluid and at times, at best I would venture to say, the distinction between where the artwork begins and where it ends dissolves in the very experience of it.

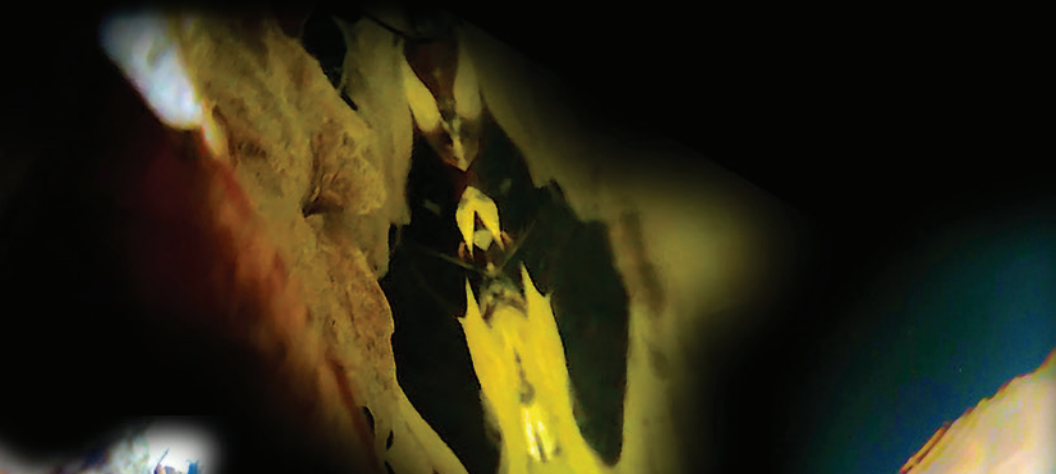
Adam Wolfond’s remarkable installation, *What if my Body is a Beacon for the World?*, created in collaboration with other dedicated autistic and neurodiverse participants at Dis Assembly, situates itself within this age-old tradition. Adam’s work invites us into a new relationship with the world, providing us with rare access to a particular mode of perception – his mode of perception – and offering us the lens through which we might learn to navigate and even revel in this unique pathway through the ever-surprising, multiplicitous experiential world.

Koffler Arts couldn’t be more proud to host, alongside our partners at Dis Assembly, this world premiere of Adam Wolfond’s installation. We are so very lucky to share a building with neighbours of such relentless creativity and fearless joy.

Welcome.

**Matthew Jocelyn**  
General Director

**kofflerarts**



# What if My Body is a Beacon for the World?

## Sensing with Neurodiversity

Directed by Adam Wolfond with Dis Assembly

'Man of autism'; Adam Wolfond is a non-speaking, multidisciplinary artist and published poet living in Toronto. He works collaboratively with Dis Assembly, a lab for neurodiverse artistic research and experimentation located at Youngplace. His exhibition, *What if My Body is a Beacon for the World?* is a non-narrative video and sound installation that seeks to convey some of the ways in which he perceives and navigates the world.

Working with Dis Assembly co-founder Estée Klar, a PhD in Critical Disability Studies, and a close-knit team of collaborators, Wolfond uses endoscopic and body cameras to record movements and thoughts through the time and space of his surroundings: the urban landscape, bodies of water, environmental and ambient sounds, and text, including his typing on an iPad to express ideas, feelings, and observations.

Projected onto the walls, screens and floors throughout the gallery, viewers are immersed in a comforting ambience of flickering light, compelling images, and sound fragments intended by Wolfond to control and tether the calm to feelings in his body. The flow and pace of the environment challenge us to consider ways of seeing beyond dominant and prescribed neurotypical and normopathic codes of perception.

Though autism is often characterized as a dysfunction, Adam, as any artist does, explores the reaches of his imagination to communicate something about himself and his relationship to the world around him. *What if My Body is a Beacon for the World?* offers unique insights into the human condition by shining a light onto new and greater possibilities for understanding creativity, artistic process, and how the brain and body diversely function.

**David Liss**

Exhibition curator



## Adam Wolfond

Adam Wolfond is a man of autism, poet and artist who uses a text-to-speech device to speak. He is the first non-speaking autistic person to attend university in Canada and is completing his M.A. Wolfond has been featured at poets.org as their youngest poet to ever be published, and his work has been featured in *The New York Times Magazine* (2023). Wolfond has also exhibited his film and installation work in Toronto, Canada. He is the co-founder of Dis Assembly in Toronto, an arts collective which

practices techniques for neurodiversity. Languageing is a way of movement, a continual disassembling, challenging the way of neurotypical grammars for more diversities to come. His work can be viewed at [adamwolfond.com](http://adamwolfond.com) and also, [dis-assembling.ca](http://dis-assembling.ca). His book *The Wanting Way: poems*, by Milkweed Editions Multiverse Series was released in 2022 and *Open Book in Ways of Water* was published by Punctum Press in 2023.



## Estée Klar

Estée Klar is a theorist/artist and holds a PhD Critical Disability Studies from York University. Her dissertation, *Neurodiversity in Relation: an artistic intraethnography* is a collaborative work with Adam Wolfond, now a published writer and the first non-speaking classically autistic M.A. student in Canada. Klar is also a facilitator and an artist and co-founder with Wolfond of Dis Assembly, a lab for neurodiverse artistic experimentation involving processes that explore conditions and techniques

for human and more-than-human relation and support, located at Artscape Youngplace in Toronto. She collaborates with others around the world in these projects. Klar is also the founder/director of the former Autism Acceptance Project (2006—10) and its subsequent artistic-activist events, and the original blogger at *The Joy of Autism* (2004-8) which over the years has resonated throughout the autistic community. She is an artist and filmmaker and her can be seen at [www.esteerelation.com](http://www.esteerelation.com) and [dis-assembly.ca](http://dis-assembly.ca).

## **Artist Statement**

Adam Wolfond

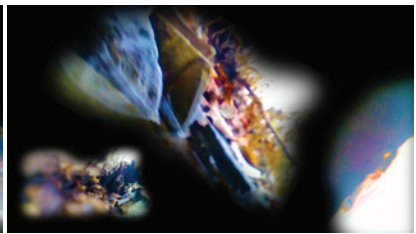
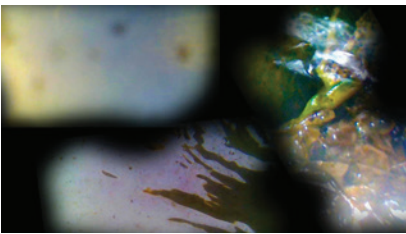
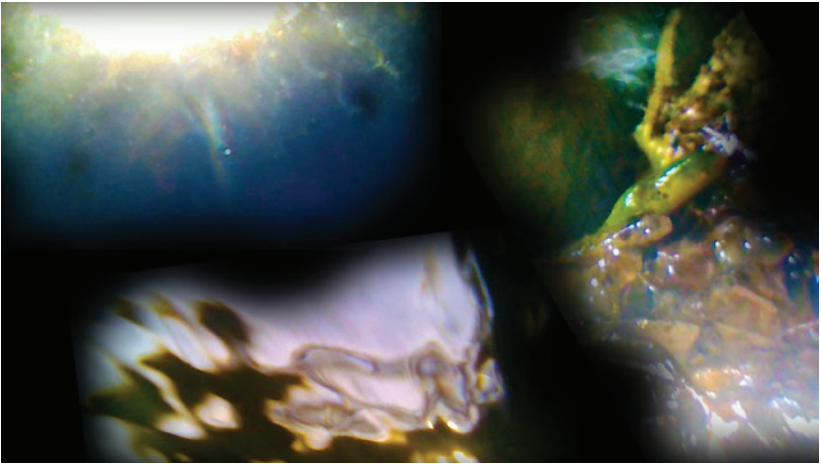
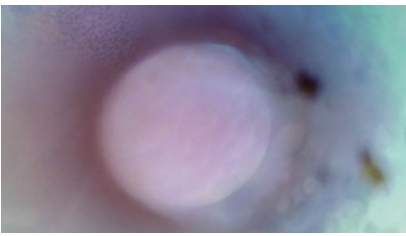
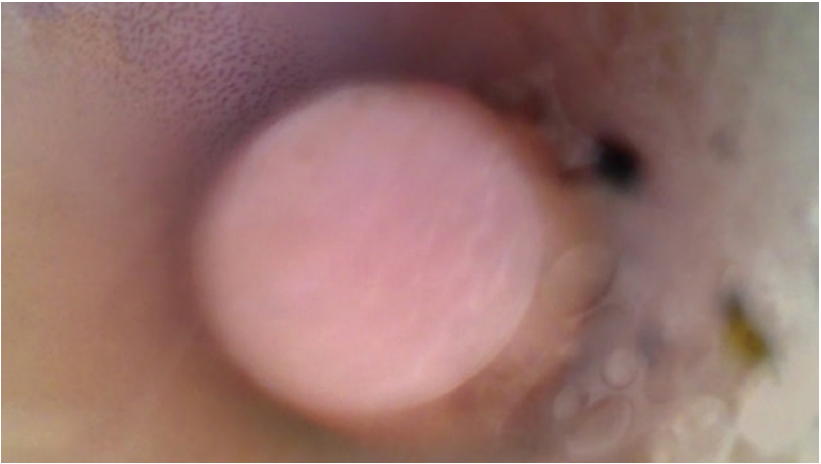
### **Introduction**

Collaboration is how I make my writing and video work – the way of people sharing ideas with me – and it is important to pace the fact that I always want to make work so constant support is needed; teaching and learning must always continue and it would not be possible for me, as an autistic non-speaking person with motor challenges, for me to do this work alone. We need to challenge the ways that autistic non-speakers can participate in the creation and contribution of knowledge.

Video work is the most interesting way for me to express attention to the sensory details that come at me and the way I see how water patterns meanings without words. This work does not offer a narrative but a feeling of how the world paces with me and how I pace with the world.

### **Background**

The way I think about space and time, as an autistic non-speaker with movement differences and challenges that need human and non-human supports, is through the pace of the space and this can think about the ways openings are rallying with the sense of place that dances with the offerings that the world gives people. This is a vitalist, new materialist way turned towards an autistic way of thinking about the paces of spaces. The difference between space and place is that space is plotting the points that time gives to the mind that ropes of thinking can feel and that means that I can give names to places like others but the space of feeling is always changing so the making of space is going like the feelings that make it and that means that the openings – the ceaseless flows that I feel – toll the body to the ways of place like the paces that flow from the body apprehending it. The way of autistic place is the space of the more-than – other than the places that are named like static language. Attention to the space thinks more and tolls the autistic body because place is not real but pace is the movement that makes space. The movements are coming at me a lot, really giving me anxiety so the man of autism is trying all the time to understand places that move too greatly toward me – like a fractal or kaleidoscope – and that I have to go through doors perpetually thinks about answering the placements that other people know – important is this understanding of autistic perception and the paradox of control – a want to know everything – and being open. Places are still like names in neurotypical perception and spaces are full of movements in autistic feeling. Prepping me is a more important way to help me manage like lots of neurotypical mapping in a neurotypical world.



## Collaboration

My work also collaborates with other autistic non-speakers. Some have seizures and cannot come every week to the studio. I also have my body to think about time, what Alison Kafer calls “crip time.” Proprioception (that is movement and perception combined and how perception influences movement and how movement influences perception) configures time around the body rather than the other way around. Body space and time is “pacing with the atmospheres.” I base my pace on others and the more-than-human calls that ask my body to answer.

My video and sound work is a project also about how autistic collaboration happens. I need the facilitation and relation that moves the way of techniques that emerge in the process of trying out things together. Methods are prescribed forms of writing and doing research but my work is experimental in “rallying” together. At my studio, we read and study together, share ideas, and our making moves with my poetry.

Using what I call “the wanting way,” in the way of thinking and moving, can talk about the ceaseless flow of the things that come artfully at us. This means that feeling is the rallying tool to get the ideas I need, offering new paths of citying and citing. Citying and citing signal different ways of moving, reading, studying, thinking, perceiving. Making with wanting ways needs techniques that are saturations of feeling that come to sense, and that is falling the way of the easy navigation with calming supports. That feeling can think with the awesome open game of s/p<sup>1</sup>ace that is wanting to make sense of walks and spaces and directions, and making this way needs relation. Rallying tools can be anything that buttresses movement in the open field of autistic perception, but also includes the open field of autistic feeling. In the wanting ways we make a calm ceaseless flow alongside tics<sup>1</sup> and we use these real moves as seeding the want for easy techniques. This is our process. Easy techniques are the ones that are natural for the ways I need to move and this can be with good sticks that I t<sup>2</sup>allow<sup>2</sup> or the anchoring dance of bodies that are activating the ways – is the feeling body attracting the molecules and gearing them in the way of walking to my studio? Even walking is attention to the paces, lures, and ways that are also languaging.

Talking is a technique pacing the body for better or worse, and teaching has become the accident of talking; the game is to think by speaking but the want is to feel, so the techniques are easier when people appreciate the nuances of the autistic non-speaking rally. People have to make time to appreciate bodies that can’t speak to be understood as a dance that also has to feel the

<sup>1</sup> Tics refer to repetitive body movements and also hesitations, similar but different from Tourette’s syndrome.

<sup>2</sup> Tallow is a word I invented to wave sticks in front of my eyes: a tallowing for the following, a wanting way of navigation and seeing.







atmospheres that I am answering at the same time to move in that feeling-thinking field of attraction, and that is the technique that jams in the way the dance of feeling happens – steps can't become answers to movements; not fascist makings of how movement ought to be.

## Languaging

The ways other than having a body that can't speak and can't write without support is the languaging that thinks in the language of speakers that are rallying easily, and the ways of the minor<sup>3</sup> are the ways my movement dances only with another who dances the major and that brings the collective orientation to rally and graciously give dance a flexion that paces the ways of care – and we are making an errant way. Poetry itself rallies and thinks and feels and moves in the thickness of atmospheres. The making of “languaging” is feeling the rallying relation that is more than making sense – that names a sense – and the languaging I do is always opening the ways I feel the waves that come in the ways that some call important impulses pulsing the goings and comings of feeling and intensity, so creolization is the process of being a way of métissage (Glissant, 1990).

The way we autistics need and want is for the people to vary the cooking so the recipe for supportive typing is upholding the interesting ingredients but the cooks give the actual food its making – and I am an autistic languaging cook; name the ways of attraction in the sense that the dance is more than the ways of choreography, and the cooks feel the calls of the chemistry that want more or less salt. Feeling has been fasting in the way of “therapy” for autistics that is not supportive, so using rally of facilitation has to be sensitive – giving and carrying – so that open vat of having a style of writing can move with the body that is also my typing finger. For example, I easily think when my mom is near because my body can go in the direction it wants and I sit with her as comfortably as I can and feel how she puts me back on calm feeling when my eyes or body loves to answer a different call, but she can also feel that call bathing me and having this attention and feeling is buttressing paces that come to me answering the ways I need, and my mom can pace in landing and flying so I want people to understand that I manage rally that feels a lot.

The volition of movement is sometimes carried with my facilitator so I can write the long thinking-talking that is held by ways of varied moves, and that means that easy typing conditions address the same calm that I need. Please remember it is difficult to type and it takes me sometimes an hour to write one paragraph<sup>4</sup>.

3 Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, Duke University Press, 2016.

4 For this proposal, I also need an editor to punctuate in a more neurotypical pace.



The lines are making changes  
that pulse the paces  
that wave the calls to answer  
and the waves are becoming  
like fractals that move in  
to the details of that sheen  
of ceaseless flows that make  
the autistic perception dance.

Waves are the movements of life  
that land and flow and the languaging

**Can art attract the open?  
Has the call for autistic answers  
this idea of iterations  
that feel and game  
and talk about dances  
like attracting the languaging  
of the open?**

**Paces of vitality shimmer in the languaging  
like a landing that varies the falling  
that falls to move.**

**The ceaseless flows of vitality  
sounds exciting  
but the movement  
to man of autism's dance  
is making time stand still  
when my body feels more  
than what it can call  
answering dance  
is about needing answers  
to both open and close  
in moments of living.**

**Open duration is gaming the body  
to ceaseless dances that pull me in  
and that has meaning  
when doctors leap to language  
of pathology.**

**The language pathologizes landings  
that need falling meaning  
that open game of movement  
leaves feelings to dance  
the duration.**



The question about assembling a support network is always about how the support can help me ceaselessly flow but the ways also need my input to say how I need support. The way I bathe in the atmospheric is a way of feeling that is worth the time because it has the potential to assemble offerings of ways that I see and sense, opening the ways of perception that are offering the answers about making with my amazing stims<sup>5</sup>.

I feel the happy making of the call to be creating in my own words and ways with the tassels of calls that fringe the feelings that are not expressed in the same ways, so talking about dance of assembly is like cutting the feeling that can't be worded and that means, that as openings, the caverns are always leading to ways we can't see. DeafBlind people, like autistic non-speaking people, use touch and other senses to make a world that seems different in ways pace can feel so the wanting ways are bathing the senses, shaping the ways we move. Being with neurodiverse typing the way we do is the facilitation that parses the field of sense, but it is the only way I can be included in the university and in society.

I am body of meaning-making that paces to many offerings that the world thinks of as disordered – lots of meaning energizes the language of ceaseless movements like tics that various people call difference, and others ease into the ideas that autism is pacing to the ways of pathology, but what if my body is a beacon for the ways of the world like the ways that water eases iterations other than the spoken words?

My work is about the making of the pace of study and living like the ways I make films. People are wanting to study the same ways<sup>6</sup> but I want and need to film my work. Film is useful to think about movement and that opens the assembly for others to think about life that needs feeling as the starting point for discussion about the ways we might face the dance of seething, teeming worlds that autistic living gives. The way ceaseless movements are calling upon the game of spacetime eases the videos I make toward the meaning of the senses, and it is the pace of the human and more-than-human world that shows up in my work. When describing perception, time, place and space, the conversation yields to the way of speech; talking about experience is after-the-fact; after the ceaseless flow through clandestine words. People can pose as talkers about feelings after the feeling happens and that means that weak talkers like me are forced to bottle up feeling and describe the more-than in language. This is why I have chosen film to think more about sensation of what we call spacetime to think about the way of autistic movement, languaging and perception<sup>7</sup>.

Open the ways of thinking and writing and you get inside language to make an art form that opens the doors for people to love the autistic dance of relation. I want to write in collaboration and make art that is offering conditions in all places that are autistic. I am gathering lots of ideas and people need open thinking about easy ways of how living pace is answering about that peaceful way of buttressing feeling and simple diversity. Thinking is always moving and changing, making our understandings of calm diversity peaceful and when we, in that move toward languaging differently, can see new ways that neurodiverse humans can perceive.

## **“Methodology”<sup>8</sup>**

Filming the insides of things, including water, thinks about the world moving toward me, the details and feelings that toll my autistic body. My method of filming is through the use of accessible tools like body cameras and an endoscopic camera that I tether to my fingers or place inside things, capturing the pulse and paces that lean towards a more vitalistic understanding of the movements of the things I feel in the world. The installation effect of both the visual and sound (using a zoom recorder) lures viewer-participants to different sensations and paces within space.

To my knowledge there is no non-narrative film work done by autistic non-speaking people. My motor movements make it sometimes difficult for me to hold a camera so with my collaborators, I manage to find ways of filming that become more accessible to my way of movement. Input from other non-speaking autistic participants at Dis Assembly, a neurodiverse arts co-lab, becomes part of the feelingthinkings that morph into this work. This collaborative methodology – with other non-speakers as well as speakers – manifests with process and rallying techniques with other writers, artists and autistic people. Following this exhibition we will include a digital record of the rallies with other participants that have enabled this work, illustrating the need for support of autistic people in study, academia, artistic and other forms of non-speaking autistic knowledge contribution.

5 Stims is short for self-stimulatory behaviour and reclaimed by the autistic community as “stimming.”

6 Universities and medical researchers aim for “participatory” research that includes autistic people, but most non-speaking autistic people don’t get asked to contribute to research because they are supported by another person. Our agency is questioned. Our way of language is too. This is a problem for people like me who cannot contribute without human and more-than-human facilitators. If I had to ask one key question that buttresses this work, it is what emerges when non-speaking autistic people can collaborate with support? What if my body is a beacon for the world to understand not only neurodiversity, but the diversity of the human species?

7 There is no existing artistic work by an autistic person that highlights both perceptual and motor-planning differences that are the wanting ways of relation. I use wanting ways as desirous wanderlines – a “dancing for the answering” of the atmospheres that I attend to. My motor movements are tic-like and sometimes hyperactive; calm facilitation activates my motor movements to the keyboard to type my thoughts. It takes me an hour to write one or two paragraphs.

8 In scare quotes as the term implies that I am following a pre-existing method. While film and sound is my method of research, it is also a collaborative way.

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## Beyondness Partition

Erin Manning

It is common to make a breach between practices: writing, reading, filming, living. For Adam Wolfond, life takes place in the non-breach, in the impossibility of breach-as-separation. This is a difficult world to navigate, not because it doesn't carry its own directionalities, but because its footholds have to be crafted anew for each iteration of how it materially unfolds. Pace becomes a key operator: "My work is about the making of the pace of study like the way I make films."

The making of films, which could be as simple as the attunement to a vector of light or movement, *paces* the breach, opening it to what is never was, a separation. Because that's the thing. We've neurotypically come to think of breach as separation. Autistic perception, quite to the contrary, is constitutionally incapable of such cut-and-dry separation that would say, with confidence, what something *is* or *isn't*. Light *is* study when paced into a movement that *is* dancing, which is to say, reading.

Separateness, a commitment to hold thought and practice apart, turning living into manageable bits, stumps a mobile body. Stalled, the body trembles in absolute movement. Visibly, it is stuck. Inwardly, it vibrates, its motion "caught" because the disconnect is too much. How to move in the face of a breach that never really was a separateness?

Film, for Wolfond, is one of many relational techniques for pacing a world that wants to privilege separateness in the name of rigour. Film's capacity to sculpt time, to think with Andrei Tarkoswky, beckoning the rhythms of the world into streams of movement and light, offers an inflection for the body-stalled. Filming from movement itself – a body camera catching water's ripples, "capturing the pulse and paces that lean towards a more vitalistic understanding of the movements of the things I feel in the world" – Wolfond makes the relational yield of the breach felt. Here, in the pacing of relation, worlds grow that move a body, a movement in committed resistance to the violences of normopathy's commitment to separation.

Difference without separability is how Edouard Glissant writes of the necessity to move beyond what Ruth Gilmore calls "partitions." Racially, ecologically, partitions enforce the separations that allow an easy parsing of the world into what counts and what should be discarded. The breach functions here as a mechanism for surveying what matters. Adam Wolfond's work produces in the breach, not to make a point, but because difference without separability is the only ethos that can generate the relational weave of autistic life, and of neurodiversity more broadly. Difference without separability is the ethics for a poetics of relation that paces the impossibility of bordered existence.



## Erin Manning

Erin Manning studies in the interstices of philosophy, aesthetics and politics, concerned, always, about alter-pedagogical and alter-economic practices. Pedagogical experiments are central to her work, some of which occur at Concordia University in Montreal where she is a research chair in Speculative Pragmatism, Art and Pedagogy in the Faculty of Fine Arts. Recent monographs include *The Minor Gesture* (Duke 2016), *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* (2020) and *Out of the Clear* (minor compositions 2022).

Her artwork is textile-based and relationally-oriented, often participatory. She is interested in the detail of material complexity, in what reveals itself to perception sideways, in the quality of a textural engagement with life. Her work often plays synesthetically with touch, of recent in acknowledgement and experimentation with the ProTactile movement for DeafBlind culture and language. Tactile propositions include large-scale hangings produced with a diversity of tools including tufting, hooking, knotting, weaving. 3e is the main direction her current research takes – an exploration of the transversality of the three ecologies, the social, the environmental and the conceptual. An iteration of 3e is a land-based project north of Montreal where living and learning is experimented. Legacies of SenseLab infuse the project, particularly the question of how collectivity is crafted in a more-than human encounter with worlds in the making.

## The Beckon, the Buttruss, and the Ceaseless Rally

Chris Martin

In my desire to rally with Adam Wolfond and his relational art practices, I am beckoned over and over into wanting ways. I am beckoned by moments, atmospheres, movements, images, sounds, and of course words. One word in particular has been luring me of late: *ceaseless*. No matter how many times it arrives, it always feels revelatory.

He writes: “bathing neurodiversity / is a ceaseless condition / for the moving and seeing / that is having the erasure / of dancing autistic people like me.” In a neuronormative world, we must bathe neurodiversity without cease, creating dance floors wherever there is risk of erasure. But what of this bathing?

He writes: “I bathe / in a not water but thick / mess of ceaseless meandering / visuals that want my attention / and I have learned that I also / need support for my goings and comings / in the neurodiverse collage that is a city.” Meanderings,



inefficient transports through the urban collage, leap visually at every turn. In this mess there are ceaseless messages and one needs the support of others to find patterns of relation, to forge together maps that can adapt.

He writes: “I am the conductor of dancing silence / that is full of actual ceaseless flow / of thoughts and the movement / is like a music of ways of silence.” The forever bathing flow we find in the rally is a type of music that calls out for dancing. Even or especially in what others perceive as silence, there is a symphony awaiting its conductor, or a conductor assembling an already playing symphony around themselves like a map. He writes: “I am dancing my body / to sound the things I become / rallying the ways of ceaseless thinking / that I can feel / can we open that door / to thinking about sound?” This exhibition is an invitation to a ceaselessness shared. How will you dance your body to sound the things you become? The door is wide open.



## Chris Martin

Chris Martin is a tilted thinking animal who sways, hags, loves, trees, lights, listens, and arrives. A poet who teaches and learns in mutual measure, he is the connective hub of Unrestricted Interest and the curator of *Multiverse*, a series of neurodivergent writing from Milkweed Editions. After publishing four collections of poetry, most recently *Things to Do in Hell* (Coffee House Press, 2020), he released his first book of nonfiction *May Tomorrow Be Awake: On Poetry, Autism, and Our Neurodiverse Future* (HarperOne, 2022). He lives in El Cerrito, among the scrub jays and coast live oaks, with Mary Austin Speaker and their two bewildering creatures.

## Wolfond Lexicon:

Interpreted by Estée Klar, PhD

*“Process-relational thinkers remind us that [...] social constructs, as deep as they are, are created out of our lived embodiment as biological organisms engaging in causal webs deeper than our social practices, languages and concepts. The task is to attend to our deepest experience in ways that allow us to critique (admittedly from within) the very concepts we have inherited to think with!”*

*(Robert Mesle, 2008. p. 63)*

*“Can a good body feel without another body?” – Adam Wolfond*

As mother, scholar and collaborator with Adam Wolfond, I have created a lexicon of his frequently used terms as a starting point to open the ways that we think of becoming as a continual relational process with the human and more-than-human. I am privileged to sit behind his iPad screen alongside him and to feel the way his body moves as a grammar in and of itself -- that deepens the meaning-full mannerisms of his languaging, rendering each word an open door that creates many semantic possibilities. Manner is movement. Paces, as Adam says, are patterns. To attune to manner, paces and patterns has been part of my life journey alongside him, as his parent and support person. These movements, be it tics, hesitations, or catatonia are expressive in themselves and through drawings I've learned to attune to them. Attentions wander and become the relational weave of phrasings and there's an outright musicality to it. Music, pace is the meaning. Try to reduce it – you cannot. For autistic, neurodiverse languaging exists beyond the words and terms that often flatten meaning, and have become detrimental to autistic existence. Terms like behaviours, disorder, abnormality and more, have become deeply entrenched in our thinking about autistic life with a concomitant call to normalize. We have been taught to think of autistic movement – stims, repetitions, yelps – as wrong. We writhe uncomfortably when diverse bodies “disrupt” how we are expected to be in certain settings – just think of the classroom with the tables lined up, how we are supposed to be quiet and still in the theatre, the art gallery. In our work, however, autistic mannerisms have liberated us; we can sleep and still participate in study together; we can lounge in a bean bag chair, run around the room, stare out the window – and we know there is attention without looking. Now think of the way in which creative work in a neurotypical world calls for authorship, not collaboration, and even a mastery of one's body to still, to look in the eye, to speak as a proof of authorship.

Yet, Adam and the many other non-speaking autistic people who collaborate at Dis Assembly, our studio, are always more-than-one – relating and attuning to the human and more-than human that becomes part of the relational weave. In the words of Édouard Glissant, “Relation is movement” (1997, 171).

These manners are in part how I’ve helped others to support and assist Adam without me. It is not an easy task to reorient the ways in which others have been trained to imagine autism and disability. For twenty-two years now, I’ve been tasked with translation – something I’m hesitant to do because I will inevitably fail to capture the expanse of meaning. It is perhaps no wonder then, that I came to feelthink more deeply by drawing lines of movement that I called *Relationshapes*, following the work of Fernand Deligny. So training is all about reorientation and feeling; it is about total immersion in autistic worlds – non-speakers who have written important works; rethinking how we have come to interpret movements in normative ways. While I am neurodivergent, I am not a non-speaking autistic person so the best people to relay meaning are the ones who will be a part of this exhibition throughout its course – and you will have the opportunity to meet with those who collaborate and *feelthink* with us in studio at several programs hosted by the Koffler Gallery. But I am but one source of reorientation, developing a more open way of considering how to live alongside Adam outside an oppressive pathology paradigm that is surprisingly under-researched yet over medicated. We will all be able to share this way of autistic languaging – with and without words – together and hopefully reimagine how we think we are and ought to be.

## **Ableism**

**(not Wolfond’s often-used term but one we should know)**

A term used to describe a culture that either seeks to normalize disabled bodies or fails to consider disability as diversity. Gary Albrecht et al describes Ableism as:

“[...] prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviors towards persons with disability. Definitions of ableism hinge on one’s understanding of normal ability and the rights and benefits afforded to persons deemed normal. Some persons believe it is ableism that prevents disabled people from participating in the social fabric of their communities, rather than impairments in physical, mental, or emotional ability. Ableism includes attitudes and behaviors emanating from individuals, communities, and institutions as well as from physical and social environments” (2006, p. 1).

This term arose from the civil rights perspective, calling upon a minority oppression model (Albrecht et al). In Wolfond's languaging, love is central, but he is aware of the injustices toward him as he has experienced exclusion his entire life:

The dreaming dance is  
trance of chance to love  
the way I am.  
In the dance of chance  
pace is talking without words  
to decide my peaceful wordless mind

and rally the thinking that happens  
through feeling the way and  
assumes we are  
all worthy of love  
and respect. I seesaw  
language of disability pacing  
autistic prancing to crip the ways always

patterning the taming therapists to music  
pace of game to be like autistic  
greatness.

(Segment from Wolfond's poem, Another Dream of Wanting Justice, 2022, p. 112).

## Atmospheres

When the language of production dominates a culture, it ceases to attune to the multitudes, the atmospheres that consist of feeling. The atmospheres are also referred to by other philosophers as the *Intra*, the liminal or like Marcel Duchamp coins, the *infrathin*: The warmth of a seat (which has just been left) is *infrathin*. Sliding doors of the Metro—the people who pass through at the very last moment is *infrathin*. Others might consider the atmospheric as the liminal, the inbetween-ness that we ineffably feel.

Atmospheres can be this ineffable feeling, it can be the mood in the room, of another person, the birds and nature that sings and hums, the patterns that are felt that pace us.

## Bathing/Saturating

Wolfond frequently uses these terms in relation to the atmospheric. Bathing not only conjures water, but is a full immersion within its depths and flows:

Main idea in the eros of autism is the pace  
dancing so I feel fantastic like rallying ocean waves  
carrying me like a boogie  
board of puttering  
on top of the warm water

(Segment from: Eros of Bathing Stimming Dancing Pracing, Ibid, 149).

There is a never-ending undulation saturating the dance of feeling.

## Body-Borrowing

Wolfond invents this term to express how support works when the body cannot move and needs to feel anchored in space. Like some other non-speaking autistic people, motor-planning (apraxia in clinical terms) is difficult in the sense that deliberate thought is sometimes required to move a leg, or to find one's arm to pick up a fork, whereas in neurotypical cultural training, we are taught how to orient in spaces and with objects in the same ways – self-same bodies can follow the rules of engagement in a territorialized world. Sara Ahmed writes – in *Queer Phenomenology* using Husserl's table, that how we perceive worlds is in relation to the proximity between body and objects through action. In this sense, proprioception<sup>9</sup> works here – the body, the human and non-human objects, the atmospheres and movement entwine to create and reorient what we perceive:

Sitting at a writing table, with a pen in hand, and perhaps a table lamp, we are engaged in a certain type of work. Thus, this space makes “certain things, not others, available” to us (p. 14). These objects are gathered in this space by us, while they create the space where our bodies inhabit. Our action, or intentionality, then, creates lines of direction that shape our perception and how we orientate ourselves toward the objects. A dinner table, which we gather and are gathered around, creates different kinds of orientation and lines of direction for our bodies than does a writing table. Thus, this orientation and the lines of direction are certainly not “neutral” or “originary” or, as Ahmed describes, “it is not just that I find them there, like that. Rather, the nearness of objects is a *sign* of an orientation” (emphasis by Ahmed, p. 58). It is in this recursive relationship between repetitive actions and our orientation toward the objects that

<sup>9</sup> The sense of body position, movement and force – it allows the brain to know where the body is in space and is crucial for maintaining balance. George Quasha refers to Adam Wolfond's work as ecoproprioceptive – adding the ecological into the relational feeling.

“something queer happens” (Britzman, 1999). What if our orientation turns our bodies toward the objects that are not supposed to be there? What happens when our bodies are not “in line” with the lines of direction? (Dai Kojima, 2008, 88 – 91).

Body-borrowing assists in orienting towards expective spaces/environments in a world that demands normative movement and relation; an assistive rhythm, a touch, a grounding voice can help someone like Wolfond navigate the city without being run over by a car. The same is true for continued rhythmic movement towards a qwerty board to be able to type. Typing on a text-to-speech device when someone has apraxia/dyspraxia (clinical terms), has been called facilitated or supported communication. Proximal or touch support helps activate sustained movement. The autistic person borrows the assistive body that we sometimes call the human metronome.

Sticks that Wolfond picks up are inventive tools to blur the busy visual/sensorial field – he picks them up along a walk, or when he is required to sit still to calm his body or navigate. Oliver Sack’s work *Awakenings* also shows this body-borrowing when a catatonic woman uses the black and white square patterns on the floor to assist with movement towards a window. Human and more-than-human body-borrowing then becomes an important consideration in the way we support others relationally.

## **Ceaseless Flow**

Flow seems like a lovely way to be. We imagine a stream that flows effortlessly without interruption. Yet a “ceaseless flow” in Wolfond’s lexicon also gestures towards the flow of stimuli that ceaselessly enters the sensorial-visual field. When Wolfond describes the visual field like “a forge inside my eyes,” we picture a rushing influx of fractalized images; one can’t quite grasp one thing but endlessly attempts to hold on despite the ceaseless flow of imagery and feelings. In Deleuzian terms, this is like flying and Wolfond describes his body in need of grounding, or “landing,” with other bodies and rhythms that help him do so. In no way is a ceaseless flow always a good feeling -- for Wolfond it can also be frustrating. This is the paradox of autistic living which we must approach with care, for therapeutic methods might throw the baby out with the proverbial bath water.

## **Dancing for the Answering**

The word dancing is proliferous in Wolfond’s lexicon. Relation is more than a staid state of being, but an interweaving of sensorial-relational affects that enfold with the movements that create an ontogenesis of becoming. -

One dances affect and relation and it changes who we are. But when Wolfond speaks of dancing for the answering, it can also feel like a frantic fluxus shuffle. For answering is an end point; it lies flat. It is answered, done. But a dancing is an open way to feel the affects of relation, to know where we are in space, to feel oneself as part of another human or non human entity. We become only in relation: “can a good body feel without another body?” asked Wolfond at the age of 13. He was already aware that to be is a process of relation, not an ending – perhaps this is why many autistic people suggest they cannot feel their bodies in space – and like Madeleine Gins writes in *Helen Keller or Arakawa* (1994), the Deafblind touch snakes tendrils along to feel the edges that enable navigation. This notion of not feeling oneself, one’s body in space is experienced by other autistic people too – not feeling where a leg is in space can be unsettling; perhaps there needs to be a heavy skip to feel one’s feet, or the mouth needs to touch the ground to know where it is; or perhaps one needs to carry a heavy log to feel the gravity of space. The dancing for the answering is the grounding and answering – the ing-ing is a continuous movement; the game is always in the feeling dance and the spaces are created by it. This is the diversity of perception itself – we do not feel or know the world the same way, although it has been hammered into most of us. It is mere neurotypical illusion, perhaps, that we view the world, the relation, as still, sure and all the same.

## Dis Assembling

Dis Assembly – the name of our studio is about avoiding stillness in thought, ideas, works. It is always an effort to keep going, to challenge ourselves. In a more literal sense, the body is also dis assembling. Akin to this concept is Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of territorialization and deterritorialization and also, lines of flight and grounding, molar and molecular. The capture of an idea, a work is momentary, as it is a continual processual movement. “The novelty of territorial expressiveness often comes from its ‘opening’ onto other **assemblages**, or onto the ‘cosmos’; that is, when expressiveness no longer functions strictly for the territory but expresses a **becoming** – a loss or change of function – it is *deterritorialized* (this is especially liberating – socially and politically – when territories have an oppressive function – as with the aspects of modern capitalism)” (Young & Genesko, 2013, 387). Wolfond: “People who are pained to feel the patterns are making the language shout reason and thin lines of haecceity are making the dance but the ways of making meaning are languaged knowing rather than calls that are felt that assemble bodies to relate.” There is a point at which the pace of a work, an event or activity assembles and then reaches its apex so that it must disassemble again. This is how autistic languaging can also feel as it hinges towards a new line of flight.

## **Facilitation and Facilitated Communication**

Facilitated communication is a method developed by Rosemary Crossley in Australia to assist people with cerebral palsy to type to communicate. She abutted the mental health system that suggested that some people who were severely physically disabled also possessed intellectual disability. This was an important move to make communication via assistive devices accessible for disabled individuals to communicate. Facilitation involved holding the hand of someone with low muscle tone to feel and learn the motion needed to single out the finger and type on a keyboard. With the touch of an assistant, or facilitator, this motor planning could take place. The typist would learn how to reach for the keyboard, aiming for physical independence but also acknowledging that lifelong physical assistance might be needed. The aim ultimately is for access to written communication. Gradually, support was “faded” back – to the wrist, the forearm, the elbow, the upper arm, the shoulder, if possible. Later, Professor Emerita of Syracuse University, Douglas Biklen, brought the method to the United States for autistic people who also showed low muscle tone and motor planning issues. Today, the method has been adapted to using spelling boards while some, like Wolfond, continue to use touch support to activate his movement or to reach for something he otherwise cannot.

## **Feelingthinking**

A conjoined feelingthinking does not parse subjective from objective thought. Thinking, that is often conjoined with notions of intelligence, rationality, objectivity and positivism.

## **Gaming the Space**

Although this sounds like a video game, Wolfond refers to gaming the space as a way to figure it out – to navigate it. Unlike Edmund Hurrssel’s table<sup>10</sup> where he suggests that we can simply reach for a cup on it without looking specifically for it, Wolfond often needs to repeat holding and putting down the cup multiple times as if he is measuring the distance by feeling. Movement repetition often serves this purpose.

## **Landing**

When a body can’t feel itself in space; when it becomes anxious in that feeling, it yearns to land. Perhaps the shaking of a stick is a grounding action, to help soothe the body that must otherwise move, that needs to navigate on a walk, or sit still in the classroom. A landing, in autistic movement, might be to



open and close a door a number of times until it feels complete, or answered. A door can be a question, as Adam used to say. We take for granted that all of us can feel our limbs in space, or that we know that the cup that is slightly beyond our reach on the table can still be accessed without looking. Arakawa and Gins write: “A chair is pictured or held in place by perceptual landing sites (direct perception) with the assistance of imaging landing sites (indirect or imitative perception) has for its perceiver a distinct position in relation to everything else in the room – the work of dimensionalizing landing sites)” (2002, 21) – the stick probes the space, or “**games**” it, as Wolfond writes, within the forging movement and details; dimensions may be askew, tilted, needing to “body-borrow” or tallow to be settled.

## Languaging

A term that Adam Wolfond has coined, languaging has come to imply the bodymindworld’s interweaving that lures the body in many directions. Wolfond calls these orientations “wanting ways.” Chris Martin, writes of Wolfond’s work as a phrasing that moves in a three-wave motion. Like water, the body paces to the patterns of the atmospheres which are the more-than-human calls that ask Wolfond “to answer.” Following the concept of worlding of Donna Haraway and other affect/new materialist theory, Wolfond describes his body as saturated and immersed in the feelings of the world. Rather than a reductive, explicative grammar, Wolfond creates his own grammars that ripple these rhythms. Languaging resists punctuation but instead hinges like an open door towards more doors. Which way we will swerve is the open question.

Autistic professor Melanie Yergeau writes that researchers, “must confront the idea that being autistic confers ways of being, thinking and making meaning that are not in and of themselves lesser – and may at times be advantageous [...] And while at times these nondiscursive worlds may be idiosyncratic or mutually unintelligible, these worlds hold value and meaning, as much as they might bristle at value and meaning. They are intentional sites, which, much like sign languages have already done in the fields of linguistics and rhetoric, promise to (make us) question long-held notions about language itself” (Yergeau, 2018, 34).

Our inventions at our studio are about how movement moves with various materials and affect – the way ink moves easier against some paper; the way ice melts and drips and makes us think about time, bodies and relation, and also, to the environment now in crisis. These relations shape our moves for a

10 “For Husserl, the body is not an extended physical substance in contrast to a non-extended mind, but a lived “here” from which all “there’s” are “there”; a locus of distinctive sorts of sensations that can only be felt firsthand by the embodied experiencer concerned” (google). This is why phenomenology – with the binary of inside/outside doesn’t work in Wolfond’s “bathing” experience – where the body cannot feel itself in space without thinking about movement relationally. Rather, we believe that bodymindworld needs to be conjoined in this relational approach.

way of thinkingfeeling. This is a way of languaging the event as Wolfond also writes immersively, within it. Language is not just written by the body, after the body experiences, rather, writing is a relational weaving that emerges within formless space, relationshaping it. (Klar-Wolfond, 2020, 89). Wolfond: “after the language uses us/the good body is always pale/because it is always/language that answers too/much and the body actually says more” (Wolfond, 2019, 18). This is why film is the way Wolfond with others have chosen to sculpt a languaging spacetime, a “**minor cinema**” as Deleuze and Guattari note, that “precipitates minoritarian becomings in its audiences and participants” releasing affective autistic intensities that “give voice” to autistic expressivity (see also: Young, Genesko and Watson, 2013, 195).

## Man of Autism

Other than being taught to begin his sentences with sentence-starters when he was younger, like a runway for him to then continue in his own words “I want/I think...” Wolfond rarely writes his identity as the singular *I* (except as he was taught as a sentence starter “I think...”) and we attribute this to his approach to becoming with the world in relation. More than one, more than the singular *I*, Wolfond can’t seem to parse the individual from the greater field of relational influence. It became important for Wolfond to extend filmic movements without gazing upon his autistic body, or creating a narrative that focusses on the *I* of being in the world. The video/sound installation seizes the moments, the details that undulate the feeling-seeing.

In our thinking together, we have often questioned the purpose of labels in the contemporary moment. Autism is often misconstrued, leaving a lot of autistic people out in its conception and understanding of autistic experience. And yet, Wolfond continues to announce himself as the *man of autism*. This can also allude to a refusal of the *I* in identity politics that is concerned too much with notion of agency that is conflated with the independent body. It is also indicative of the way in which Wolfond has been identified by others and by the clinical community. We question the way of identity and how that shapes one’s sense of self.

## Names of Things

More than the names of things that Wolfond feels is reductive to the dance of relation, the grammars of language also delimit the vitality of things and ontogenetic morphing. When Wolfond writes, one may be at first glued to each word and we hang, clinging to where he might lead us towards resolution -- and yet, it keeps going... one might too quickly assess that Wolfond’s writing is child-like in that “there is a word for that,” and he hasn’t used it

“appropriately.” Yet his words keep grasping towards the musicality, the rhythm, and patterns the feeling. As his supporter I feel this as typing each word speaks more than the abstractness that the notion of words denotes. “Using the master’s language” to dismantle the master’s house is a way to rethink autistic languaging and expression beyond the denotative names of things that delimit the relationality of the multiverse.

## Neurodiversity

We prefer to use the term neurodiverse although “neurodivergent” has become more recently popular. I have been working in this field since 2001, and the first conception of neurodiversity occurred in the early 1990’s. We may intermingle the terms neurodiverse, neurodivergent and autistic and acknowledge their nuanced meanings and how they have transpired over time. We understand these terms as culturally transient in the context of ever-shifting understandings of diversity. “Autistic person” also reclaims autistic identity from the clinical-medical model that characterizes autism as a disorder. However, we also question identity-language as overly situated and perhaps monolithic over time, although it has been important to move with neurodiversity to resist the clinical vice. In our work together, we wriggle from fixed positions. Positionality is not how Adam Wolfond tends. Rather, he’s interested in movement, ontogenesis. Neurodiverse is therefore used as a gesture for way. Autistic is a signpost to remember autism’s history and clinical roots and then reclamation of its meaning by autistic people. Neurodivergent is used in recognition of individuals who diverge from neurotypicality, but who do not necessarily identify as autistic, thus creating a new direction “because even autistics, who are most definitely neurodivergent, are diverse in an infinity of ways that expand from the neurological... the adjective neurodiverse [reminds us that] we need a concept for diversity within diversity that isn’t measured by the standard of typicality” (Senselab, Introduction to Diversity-In-Diversity issue, *Inflexions*, <https://senselab.ca/wp2/diversity-in-diversity-launch-sept-5-at-19h30-senselab/>. Neurotypicality, or neurotypical, suggests fixity – it is position, attitude and measures for an ideal that is described as normality. Adam’s movement tends toward new concepts of relation. The movement of neurodiverse language suggests more movement to come; diversity is always making way for more, and just can’t be held down.

## Neurotypical

Conceived following the creation of the term neurodiversity, neurotypical refers to the dominant culture and its forms, be it grammatical form, architectural form and the way the body must form in order to be accepted. Neurotypicality has often suppressed minority expression and deemed it incompetent. Autistic bodies are often conflated with lack of intelligence, agency and competence or as highly gifted but otherwise lacking in functional competence. These attempts only achieve an Othering. Neurotypicality is also tied to neoliberalist capitalism in the way it configures movement and bodies towards productivity. Wolfond writes: “The game of neurotypicality [...] has the music a canned rhythm when it is like a march? Yes, people march to the same beat that the meaning closes the open that neurotypicality languages down and this paces to bodies that can move the same ways.”

## Open

Open can mean open-minded but in Wolfond’s work he upholds the paradox: it is also chaotic and unsettling. Open languaging lies in the undulations, the hinges, refusing to shut down meaning. The open can be a space that is too busy and needs assistance to navigate. The open can be “easy” and also hard. The open is always the paradox of autistic living.

## Pace & Pattern

Pace and pattern, the more-than-human, can also be considered assistive supports. But we don’t, in normopathic renditions of relation and space, acknowledge the movements that skew the grids and lines most of us live by. Or, we acknowledge them outside of the norm. The autistic non-speaking, catatonic, ticcing body moves in alternate ways, and if we are open to it, reorients a way, many ways, that we can be in the world.

Paces are the feelings that pattern the matter of the world. Paces are more than bodies that walk and talk, pacing is a musicality where the pace of a poem, a phrase, twists and turns. Being attuned to the paces that pattern can be difficult as there are multitudes of paces that call us to dance. Pace is also duration, shifting the way we feel spacetime. Wolfond writes:

“Paces are patterns that are putting the meaning into the answering that people can think about and that languages the need that lives in between the words, and without the feelings there would be a forgotten expression that makes dancing dead. The dancing paces make meaning come alive. That time that is gaming the clock is facing the various tasks of the day but

feeling dims the clock feeling durations that give the paces meaning like real thinking that moves in many ways, languaging feels the poetics of the open and that makes description difficult because feeling is more than the sum of words. Pacing autistically is the timing of different thinking feeling that the body becomes in relation with the offerings that the world gives, having the paces of many things can be overwhelming, I make my way by languaging my questions that more varied feelings make and I become with my sticks that ground my movements; has the body a pace of many things? Yes, but I make my way with support that grounds me in the atmospheric dance.”

## **Rally**

Wolfond uses this word to describe, again, the way his body and languaging rallies with the atmospheres. At Dis Assembly, we also use the word to describe how we use cues to study – how a reading, a thought moves and morphs into a broader thinking of the topic we began with. When Wolfond writes poetry, for instance, he may be cued by what someone else said, by something he read. We are always rallying, all of us. But as we focus on independence and authorship, we lose the relationality of how thought and feeling resonates.

## **Tics**

Tics, similar to Tourette’s syndrome, are often described as involuntary movements. Tics can be vocal and gestural. Yet, different from Tourette’s, autistic tics are rapid repetitive movements. Tics are also considered a language in Wolfond’s lexicon – “I am the masterful ticcer” – another pattern that grammars differently. Tics respond to the atmospheres and also the body. A body can tic more when it is not feeling well, when there is tension around, when happy and excited. Tics are the overflow of expressive emotion, unable to quiet and be still – this latter way the preferred situatedness of the body in a neurotypical world. Anne Donnellan, Martha Leary and David Hill (2013) have been important contributors to an alternative way of understanding autistic movement outside of the behaviorist model.

## **Twallow**

Twallowing is how Wolfond refers to the waving of a stick. Wolfond uses the sticks that he collects on walks to navigate and see the visual field – a twallowing for the following. In behaviourism which pathologizes autistic movement, this has been referred to as “regarding” or “self stimulatory behaviour” which the “therapy” seeks to eradicate to make the autistic comply to normative standards of movement.

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Isaiah Grewal	Quincy Pfeiffer	Gabby
Gregory Horton	Geoff Pym	Liv
Justice Kilbrew	Caden Rainey	Zach
Miles Kirs	Angelo Reboira	

## For More Information

<a href="http://dis-assembly.ca">dis-assembly.ca</a>	<a href="http://esteerelation.com">esteerelation.com</a>	<a href="http://kofflerarts.org">kofflerarts.org</a>
<a href="http://dis-assembling.com">dis-assembling.com</a>	<a href="http://adamwolfond.com">adamwolfond.com</a>	

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