

**Divergent Landscapes: Authenticity, Connection, and Introspected Wilderness in  
Transformative Praxis**

Matthew P. Larson

Transpersonal Wilderness Therapy, Naropa University

May ??, 2025

**Author Note**

This paper represents the author's reflections on neuroqueer theory and neurodivergent praxis within healing contexts, contemplative community, academia, corporate politics, and society at large. Slides for presentation of this material are publicly available:

<https://presentation-archive.herokuapp.com/divergent-landscapes.html>

Immediate access on a personal device may be found by scanning the QR Code for Access to Divergent Landscapes (Appendix A).

### **Divergent Landscapes: Authenticity, Connection, and Introspected Wilderness in Transformative Praxis**

Neurodiversity is a word I learned on my own, after decades of struggle in search of a place where I fit expectations and found my presence supported without encountering calls to give up authenticity or succumb to normalization. I desperately hoped to locate a thoroughly inaccessible context, one where I might spend more of my time and energy focused on forward thinking work than on the work of surviving oppressive forces (Bottema-Beutel et al., 2020; Pearson & Rose, 2021; Chapman, 2023). I was rapidly backsliding into *autistic burnout* before finding anyone who confirmed that I matched highly pathologized diagnostic criteria (Raymaker et al., 2020). Such was the typically unacknowledged cost of meeting increasingly unreasonable demands on my labor and skill without even a hint of accommodation for the multiply disabled and multiply marginalized ways that many autistic people, or indeed many disadvantaged intersecting identities, experience the world (Stevenson & Mowad, 2019).

At that time, *neurodiversity* had already come to represent a global movement spanning roughly a decade of coordinated disability rights activism based on more than three decades of largely digital community building by autistic adults. The word neurodiversity had also been widely co-opted into a performative *neurodiversity-lite* framework by those seeking to cash in through being one of the first in their so-called communities of care to virtue signal their way through the very same enduring and oppressive practices (Chapman, 2023). Only the latest branding was adopted, to proudly declare their supposed focus on inclusivity and social justice. Those who would errantly come to refer to a given client as “a neurodiverse person” continued to consistently overlook, and frequently speak over, the needs painstakingly described by a

burgeoning global community seeking neurodivergent, and therefore collective, liberation. As Walker boldly wrote in a chapter entitled, Guiding Principles for a Course on Autism:

*The present state of autism related discourse, theory, and praxis in the academic and professional spheres is deplorable. The discourse and theory reflect a level of ignorance and bigotry that would be regarded as scandalous in most academic circles today if it involved any other historically oppressed group.* (Walker, 2021, pp. 144-156)

While autistic community was the context for the early evolution of neurodiversity theory, we would be remiss in assuming concepts used in advocacy and education have been static in their definition or singular in their use. The neurodiversity movement grew from being specifically targeted to autistic or cognitively disabled people to include ADHD and dyspraxia, among many other pathologized ways of being. The term *neurodivergent* wasn't created until the early 2000s, contemporary to more inclusive notions integrating more broadly within neurodiversity discourse. Kassiane Asasumasu defined it as including any neurological functioning that is considered "divergent from typical" (sherlocksflataffect, 2015).

Let's continue with an exploration of Authenticity, Connection, Wilderness, and Transformation before addressing *Divergent Landscapes* as a theoretical foundation for possible futures, redefining the ways we interact with ableism, difference, and disability. This work is intended to serve varied purposes; educating about normality and neurodivergence as created and driven by the needs of capital, reclaiming neurodiversity from reductionist neurodiversity-lite campaigns, and providing options for how one might move toward collective liberation through individual integration of theory surrounding *Neurodivergent Marxism* (Chapman, 2023, p. 161). Modern systems of oppression did not arise without cause, nor are they rightfully based on any notions of individual impairment when compared to normative samples of a given population.

**Authenticity**

Systems of power do not generally allow for divergence from an assumed normative and supposedly objective binary. We either show ourselves as well suited to an unrealizable ideal, or we diverge and attract the ire of standard bearers for the *Laziness Lie* (Price, 2021, pp. 15-22). Authentic struggle in hostile environments gets labeled as unworthy effort and pushed aside. If one cannot leverage control over capital, and finds themselves unable to sustain the effort required in direct service to capital, they become part of a surplus class, neither supported nor fully excluded (Marx, 1990; Federici, 2004; Adler-Bolton & Vierkant, 2022). However, one might see that “rather than the surplus being a drain on workers, as the dominant ideology suggests, the two are intimately connected, with members of each routinely having some small part in, or crossing over to, the other” (Chapman, 2023, p. 155). This surplus directly feeds capitalist interests, supplying labor to meet surging market demand, or accepting newly disabled members as boundaries for applied othering shift to meet corporate demand.

Any honest and mature evaluation, accessed from a place of right relationship, holds consideration of much more than exclusive and simplistic binaries like light and shadow, ability and ableism, impairment and disability, wisdom through experience and wreckage rooted in unchecked assumption. In suspending disbelief and holding individuals as experts of their own experience, support is provided to surplus class members in defining their own boundaries while radically accepting unfamiliar ways of being. Right use of power granted by inherited systems and projected roles would assign dysfunction to relational or group fields, instead of singling out those who are already waging war against oppressive forces and constant demand for compliance with normalization, recognizing the responsibility to accommodate which accompanies privilege.

As anyone attuned to current sociopolitical trends might report, capital is both the basis for and continued goal of the pathology paradigm we've been inhabiting. Colonialism, imperialism, and white supremacy, all serve the contemporary notion of a *normal* person (Chapman, 2023, pp. ix-x). Barring overt expressions of prejudice, it would be pointless to attempt any assignment of personal blame for this untenable situation. As Marx tells us, humans "make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted by the past" (Marx & Padover, 1972). And yet, even while avoiding blame, one may still hold valid claims of injustice and seek to re-balance accounts.

The richest 1 percent have accumulated approximately 20 times the wealth of the poorest 50 percent since 1995 (Ahmed et al., 2022). The 2007 mental illness disability rate for the United States included 1 in every 76 people, double the rate in 1987, six times the rate in 1965 (Whitaker, 2010). Stress accounted for 37 percent of all work-related absence, and 45 percent of all working days lost to ill-health, during 2015 and 2016 (Ferguson, 2017). In populations diagnosed with serious psychiatric disorders, 40 percent are held in police custody during their lifetimes. In recent years, those diagnosed, especially Black people, are among the most likely to be arrested, or harassed by the police, or to die in police custody (Parsons, 2018). Between 1992 and 2013 the medication of ADHD in children under 16 increased between three- and four-fold (Beau-Lejdstrom et al., 2016). Autism diagnosis in the UK increased nationwide by 787% from 1998 to 2018 (Russell et al., 2021). Australian researchers found 37% of autistic people, spanning ages from childhood to old age, with co-occurring depression diagnosis. This was linked directly to reduced quality of life, loneliness, and suicide risk (Richdale et al., 2023).

Denmark is often cited among the happiest countries in the world, and autistic people there were still found to be 3 times more likely to die by suicide than members of the general population (Kölves et al., 2021).

“The Laziness Lie has set us up to expect more productivity out of ourselves than is really feasible or sustainable. As a result, many of us live continuously on the edge of breaking down” (Price, 2021). Similar stigma falls on anyone affected by impairment, trauma, addiction, or neurodivergence, inspiring struggle frequently compounded by racial bias. This has resulted in many cross-cultural imbalances targeted by neurodivergent activists while working toward collective liberation from a thoroughly harmful paradigm:

- racism and colonialism were primary to the emergence of capitalism as a global system
  - feminists describe continuous extraction of unpaid emotional and reproductive work
  - disability and related discrimination is both created, and made worse, by capitalism
  - hoarding capital via environmental destruction will ruin our planet, ending all human life
- (Robinson, 2000; Hochschild, 2012; Oliver, 1990; Kovel, 2002)

Realizing the potential folly of bringing statistics into contemplation of post-normal futures, consider how recent work by Umagami emphasizes perceived differences between actual autistic experience and observational assumptions about those experiences (2023). The cultural humility fundamental to embracing a clinical social justice lens must acknowledge the no-win situation autistic adults consistently encounter in the lonely divide separating inclusive practices from autistic people opting out of social interaction owing to sensory constraints being perceived as unwillingness to engage in prosocial activity. Self-care invoked by an autistic person, like exiting a poorly accommodating context, often ends up being interpreted as lacking desire to maintain access to a given social connection, despite autistic reports to the contrary.

*When survival depends on accommodated needs, and little else, there is not much room for individual effort paying dividends in resolving related issues. Disabled people, and particularly autistic people, need freedom from the work of surviving before their efforts are evaluated on any par with ableist, neurotypically conforming, notions of normative behavior.*

(Larson, 2023b)

### **Connection**

Our plant, animal, and fungi friends remain in authentic and deep relationships with, and within, the contexts that surround them. Humans are also quite inseparable from these networks, entirely dependent upon the resources provided for our survival, despite the evident hubris expressed through efforts to control processes beyond the limits of our influence. The innate human tendency for biophilia (the effortless adoration of and enduring connection to natural objects, beings, elements, and processes) demands a sea-change from a too-common perspective of natural separation, categorization, and domination. Our human-nature connections form the basis of sustainable and scalable ecologies of practice (Flaherty, Heider, & Larson, 2023). We have only to revisit those lessons with humility to unlock the grandeur of equitable experience.

Placing emphasis on the embodied nature of cognition as well as the socially rooted maintenance of disability, neurodiversity theory has helped connect mental health politics with the broader politics of disablement (Graby, 2015). It was only following Adolphe Quetelet's influence, contemporaneous to the Industrial Revolution in England, that applying statistical methods to the brain and mind was used to reify emerging hierarchical distinctions in ability, social class, gender, and race (Jarrett, 2020; Quetelet, 1835). "In this context, alongside begging, sex work, petty crime, and other things deemed outrageous to bourgeois morality, madness came to be seen as a problem to be solved by locking people up" (Chapman, 2023, p. 42). Segregation

of able poor into workhouses, criminals into prisons, and mad into asylums, flourished during the nineteenth century.

Francis Galton, quite taken with phrenology, is notable for combining Charles Darwin's theory with Quetelet's statistical methods, allowing for analysis of intelligence over different generations (Chapman, 2023, p. 48). His goal was to “range men according to their natural abilities, putting them into classes separated by equal degrees of merit” (Galton, 2018). Women were not considered, assumed by Galton as unlikely to represent genius. Even so, he was able to formalize and provide the appearance of scientific legitimacy to practices of normalization. Such practices expanded over the decades that followed, eventually used to justify atrocities inherent to ethnic cleansing and genocide (Cryle & Stephens, 2018).

German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin, like Galton, utilized the concept of the normal mind to ground a broader political project of biological and cultural control. He wrote that “an ever-widening stream of inferior stock is mixing itself with our offspring, contributing to the deterioration of the race” (Chapman, 2023, p. 55; Kraepelin, 1922). Similar perspectives were shared by Eugen Bleuler and openly supported by Winston Churchill (Bleuler, 2018; Sloarch, 2016). Eugenic ideology created in England was expanded in the United States, though in Germany’s flirtation with national socialism it was elevated to an industrial scale.

*As the full extent of the horrors of the Holocaust increasingly came to light, support for authoritarian eugenic policies sharply declined in liberal societies. At the same time, Kraepelian biological psychiatry also came to be seen as tainted through its association with Nazi eugenics. Because of this, Freudian psychoanalysis and behaviorism – the main alternatives to biological psychiatry available at the time -- became dominant in US and European psychiatry in the 1950s.*

(Chapman, 2023, p. 63)



**Wilderness**

What does any of this have to do with *wilderness*? This word is in the title of the degree program for which this work was undertaken, and even repeated in the title for this presentation. Wilderness is a concept evocative of grand expanses of undeveloped terrain, the natural world, or sometimes barren wastelands. Using it to describe anything is often meant as application of a label meaning the opposite of civilized or cosmopolitan. In modern times, we have come to separate our concept of self from nature in service of capital (Chapman, 2023). Wild lands had to be tamed, or even destroyed and recreated, in order to vanquish the enemies of eminent domain; one does not enter into relationship with a commodity, after all.

Some refer to erratic or unexpected behavior as wild, others use this word for describing anything outside of human influence. I tend to think about and label unexplored interiors of my own bodymind as wilderness, locations entirely undiscovered unless I provide an introspected map of the terrain. Some say protest is an embrace of wild behavior. I hold it to frequently be the only tool left for populations abused and abandoned in the violence of the clinical gaze, the violence of enforcing *normality*. When one's very identity is commonly held as an object of disgust, there is remarkably little choice left to those seeking to show up in community with an authentic presence beyond the counter-social behavior of demanding change (Yergeau, 2018). What choice may remain is built upon assimilation, not options for freedom of expression, much less the agency in choice beyond easily marketable false binaries.

To date, commodification of the natural has only paid out in the currency of alienation (Chapman, 2023). As complexity and complications mount, we move away from our natural connections to place and time, and toward the demands of business leaders. Capitalist pursuits

require that humans comprising the surplus class, and indeed everyone involved to some extent, embrace unnatural relationships and processes. Many people are forced into inauthentic ways of being, simply surviving in perpetual service of comfort and efficiency as defined exclusively by those benefiting most from capitalist aims. It is doubtful, however, whether these non-landscape aspects of wilderness were considered at any depth by educators or administrators while building the Naropa program of study this cohort has nearly completed; preparation for an unregulated profession beset by a legacy of alleged kidnapping, coercion, shaming, manipulation, and neglect used to support the commodification of wilderness (Kaye, n.d.).

Psychoanalytic judgments have long been known to lack objectivity in comparison to judgment about normality in bodily medicine (Adams, 1989). Many of our textbooks still thoughtlessly reinforce outdated theories and oppressive interventions. Citations of divergent experience repeatedly build an autistic character into case studies as the negatively framed example, favoring statistically timed defaults and the perception of prosocial appearances over wellbeing. To be identified as wild in this way is to be considered broken and breakable, less than human, developmentally flawed or willfully turning away from social structures and environments assumed to be helpful. This wildness, this “misbehavior,” we are told, must be normalized, corrected, trained away, and eventually erased from humanity, at great emotional and financial costs to the “normal” people who find themselves expected to provide services or accommodations for people who have been disabled through alienation and disregard.

Our discourse instead, centers on debates like the usage of terms like *wilderness* vs. *nature-based* or *ecologically centered* therapeutic practice. Is it Wilderness Therapy, Nature-based Therapy, or Ecotherapy that we might each choose to practice after graduation...? How do

we integrate transpersonal philosophy? Is it enough to be culturally competent, or should we deepen our support by expressing a cultural humility which allows for lacking knowledge?

Left without consideration are many more important questions.... Are we holding social justice and inclusive practices above key performance indicators and profit generation models? Are the same people expected to endure policies being debated the ones leading conversations about how such policies affect their lived experience? How are we ensuring marginalized voices are primarily featured in experiential learning, that personally lived experience is granted similar levels of esteem as clinical research or academic theory? How do we invite those in privileged social locations into right relationship, when such participation is so often considered an unreasonable expense or distraction from personal gain (as opposed to their responsibility within equitable spaces)? How do we broaden our focus to consider ecologies, systems of influence and dependence, while simultaneously honoring unique or novel roles, rights, and responsibilities for each context? How are we re-framing individual pathology as societal responsibility?

Humans, in our present historical moment, have generally accepted service of false binaries, manufactured scenarios which lend an appearance of agency through offers of simple choice points. This veneer of simplicity effectively eliminates consideration of anything wild, anything inefficient or expensive, detracting from compounding capital gains. The majority of people in the United States, according to a number of studies, identify with above-average intelligence (Heck, Simons, & Chabri, 2018). Even more than suppression of wilderness or difference, people overwhelmingly revealed a desire to appear as better than normal; most indicated that they believed themselves to be embodying such a favorable state. An increasingly uninhabitable and constricting definition of normality has left individuals or private companies to

determine whether neurodivergent life should be allowed to reproduce in a world that has utterly failed to accommodate neurodivergence (McGuire, 2013).

*The main difference between contemporary approaches and Galton's is that, while Galton framed the social harmfulness of subnormal cognition more primarily at the societal level and thus a task for governmental intervention, contemporary approaches tend to frame the badness more primarily at the individual level and thus a matter of individual responsibility.*

(Chapman, 2023, p. 124)

### **Transformation**

Transformation begins, not with action, but with imagination; we humans tend to build what we see. So, unless we take enough time to contemplate various possible futures we will almost certainly continue to reify the same damaging theories that previously led to disability in praxis. Cal Montgomery has explained a disability justice perspective on bodily impairment quite powerfully, and succinctly, “Disability is injustice, not tragedy; unequal treatment, not inherent inequality” (Bascom et al., 2012, p. 76). This statement also applies, with equal gravity, to the many people disabled by societal rejection of cognitive or behavioral difference. Edward Bernays forcefully defended recommendations for adopting capitalist manufacturing of “normal” desires for consumers coupled with restricted norms for employment and work by governments in liberal democracies. In order to control the desires of their populations “the engineer of consent must create news. News is not an inanimate thing. It is the overt act that makes news, and news in turn shapes the attitudes and actions of people” (Bernays, 1947).

Continuous division of labor has deskilled workers with increasingly unfulfilling and alienating tasks, despite higher pay and access to commodities (Chapman, 2023, p. 89). With this ever-constricting set of expectations applied to neuronormativity, the further one resided in

proximity from normative compliance the more one came to be seen as a problem to be fixed, or an aberration to be eliminated. This paved the way for the spread of behaviorism. Consider the words of an architect of this manipulative and domineering approach to building better workers:

*Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select -- doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and the race of his ancestors.*

(Watson, 1924)

In a biomedical or mechanistic worldview, *normal* is implicitly privileged as a superior and desired state. As such, “the pathologization of neurominorities can be recognized as simply another form of systemic oppression which functions similarly to the oppression of other types of minority groups” (Walker, & Raymaker, 2020). Walker, in offering neuroqueer theory, builds on a concept the philosopher and historian Thomas Kuhn developed to make sense of how sciences developed historically. Kuhn described a paradigm as a set of assumptions and core beliefs that a given scientific community shares to ground their research for a given historical period (2012). It is the transition from a pathology paradigm to a post-normal paradigm which will support the diversity required by societal and ecological balance into our future. This exposes demand for improved social support for neurodivergence rather than continued calls for its elimination.

As it has evolved, neurodiversity theory has helped to provide more unified approaches to activism which focus on collective liberation. Centering disabled people as primary experts regarding their own experience sets up a bold challenge to the prior assumptions of authority in psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy, among many other clinical professions (Chapman, 2023, p. 140). Acknowledging, similar to the way the Disability Justice Movement in the United

States formed their position, that rights-based approaches tend to fall short of justice in varying and compounding impacts with the addition of each intersecting marginalization, neurodivergent activists are nonetheless demanding rights. In pursuit of this aim they neuroqueer the spaces they inhabit, embracing weird potentials by utilizing their neurodivergent presence, behavior, and customs as active and direct forms of resistance (Yergeau, 2018).

One key to right relationship with neurodivergent populations is the utilization of theory and praxis developed directly by neurodivergent professionals (Larson, 2023a; Larson, 2023e). Note the call for clinical humility and centering of marginalized perspectives in considerations specific to Neurodivergence-Informed Therapy:

- re-conceptualization of dysfunction as relational rather than individual (supplanting pathology with neurodivergent perspectives)
- importance of neurodivergence acceptance, disability community, pride, and culture to emancipation from neuro-normativity
- need for a relational epistemic humility regarding different experiences of neurodivergence and disablement

(Chapman & Botha, 2022)

The Socialist Patients Collective, active in 1970s West Germany, produced a manifesto entitled *Turn Illness into a Weapon for Agitation* in which they called for the use of illness as leverage in demanding resources for the fight against capitalist domination (Huber et al., 1993). Their stated aim was to break the associations between health, normality, and productivity (Chapman, 2023, p. 146). The Neurodivergent Marxism described by Chapman blends all of these considerations, individual and collective, present and historical, in a call to divest from destructive capitalist and eugenic pursuits. We are urged to hold all humans as complex and

natural beings with agency and value, evolving free from the maladaptive and frequently inhumane pursuit of homogeneity.

*The pathology paradigm is nothing more than institutionalized bigotry masquerading as science. [...] When we hear someone refer to autism as a 'disorder' or 'condition,' it should instantly set off the same sort of alarm bells in our minds as hearing someone refer to homosexuality as a 'disorder' or refer to a member of some specific ethnic group as 'inferior'.*

(Walker, 2021, pp. 129-131)

## **Conclusion**

A paradigm shift requires monumental effort and coordination. Neurodivergent activists are demanding no less from those in social roles granted more power and less stigma. In a capitalist economy that destructively pursues constriction of normative concepts, it is not merely thinking that needs to change. Our material conditions, the ways and means of our daily lives, must change before any of us truly access liberation from oppression (Chapman, 2023, p. 137).

One of the key areas of conflict specific to pursuit of neurodivergent liberation focuses on denying claims of validity in neurominority or disabled status. For example, many ask if it is even possible to claim social culture unique to autistic identity. This represents a pervasive and particularly sinister de-humanization and theft of agency, holders of power exclude anyone they view as avoiding work, or *malinger* (Chapman, 2023, p. 82). Others hold positions that rule out the possibility of autistic self-advocacy entirely, with autistic adults judged as not being autistic enough to know any better, or too autistic to be able to communicate their needs (Yergeau, 2018, pp. 28-31, 60-67). I have frequently encountered these vacillating yet simultaneously held positions, enduring being labeled and discarded as one willfully engaging in behavior described as *always too much and never enough*.

Such bigoted and uninformed takes tend to come from those aligned with *extractive abandonment* industries, the administration of surplus populations allowing for mining their oppressed status for profit while also extracting surplus value from the institutional workforce (Chapman, 2023, p. 150). The multi-billion dollar Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) industry, one such implementation, is widely known to cause profound harm, yet continues to grow simply owing to the inertia of its profit generation and propaganda pipeline. Not even the United States' own federally funded study was able to confirm a clear win for ABA, despite its continued marketing as the gold standard in care for anyone pathologized through diagnosis with the medicalized definition of Autism Spectrum Disorder (Stewart, 2019).

We have explored neurodiversity concepts relevant to post-normal futures in terms of Authenticity, Connection, Wilderness, and Transformation, so let us finally turn our attention to the work of assembling all of these parts into *Divergent Landscapes*. One's understanding of their relationship to personal interiors, as well as animism, biophilia, their place within nature, and social intersections will determine how well they may identify with this concept. As with any extant psychotherapeutic theory or praxis, interventions are not generally suitable for all populations. This is as much a function of the intention and design principles framing development of an instrument, and the clinician's social location, relationship to bias, and broaching skills, as it is a client's disposition, comfort with vulnerability, and ability to both identify and endure discomfort.

Systems theory explains how micro, mezzo, and macro scales reflect the same basic shapes and intents as we move between layers of abstraction and behavior to examine the ways each slice differs from, or supports, the others. In this vein, each of our individuated bodyminds



represents the same basic shapes and intents revealed at microscopic and universal scales. Each of our conversation groups simultaneously represents all of the internalized messages, and indeed the systems themselves, of the society from which group membership is selected. It is possible in this context to produce various impact outcomes through minimal change with intention or novel inputs; nearly identical porphyrin rings are used to build basic atomic structures found in every living thing produced on this planet (Larson, 2023d). “Increased cognitive diversity at the group level makes groups better at adapting to changing environments,” as evidenced by improved creativity in shared problem solving upon adding a single member diagnosed with ADHD (Chapman, 2021; Chapman, 2023, p. 151).

We must change the ways we relate to each other and within our local, regional, and global ecologies. Given Chapman’s framing of Neurodivergent Marxism, Ethan Watters’ description of widespread medical missionary work worldwide, and more specifically the establishment of psychotherapeutic intervention based pharmaceutical pipelines, his descriptions of Westerners descending on new markets align perfectly with the normalization of capitalist alienation: “Although undertaken as humanitarian outreach, these efforts often look more like massive attempts at indoctrination” (Watters, 2010).

We must honor calls to build, engage in, and teach collaborative healing practices, synergetic and self-directed care, working toward wellbeing in solidarity; commonly held inclusive practices celebrating diversity and flexibility through right relationship are deeply needed by modern humans (Adler-Bolton & Vierkant, 2022; Graby, 2015; UPIAS, 1975). These calls to action depend upon individual agents for change, spiritual practices, social networks, educational institutions, government agencies, and media corporations alike. Every voice is

needed to combat the leverage held by generations of normalization and consolidation of privilege; vested interests in modern power structures will not transition peacefully.

*A transitional politics that centres the surplus and, crucially, finds ways to empower the surplus as surplus, will need to take different forms to traditional union organising, which is based on the threat of withholding regular waged labour. [...] It may be that demand for Universal Basic Income gives those members of surplus who have never worked more economic power -- primarily the power to withhold as consumers but also to organise towards direct action -- regardless of whether they can withhold labour.*

(Chapman, 2023, p. 162)

## **Possible Futures**

We begin building *Divergent Landscapes* by imagining ourselves alone, safe, and comfortable within the biggest physical expanse we are able to conceptualize. Any forms already within this space are welcome. We may also start within a void and actualize our landscape as we create its map, we might explore what is present before contemplating making changes. Also within this imagining are any number of biologically and neurologically diverse representations of relationships from our waking lives. Anything we perceive as outside of ourselves may also have one or more representations within our internal landscapes.

Just as we may understand ourselves to be in relationship with everything we encounter, we may also model those relationships within. We could go so far as to experiment with various ways of relating in imaginative play before deciding on one approach to embody, or perhaps set up clones for practicing variations on a theme in rapid succession. Passive fascination with a given aspect of introspected wilderness may also yield generative effects. In these imagined wilderness areas it is perfectly reasonable for philosophical concepts to embody physical forms. Anything we struggle with may be objectified and examined from any angle, or in relationship.

Once we have oriented to this internal ecosystem we might begin to reflect on features of the landscapes we perceive. Paying careful attention to the labels and feelings that bubble into awareness, we may notice any number of sensations through somatic experience, traumatic replay, or other devices of memory. It is important to remain attentive to our self-care needs at such times, honoring anything that feels like too much with a retreat and return to the middle of our window of tolerance. If there is energy and curiosity present, if we feel resourced to handle the impact, we may choose to briefly examine each input before setting it aside. However you choose to map the space, it is entirely yours to define; one may want to consider building several different maps to meet with varying environmental demands on skills and resources, or the level of masking required via encounters with pathologization or bias.

It may be that, even within our own introspected wilderness, we don't understand, or even see, all of what is present; we may entirely overlook, or bypass, wild expanses without skilled guidance. Similarly to the ways humans have been distanced from nature since industrialization, with separation often comes judgment and inevitable assignment of our experience to undesirable aspects like neglected wilderness, dangerous territory, or even nature as enemy. In *Divergent Landscapes* we may choose instead to focus on nourishing relationships with our most private internal parts or the oppressive systems we encounter. We may choose quiet conversation with a hummingbird, or leaping ravines symbolic of difficult exchanges; the point is to arrive in a place of complete control over how we react to any given stimulus, a place frequently denied to people marginalized as surplus class members.

Noted as vital in healing and coping with marginalization, embrace of a marginalized identity was one key finding resounding through the recent work of many neurodivergent

academics (Umagami, 2023, Walker, 2021, Yergeau, 2018). Despite the current position of the APA, heeding neurodivergent wisdom means accepting autism as a way of being primarily shaped by sensory processing differences from majority populations (Larson, 2023e). Harsh influences relating to pressure, temperature, thirst, pain, balance within space, and orientation of body parts to each other are easily overlooked without skillfully focused curiosity, not to mention the suspension of disbelief in things outside one's perceived experience. Neurodivergent people, of many diagnoses and origins, frequently struggle with managing complex variability in responses to sensory stimuli, or tracking executive function. They report difficulty coordinating movement, muscle tone and postural differences, including vocal prosody and tonal variability (Bascom et al., 2012). Masking those differences increases difficulty in mood regulation and concentration, so the need for extended rest and low stimulation environments going unmet has been cited as frequent cause for overload (Williams, Corbin & Hart, 2023). These are people in need, not of correction or fixing; they find themselves desperate for reliable access to quiet, calm, acceptance, curiosity, and trust. This is wilderness that lives among us, has always lived among us, and only recently became a problem.

In much the same way a globally relevant human rights campaign defined widely shared experiences as a *neurominority* from within digital forums, locating and interacting with social media circles claiming pride in autistic identity lent my first true taste of belonging after more than 40 years of life. A pervasive sense of alienation, failure, and lacking personal safety was suddenly a community-identified experience (Bascom et al., 2012). Many of the harms we had suffered were similar. Our ecstasies, too, were similar, even when outside the acceptable range of experiences we keep seeing described for *normal* humans.

I keep reading stories of abuse that may as well have been penned in my own journal, they landed so close to home. More importantly, I keep reading about lessons learned by other neurodivergent people. Messages they long to share happen to perfectly fit my needs, and now that I've heard the resounding call for authentic neurodivergent representation in psychological research and therapeutic practices I stand ready and excited to help guide other neurodivergent people through the gauntlet that is our daily lived experience, despite the lack of support so often encountered when educating holders of privilege about oppression (Jones et al., 2020).

So, I began fostering neurodivergent connection in earnest. I learned about amazing reading lists from citations in media streams, and watched cautiously as flame wars erupted or the murder hornets swarmed in comments. I poked the algorithm utilizing an industry insider perspective to extend the reach of my platform as well as any assistance my strategic interactions within these communities might provide. I devoured volumes devoted to unwinding this mess we've collectively made in our rush toward fulfillment of capitalist demand for individuation, and dive eagerly into the topic whenever the *infodump* is welcomed. Our mycelial flow of information allows for self-paced deep dives into theories developed to battle racism, disability, capitalism, and bias. I'll continue this work while applying integrated wisdom toward building community, striving for food sovereignty, embodying an intentional and internationalist counter-sociality, while mindfully approaching liberatory practices for the good of everyone.

*The Empire of Normality, and in turn the pathology paradigm, emerged in the context of capitalist logics, but have now become pervasive and partially distinct systems of domination in their own rights. [...] at this historical moment, the collective building of a mass anti-capitalist politics of neurodiversity will be necessary for not just neurodivergent liberation but also for our broader efforts towards collective liberation.*

(Chapman, 2023, pp. 164-165)

### References

- Adams, M. B. (1989). The politics of human heredity in the USSR, 1920-1940. *Genome*, 31(2), 879–884. <https://doi.org/10.1139/g89-155>
- Adler-Bolton, B. & Vierkant, A. (2022). *Health Communism: A Surplus Manifesto*. Brooklyn: Verso.
- Ahmed, N, Marriott, A, Dabi, N, Lowthers, M., Lawson, M. & Mugehera, L. (2022). Inequality Kills: The unparalleled action needed to combat unprecedented inequality in the wake of COVID-19. Oxfam. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/inequality-kills-the-unparalleled-action-needed-to-combat-unprecedented-inequal-621341/>
- Bascom, J., et al. (2012). *Loud Hands: autistic people, speaking*. Washington, DC: The Autistic Press
- Beau-Lejdstrom, R., Douglas, I., Evans, S. J. W., & Smeeth, L. (2016). Latest trends in ADHD drug prescribing patterns in children in the UK: prevalence, incidence and persistence. *BMJ Open*, 6(6), e010508. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2015-010508>
- Ben-Moshe, L. (2017). Why Prisons are not "The New Asylums." *Punishment & Society*, 19(3), 272–289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474517704852>
- Bernays, E. L. (1947). The Engineering of Consent. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 250(1), 113–120. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271624725000116>
- Bleuler, E. (2018). *Textbook of Psychiatry* (A. A. Brill, Trans.). New York: Macmillan. (Original work published 1924)
- Bottema-Beutel, K., Kapp, S. K., Lester, J. N., Sasson, N. J., & Hand, B. N. (2020). Avoiding Ableist Language: Suggestions for Autism Researchers. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0014>
- Chapman, R., & Botha, M. (2022). Neurodivergence-informed therapy. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology*, 65(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/dmcn.15384>
- Chapman, R. (2021). Neurodiversity and the Social Ecology of Mental Functions. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(6), 174569162095983. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620959833>
- Chapman, R. (2023). *Empire of Normality*. Pluto Press (UK).

- Chödrön, P. (2019). *Taking the Leap : Freeing Ourselves from Old Habits and Fears*. Shambhala Publications, Incorporated.
- Crowe, A. (n.d.). Linktree. Retrieved January 8, 2024, from <https://linktr.ee/anniecrowe>
- Cryle, P. M. & Stephens, E. (2018). *Normality: A Critical Geneology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- differentnotdeficient. (2019, April 28). Sensory Survival: Living with hypersensitivity, overwhelm, & meltdowns. NeuroClastic. <https://neuroclastic.com/sensory-survival-living-with-hypersensitivity-overwhelm-meltdowns>
- Dunayevskaya, R. (1992). *The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is a Capitalist Society: The Marxist-Humanist Theory of State Capitalism*. Chicago: News and Letters.
- Federici, S. (2004). *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia.
- Ferguson, I. (2017). *Politics of the Mind: Marxism and Mental Distress*. London: Bookmarks.
- Flaherty, A., Heider, K., & Larson, L. (2023). *Divergent Gardens: A Place Where Community Grows*. gurumojito autopublishing. <https://presentation-archive.herokuapp.com/divergent-gardens.pdf>
- Freud, S. (1975). *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (J. Strachey, Trans.). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1914)
- Galton, F. (2018). *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences*. London: Macmillan. (Original work published 1869)
- Ghanizadeh, A. (2011). Sensory Processing Problems in Children with ADHD, a Systematic Review. *Psychiatry Investigation*, 8(2), 89. <https://doi.org/10.4306/pi.2011.8.2.89>
- Graby, S. (2015). Neurodiversity: bridging the gap between the disabled people's movement and the mental health system survivors' movement? 231–244. <https://doi.org/10.51952/9781447314592.ch016>
- Green, S. A., & Ben-Sasson, A. (2010). Anxiety Disorders and Sensory Over-Responsivity in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Is There a Causal Relationship? *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 40(12), 1495–1504. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-010-1007-x>
- Heck, P. R., Simons, D. J., & Chabris, C. F. (2018). 65% of Americans believe they are above average in intelligence: Results of two nationally representative surveys. *PLOS ONE*, 13(7), e0200103. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0200103>

- Hochschild, A. R. (2012). *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Huber, W., Jean-Paul Sartre, & Sozialistisches Patientenkollektiv. (1993). *SPK - turn illness into a weapon for agitation by the Socialist Patients' Collective at the University of Heidelberg*. Heidelberg Krim, Self-Publ. For Illness.
- Jarrett, S. (2020). *Those They Called Idiots: The Idea of the Disabled Mind from 1700 to the Present Day*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Jones, D. R., Nicolaidis, C., Ellwood, L. J., Garcia, A., Johnson, K. R., Lopez, K., & Waisman, T. (2020). An Expert Discussion on Structural Racism in Autism Research and Practice. *Autism in Adulthood*, 2(4). <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.29015.drj>
- Kaye, K. (n.d.). *Breaking Code Silence*. Breaking Code Silence. <https://www.breakingcodesilence.org/>
- Kovel, J. (2002). *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?* New York: Zed Books.
- Kølves, K., Fitzgerald, C., Nordentoft, M., Wood, S. J., & Erlangsen, A. (2021). Assessment of Suicidal Behaviors Among Individuals With Autism Spectrum Disorder in Denmark. *JAMA Network Open*, 4(1), e2033565. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.33565>
- Kraepelin, E. (1922). Ends and Means of Psychiatric Research. *Journal of Mental Science*, 68(281), 115–143. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.68.281.115>
- Kuhn, T. (2012). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (50th Anniversary Ed.)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1962)
- Larson, M. P. (2023a). *Divergent Presentation: Autistic Views on Neurodiversity in Research*. gurumojito autopublishing. <https://presentation-archive.herokuapp.com/divergent-presentation.pdf>
- Larson, M. P. (2023b). *Divergent Review: Consideration of Recent Autistic Research*. gurumojito autopublishing. <https://presentation-archive.herokuapp.com/divergent-review.pdf>
- Larson, M. P. (2023c). *Divergent Cultures: Consideration of Confrontation in Conversation*. gurumojito autopublishing. <https://presentation-archive.herokuapp.com/divergent-cultures.pdf>



- Larson, M. P. (2023d). *Divergent Biophilia: Contemplation of Animism and Porphyrin Rings*. gurumojito autopublishing. <https://presentation-archive.herokuapp.com/divergent-biophilia.pdf>
- Larson, M. P. (2023e). *Divergent Population: Reflections on Neurodivergence, Trauma, and Nature*. gurumojito autopublishing. <https://presentation-archive.herokuapp.com/divergent-population.pdf>
- Lemov, R. (2005). *World as Laboratory: Experiments with Mice, Mazes, and Men*. New York: Hill & Wang.
- Marx, K. (1990). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume III*. London: Penguin. (Original work published 1867)
- Marx, K., & Padover, S. K. (1972). *The Karl Marx Library*. New York, McGraw-Hill.
- McGuire, A. E. (2013). Buying time: The S/pace of Advocacy and the Cultural Production of Autism. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 2(3), 98. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v2i3.102>
- Michelle, F. (2022, September 20). *Identity First Autistic - Mengapa Deteksi Dini Sangat Penting*. <https://identityfirstautistic.org/>
- Moser, D. & Grant, A. (1965, May 7). Screams, Slaps, and Love: A Surprising, Shocking Treatment Helps Fargone Mental Cripples. *Life*.
- Murray, D. (2020, February 17). Monotropism -- An Interest Based Account of Autism. London, UK: National Autistic Taskforce <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338127881>
- Oliver, M. (1990). *The Politics of Disablement*. London: Macmillan Education.
- Parsons, A. (2018). *From Asylum to Prison: Deinstitutionalisation and the Rise of Mass Incarceration after 1945*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Pearson, A., & Rose, K. (2021). A Conceptual Analysis of Autistic Masking: Understanding the Narrative of Stigma and the Illusion of Choice. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0043>
- Pickett, J. P., Rickford, J. R., Pinker, S., Watkins, C., & Huehnergard, J. (2018). *The American Heritage dictionary of the English language* (5th ed.). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Price, D. (2021). *Laziness Does Not Exist*. New York, NY: Atria Paperback
- Quetelet, J. A. (1835). *The Average Man (l'homme moyen)*.

- Raymaker, D. M., Teo, A. R., Steckler, N. A., Lentz, B., Scharer, M., Delos Santos, A., Kapp, S. K., Hunter, M., Joyce, A., & Nicolaidis, C. (2020). “Having All of Your Internal Resources Exhausted Beyond Measure and Being Left with No Clean-Up Crew”: Defining Autistic Burnout. *Autism in Adulthood*, 2(2), 132–143.  
<https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2019.0079>
- Richdale, A. L., Chetcuti, L., Hayward, S. M., Abdullahi, I., Morris, E. M. J., & Lawson, L. P. (2023). The impact of sleep quality, fatigue and social well-being on depressive symptomatology in autistic older adolescents and young adults. *Autism Research*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2899>
- Robinson, C. J. (2000). *Black Marxism : The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of North Carolina Press. (Original work published 1983)
- Robison, J. E. (2016). Kanner, Asperger, and Frankl: A third man at the genesis of the autism diagnosis. *Autism*, 21(7), 862–871. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361316654283>
- Russell, G., Stapley, S., Newlove-Delgado, T., Salmon, A., White, R., Warren, F., Pearson, A., & Ford, T. (2021). Time trends in autism diagnosis over 20 years: a UK population-based cohort study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 63(6), 674–682.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13505>
- Schalk, S. (2022). *Black Disability Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sedgwick, P. (2015). *Psychopolitics: Laing, Foucault, Goffman, Szasz, and the Future of Mass Psychiatry*. London: Unkant.
- sherlocksflataffect. (2015). PSA from the actual coiner of “neurodivergent.” Tumblr. Retrieved December 24, 2023, from  
<https://sherlocksflataffect.tumblr.com/post/121295972384>
- Silberman, S. (2015). *NeuroTribes: the legacy of autism and the future of neurodiversity*. New York, NY: Avery
- Sinclair, J. (1993). Don't Mourn for Us. *Our Voice*. [https://www.autreat.com/dont\\_mourn.html](https://www.autreat.com/dont_mourn.html)
- Sloarch, R. (2016). *A Very Capitalist Condition: A History and Politics of Disability*. London: Bookmarks.
- Stewart, J. N. (2019). Comprehensive Autism Care Demonstration Quarterly Report to Congress [Second Quarter, Fiscal Year 2019]. The Department of Defense of the United States of America. RefID: 8-C535A85

- Szasz, T. S. & von Hayek, F. A. (1998). Personal Correspondence. Cybercenter for Liberty and Responsibility. Retrieved December 24, 2023, from <https://www.szasz.com/hayek.html>
- Umagami, K. (2023). *Towards a better understanding of loneliness in autistic adults: examining measurement tools and lived experiences* (Dr. Laura Crane, Ed.). [IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society]
- UPIAS. (1975). *Fundamental Principles of Disability*. London: Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation and The Disability Alliance.
- Walker, N. (2019). *TRANSFORMATIVE SOMATIC PRACTICES AND AUTISTIC POTENTIALS: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION*. [https://neuroqueer.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Nick\\_Walker\\_Dissertation.pdf](https://neuroqueer.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Nick_Walker_Dissertation.pdf)
- Walker, N. (2021). *Neuroqueer Heresies : notes on the neurodiversity paradigm, autistic empowerment, and postnormal possibilities*. Fort Worth, TX: Autonomous Press, LLC
- Walker, N., & Raymaker, D. M. (2020). Toward a Neuroqueer Future: An Interview with Nick Walker. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.29014.njw>
- Watson, J. (1924). *Behaviorism*. New York: People's Institute.
- Watters, E. (2011). *Crazy Like Us : the globalization of the American psyche*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Watts, S. (2003). *Disease and Medicine in World History*. London: Routledge.
- Whitaker, R. (2010). *Anatomy of an Epidemic: Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs, and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness in America*. New York: Crown.
- Yergeau, M. (2018). *Authoring Autism : on rhetoric and neurological queerness*. Durham: Duke University Press

**Appendix A**

**QR Code for Access to Divergent Landscapes**



*Scan to access <https://presentation-archive.herokuapp.com/divergent-landscapes.html>*

**Appendix B****Wild? or Not.**

- any autistic person is fully human
- self identification as autistic is valid
- autism is not a disease or a disorder
- accommodation is the responsibility of the privileged
- 

*Wilderness* is a word that many are stepping away from.... One key to the distaste critics hold for this term is in how such separation from undeveloped natural spaces precludes the option of being in relationship with the land. Even this framing of a lack of development is questionable at best when considering indigenous peoples' various land or water protector roles within communities as they continue to honor ancestral wisdom and practices. To see a forest as untouched is to ignore the role of a fire keeper in maintaining the health of an entire regional ecosystem, or the eminently natural systems engineered in the construction of a beaver dam.