

Co-Composing with Laura Aguilar's Nature Self-Portrait series: A Case for a Neurodivergent Gaze

Protichi Chatterjee
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India
protic92_llg@jnu.ac.in

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37536/ECOZONA.2026.17.2.6092>



Abstract

This article develops a theory of neurodivergent gaze via a mode of environmental awareness by engaging with Laura Aguilar's *Nature Self-Portrait* photographic series (1996). I do so through my positionality as a neurodivergent spectator and autotheoretically argue that a neurodivergent gaze manifests affectively and texturally as I develop an overclose proximity with Aguilar's self-portraits. I draw on Ann Cvetkovich, Lauren Berlant, and Erin Manning to first situate Aguilar's photographs as neurodivergently-coded by taking into account her state of depression, dissociation, and suicidation at the time when the photographs were taken. Through Matthew J.C. Cella and Alan Jurgens, I claim that depression can be understood via ecosomatic and enactive paradigms that consider an individual's affective, somatic, and cognitive constitution as deeply entangled with one's surroundings. I argue that these self-portraits are a *cripistemology* of depression that Aguilar then mobilizes to dismantle the anthropocentric, able-bodyminded, and neurotypically-inflected subject-object, human-nonhuman division by highlighting how the New Mexico landscape and her body constantly appear to co-compose each other. I define this movement of co-compositionality as the environmental awareness of a neurodivergent gaze in operation. This, as Manning argues, attends to both human and nonhuman elements nonhierarchically and indiscriminately, therefore dismantling the vertical hierarchy between the two in anthropocene spectatorship of the genre of self-portraiture. Lastly, as I theoretically en flesh my neurodivergent gaze's operation via Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Tina Campt, I, too, co-compose a self-portrait in a spectatorial response to Aguilar's photographs.

Keywords: Neurodivergent gaze, environmental awareness, co-compositionality, *cripistemology*, depression.

Resumen

Este artículo desarrolla una teoría de la mirada neurodivergente a través de un modo de conciencia ambiental, partiendo de la serie fotográfica *Nature Self-Portrait* (1996) de Laura Aguilar. Lo hago desde mi posición como espectadora neurodivergente y definiendo, desde una perspectiva autoteórica, que la mirada neurodivergente se manifiesta de forma afectiva y textural a medida que establezco una proximidad excesiva con los autorretratos de Aguilar. Me baso en Ann Cvetkovich, Lauren Berlant y Erin Manning para, en primer lugar, situar las fotografías de Aguilar como codificadas desde una perspectiva neurodivergente, teniendo en cuenta su estado de depresión, disociación y tendencias suicidas en el momento en que se tomaron las fotografías. A través de Matthew J.C. Cella y Alan Jurgens, sostengo que la depresión puede entenderse mediante paradigmas ecosomáticos y enactivos que consideran que la constitución afectiva, somática y cognitiva de un individuo está profundamente entrelazada con su entorno. Sostengo que estos autorretratos constituyen una *cripistemología* de la depresión que Aguilar moviliza para dismantelar la división antropocéntrica, basada en la idea de un cuerpo y una mente 'capaces' y con un sesgo neurotípico entre sujeto y objeto, y entre humano y no humano, al destacar cómo el paisaje de Nuevo México y su cuerpo parecen componerse mutuamente de forma constante. Defino este movimiento de co-composicionalidad como

la conciencia ambiental de una mirada neurodivergente en acción. Esto, tal y como sostiene Manning, aborda tanto los elementos humanos como los no humanos de forma no jerárquica e indiscriminada, desmantelando así la jerarquía vertical entre ambos en la contemplación antropocénica del género del autorretrato. Por último, al plasmar teóricamente el funcionamiento de mi mirada neurodivergente a través de Maurice Merleau-Ponty y Tina Campt, yo también co-compongo un autorretrato como respuesta espectral a las fotografías de Aguilar.

Palabras clave: Mirada neurodivergente, conciencia medioambiental, co-composicionalidad, cripistemología, depresión.

Introduction

Theories on spectatorship that mobilize the conceptual category of the gaze have noted how power relations function in a unidirectional, hierarchized manner from the spectator to the spectacle. Particularly vis-à-vis the camera, the relationship between the photographer, the spectator, and the photographed is vertical wherein the photographed resides in the realm of passivity and objecthood.¹ Although visual studies theorists have challenged the status of passivity and objecthood of the photographed and called for an ethics of spectatorship that nuances agency within the event of photography, such theories often presuppose, firstly, a human actor who is being photographed and whose agency must now be restored by the ethical spectator; and secondly, an able-bodied, neurotypical spectator who is capable of ethical engagement.² As Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Anna Stenning, and Nick Chown argue in the introduction to *Neurodiversity Studies* (2020), it is most often “the construct of the neurotypical as an ideal ethical subject” that is “exclusionary of those who may be able to offer alternative conceptualizations” (1). This paper takes up both such presumptions within the discourse of ethical modes of spectatorship and asks, what happens when we displace the neurotypical ideal ethical subject as the one who gazes and instead consider a neurodivergent gaze in operation? What happens when we take the human actor who is being photographed and whose agency must now be restored via ethical spectatorial practices, in tandem with the presence of nonhuman actors within the photograph’s frame, and therefore destabilize the anthropocentrism inherent within the genre of self-portraiture?

To flesh out the workings and ethics of an alternative conceptualization of gaze via neurodivergence that mobilizes a particular mode of environmental awareness, I

¹ See Laura Mulvey’s conceptualization of male gaze in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975); and Susan Sontag’s inhibition regarding photograph’s objectification of people as properties in *On Photography* (2005/1973).

² In “What is a photograph? What is photography?” (2010), Ariella Azoulay writes that the spectator faces the photograph’s event from an externalized, vertical view which affords a limited understanding of the photograph’s potentiality. Instead, as she proposes in *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008) regarding photographs of Palestinians, the ethical spectator needs to “watch” the photograph for movements, thereby entering the photograph’s frame and restoring citizenship and subjecthood to the dispossessed Palestinians.

engage with the works of Chicana-American photographer Laura Aguilar (1959-2018). I especially take up the photographs titled *Nature Self-Portrait #5* and *Nature Self-Portrait #12* from her *Nature Self-Portrait* series (1996). I argue that an environmental awareness attends to the textures within the photographic frame indiscriminately and without forming a vertical, hierarchical relationship between the spectator and the photographed. By theorizing the co-compositionality within Aguilar's self-portraits, this article demonstrates how the actions of the nonhuman elements, which Aguilar then doubles as, are what constitute the events captured by the photographs. I develop this concept of gaze via my positionality as a neurodivergent spectator of Aguilar's equally neurodivergently-coded self-portraits, and claim that her photographs become generative sites of alternate knowledge-production from a crippled or disabled position. As the Laura Aguilar Trust notes, Aguilar often used photography as a medium to explore her marginalized identities, including being Native Californio, Chicana, lesbian, and auditorily dyslexic ("The Life of Laura"). The fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2013) categorizes auditory dyslexia as a learning disability involving a difficulty in parsing acoustic stimuli. Her studio manager and friend Christopher A. Velasco points out that Aguilar "decided to put the camera on herself because she couldn't communicate like she wanted to with language, so she was like, 'Let me use the camera on myself and make these self-portraits'" (Duron). From the *Nature Self-Portrait* onwards, Aguilar also experiments with the nude form embedded in natural landscapes. The Laura Aguilar Trust notes that, at a time when Aguilar was struggling with "mounting depression and, increasingly, suicidal thoughts," this series, along with Aguilar's decision to finally try medication for depression, proved to be "healing for the photographer, who could draw upon her familial ties to nature, open space, rivers, rocks, and woodlands" (*Nature Self-Portrait*). In an interview, Aguilar herself opens up about how her trip to rural New Mexico to photograph *the Nature Self-Portrait* stemmed from, and became a part of, mourning the death of one of her closest friends (*Interview by Carolina Miranda* 107).³

³ In this series, the photographer Delilah Montoya assisted in clicking the photographs as Aguilar, guided by her inverted image on the camera's lens, assumed her postures. However, Aguilar insists that these are indeed self-portraits and not photographs of hers taken by Montoya. Adhering to Aguilar's nomenclature, this article will also treat these photographs as self-portraits. For more information on Aguilar's artistic practice, see *Interview by Carolina Miranda* (2018). Information regarding Aguilar's usage of medication during the production of the series was provided to me by Christopher Velasco in personal correspondence.



Figure 1. Laura Aguilar. *Nature Self-Portrait #5*, 1996, Gelatin silver print, 16 x 20 in.
© Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016.



Figure 2. Laura Aguilar. *Nature Self-Portrait #12*, 1996, Gelatin silver print, 16 x 20 in.
© Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016.

This article takes up Aguilar's undulating depressive state as a form of neurodivergent criptistemology and asks, what can depression, dissociation, and, suicidation, reveal about the structure of the world in which we live?⁴ More specifically, how does depression expose the structural injustice of a neurotypically-oriented world-order, especially when accounting for Erin Manning's (2016) and

⁴ Lauren Berlant differentiates suicidation from suicidal ideation (2022). They argue that suicidation as an ongoing and ceaseless affective condition brings to relief the inconvenience of living in constant proximity to structural violence. Suicidal ideation, on the other hand, is often invoked in medical and psychiatric discourses as a manageable symptom of clinical depression.

Lennard J. Davis' (2013) reframing of depression within the neurodiversity spectrum? If "depression might [indeed] be capable of producing other kinds of writing and knowledge besides science," how can we produce cripistemologies via states of depression and suicidation as seen in the photographs (Cvetkovich 95)? To entangle myself in Aguilar's photographic world-building, I mobilize Ann Cvetkovich's notion of depression as a "response to a fucked-up world or a fucked-up life" (15). This article therefore adds to existing scholarship on Aguilar's works by prompting an eco-cripistemological engagement with her self-portraits following Matthew J.C. Cella's ecosomatic and Alan Jurgens' enactive paradigms of understanding depression, which foreground the enmeshment and embodiment of our somatic, affective, and psychic states of being with the environment that co-affects us into presence.⁵

The specificity of the neurodivergent gaze posited in this article involves my particular experience of multiple neurodivergence, both diagnosed bipolar affective disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and the spectrum of undiagnosed traits that accompany these diagnoses.⁶ I theorize the relational, ecosomatic, and enactive haptic-tactility and affectivity of my neurodivergent gaze by invoking the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's abstractions on gaze as a function of an indiscriminate universal flesh. However, I argue in the last section of the article that a neurodivergent gaze also has the capacity to enfold differing resonances of relationality present in the neurodiversity spectrum. I thereby extend Tina Campt's theory of a Black gaze, which, via its indefinite article 'a', suggests tentativeness, capaciousness, and polyvalence (ch. 1, para. 40). I also take into account Erin Manning's expositions on neurodivergent perception as being available to anyone who deviates from the norm of enforced neurotypicality that, like most normative frameworks, structures the world.⁷ What remains as an operative function of a neurodivergent gaze is that it unstructures the position of power occupied by the

⁵ See Amelia Jones's "Eternal Return" (2002), which argues that Aguilar performs the self as other through "a tune of difference" (968); Jones's *Body Art* (1998), which explores the posthuman videographic performance of depression as embodied emotion; Jay Buchanan's "Object-Selving" (2022), which looks at Aguilar's co-performance with inanimate elements to create an object-self instead of a subject-self; Ann Marie Leimer's "Creating a Space" (2021), which demonstrates how the female nude form in Aguilar's self-portraits blurs the distinction between human body and natural landscape; and Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen's "Has the Queer Ever Been Human" (2015), which conducts a non-anthropocentric reading of "queer connections between flesh and stone [...] human and nonhuman" (184).

⁶ See Robert Chapman's "Neurodiversity and the Social Ecology of Mental Functions" (2021) for a discussion on the neurodiversity spectrum including, but not limited to, the oft-pathologized conditions of autism, bipolarity, learning disabilities, and other mental disorders categorized in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2013). This article invokes both usages of neurodivergence: the depathologizing of mental illnesses and the broader political usage that recognizes neurodivergence as deviating from the norm of White, able-bodied, heteropatriarchal, majoritarianism.

⁷ Since I find some, but not all, frequencies of autistic perception to resonate with my particular mode of neurodivergence, I have refrained from using Manning's term "autistic perception," itself shortened from what Manning has called "neurodiverse forms of perception" (15).

human spectator, thereby recalibrating normative and anthropocentric understandings of gaze.⁸

This article follows a method of deep resonance and affective vulnerability with and in front of Aguilar's photographs. I co-create with Aguilar across time and space as a way of co-interpreting the self-portraits and I produce a self-portrait of my own in spectatorial response. In a way, my academic and personal life co-mingle here, on the surface of this article. I write it while the Supreme Court in India has passed a judgement that enables mining activities in 90% of the Aravali hill range (Shah). The Southern Ridges of the Aravali run through and around my university campus. I have often snuck into its folds, away from the prying eyes of the security and administration, to sit with my thoughts, mull over the condition of the country and the world, be sad and depressed. This current context has inevitably altered the resonance of my engagement with Aguilar's *Nature Self-Portrait*. I now approach her photographs with a sense of loss and dread—loss of a safe space where I could decompress uninhibitedly, and dread for the inevitable changes to the climate that the mining activities will bring. I respond to Aguilar's self-portraits while being caught in the limbo of mourning and anxiety. In mobilizing this resonance between Aguilar's affective-psychic states and my responding bodymind into a conversation, I open up spaces for producing knowledge about our lived realities from a crippled or disabled position.

Photographic Subject-Object: A Dissolution of Normative Frames

Critical discourses on photography usually describe it as an event and, sometimes, as a document of an event that promises its continuity in the future (Sontag, *On Photography* 7; Azoulay, *Civil Contract* 14; Butler 83). It is an event insofar as it is an "experience captured," with the camera becoming "the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood" (Sontag, *On Photography* 2). Therefore, a photograph captures, acquires, and possesses an experience, turning it into an event that must be gazed upon. However, it is precisely because it "bears the seal of the event itself" that the photograph can open up to the potential variations of the event-information (Azoulay, *Civil Contract* 14). "The event is where experience actualizes" in its current form (Manning 3). However, experience itself is quite volatile, replete with the nonconscious welling of affect, that indeterminate, difficult-to-articulate facet of sensation that cannot be quantified or parsed for meaning. In the work regarding autonomy of affect and how it shapes politico-cultural sensibilities, philosopher Brian Massumi equates affect to the intensity with which the skin reacts to sensation. He argues that affect differs from emotions precisely because the former is indefinable and therefore, unnameable. Contrarily, emotion "is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point

⁸ See, bell hooks' "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators" in *Black Looks* (1992) and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's *Staring: How We Look* (2009) as two of the many works challenging the unidirectional, hierarchical theory of gaze.

onward defined as personal" (28). Emotion is "qualified intensity," bound semiotically and semantically, thus, flattening the intensity of sensation by qualifying it into "narrativizable action-reaction circuits" and bringing it to the threshold of consciousness (28). This subjective qualification of intensity into a catalogue of emotions presumes a neurotypically-inflected, human actor. Manning calls this narrativizing action "parsing." She writes that "[p]arsing, so allied with the neurotypical, not only reduces our capacity to feel the event in the event, it perpetuates the hierarchy of conscious experience over nonconscious experience, reason over affect" (22). The nonconscious welling of the affective force is capable of reorienting one's experience in ways that are also often involuntary and nonconscious in their movement. Maybe, this is why Sontag argues in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) that photographs relay affect, but not meaning. To understand the context of a photograph as meant by the photographer, one has to provide captions and therefore foray into the structured realm of language (ch. 2, par. 14). Moving photographs from disarticulation to articulation also involves a kind of parsing or narrativization that contains the unexpectedness of the photograph within semiotic and semantic qualifications. But what happens when photographs are not supplied with explanatory captioning, as seen in Aguilar's *Nature Self-Portrait*? What sensory epistemologies can be generated from the photographic surface?

My bipolarity and ADHD also bring me too close to zones of disarticulation, which refer to a concentration of "feeling-forms" within any experience that I find difficult to "organize... into manageable bits" (Manning 135). Scenes of intense psychic distress often cause an affective trembling within me that is difficult to encapsulate within the norms that structure language, relegating me into the figure of what Jackson-Perry et al. term as a sensory stranger in a neurotypical world (125). These language norms presuppose a neurotypical subject who is able to cognize, perceive, and feel 'normally.' Aguilar's foray into the landscapes of New Mexico for the *Nature Self-Portrait* series is a visual record of her struggles with depression and therefore a mode of cripistemology, defined by Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer as an approach that produces "first-hand, and in some cases, first-person knowledge about topics that concern disabled people and communities, broadly conceived" by "structurally placing crip(s) at the beginning or center of the production of knowledge" (158). Cripistemology stands to correct the epistemic injustice of diminishing the crippled, disabled, and/or neurodivergent sensory strangers as bearers and producers of valid knowledge. Via the technology of self-portraiture, Aguilar finds within the rocks and trees a way of producing knowledge. Her photographs become a visual first-person narrative of the ongoing, though fluctuating, intensity of her depression, and are a reflection of her ecological milieu. My zones of disarticulation resonate with Aguilar's self-portraits in ways that produce meaning, without flattening the photographs' affective intensity. Indeed, the visual medium is often a more welcoming avenue for crip knowledge-production for those neurodivergent individuals who find the norms of oral or written language

restrictive. Jackson-Perry et al. relay how one of the authors appropriates visual languages to convey their sensory divergence:

[...] the way [the author] portrays sensory experiences has given me almost some form of late-onset synaesthesia [...] [they] turn into pictures and sounds [...] they created a vocabulary in my head that is in pictures and sounds (not words) that are attached to sensory experiences. (130)

For Aguilar, who is auditorily dyslexic, the sonic properties of language resemble a phonetic babble. She remains a disarticulated figure, dismembered from the neurotypical linguistic loop (Berger 1-2). Within her self-portraits, Aguilar explores visually and affectively her intersectional identities as a neurodivergent, Indigenous, Chicana, and lesbian bodymind. I have taken the liberty to add neurodivergent as one of her identities. It is a form of recognition from a fellow neurodivergent individual to another, across time and space.⁹ In its most un-pathological sense, neurodivergence “simply means a brain that diverges” from the norm (Asasumasu).¹⁰ More concretely, the term usually refers affirmatively to those individuals who fit the diagnoses of neurodevelopmental, neurocognitive, and/or mental disorders under the medico-psychiatric regime. The term neurodivergence attempts to undo the deficit/disorder-based language of medical science by borrowing from the social model of disability, and the term’s deployment engages in a politics of affirmation (Walker, Davis). Neurodivergence challenges the often-backgrounded presumptions of neurotypicality that serve as the foundation for everyday experiences. In the manner of a much-needed rant, Manning polemicizes the definition of neurodivergence while showing the pervasiveness of neurotypicality as a structuring and othering tool in almost all foundational identity politics.

When do we honor significantly different bodies and ask what they can do, instead of jumping to the conclusion that they are simply deficient? When is the fat body, the immobilized body, the blind body, the deaf body, the old body, the spastic body celebrated? Yours, mine, the life of the autistic...yours, mine, the life of the schizophrenic, of the psychotic, the depressed, institutionalized and out of sight, yours mine, the First Nations, disenfranchised by a settler colonialism that refuses to recognize political practices neurodiverse at their core, yours, mine, the drug addict, the drunk, the black man, treated last in the emergency ward (if treated at all), yours, mine, the transgender, the transsexual, the gay or lesbian, our rights too rarely recognized as they should be, yours, mine, lives deemed less worthy, less worthy not just because of our visible difference, but because [...] we have already been situated, aligned in opposition to the dominant ideal of life, to the majoritarian discourse of neurotypicality, and we fall short. (4)

⁹ Neurodiversity Studies often prefers to use an identity-first language to emphasize the importance of one’s neurocognitive trait to one’s selfhood. See, for example, Robert Chapman in “Neurodiversity and the Social Ecology of Mental Functions” (2021).

¹⁰ Neurodivergence as an identity -marker is a tool of inclusion, resonance, and camaraderie with anyone who is neuroatypical. Kassianne Asasumasu writes, “It is not another damn tool of exclusion. It is specifically a tool of inclusion [...] Neurodivergent is for all of us” (para. 7).

In an interview, Aguilar opens up about her depression and suicidation, and how her photography often becomes a visual testimony of her mental state for her therapists (Aguilar 118-20). Aguilar's bodymind and self-portraits are thus thoroughly neurodivergent, not just because of her auditory dyslexia, but also because she diverges from the "dominant ideal of life" by being depressed, Indigenous, Chicana, and lesbian (Manning 4). Moreover, states of depression and dissociation result from living in a world that is no longer habitable. They are the ceaseless feelings of heaviness that arrest mourning, grieving, and overcoming this sense of loss. If, as Alan Jurgens argues, "the structure of human experience and cognition always involves a relation to the world and to others, which constitutively shapes cognition," then states of depression cannot be uncoupled from the constant erosion of the ground on which we walk and build our lives (74). They are, in fact, the "predictable effect and nonexceptional experience of living with, in, and under biopower's structural disciplines and historical aggressions" (Berlant, *Inconvenience* 118). Depression and accompanying dissociation stem from the infrastructures of inequality that turn the impersonality of structural violence into a personal violation, resulting in an "ongoing difficulty felt in the body as a demeaning displacement" (*Inconvenience* 119). It is from this sense of displacement and non-belonging that suicidation irrupts as a mode of salvaging the dissociated poetics of life. Suicidation "marks the sense of the unendurable that is endured, and the work of holding things together while feeling that they might not hold and that life, as it is known, might not either" (Berlant, *Inconvenience* 122). In a way, suicidation is the feeling of losing a grievable life on a soon-to-be lifeless planet, and a speculative death that operates on an intense engagement with wish fulfilment.

The undulating affective weight of these intense and unendurable structures of oppression appears as the optical spread of the *Nature Self-Portrait*. Aguilar places her body in relation to the sparse and parched grounds of the landscape while restricting the spectator's access to her face and eyes, seeming to maintain a sense of private contact with the landscape in which she blends. For Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, the face of the (human) staree facilitates an "intense eye-to-eye with the viewer", becoming a site to challenge and direct the starrer's dehumanizing gaze (84). In *Nature Self-Portrait #5* and *Nature Self-Portrait #12* Aguilar effaces herself by turning her back on the camera lens, thereby foregoing the visual economy of staring. This denial of spectatorial engagement with her face destabilizes "the [visual, facial] norms that [...] allocate who is and is not human" (Butler 77). She denies the spectators an engagement with her face and instead doubles her body into the rock-body and the tree-body. She thus disturbs the anthropocentrism of an ethical response driven by our "capacity to respond with outrage, opposition, and critique...depend[ing] in part on how the differential norm of the human is communicated through visual and discursive frames" (Butler 77). This is further exacerbated by the shadow of Aguilar's curled-up body obscuring her head (*Nature*

Self-Portrait #12).¹¹ The visual, facial norms are stretched to their limits in ascertaining the recognizably human all the while Aguilar's seemingly headless body doubles up as the surrounding rocks. Drawing inspiration from the photographer Judy Dater's series, Aguilar's curled-up posture may also reflect the ongoing difficulty of movement and the heaviness of sadness felt in the body during depression, as well as, a mode of blending in with or doubling-up as the rocks and thereby destabilizing the anthropic from the technique of self-portraiture.¹²

By becoming a doubling-body with the rocks and trees in the landscape, the demarcation between the subject of action and the object acted upon is smudged. The shadows of the rocks, trees' limbs, and Aguilar's body appear to be indistinguishable from one another. The camera attends to the shadows of both human and nonhuman in the same way. The genre of self-portraiture already destabilizes the subject position of the photographer who at once appears as the subject and object of photography. While posing in front of the camera, Roland Barthes feels his subjecthood slipping into objecthood, calcified and entombed (13). As Gabriella Giannachi also notes in *Technologies of Self Portraiture*, this "doubling of the self as a subject and an object implies that the object [becomes] a *sine qua non* for the subject to recognize itself as such" (3). By posing in the nude, Aguilar becomes an object in the dual sense of the word—acted upon by the camera's calcifying shutter, while simultaneously possessed and scrutinized by the spectatorial gaze. However, this does not mean that she loses her subjecthood. Via self-portraiture, she doubles as both the subject of action and the object that is acted upon. She is both subject-becoming-object and object-becoming-subject, thus challenging the presumably neat distinction between the two. Aguilar embeds herself within the landscape by placing her body within the realm of those that have often been considered as objects in our anthropocene world—rocks, trees, sand, and grass. Moreover, she does so while in a state of depression, which, as Mel Y. Chen has demonstrated, is often associated with states of inertness, passivity, heaviness, and immobility, features that depression shares with other nonhuman, insensate elements in the animacy hierarchy (27). As Aguilar, in her depressed state, doubles with the rocks and trees, their (Aguilar's and the rocks' and trees') normatively lessened mobility-oriented agentic capacities enter the "calculus of animacy" (Chen 2). Within the schema of the photographs, the agentic irrupts with insistence via the transformation of object-becoming-subject; Aguilar, the trees, and the rocks pose in front of the camera through, if not the anthropocentric, neurotypically-inflected concept of agency (the capacity to act), then with what Manning calls agencement. The problem with agency, as she argues, is that "it makes the subject the subject of the action" (Manning 16). Drawing from Henri Bergson's and William James's theorizations on the act to develop the concept of agencement, Manning decenters the human subject from the activity of the act by foregrounding the nonvolitional in the act, rather than the event's decision to

¹¹ I would like to acknowledge the anonymous reviewers who brought this to my attention.

¹² Christopher Velasco referred me to Judy Dater's work from which Aguilar drew inspiration for her *Nature Self-Portrait #12*.

actualize (21). In this context, the mere existence of the rocks' rough texturing, shape, and form, the flailing limbs of the leafless trees, the way the sun hits them to form indiscriminate shadows upon the dry land, the wind that picks up at that particular moment to sway the trees' limbs or move the sand, all constitute the nonvolitional in the event's decision to act at that particular moment (the agencement), which is then followed by the camera's shutter—capturing the experience. Aguilar's photographic frames, thus, record the instants of becoming-subject and becoming-object, the indeterminate moments prior to the permanence of the subject-object divide in neurotypically-oriented perception's action of parsing via backgrounding the nonhuman agents of an event's making.

Textured Worlding: Neurodivergent Perception through Environmental Awareness

The blurring of the subject-object divide within the photographic space is as much haptic-tactile as it is visual.¹³ The sensation of touch is precisely that through which, I, the neurodivergent spectator, enter the frame of Aguilar's self-portraits. An overwhelming 'aroundness'—here, my feeling of being inside the folds of various textures—via the sensation of touch is a particular mode of neurodivergent functioning that dwells within sensation rather than form. The action of deciphering and differentiating texture from form—the roughness of the rock's skin, the graininess of the sand, the smoothness of Aguilar's back, the scrappiness of the tree barks – occurs much later and slower. The textures of the two photographs I engage with, continuous with the New Mexico landscape, merge within the mental frame of my viewing-feeling bodymind. For me, their distinction as two separate photographs does not materialize at the beginning, and instead, they appear as instances from the same event of Aguilar's movement within the desert landscape. The separateness of the two photographs only emerges at a later stage when the overfull sensation of the textures is acclimatized to my bodymind. This differential experience of engaging with photographs is also neurodivergent. Its mode of registering is sensation and not form or content. Sensation, in this context, does not discriminate between the human and nonhuman. Such mode of indiscriminate perceptual action is often termed as a deficiency in differentiation. It is pathologized as mindblindness, which leads to the empathy-deficit model of indifference in autistics and other neurodivergents. However,

[t]o experience the texture of the world “without discrimination” is not indifference. Texture is patterned, full of contrast and movement, gradients and transitions. It is complex and differentiated. To attend to everything “the same way” is not an inattention to life. It is to pay equal attention to the full range of life's texturing complexity, with an entranced and unhierarchized commitment to the way in which the organic and the inorganic, color, sound, smell, and rhythm, perception and

¹³ Though hapticity and tactility both imply forms of touch-based sensations, the former also includes kinesthetic sensations of immersive bodily movement whereas the latter is more textural and felt on the skin's surface.

emotion, intensely interweave into the “aroundness” of a textured world, alive with difference. (Manning and Masumi 04)

To attend to everything “in the same way,” indiscriminately, is not mindblindness. The collapsing of the subject-object divide requires a work of slow perception wherein that which is normally at the periphery of neurotypical spectatorial gaze takes over and fills out the frame. In Aguilar’s photoportraits, the rocks, trees, and landscape do not remain backgrounded, even for Aguilar. She compels the spectator, here, me, to engage with the texture of the rocks. The haptic-tactile component of life, via the grain of the photographs that is accentuated by the black-and-white monochrome, takes up a predominant space within the frame. In a way, the frame itself dissolves as the haptic-tactile vibrates throughout the photographic space. However, the photographs are not themselves grainy and pixelated. Rather, it is the heavily textured worlding of Aguilar’s that constitutes the grain and brings in the haptic-tactile. To then focus on the texture of the rocks or the roughness of the tree barks in tandem with Aguilar’s immobile body is to foreground the textural aspects that often remain peripheral.

Within Aguilar’s photoportraits, I find a distinct companionship with the skin of the rocks. I feel them under my fingertips, or pressing against the back of my legs. I find a resonant memory of me sitting atop the rocks as I lose myself in the setting sun’s orange glaze. This orange glaze reminds me of the cakes I would bake in my makeshift stovetop oven; the vessel lined with salt that would grainily clump up during the baking process. The sunset and the smell of orange-glazed cake being baked upon a layer of salt arrive together for me, indistinguishable. In that moment, I forget the human, me, sitting and thinking about these memories and associations. I transform into a becoming-cake, becoming-rock, becoming-sunset, becoming-orange-glaze. My humanity becomes interchangeable with the objects-subjects of my associations. This is not a matter of resemblance or identification through which emotions like empathy often work. Saidiya Hartman, who discusses the ethics of emotional spectatorial responses to the suffering Black body, argues that such emotions are slippery because “in making the other’s suffering one’s own, this suffering is occluded by the other’s obliteration” (19). Thus, it is not a complete identification with the other or the insensate, which is stifling in its hostile takeover and/or possession of the other’s bodymind. Instead, such emotional responses in spectatorial practices often presume a vertical, and therefore, hierarchical relationship: “the sufferer is over there” while the spectator who can empathize or have compassion for the sufferer is over here (emphasis in original, Berlant, *Compassion* 4). These responses presume a neurotypical subject at the center of this action, one who can parse effectively the direction toward whom these feelings are to be directed. As Anna Stenning argues, it is often difficult for some neurodivergent spectators to parse the human from the nonhuman, resulting in a further difficulty in orienting emotions such as compassion and empathy solely towards the human sufferer (108). As Stenning further argues, this difficulty is often perceived as an

inability and such neurodivergent spectators are incorrectly labelled as being empathy-deficient (108). However, affect in its sensation-oriented functioning, does not differentiate between a human or nonhuman actor. Neither does it differentiate between subjects and objects. Therefore, to not feel the named emotions of empathy and compassion is neither a deficit nor unethical. When I say that my humanity becomes interchangeable with the elements within the photographic frames, I refer to the unsubtracted overfullness (and not a deficiency) of the affective sensations that the rocks, trees, shadows, ground, and Aguilar herself cause within me. This 'becoming-' is an attunement to the barest hum of sensation that connects me, unhierarchically, in a mode of horizontal instead of vertical companionate relationality with every element in Aguilar's *Nature Self-Portrait*. Therefore, 'becoming-' is a movement within the experience-in-formation of the rocks, trees, sunsets, and cake, via Aguilar's photographs, which attends to the potentiality of the events and enables co-inhabitation within the event-in-making. It is the movement of perception toward foregrounding the often-backgrounded milieu made up of those designated as objects and subjects that co-affect each other into their present realities. 'Becoming-' is attending to these textures in our ecologies. To tend to the texture of the world we live in is to orient ourselves to different kinds of worldings by activating differential perceptions. It is to foreground our emplaced and embodied self, which, in normative, ableist, neurotypical modes of perception-cognition, usually takes a backseat.

To attend to everything the same way, to come alive within the textures of the world, is an "*environmental mode of awareness*" based on the mutual action of reciprocity and relationality (emphasis in original, Manning and Massumi 6). It is not a human-centered attention to the environment but is rather an awareness of how the environment as an agentic milieu composes itself and is composed by others. Therefore, it is an awareness of the environment's co-compositional tendency. In Aguilar's photoportraits, it is the decision of the environmental components around her bodymind that leads to the event of photography. The environment and Aguilar co-compose the photographs through the presence of dynamism apparent in the way rocks are formed and obtain their rough texturing or how the trees have grown from saplings and eventually grow old and die. Any such biological movement of life or matter's formation cannot take place in isolation from the surrounding natural world. Additionally, Aguilar's photographs are not just co-compositional because of the engagement between Aguilar and the dynamism of the nonhuman elements, but my spectatorial encounter also co-composes these self-portraits as photographs of movement, texture, and affective overfullness mobilizing environmental awareness. This awareness occurs through what Manning and Massumi define in *Thought in the Act* (2014) via Alfred North Whitehead as entertainment, wherein the immediate field of experience is foregrounded, "prior to the distinction between active and passive, subject and object" (8). Aguilar's self-portraits capture this moment which is often too quickly parsed in neurotypically-oriented experiences of perception to be noticed or dwelled upon. By mobilizing a distinctive neurodivergent gaze that attends to

everything the same way, Aguilar destabilizes the subject-object divide in neurotypically-inflected spectatorial practices, capturing within her photographic frame that particular moment of entertainment where the rocks, trees, soil, and her body are fielded indiscriminately without any of the elements being backgrounded for the centering of the human subject. She mobilizes a neurodivergent perception that

dances attention, affirming the interconnectedness of modes of existence, foregrounding the relationality at the heart of perception, emphasizing how experience unfolds through the matrix of qualitative fields of overlap and emphasis already immediately moving toward expression in a dynamic field of becoming alive with co-composition. (Manning and Massumi 6-7)

Aguilar's photographs cannot materialize without the co-compositional forces of nature. The rocks, trees, and the New Mexico landscape compose the way Aguilar's body is placed in relation to them. Movement—as I read it in the slightly bent grass-blades and the somewhat leaning foliage of the trees in the backdrop of *Nature Self-Portrait #5* as well as in the grains of loose sand or dirt near the base of the rocks along with the skewedness of the finer (dry) tendrils of the dead tree in *Nature Self-Portrait #12*—is itself co-compositional in Aguilar's photographs. The stillness and the slight sway of the rocks and tree limbs, respectively, compose the mirroring movements of Aguilar's body. Moreover, the photographer's body, together with the camera, in turn compose the way the rocks and trees are perceived in relation to her body. This co-compositional force of an environmental mode of awareness makes immediate parsing of the photographic scene as a human versus nonhuman situation via subtraction of entertainment, as discussed above through Manning and Massumi, difficult in neurodivergent perception. I cannot get unstuck from the way the tree limbs must have swayed in the wind that day, or, how the wind would have picked up the loose sand of the parched land. This sand might have blown into Aguilar's eyes, mouth, and nostril. It might have covered the lens of the camera too. Non-subtraction of entertainment in experiencing the environment surrounding Aguilar demonstrates that the human and nonhuman "co-feature as tonal differences in a field modulating the whole of experience at all levels, composing an overall mode of existence that is in a different key than the neurotypical norm" (Manning and Massumi 8). Seeing the self-portraits in their dynamism compels me to ask to questions: where the rest of the mid-sneezing, crouching, dirt-smudged pictures went; and, can we ever be unaware of co-compositionality when engaging with such photographs that insist on our embeddedness within the world we live? This deep ecological relation between Aguilar's bodymind in the vicissitudes of depression and the elements of nature around her highlight what Cella calls the ecosomatic paradigm. It "assumes contiguity between the mind-body and its social and natural environments; thus [...] the work of negotiating a "habitable body" and "habitable world" go hand in hand" (253). Although Aguilar's journey into the landscapes of New Mexico serve to be therapeutic ("Life of Laura"), the sparseness of the landscape, its parched aesthetic, and its monochromatic rendering resonate with Aguilar's interiority, which is marked

heavily with depression, suicidation, and a dissociating self. The photographs double as a depressed selfhood wherein nature and culture coexist “in various forms of commixture within a middle realm...in which the partners are in a relation of ‘consanguinity’” (Edward Casey qtd. in Cella 242). This coexistence as partners and not as subjects or objects of photography marks the co-compositional nature of Aguilar’s self-portraits. Each of these partners flesh the other out into affective existence. A field of relational affective milieu is created where the nonhuman elements such as the tree and rocks stand affected by Aguilar’s presence and in turn also affect her into doubling up as the tree and rocks. My resonance with Aguilar as I myself dissolve within the folds of her landscape indicates a coming alive within the textures of the world. In neurodivergent perception, “without the surrounding environment, we cannot perceive or feel anything, meaning that the environment shapes us as we shape it. It is a dance of reciprocity” (Rosqvist, Nygren, and O’Donoghue 30). In my own engagement with the photographs, my neurodivergence compels a dwelling on the parts rather than the whole that enables me to enter a field of relationality with the elements within the frame. In this way, the frame expands to include different kinds of potentiality of the perceptible reality in front of me. Chen demonstrates that those who are physically and/or mentally disabled are often ranked lower in the animacy hierarchy of linguistic ordering, nearer to nonhuman animals and insensate objects, and are therefore not perceived as autonomous human subjects (27). To then engage with Aguilar’s self-portraits in a manner that expands this field of perceptible reality so as to attend to everything within the photographic frame indiscriminately is to challenge the normative, ableist positions of anthropocentrism and, instead, foreground the enactivism of our being. Alan Jurgens argues that enactivism is crucial for understanding neurodiversity since our “embodiment and embeddedness [in nature] constitute the individual’s cognition and experiences in the world” (74). Neurodiversity can never be divorced from the question of ecology. In fact, the term neurodiversity—borrowed from ‘biodiversity’—takes its model of equality from the ecological world which is “itself an argument for respecting differing abilities and the uniqueness of all living beings” (Nocella II, 217). Therefore, such deep entanglement of the neurodiverse population—our divergent ways of perception, cognition, and structuration—with the ecological already situates any study of neurodivergence within the ecosomatic paradigm.

Fleshing Out Neurodivergent Gaze Co-compositionally: Moving toward the End

By “considering the impaired body in relation to its environmental situatedness” (Cella 277), we foreground the co-compositionality of Aguilar’s self-portraits and our spectatorial response to these photographs. Phenomenologically, gaze does not function in a vacuum, neither is it solely the property of the human seer. In *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968/1964), Maurice Merleau-Ponty posits that vision is enfleshed and therefore haptic-tactile. It is coterminous with what he calls the “universal flesh” that is based on reciprocal action but which “belongs neither to the

body qua fact nor the world qua fact" (139). Emerging from the world in which the seer is embedded and emplaced and to which they are connected by the universal flesh that surrounds everything, the seer only later differentiates himself as the 'eye'/'I' that sees. This flesh is the mediation between the sensory and the visible, the screen upon which reciprocity occurs and upon which the world and the one belonging in the world co-affect each other into existence and form. According to Merleau-Ponty, gaze cannot exist without the tangible and sensory as basic pre-existing structures; what is seen, can be felt, touched, and experienced as texture, sensation, kinesthetic rearrangements, and so on (134). The "seer and the visible reciprocate one another [into tangible beings] and we no longer know which sees and which is seen" (Merleau-Ponty 139). Hence, co-compositionality emerges as the gaze's essential structure. It is based on reciprocal relationality with the ecological system that is coterminous and continuous with the bodymind.

If any gaze is reciprocal, multidirectional, and ecosomatic in its approach, then, given that neurodiversity signifies a "perceived variation in the cognitive, affective, and sensory functioning from the predominant neurotype" (Rosqvist, Stenning and Chown 1), a neurodivergent gaze also includes these latter facets in various degrees of manifestation. Resonating with Camp's theory of a Black gaze, a neurodivergent gaze "shifts the optics of 'looking at' to a politics of looking with, through, and alongside another" ("Prelude" par. 23). By shifting the optics of looking, Camp foregrounds the bonds of relationality between the spectators and Black sociality. A Black gaze therefore requires exertion to remain in close proximity to the photographed. In this article, a neurodivergent gaze likewise dwells in an overclose proximity within the bonds of relationality and companionship with forms of life and sociality that exceed the brackets of neurotypically-oriented, able-bodyminded anthropocentrism. Quite tellingly, when Amelia Jones establishes an alternate way of engaging with Aguilar's *Nature Self-Portrait*, she argues for embodied spectatorship "that involves deliciously relinquishing our power as viewing subjects and reveling in our own otherness" (952). Is this otherness not another name for the potentiality of neurodiversity, then? When Jones draws a relation between her nervous, anxious body and Aguilar's depression in her self-portraits, is she also not forming a neurodivergent, or at least, neurodivergently-allied sociality that exceeds the normativity that structures human subjectivity (Jones 968)?

In this essay, a neurodivergent gaze builds structures of close proximity with the human and nonhuman by residing inside the undifferentiated element of the universal flesh. Therefore, in reciprocity and co-compositionality, Aguilar and I are also the rocks as we are the bodies. We are also the shadows as we are the light. A neurodivergent gaze mobilizes a distinctly neurodivergent perception that is hyperrelational in its slowness, affective-textural in functioning, and exists in the moment of entertainment (that is, before a subject and object get differentiated as such). In its speculative mode of operation, a neurodivergent gaze co-creates the existence of multiple branches of an event-in-making. It visualizes not just the photograph's captured event, but also the "what-could-have-been" that led to the

particular photographic event. Therefore, in its proliferation of “what-could-have-been,” it is capacious in function.

In response to Aguilar's self-portraits, I took a photograph as well (Fig. 1). This photograph is intensely co-compositional and the self within it is dispersed as simultaneously everything and nothing.



Figure 1. Author produced. *Untitled Self-Portrait*, 2025

I took the photograph when I visited the Himalayan mountain ranges, driven out of Delhi by the pollution shrouding the city, which descended upon us in an almost solidified smog, unmoving and still. The pollution hung heavily in front of our eyes and visibility was almost zero. I could not breathe. The inhabitability of the city at that time led me to flee its borders and run to Uttarakhand, where I could sit with the Himalayas. I was also quite stressed. I had to start writing this paper, and Delhi would not allow me to. The air was not just stifling my lungs but also my brain and heart. Words could not flow. How could they when I could not even see the sun because of the smog? The trip to the Himalayas was a last attempt to write about Aguilar's *Nature Self-Portrait*, but I was unable to write there either. Apparently, my words could only be wrenched from me in Delhi when the smog would clear up and the pollution levels would drop. Nevertheless, my trip resulted in something else altogether. As I sat there on the banks of the river (I had never seen a river so blue before in my life), I felt a deep sense of relationality with Aguilar's photoportraits. I sat there for hours, lost in thought, and the only way I could express how I felt was by clicking photographs. I was weighed down with an ancient sadness, as if the world had already come to an end and I was sitting in the remaining few places where the air, river, and mountains still existed freely, the few remaining places where maybe I could still be free to draw a breath. And, as I sat there, I sensed how quickly these too would vanish. The river was already being used for kayaking. Adventure sports predominated the space. The parts of the river that could be tamed were done so in order to promote these sports

for economic gains. The mountains were already capitalized to provide the so-called mountain experience to tired urban travelers like me. The rocks had warnings painted on them: do not cross; danger. Yet, even amongst these spaces of anthropocene interference, there were moments of pure relationality and becoming. I observed how my and my partner's disembodied shadows mixed with that of a cow's and the rocks on which we sat. We were an interplay of shadows, co-mingling and merging at the base, or getting differentiated after we emerged from the same base of shadowy rocks and textured sand. The shadows became the universal flesh that connected us to each other and to the nonhuman entities that embraced us.¹⁴ Indistinguishable. I returned from the trip being co-composed into life anew by the ecology around me.

This entire article is an exercise in co-composition: Aguilar's co-composed self-portraits also co-compose the photograph I have taken in response. This is the operative function of a neurodivergent gaze at work. The power dynamic embedded within normative spectatorial practices is undone in neurodivergent gazing practices precisely because of the deep relationality that is formed between, herein, Aguilar's self-portraits and my viewing-feeling bodymind. I become undone and then put together by every element in Aguilar's photographs. In turn, I co-compose a photograph and this article, which are formed in consanguinity with Aguilar (across time and space). The operative force of this neurodivergent gaze is criptestemological. It functions to produce modes of knowledge—epistemes—that can only originate from crippled or disabled spaces. By mobilizing the disarticulation of the affective milieu, this neurodivergent gaze operates on the feltness of an experience-in-making. Both depression and dissociation register as a thickness and sluggishness of intense feelings coagulating in space, much like “walking in molasses,” as linguistic capacities flounder upon a calcified field (Manning 179). In Aguilar's self-portraits, a disarticulated neurodivergent gaze emerges as a tool for framing this feeling of “walking in molasses.” This gaze is precisely what makes known the agencement of the nonhuman rocks, trees, and the New Mexico landscape in co-composing the image of sensed depression. Of the order of the affective and not language, the neurodivergent gaze is a way of making visible that which often remains backgrounded in day-to-day experiences of the world's texturing pattern. Its temporality is that of a slow perception wherein the spectator's gaze cannot take in the totality of the image, and instead dwells within the image's fragments. In this article, a neurodivergent gaze emerges as a mode of imaginative, speculative, and creative engagement with the moment of photography where the event of taking the photograph is slowed down and the what-ifs emerge as the rabbit hole of relationality through which the spectator falls. Moreover, it is a way in which I, a neurodivergent spectator, engage and co-compose with Aguilar and the world in which I live. It is a gaze of anxiety, psychosis, depression, of rocks, trees, sand, and rivers. It is a gaze of

¹⁴ I thank the editor of this special issue for giving me this phrase. This article is also co-composed in so many ways by the feedback and suggestions made by my friends, supervisor, the three anonymous reviewers, the editors, and Christopher Velasco.

shadows that look back at me, opening and splitting me up. It is a distinctly pluriform, non-anthropomorphic gaze that displaces the neurotypical human from theories of spectatorship.

Submission received 24 February 2026 Revised version accepted 20 October 2026

Works Cited

- Aguilar, Laura. "Interview with Laura Aguilar." *Interview by Carolina Miranda*. [Los Angeles, California], 14 May 2018. Oral. Last accessed 4 June 2026.
- . "The Life of Laura." *Nature Self-Portrait/About*. Personal Web Site. Laura Aguilar Photography, Laura Aguilar Trust LLC, 2022. <https://www.lauraaguilarphotography.com/about>. Last accessed 13 June 2026.
- . *Nature Self-Portrait/Works*. Personal Web Site. Laura Aguilar Photography, Laura Aguilar Trust LLC, 1996, <https://www.lauraaguilarphotography.com/works>. Last accessed 10 July 2026.
- . "Nature Self-Portrait #5." *Nature Self-Portrait/Works*. Personal Web Site. Laura Aguilar Photography, Laura Aguilar Trust LLC, 1996, <https://www.lauraaguilarphotography.com/works>. Last accessed 14 June 2026.
- . "Nature Self-Portrait #12." *Nature Self-Portrait/Works*. Personal Web Site. Laura Aguilar Photography, Laura Aguilar Trust LLC, 1996, <https://www.lauraaguilarphotography.com/works>. Last accessed 14 June 2026.
- Asasumasu, Kassiane. "PSA from the Actual Coiner of 'Neurodivergent'." Tumblr. *Lost in My Mind TARDIS*, 2015. <https://brightlotusmoon.tumblr.com/post/655527684253892608/psa-from-the-actual-coiner-of-neurodivergent>. Accessed 3 June 2026.
- Azoulay, Ariella. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. 2008. 2nd ed, Zone Books, 2014.
- . "What Is a Photograph? What Is Photography?" *Philosophy of Photography*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2010, pp. 9–13, <https://doi.org/10.1386/pop.1.1.9/7>.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard, Paperback ed, Hill and Wang, 1981.
- Berger, James. *The Disarticulate: Language, Disability, and the Narratives of Modernity*. New York University Press, 2014.
- Berlant, Lauren G. "Introduction: Compassion (and Withholding)." *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, edited by Lauren G. Berlant, Routledge, 2004, pp. 15–28.
- . *On the Inconvenience of Other People*. Duke University Press, 2022.
- Buchanan, Jay. "The Object Selving of Laura Aguilar: Queer Chicana Opacity and the Archive Prosthetic." *Chiricú Journal: Latina/o Literatures, Arts, and Cultures*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2022, pp. 39–58, <https://doi.org/10.2979/chiricu.6.2.04>.
- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Verso, 2009.
- Campt, Tina M. *A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See*. MIT Press, 2021.

- Cella, Matthew J. C. "The Ecosomatic Paradigm in Literature: Merging Disability Studies and Ecocriticism." *Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities: Toward an Eco-Crip Theory*, edited by Sarah Jaquette Ray and Jay Sibara, University of Nebraska Press, 2017, pp. 248-293.
- Chapman, Robert. "Neurodiversity and the Social Ecology of Mental Functions". *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 16, no. 6, 2021, pp. 1360-72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620959833>.
- Chen, Mel Y. *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Duke University Press, 2012.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Duke University Press, 2012.
- Davis, Lennard J. "Depression and Disability." *The End of Normal: Identity in a Biocultural Era*, University of Michigan Press, 2013, pp. 43-67.
- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*. 5th ed, American Psychiatric Association, 2013.
- Duron, Maximiliano. "Laura Aguilar's Lasting Legacy: How the World Caught Up to the Pioneering Photographer." *ARTnews*, 24 Apr. 2020. <https://www.artnews.com/feature/laura-aguilar-who-is-she-1202684828/>. Accessed 4 June 2026.
- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. *Staring: How We Look*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Giannachi, Gabriella, editor. *Technologies of the Self-Portrait: Identity, Presence and the Construction of the Subject(s) in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Art*. Routledge, 2023.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford University Press, 1997.
- hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. South End Press, 1992.
- Jackson-Perry, David, et al. "Sensory Strangers: Travels in Normate Sensory Worlds". *Neurodiversity Studies: A New Critical Paradigm*, edited by Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al., Taylor and Francis, 2020, pp. 125-40.
- Jones, Amelia. *Body Art/Performing the Subject*. University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- . "'The 'Eternal Return': Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment". *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2002, pp. 947-78, <https://doi.org/10.1086/339641>.
- Jurgens, Alan. "Neurodiversity in a Neurotypical World: An Enactive Framework for Investigating Autism and Social Institutions." *Neurodiversity Studies: A New Critical Paradigm*, edited by Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al., Routledge, 2020, pp. 73-88.
- Leimer, Ann Marie. "Creating a Space and a (Visual) Language in the Work of Laura Aguilar." *On the Nude*, edited by Nicholas Chare and Ersy Contogouris, Routledge, 2021, pp. 143-54.
- Luciano, Dana, and Mel Y. Chen. "Has the Queer Ever Been Human?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 21, numbers 2-3, 2015, pp. 183-207, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2843215>.
- Manning, Erin. *The Minor Gesture*. Duke University Press, 2016.

- , and Brian Massumi. *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience*. University of Minnesota Press, 2014.
- Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Duke University Press, 2002.
- McRuer, Robert, and Meri Lisa Johnson. "Proliferating Cripistemologies: A Virtual Roundtable." *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* [George Washington University], vol. 8, no. 2, 2014, pp. 149–69.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*. Edited by Claude Lefort, Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Northwestern University Press, 1968. Originally published by Editions Gallimard, 1964.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, Sept. 1975, pp. 6–18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6>.
- Nocella II, Anthony J. "Defining Eco-Ability: Social Justice and the Intersectionality of Disability, Nonhuman Animals, and Ecology." *Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities: Toward an Eco-Crip Theory*, edited by Sarah Jaquette Ray and Jay Sibara, University of Nebraska Press, 2017, pp. 210–247.
- Rosqvist, Hanna Bertilsdotter, Anna Nygren, et al. "Earthlove: Theorising Neurodivergent Reader Love of *A Room Called Earth*." *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture*, vol. 70, no. 1, 2023, pp. 25–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20512856.2023.2277052>.
- Rosqvist, Hanna Bertilsdotter, Anna Stenning, et al. "Introduction." *Neurodiversity Studies: A New Critical Paradigm*, Routledge, 2020, pp. 1–12.
- Shah, Tanishka. "How the Supreme Court's New Definition of the Aravalli Redraws the Landscape of India's Oldest Hill Range." *Environment* [New Delhi], 8 Dec. 2025, <https://theleaflet.in/environment/how-the-supreme-courts-new-definition-of-the-aravalli-redraws-the-landscape-of-indias-oldest-hill-range>. Last accessed 6 Jan. 2026.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. Rosetta Books, 2005. Originally published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973.
- . *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Picador, 2003. Epub
- Stenning, Anna. "Understanding Empathy Through a Study of Autistic Life Writing: On the Importance of Neurodiverse Morality". *Neurodiversity Studies: A New Critical Paradigm*, edited by Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al., Taylor and Francis, 2020, pp. 108–24.
- Walker, Nick. *Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities*. Autonomous Press, 2021.