Introduction

One night ten years ago, as I read the story of The Princess and the Pea to my then young children, I had an epiphany. The Pea Princess, kept awake by a single pea beneath a tower of mattresses, is no blue blood. As Rhi Lloyd-Williams suggests in their blog, 'The Princess and the Pea was Autistic' (2016). And, interestingly, the fairytale's author, Hans Christian Anderson, is also now considered to have been autistic (Brown 2007). Indeed, the more I thought about it, so many characters in children's stories sense, process, remember, imagine, and communicate differently from the 'norm'. Why does Goldilocks need everything in the three bears' cottage to be 'just right'? Why did Jack forget to sell the cow for money and become distracted by the beans? Was Cinderella perhaps 'masking' with a social self that enables her to go to the ball, at least until midnight?

Such cultural memories of neurodiversity are both there and not there, both remembered and unremembered, or what Eviatar Zerubavel describes as culturally hidden yet before us in plain sight (2015). Such stories are, arguably, however, reliant on a 'disability prosthesis' that screens out disability from our imaginations 'even as we consume them' (Mitchell and Snyder 2000: x). Yet, on some level, they disrupt ideas of the norm: they make central the fact and value of neurodiversity, asserting a persistent and long-standing cultural history (Seidel 2004: n.p.).

Research Context and Rationale

In the 1980s several autistic people published their autobiographies: these included memoirs by the now well-known autistic authors Temple Grandin and Donna Williams. Since then, many autistic people have been writing memoirs, making films and creating art works with a huge rise world-wide of digital blogs and websites that record and reflect on autistic people's life stories and experiences. Various assistive technologies that facilitate text and speech communication have enabled the creation and dissemination of

media works produced by non-speaking autistic people. The range of autobiographies alone is hugely heterogenous and is transforming and connecting neurodiverge-nt histories and memories. This diversity includes variation in terms of nationality and geographical location, gender and sexuality, as well as race and ethnicity, with a more inclusive range of non-speakers who spell, type and use technology with or without assistance. Such self-advocacy and self-representation illuminate autistic people's lived experiences from the perspective of autistic people themselves and in so doing challenge ableism that includes the pathological and cultural othering of autistic people along with structural inequalities.

Despite the large corpus of works by autistic people, analysis of such multimedia life story work is largely neglected (Stenning 2024). For memory studies, I argue, the inclusion and analysis of autistic works have the potential to expand our knowledge. Blogs, films, memoirs and autobiographies by autistic people, after all, 'contribute to a shared cultural repository' (Stennings 2024: ix). Works created by non-speaking autistic people surface 'assumptions about the nature of communication itself' as well as the nature of remembering both individually and collectively. In addition, analyses of autistic people's memory works deepen and extend research and understanding in the subfield of memory activism since they are recognizably a 'neglected component of liberatory world making' (Stenning 2024: ix).

This book seeks to bring into the interdisciplinary field of memory studies the lived experiences and memories of speaking and non-speaking autistic people communicated through their own media and cultural works that are already in the public domain. It aims to fuel further conversations around neurodiversity and neurodivergent perspectives within the interdisciplinary field of memory studies. The book seeks to forge more dialogue between memory studies, critical autism studies and critical disability studies. While the dominant popular memory of autism and autistic people draws on the diagnostic, medical and pathological master narratives of autism as deficit and abnormality, what Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering (2013) term 'vernacular memories' provide critical counter memories. They articulate a heterogeneity of remembering, evidence the significance of polysensory memory and show how human memories connect with more-than-human memory. Analysis of these vernacular memories extends concepts in memory studies and the growing subfield of activist memory studies (see Rigney 2023) and adds an important but missing dimension to calls for more critical memory studies (Kaplan 2023).

The study asks what new insights emerge when a wider diversity of neurological experiences, specifically autistic people's lived experiences and ways of remembering, are brought into the study of the remembering of the individual and collective past. Do such lived experiences accord with the established

Figure 0.1. *Sea Hoarse* (2021). © Anna Reading.

ontological and epistemological foundations for memory studies? Or do they reveal how studies of remembering the individual and collective past tend to rest on ideas of the 'norm' and normalcy? What does this then mean for developing neurodiverse concepts and methods in memory studies?

The book examines autistic peoples recorded and recollected lived experiences through the paradigm of 'neurodiversity'. Neurodiversity as an idea recognizes that the perception, cognition and communication of humankind is naturally neurodiverse (Blume 1998; Singer 1998; Walker 2008; Walker 2020). The neurodiversity paradigm, like any concept or idea, as I discuss in more detail further on, has multiple threads (Russel 2020) as well as critics and critiques (Mitchel 2019; Kansen 2016; Ortega 2009). But what constitutes the compass for my research is that a neurodiversity lens enables 'a tenant of inclusion based on universal rights principles' (Kapp 2020: 4). For the field of memory studies, which at the time of writing is only beginning

to engage with disability studies and critical autism studies, the neurodiversity paradigm helps to frame a much-needed engagement with how people's lived experiences of remembering and forgetting are naturally neurologically diverse. It prompts us to ask how the paradigm might enable a more complex and deeper understanding of memory through 'neuroqueering' the predominantly normatively framed concepts and experiences of remembering that people bring to the world.

As we shall see, autistic people's lived experiences recorded and articulated through different media clearly chime with established axioms around remembering and forgetting the individual and collective past. But they also build on and extend these, and at times they fundamentally unsettle and reveal to us the hidden biases of normative ideas such as technology, form, human-centrism, and sociality. As Ian Hacking argues, 'normalcy which is the cardinal meta concept of bio politics was lifted straight from physiology. I call normalcy a meta concept because no thing or person is simply normal or abnormal' (Hacking 2011: 408). Joanne Limburg (2021: 104) goes further, suggesting that ideas of the 'norm', 'normalcy' and what is 'normal' are fictions. They are nineteenth-century inventions based on the pseudo-science of measurement and quantification to accommodate the requirements of wage labour that emerged with industrial capitalism (Davis 2017).

I am not arguing that 'norms' are totally unhelpful – they can be useful in terms of social boundaries for example – but within memory studies neuronormative bias is comparable to what has been termed 'methodological nationalism': or the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form to frame research (see Wimmer and Schiller 2003). In memory studies there is what we might term 'methodological *neuro*normalism'. This is the assumption that individual and collective memories are to be studied through a set of norms that are so central we can unhelpfully cease to see them, and we thereby unwittingly marginalize some groups or overlook important insights. An example, epistemologically – by which I mean the knowledge we use to understand the world – is the assumption of a norm for the interpretation of form and meaning. So, within memory studies, scholars broadly agree that interpretation is polysemic, or in other words, that in the discursive and symbolic world, there may be more than one meaning to a text or a word, such as 'chair'. From this, scholars study how different people remember differently a word or image of a chair for intersectional reasons of language, culture, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, and individual preference. We may also find that for some people, a chair is a deeply traumatic object in which the usually safe and domestic object has been used as weapon of torture that then turns the memory of the object against them (See Scarry 1985: 41). Yet, although the study of symbolic and material chairs is thus highly varied, it is anchored in the neuronor-

malist assumption that everyone will recognize the form of a chair when they encounter one. It is assumed that cultural forms and the language to name them will be self-evident. But what if my perception and processing is fragmented or overwhelming to the extent that I do not recognize a chair as a chair, or I recognize only that wooden chair right there as a chair? What if my perceptions are so acute that I can see different kinds of light coming from you, and I can hear the fine buzz of electricity in the wires in the walls? What if to me these perceptions are more important than the flicker of a difference in the mood on your face, or indeed the flicker of a difference in your tone of voice, or the shade of the meaning of a word, such as 'chair'? What if when I hear you speak I cannot process or remember every phoneme of what you say in words, because unlike you I am processing and reacting at a different level so that I simultaneously see, hear, smell, sense all at once, sometimes in ways that blend my senses and that are synaesthetic, or that automatically link them to a vast storage of knowledge and images, including the fact that the chair you sit on was once part of a forest? What if, as you talk to me, I can't forget the 'commodity chain' of the wooden chair and I imagine vividly the murder of the trees and I feel overwhelmed with grief at the memory of their pain? As Stuart Murray notes:

> Given that I live with someone whose appreciation of all aspects of the world from how things looks and sound and smell to what gives pleasure or pain is so different from my own, how can I continue to write and publish analysis or commentary on this book or that film in which I advocate that it has certain meanings that I have the capability to discern? From where do I get such authority? (Murray 2008a: 18)

As I shall argue, 'autistic memory works', or media produced by autistic people that record lived experiences, disrupt methodological and conceptual norms through evidencing the diverse ways in which human beings individually and collectively remember. Further, such memory works constitute not just a form of individual and collective advocacy and memory activism by and for autistic people, but their insights disrupt and extend ideas around the relationships between memory and activism or what Ann Rigney has termed the memory-activism nexus (Rigney 2018; Rigney and Smits 2023).

This study is situated at the interstices of literary studies, media studies and memory studies, but framed and critiqued through disability studies and critical autism studies. It brings memory studies into deeper dialogue with established work in disability and autism studies so that we might extend the study of memory, particularly activist memory studies. As Red Chidgey notes, disabled people constitute the world's largest minority and yet there is a dearth of research that specifically examines cultural memories of disability (Chidgey 2014). She adds: 'A study of contemporary memory-making

practices around disability can provide a crucial lens through which to engage with ongoing issues of socioeconomic and cultural marginalisation' (Chidgey 2014: 90). To this we can add that a study of contemporary memory making by neurodivergent people can magnify our understanding of the socioeconomic and cultural marginalization of autistic people as well bringing neurodivergent concepts to the field. As Tess Burton argues in her study of memories of chronic pain, 'the humanities study of memory will be diminished if we do not explore the implications of advances in biological and neurological research upon our conceptualization of the time-bound, politically constituted, socially embedded, remembering body' (Burton 2011: 24).

Disability, Neurodiversity and Memory Studies

Research in memory studies on disability and neurodiversity is marginal and limited. Nonetheless, some foundational research on disability and neurodiversity is at the heart of memory studies because of the field's longstanding focus on memories of the Nazi holocaust (Reading 2002; Rothberg 2009; Levy and Sznaider 2002; Young 2000). Research addresses the history, memorialization and forgetting of autistic people as part of the Nazi's 'euthanasia' programme that involved the murder of disabled adults and children (Knittel 2014). Victims included those diagnosed in Vienna by the Nazi sympathizer Dr Hans Asperger with what he termed 'autistic psychopathology'; Asperger, until recently, was remembered in the term 'Asperger Syndrome' (Sheffer 2018). Tamara Kwick argues that the systematic persecution and murder of disabled people designated as 'life unworthy of life' started long before the twelve-year Nazi rule and continued long afterwards, with the first memorials to these victims unveiled as late as 2014. The lag in memorialization is mirrored by a lack of academic work that 'recognizes the intersection of racism and ablism' (Kwick 2019: 45). After the Second World War, the scale and involvement of medical staff in the murder of disabled people, including neurodivergent people, was framed as being the work of a small number of individual doctors who had been corrupted by Nazi state ideology, rather than Nazi medical science and practices providing the foundations for eugenics and 'social and racial hygiene' (Kwick 2019: 51). This leaves a powerful ableist mnemonic legacy: rather than memories of disabled people being examined 'in terms of the social and cultural values' that stigmatized them, they are seen as the 'embodiment of incapacity' (Kwick 2019: 46). As Susanne C. Knittel argues:

> an examination of the memory of the Nazi euthanasia program and in particular of the mechanisms and assumptions that have led to its on-going exclusion

> from the discourse and memory of the Holocaust more generally necessarily uncovers links to prevalent issues and prejudices in contemporary society concerning disability and mental illness. (2014: 288–89)

Importantly, Knittel's study of the memory of Nazi euthanasia brings into dialogue disability studies with memory and Holocaust studies in pioneering ways that enable connections to be made between past and present injustices. A key goal of Nazi policy, through medical diagnosis, sterilization and murder, 'was to eradicate from the population people with certain kinds of minds' (Sheffer 2019: 95). Boys with different kinds of minds were, however, more likely than girls to be diagnosed with autistic psychopathy by Hans Asperger. They were treated with empathy and deemed educable with interventions designed to support different learning styles, with only the boys' language use seen as creative. Girls' communication differences, in contrast, were interpreted as waywardly female, with the cause put down to hysteria and menstruation (Sheffer 2019). Dismissed as irremediable, many more girls, who today would have been diagnosed as autistic, were sent to be murdered at Spiegelgrund, one of the most notorious disabled children's killing centres: Asperger was 'categorical that autistic psychopathy was a male diagnosis' (Sheffer 2019: 17). Yet, the public memory of the murder of autistic people is either absent or marginal. Literature about the Holocaust acknowledges the euthanasia programme but through 'a conception of disability and otherness' in which autistic people are then 'a problem in need of fixing' (Knittel 2014: 89).

The impact of war on minds and memory has long been documented by poets and folklore, with both memory loss and remembering too much – usually in sleep – seen as key symptoms of neurasthenia diagnosed in returning soldiers after the First World War. The field of trauma studies, which largely arose after the Holocaust along with the recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), has been an influential and controversial element of memory studies. The Holocaust 'ushered in an era of "traumatic temporality" defined through the rememberer's inability to recall the logical sequence of events but rather demonstrate a disorderly and fragmented narrative' (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy 2011: 31). The trajectory of the trauma discourse and the idea that directly experiencing or witnessing traumatic events resulted in different kinds of remembering took on its 'most vigorous development' after the Vietnam War (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy 2011: 26). Over time the concept of trauma characterized by its unspeakability, and/or disjointed and disrupted narrations of past events, was extended to understand the traumatic impact of violence and sexual violence on remembering within the domestic and familial sphere (Haaken 2000). The recognition that traumatic events have disabling effects on human mental health

led to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) 'becoming a household name' after it was added in 1980 to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) published by the American Psychiatric Association (Crocq 2000).

However, the concern within what was described as 'the memory boom' led some scholars to claim that society is suffering from 'a surfeit of memory' (Maier 2000: 443), with the claim that societies and individuals are addicted to memory in ways that are 'neurasthenic and *disabling*' (Maier 1993: 14, cited by Olick et al. 2011: 33, my emphasis). Trauma culture came to be viewed by some as a pathology in which victims and victim groups pressed for 'public honor and public funds by pressing *disabilities* and injustices' (Maier 1993: 147, cited by Olick et al. 2011: 33, my emphasis). Bill Schwartz (2009: 8) wrote that increasingly 'great men and women and their achievements count for less, while the victimized, wounded, *handicapped*, and oppressed count for more than ever before' (cited by Olick et al. 2011: 33, my emphasis).

Oliver Sacks' highly popular work within neuroscience brought into the mainstream ideas of cognitive and perceptual differences with one man's story highlighting visual agnosia (1985). In *An Anthropologist of Mars* (1995) Sacks wrote that autism has a 'paradoxical role' that allows for different kinds of powers. In *Cycad Island* Sacks describes the Chamorro people of Guam in which there is an unusually high rate of neurodegenerative disease that includes elements of forgetting and dementia. As Allan Megill notes, 'We are terrified of Alzheimer's disease. We are morbidly fascinated by memory disorders' (2011: 195). Such fascination, however, is problematic: Sack's popularization of memory disorders has been critiqued by disability activists for relying on anecdotes that create a literary 'freak show' (Shakespeare 1996).

In addition to questioning the ethics of anthropological psychology, the harnessing of disability terms within memory studies has been critiqued for co-opting non-normative memory-making in tropic or metaphorical terms (Murray 2017). Studies of social and collective memory have sometimes extended medical diagnoses of individual conditions to diagnoses of collective and social remembering. Hence, Andreas Huyssen uses the optic of amnesia to characterize an epoch in his seminal book *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (1995). He metaphorically extends the individual medical condition of amnesia to explain how our fear of erasure and forgetting in the mediatized world drives ever-expanding efforts to collectively remember (Huyssen 2011: 436).

Yet, such discursive erasure is, arguably, part of the process 'by which disability contributions are consistently written out of accounts of change, whether viewed historically or as critical theoretical perspectives on the present and future' (Murray 2017: note 23). The word 'prosthesis' in cultural

studies has been used to create 'multiple resonances around both augmented bodies and non-embodied states increasingly understood in terms of assemblage and supplementarity' (Holt and Murray 2018: 55). Critics argue that what has been termed the 'disability prosthesis' describes the ways in which literature (and we can then add here scholarly concepts in memory studies) relies on images of disability (Mitchell and Snyder 2000) in ways that mean that they are erased even as we watch or read them (Mitchell 2000).

Within memory studies, words such as 'prosthesis' and 'augmented' on one level are used to suggest the supplement of 'new critical spaces' that constitute new kinds of memory making. Thus, the memory scholar Alison Landsberg (2004) uses the prosthetic limb to develop the conceptual metaphor that cinema provides people with 'prosthetic memory' in the age of mass culture. This metaphorical use of the disabled body has been critiqued by several scholars (Holt and Murray 2018; Hutton 2021). The metaphor of the prosthesis disavows and objectifies the disabled body while losing sight of the daily experience of disabled people (Holt and Murray 2018).

Such problematic metaphors also prompt us to ask where is the embodied mind in these metaphors of amnesiac and prosthetic memory? In turn, this suggests the need to pay attention to how our memory connects with machines and other life forms (Holt and Murray 2018) as well as thinking about mnemonic embodiment beyond the boundaries of the skin (Shildrick 2013) in ways that are relational, multiply constituted and yet grounded and situated (Braidotti 2013).

In memory studies, some scholars use the term 'disabled histories' and, by implication, 'disabled' memories to describe the histories and memories of (able-bodied) people of colour who were marginalized. Ann Rigney asks, in an inquiry into the graves of African soldiers in a cemetery in Mainz, 'so how does memory change from "inert" or "disabled" to something active? From overlooked to "not forgotten"?' (Rigney 2021: n.p.). She builds on Stoler (2011), who discusses 'disabled histories' and 'colonial aphasia', to describe how the history of colonialism and racism within present-day societies has been 'disabled'. (Rigney 2021: n.p.). In this regard, the use of disabled memories makes both visible and invisible the actual memories of disabled people while trying to describe the marginalized memories of people of colour and the impact of colonization. Using disability as a metaphor to analytically designate the social forgetting of another group may also, of course, include disabled people and may arguably then be said to erase the actual memories of disabled people.

However, despite these omissions and erasures, some academic conversations are emerging around disabled and neurodivergent memories addressed through the question of a right to memory (Tirosh and Reading 2023). Anne Whitehead asks if there is a right to remembered presence for

body parts and whether commemorative practices can be made accessible to those with disabilities (Whitehead 2024). What are the rights to remembrance, for example, of the 400 murdered children, many of whom were diagnosed with autism by Hans Asperger, who had their brains removed, preserved and then used for experiments and disseminated across multiple research facilities throughout the 1980s (Sheffer 2018: 196)? Whitehead adds to this line of enquiry the question of what kinds of right to memory are suggested by people with memory loss, such as those diagnosed with Alzheimer's (2024).

Red Chidgey's (2014) research examines autobiographical accounts by disabled people within a digital storytelling context linked to The Museum of the Person, USA and the Envisioning New Meanings of Disability and Difference project in Toronto, Canada. The analysis of these projects surfaces tensions between micro, meso and macro elements and the rights of disabled rememberers as they negotiate between personal experience and the requirements of the public memory institution. Top-down initiatives by memory institutions to elicit stories from marginalized communities can mean that these are limited if the institution does not connect their stories to structural and democratic means of inclusion (Chidgey 2014). Former sites of institutions for disabled people have required extensive memory activism by disabled people to ensure that victim-survivors voices are included in planning and heritage processes (Carnemolla and Steele 2023). Nonetheless, the Museum of the Person's initiatives show how the recollection and mediated sharing of personal stories can be socially as well as individually transformative. Such accounts show 'the social model of disability' in operation, according to Red Chidgey (2014). While the latter has been critiqued for not including the importance of bodily experience sufficiently, it has also offered an understanding of the structural, legislative and cultural impact of discrimination. As Chidgey shows, the articulation of 'social memories around the experience of disability, therefore, can help to illuminate aspects of the social model of disability and provide resources for social change' (2014: n.p.).

John A. Lynch (2021) echoes the importance of vernacular-disabled memories in 'Evolving Exhibits'. His study examines the struggles over public memory in the attempt to create a memorial walking path to document the horrific history of a school for developmentally disabled students called Willowbrook School on Staten Island in the US. Although disability activists were successful initially, with a groundbreaking ceremony to mark the beginnings of the path, the plan foundered because the 'vernacular memory of activists and laypeople committed to social justice for the developmentally disabled' was pitted against official public memory that 'deflects attention away from the state's role' in maintaining the school (Lynch 2021: 1771). The walking trail, with twelve information stations, opened in 2022 (Russo

2022). Life story narratives provide 'situated counter-memories' that are also 'interventional in shaping social understandings of marginalised experience' (Chidgey 2014: n.p.). Building on this, *Autistic Dreaming*, as we shall see, surfaces how memory works produced by autistic people may provide situated counter-memories and 'subjugated knowledge' within the public sphere (Foucault 1980: 82).

Thus, the study of memories of disability and neurodiversity and disabled and neurodivergent remembering is predominantly marginalized within memory studies. Disability and neurodivergence are pathologized and discursively erased. Yet, research on disability and memory lies at the intellectual heart of memory studies (Knittel 2014). There is an increasing number of questions emerging around the right to memory in relation to disability (Whitehead 2023), and several scholars have brought into memory studies some of the insights of critical disability studies (Chidgey 2014; Lynch 2016). In the discussion that follows, I ask how we can bring a contemporary study of autistic memory-making into dialogue with already existing work in critical autism studies, particularly with regard to research that has focused on neurodivergent memoirs.

The Historical Memory of Autism

Research on autism, also known as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or autism spectrum condition (ASC), has developed exponentially over the past century and especially in the last four decades. The term autism is attributed to Eugen Bleuler, who included it as part of his descriptions of schizophrenia (1911). The attribution for the definition of autism as a medical condition is then frequently given to two men. The Nazi doctor Hans Asperger, whose name has until recently been given to the term 'Asperger Syndrome', and Leo Kanner, who introduced the term infantile autism in the US around the same time in 1943. Both practitioners primarily studied boys, overlooking autistic girls (Feinstein 2010). Throughout the twentieth century, multiple psychiatrists, psychologists and educationalists further developed research on autistic people, focusing primarily on causes and cures (Feinstein 2010). A turning point came after 1983 when Mike Oliver developed, in contrast to the medical model of disability, what is now known as the social model of disability, arguing that disability is the result of the social exclusion of non-typical people. Jim Sinclair, along with Kathy Grant and Donna Williams, developed from this the idea that autistic people needed rights, not a cure (Solomon 2008). This laid the intellectual foundations for neurodiversity – the idea that humanity is naturally neurologically diverse (Blume 1998; Singer 1998) – with neurodiversity activist Kassiane Asasumasu coining the

term neurodivergent. (I discuss the terms around neurodiversity in more detail further on in this chapter.)

The historical memory of autism has been subject to gender bias, with female researchers' contributions marginalized, overlooked and excluded in many accounts, skewing both our understanding of autism as well as its history (Limburg 2021). For example, Sher and Gibson (2021) note that Hans Asperger's work is very similar to the earlier research of the less well-known Jewish Soviet child psychiatrist Grunya Sukhareva (see also Bethel 2023). However, Asperger does not acknowledge her work, which, unlike his, included research with both girls and boys. Her research would have been accessible to him since it was published in German translation in 1926 (Sher and Gibson 2021). Sukhareva's findings more directly align with the modern-day *Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), although her work was little known outside of the Soviet Union because of the Cold War until the 1990s (Sher and Gibson 2021). In the UK, Mildred Creak's nine-point definition of autism conditions is used worldwide. Sybil Elgar began the first school for autistic children. She founded, with Lorna Wing, the UK's Society for Autistic Children, which has since become a haven for the diagnosis of older girls. This is now complemented by the emergence of research that draws on memoirs by autistic women diagnosed in adulthood (James 2017), developing feminist perspectives by, for and about autistic women's experiences (Cook and Garnett 2018). Joanne Limburg (2021) explores, for example, how autistic women historically have been exiled and othered by society.

Along with medical research, there are multiple non-fiction accounts explaining autistic spectrum conditions for lay readers (Vermeulen 2001; Silberman 2015) as well as handbooks for parents with autistic children (Hewitson 2018; Pukiss and Goodhall 2018; Boyd, 2003*)* and memoirs and stories by parents (mostly fathers) (see for example Macris 2011). Within cultural studies, substantial research exists on how autistic people are represented. There are, for example, studies of how medical discourse and diagnostics are reproduced within popular images of autistic people in the 1960s and 2000s (Sarratt 2011), as well as how autistic people's voices are missing from newspapers (Huws and Jones 2011). Disability studies in dialogue with media studies address representation in clinical discourses and cultural contexts, scrutinizing how autistic people are (mis)represented and how they/we represent them/ourselves (Osteen 2008). There are examinations of the representations of autistic people in films (Baker 2009; Murray 2008b) and the uses of films as a form of consciousness-raising for autistic peers (Schwarz 2008). There is also a burgeoning field of literary autism studies that includes the analysis of autism within poetry (Chew 2009), tropes and representations of autistic people in novels (Berger 2009; Burks-Abbott 2009) as well as crit-

ical examinations of autistic stereotypes in fiction (Loftis 2016). There is now a much deeper and more critical understanding of autistic representation, particularly with analyses of the role of autistic rhetoric (Yergeau 2018), how autism disturbs poetics (Miele Rodas 2018) and the implications of autism for theories of meaning in philosophy and language (Barnbaum 2008). Such research provides an essential springboard for my study, enabling a particular focus on the memory works of autistic people and what this tells us not only about autistic remembering but also how it troubles, broadens, and deepens understanding of memory studies.

Autism and Autobiography

This study extends memory studies and culturally situated research on autism through its focus on autistic life stories articulated through memoirs, autobiographies and online blogs and images, which have already garnered some academic studies outside of the field of memory studies. Autistic memoirs and autobiographies constitute a new genre, according to Ian Hacking, through making use of both traditional print and multimedia: 'its richest habitat is the blogosphere. Chat rooms are awash with autists chatting' (Hacking 2009). Irene Rose, in her study of autistic autobiography, also notes that the term 'recognizes a wide variety of autobiographical forms' (Rose 2008: 44). Thus, I draw on written memoirs, artworks, films, and blogs for this study.

The rising number of autistic published life stories has led to academic studies analysing this corpus to provide insights into aspects of autism. Initially, there was a tendency in academic research to examine memoirs by autistic people to prove patterns of autistic differences, whether in terms of writing, sentence structure or grammar (Yergenau 2018). Now, as Irene Rose (2008) argues, it is vital to ensure that autistic memoirs and life stories are not examined for what they do differently from the 'norm' but in terms of how they neuroqueer normative ideas, including, in the case of this book, neuroqueering normative ideas of memory and memory activism in memory studies. Autistic works are not there to be mined as the fixed terrain of autistic self-hood (Milton 2012; 2014). Autistic memoirs are 'inventional sites' that make us question ideas about language (Yergenau 2018: 34). To this, we can then add the question of how they trouble long-held ideas about ways of remembering. In their analysis, Davison and Henderson (2010) argue that autistic autobiographies challenge the concept of sociality by showing the importance of people's intense relationships with the environment and natural world. How, then, by extension, do they also challenge more broadly ideas of sociality that are axiomatic to our ideas of collective and social

remembering? Autistic life narratives do not just 'reveal' selves 'presumed absent'. They actively trouble and challenge knowledge more broadly, working to 'destabilize the presumed-desirable normative self' (Rose 2008: 46). In addition, the growth in the number of available texts that constitute 'the corpus of autistic life narratives' goes beyond the individual life story to enact 'a community response' that is an act of cultural resistance 'against the more restrictive discursive limits of being diagnosed as autistic' (Rose 2008: 46). Autistic life stories effectively guard against the 'body solitaire' or the singular autistic autobiography becoming reified into a tale of triumph over tragedy (Mitchel, cited in Rose 2008: 47). Instead, 'autistic life narratives have managed to defy the totalizing constraints of discursive pathologization of cognitive difference' (Rose 2008: 52). Studies also address how digital technologies enable new kinds of autistic communication and expression with 'hacking agency' to a culture that previously excluded and marginalized autistic works (Demo 2017). Others examine how life writing provides insight into social interaction, particularly the emotional life of autistic people (Bergenmar et al. 2015). Some scholars argue that such works are forming a new autistic culture (Davidson 2008).

Anna Stenning's (2024) research involves closely reading a range of texts by autistic authors, filmmakers and bloggers, focusing on questions of identity, mattering and agency and how these are narrated in heterogeneous ways. My study builds on Anna Stenning's seminal work but enquires specifically into memory: rooted in memory studies, my attention is specifically on questions of neurodivergent remembering and forgetting, both individually and collectively. It extends several earlier contributions to the study of autism, life stories and media memory (Reading 2018; 2022).

Autistic autobiographies, including multimedia, enable autistic people to tell their own stories in ways that are creative and social, allowing the body-self to be embodied, emergent and relational within the process (Douglas et al. 2019: 1). Schormans and Chambon argue that self-representation – in their study of photography by people with intellectual disabilities (ID) – constitutes the 'lost voices' within an ableist culture that steals away the self and body with false images of the other. Their study raises the question of how works created by autistic people constitute a form of memory activism (Schormans and Chambon 2014). This is echoed by Alison Kopit, who suggests that autistic autobiographies are a form of 'defiant memory as disability justice' through storying and recording daily life in which the autistic person is 'performing themselves as they see themselves and as they want to be seen' (2019: 415). Leni Van Goidsenhoven argues that 'autie-biographies' disrupt conventional life writing genres, 'performing' the genre from an autistic perspective (Van Goidsenhoven 2017). Autism narratives create a language to describe the experience of autism along with the means to create concepts

to 'think autism'. It is not so much that they describe a given reality as they constitute it (Hacking 2009).

Studies point to how autistic autobiographies and life stories work as cultural activism by disrupting popular representations of autistic people that conventionally rest on the fixed pathology of medical records and the DSM. They offer new knowledge and a reworking of language from the perspective of the autistic person's lived life with the potential to surface and counter the 'Empire of the Normal' (Couser 2000). Thus, Joyce Davidson and Victoria L. Henderson, who use the queer theorist idea of 'coming out' to examine how autistic people author their own stories, suggest that part of this 'coming out' in the form of the memoir is an act of cultural resistance that includes building community connections (2010: 155–56). They eschew the idea of the isolated autistic or, indeed, neurotypical self, suggesting instead how autistic life writing establishes the importance of the relational self and, with it, the importance of a relational analysis (Orlando 2015). Autistic autobiographies challenge the autobiography's narrative dependence on the premise of the stable, continuous self and often foreground and validate experiences of fragmentation, disruption and depersonalization (Purkayastha 2020). Other studies have shown how autistic memoirs and autobiographies constitute cultural resistance through the ways in which they create, in different ways, the autistic self into existence, celebrating heterogeneity and fluidity that goes beyond diagnostic strands (Hillary 2020).

However, what is missing so far in studies situated within disability studies and critical autism studies is an examination of life stories by autistic people as forms of memory activism. If symbols and metaphors in autistic autobiographies disrupt popular depictions of autistic people in ways that disrupt ideological hegemonies (Broderic and Ne'eman 2008), do they, by extension, disrupt mnemonic hegemonies of autistic people along with constructed 'norms' of remembering? More broadly, how do autistic life stories change and extend ideas of how people remember, perhaps extending our ideas of how memory is dispersed, extended or fragmented? Although my study does not focus on the economic and cultural production of autistic people's autobiographies (Rose 2008), it is informed by an approach that allows for a variety of sites of production as well as sites of consumption, from the conventional printed memoir to the online video and digital artwork. It seeks to develop further our understanding of memory activism as including cultural resistance, contributing to the growing subfield of activist memory studies that lies between movement studies and memory studies (Reading and Katriel 2015; Gutman and Wustenberg 2023; Rigney and Smits 2023).

The Autistic-Memory-Activism Nexus

The foci of activist memory studies concern the role of memory in relation to struggles by both individuals and collective movements that not only seek to transform the way in which the past and memory is used in the present but also work to transform 'cultural norms in a society' (Assman 2023: 1). This study contributes to activist memory studies by exploring how autistic people's memory activism and autistic advocacy, articulated through blogs, art works, films and memoirs, seek to transform historical and contemporary understandings of autistic people, as well as cultural understandings and popular memories of autistic people. As I shall show, autistic memory activism often challenges normative ideas more broadly around remembering and sensing as well as making central more-than-human memories. As an overarching conceptual framework, I draw on and extend Ann Rigney's idea of the 'memory-activism nexus' in which civil resistance is understood to be articulated through a range of different media, including memoirs (2018). The memory-activism nexus is the conceptual 'intersection' between memory and activism and allows for the entanglements of three trajectories to be explored (Rigney and Smits 2023: 14).

The first analytical trajectory, Rigney (2018; 2023) argues, concerns understanding the memory *of* activism: this entails examining the multimodal ways in which people remember their direct involvement as well as through culture and media. This first line of enquiry for autistic memory activism thus concerns exploring how, through different media, autistic activists recollect their own journey both individually and as part of a connected larger autistic and/or neurodivergent community.

The second analytical trajectory of the memory-activism nexus focuses on memory work *in* activism, asking how communities' collective memories of earlier campaigns are used to inform and shape future cycles of protest (Rigney and Smits 2023: 15). This second line of enquiry applied to autistic memory activism would thus consider how individual and shared memories of autistic life stories, communities, autistic advocacy and the neurodiversity movement shape autistic activism. Connected to this however, I argue, is also how autistic memory activism reveals the normalcy that shapes our own understanding of memory itself, thereby disrupting the neurotypical frameworks and ideas of how people and communities do and should or should not remember. Rigney's third analytical trajectory of the memory-activism nexus is primarily concerned with understanding memory activism. This is different from memories *of* activism: rather, it examines how activism by a particular group or community is directed towards changing collective memory and priorities in public commemoration. An example of this in relation to autistic memory activism concerns the campaign to stop using the term

'Asperger's Syndrome' which commemorates the work of a Nazi psychiatrist. Campaigners advocate to remember and mobilize, instead, the marginalized Soviet psychiatrist Grunya Sukhareva. This has led to autistic memory activism, resulting in a marble memorial to Sukhareva, online tributes including a Wikipedia page and commemorations of her life, as well as the campaign to change Asperger Syndrome to Sukhareva Syndrome (Reading 2024b). As we shall see, these lines of enquiry do not quite separate out in the ways that Ann Rigney's concept suggests for autistic-memory activism; my study troubles her conceptualization and further reveals the complex ways in which these different elements are entangled.

A key element of Rigney's memory-activism nexus is understanding how personal memories become transformed through mediation and remediation into collective, or what Andrew Hoskins terms, connected memories (2011; 2016). In what I coin as 'the autistic-memory-activism nexus,' vernacular memories are at the core of my enquiry. This is an important intellectual move since a powerful force within the neurodiversity movement is self-representation with connective and digital media technologies providing new affordances for autistic activism and remembrance (Reading 2022). But, as we shall see, it also illuminates how autistic people's memory activism does not fit neatly within ideas of memory activism including Rigney's nexus. Rather, autistic memory activism bulges and stretches, challenges and extends our ideas of both memory and activism. An immediately obvious illustration of this is the asymmetric value within activist memory studies given to public demonstrations and other activist techniques such as sit-ins and occupations within the public domain. Autistic activist Tori Morales writes: 'I personally cannot protest. I often struggle to complete a grocery trip. I cannot stand outside, surrounded by people (loud people) for hours without pretty severe overstimulation setting in. I commend those who engage in protests, but I am no less politically active than they are' (Morales 2022: n.p., cited in Reading 2024b: 379). The autistic-memory-activism nexus suggests a more fluid understanding of the ways in which personal memories can be scaled up into public memories through mediation and remediation to challenge normative ideas of how people remember and, in turn, how these public memories are then scaled down into individual and community stories. Neurodivergent vernacular memory work, such as writing blogs, making short films or memoirs, is arguably an essential component of autistic memory activism, as much as sit-ins, street protests or public marches, to change the memory of something or to transform structural inequalities. The autistic-memory-activism nexus conceptually provides an analytical framework for exploring how vernacular memories produced by autistic people transform and actively change public memories of neurodivergence and, more broadly, what Assman sees as knowledge and understanding (2023).

I laid the groundwork for the idea of the autistic-memory-activism nexus in two previous essays. In 'Neuroqueering Audience Research' (Reading 2024a), I explore how we can neuroqueer our understanding of media audiences and bring into audience research important initiatives by neurodivergent people in terms of media use and reception. In 'Remembering Autism in the Activism-Memory-Nexus' (2024b), I ask how Rigney's concept might be reversed and extended to include neurodivergent activism and how this might, in turn, generate new ways to understand memories of autistic activism and individual and collective remembering more broadly. I suggest that autistic activism comes in many colours, from those of the neurodiversity movement in which public advocacy and activism around autistic people's rights are central to those who pioneered different kinds of representations of autistic people and who sought to change and transform popular memories of autistic people and public understandings of autism.

Memory studies draw on conventional humanist ideas of 'giving' marginalized people a voice, relying on the efficacy of spoken interviews and recorded testimonies as part of this: this assumes that everyone uses their mouth to speak. But autistic memory activism highlights the need to embrace how media technologies are used as assistive devices for non-speakers: letter boards, iPads and/or facilitated communication are used to support people who cannot speak through their mouths. Hence, my intellectual move is to propose that Rigney's nexus can be productively extended through and with the neurodiversity paradigm to include autistic-activist memories so that we take our understanding of memory activism beyond normative and ablest assumptions.

I also contend that Rigney's original conception of the memory-activism nexus can be productively expanded and enriched methodologically. In Reading (2024b), I cite Monique Botha's insights that she took some while to 'to be an autism academic', moving through a series of identities beginning with being autistic, then seeing herself as an autistic advocate, then primarily as an autistic activist. When the university academy seemed to require her to leave those identities at the door, it was then she realized that her own kind of activism was as an autistic academic (Botha 2021: n.p.). So, while Botha's work is certainly part of the feedback loop between memory and activism that Ann Rigney identifies, it also unsettles the kinds of identities we assume as researchers as well as the methods we choose to use. Botha argues that what we need are methods that are creative, as well as methods that are embodied and that are reflexive to actively change how autistic people are marginalized and dehumanized (Botha 2021). Hence within this book – as we shall see – I deploy methods that are creative, embodied and self-reflexive. Botha's (2021) research makes it clear that activism and protest are not separate from the memory scholar or the academy: for autistic activism, such work is part of a

cycle of resistance and protest through knowledge production. Such knowledge production includes the years it took to research and write this book, along with my own struggles as an activist academic.

The idea of the autistic-activism-memory nexus enables us to frame and explore how autistic activism, advocacy, and memory work transform the collective memory and public commemoration of autistic people, autistic advocates and activists. In addition, my focus on autistic vernacular memories deepens and extends our understanding of conventional definitions of activism. Neuroqueer researching and reading, furthermore, is something that we can all bring to memory studies and activist memory studies in our different ways.

Researcher Standpoint

A key consideration for my research is my conduct of it through 'standpoint epistemology'. This, as autistic activist and academic Steven K. Kapp contends, means that any claims made by the scholar to 'authority over knowledge is created through direct experience of a conditional situation' (2020: v1). I am not an autistic activist like Steven Kapp and many other long-standing scholars who have spent years building critical autism studies and contributed over many decades to critical disability studies. My research is anchored in my three academic 'homes' of media, memory and gender studies and seeks to bring these fields into dialogue with the insights of autistic scholars, writers, makers and activists. I write as a long-standing feminist author, activist and academic who has long campaigned for equalities around peace, sexuality and gender, particularly around campaigns since the 1980s to stop sexual violence. I combined this with action research and memory activism, as well as my creative work as a feminist writer and playwright, facilitating community arts and using participatory methods to create inclusion and community connections. At the same time, over twenty years, inspired by my son, I have advocated with medical professionals, social workers, psychiatrists, teachers, friends, family and enemies to effect modest changes that bring a better understanding and collective practice around neurodivergent people's rights. I have also worked with colleagues to make our own environment at King's College more inclusive, most notably through the development of our neurodivergent-friendly REACH space for research and teaching. My journey as a parent of two youngsters who are multiply divergent inflects our lived experiences and related thinking and governs the uncertain trajectories of everyday life and our future imaginaries. I am a 'weird sister' (Limburg 2021) who mastered or rather 'mistressed' the exhausting art of masking my neurodivergence, complicated by

autoimmune Type 1 diabetes and autoimmune rheumatism. Chronic illnesses are rendered invisible in comparison to sudden and potentially curable illnesses. For me, the continual war within my body that constitutes autoimmune illnesses, along with the amplified threats from without arising ideologically from a well-biased society and physically from a regime of immune suppressants, creates a daily challenge of management along with a largely hidden roller coaster of cognitive, perceptual, and mnemonic variance that is visible to others only during moments of crisis. As with all my writing since 1995, from emails to books, I write using voice-operated technology, which generates a perceptible difference in the way words land and are crafted on the pages of what you read. My standpoint does not map directly onto the stories I am studying, but I would say that there is some relatability. My standpoint was reflexively informed at various points with research support from neurodivergent research assistants: in these ways, neurodivergence is an integral part of the reflective journey informing this project. At the same time, I am acutely aware that my privilege as a white cisgender bisexual woman writing and teaching from the position of living in a capital city in the global north, despite self-reflexivity, nonetheless, brings its own biases. There will be gaps and oversights in this study, as there will be and have been in previous studies. I hope that these biases and gaps can be corrected and enriched by the future work of others.

Methods and Forms of Analysis

This study focuses on 'vernacular remembering' (see Keightley and Pickering 2013: 79–96) through published works (memoirs, films, blogs, art) already in the public domain produced and created by autistic people, rather than works about autistic people. As John Elder Robison (2009) suggests, autistic insights need to reach the mainstream and the best way of expressing these is through autistic people's memoirs. Within memory studies, while autobiographical memory has been studied as primarily a source of individual lived experiences and the way in which we make meaning from our memories (Conway and Pleydall-Pearce 2000; McAdams 2001; Rubin 2006), memoirs and autobiographies are also studied in terms of how they are shaped by social, cultural and economic contexts (Nelson and Fivush 2004; Wang and Ross 2007) as well as a process through which collective memories are created (Fivush 2013; Keightley 2008). This study considers activist memory and ways of remembering through autistic life stories to consider both individual and collective memory. As with all research of this kind, the researcher is required to be 'sensitive to the ways in which individuals construct their own truths' (Fivush 2013: 27).

The book provides a close and reflexive reading of individual and collective remembering within media created by autistic people sometimes with the support of technology and their families. There are many works produced by autistic people from around the world that articulate heterogeneous voices, images and stories (Pripal-Kapit 2020). They range from what are generally considered to be the first published autobiographies by autistic people, such as Temple Grandin's *Emergence* (1986) and Donna Williams's *Nobody, Nowhere* (1994), to Naoki Higashida's (2013) *The Reason I Jump* and Tito Mukhopadhyay's (2008) *How Can I Talk if My Lips Don't Move*. They also include a more recent and growing body of advocacy, activist and multi-authored books, blogs, artworks, and short films that now include many more autistic women, LGTBQ and people of colour, as well as more non-speaking autistic people from different cultural foregrounds, heritages and nationalities (Pripal-Kapit 2020).

Over the course of three years, I scoped and researched hundreds of life stories from around the world, examining written memoirs and autobiographies, blogs, films, and artworks. The empirical focus amidst this became activist autistic memories in the public domain by autistic people and by autistic self-advocacy groups. Two neurodivergent research assistants, one for three months and another for six months, helped to select a heterogenous range of autistic media to ensure a rainbow of autistic people's experiences. Part of this recognizes the lived experience of intersectional, dual or multiple identities, as well as changing identities. Some autistic people express the complexity of their intersectional identities through different transmedia stories and personas that come to the fore and background, often saying how, at different times, different aspects of their identities are more important than another. The autistic writer Jamie Knight, who experienced a spinal injury as an adult, expresses this in his blog 'Spaced Out and Smiling'. He writes that he deliberately chose not to go down the 'spinal injury identity' route (Knight and Lion 2022: n.p.) but emphasizes his autistic identity through the dual experiences of Jamie and his 'plush sidekick', a soft toy lion.

Such transmedia use of blogs with videos provides for malleable storytelling that enables the expression of multiple identities: blogger and video maker Jordyn Pallette has blog posts by Jordyn alongside a video of Rocky, which is the name Jordyn Pallette gives his difficult-to-control body (2022). Ellen Jones (2022) articulates the complexity of their LGBTQI+ and disability identity. For others, race and their experience of racism as a person of colour intersect with a shifting sense of identity as an autistic person (Prahlad 2017).

I selected around forty-five memory works from the much larger corpus and then conducted a thematic analysis. This was then followed by close reading and the use of adapted creative methods using a process of alignment of an even smaller number of around eighteen memory works.

Thematic analysis is a common qualitative method but can be confusing since it describes several different approaches, from coding to the reflexive approach (Braun and Clarke 2019). Within the field of memory studies, what this means is that we first read across a body of individual memory and mediated memory 'data' to surface and identify initial themes that help to provide reflexively used foci and structure to more detailed close reading. Recent examples of thematic approaches in memory studies include memories of foster care (Steenbakkers 2020), collective remembering of Confucianism in Chinese textbooks (Xie, Chen and Liu 2021) and journalists' memories of conflicts (Ortega and Lawson 2023).

My thematic analysis involved the middle-sized corpus of forty-five works produced by autistic people, which were then read and re-read, watched and listened to so that I could develop a sense of broadly shared themes. What emerged were key themes around autistic memory activism that included challenging individual ways of remembering, as well as ideas of voice, sensory memory, time and temporalities. It also became evident that they decentred the human and extended ideas of remembering through a sense of deep connections to the wider environment or what is termed the more-than-human. Covering all five themes in the context of the book, however, proved too large, and after suggestions from helpful anonymous reviewers of an earlier draft of the book, I gave this study sharper focus by concentrating our attention on activist ways of remembering, sensory memory and more-than-human memory. The remaining themes of voice and time are more briefly addressed within the conclusion and will be published elsewhere as journal articles.

During the global COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), I worked in isolation but more deeply with the findings of the thematic analyses, structuring my foci through the themes across the texts, images and moving images themselves, working reflexively and closely, and putting them in dialogue with research articles and other secondary sources. As I discuss further on, I responded creatively through my own image-making in an art studio, making use of my daily permitted COVID walks during periods of lockdown and swimming in our local lake (when allowed) to immerse my felt-thinking with autistic works in my embodied mind/minded body. These methods were combined with some reflective autoethnographic practice through my own life and that of my family, who are imbricated with the experiences of neurodivergent subjectivities. Autoethnography has become an established method within critical autism research, and it has enabled the inclusion of the autistic researcher within the weave of voices by other autistic people (see, for example, Gouws 2019; Hughes 2012; Bothen 2021). It is also an established method used within cultural memory studies (Poulos 2012) which is commonly combined with life-writing (Ortiz-Vilarelle 2021).

What I noticed, however, was that I tended to frame what I was reading and researching through the optics of my role as a parent in relation to my children. As I questioned this bias, I realized the need to stop masking my own experiences and reflect on my own neurodivergence, rather than on my son's experiences. In addition, framing the research through my experience as a parent of an autistic youngster is ethically problematic: it plays into a trope that infantilizes autistic people, placing me as the parent in the position of authority. So now, while I do occasionally include some limited reflections and references to parental experiences, such as the reading of fairy stories that introduce the chapters of the book, these are more honestly connected with my own experiences and reflections, rather than asymmetrically positioning this in relation to youngsters.

Drawing on and extending Huijg and Acton's (2020) suggestions for a 'relaxed pedagogy', I juxtapose ways of working into my analysis that include arts-based thinking and embodied movements to disrupt traditional thematical and textual analysis. Building on Michelle Attius' insights in 'Mind-Meandering as AD(H)D Methodology' (2020), I worked dialogically and generatively, using embodied arts practices in dialogue with the works to deepen my understanding and elicit embodied insights. Arts-based analyses can be a productive way to approach research from new angles (Leavey 2020: 3). Hence, I draw on the innovative method of 'femmage' or feminist mixed media collages (Schapiro and Meyer 1977) to make new kinds of knowledge (Leavey 2020: 3). Making art, unlike sitting at a desk writing or typing into a computer, or sitting still in a library or archive, enables the capacity to explore through embodied movement (Minkkinen 2021).

This form of analysis was carried out in my art studio in Deptford, London, UK, with sessions lasting between two and four hours that were conducted between 2021 and 2022. Usually, I would work with a mixture of secondary academic sources juxtaposed with elements from the thematic analysis of autistic memory works, including quotations and images. This approach was critical to recursively give depth to the more traditional thematic analysis of autistic people's work. The use of 'femmage' or feminist collage required intense periods assembling and juxtaposing different elements drawing on a range of different art materials, including those 'found' on the way to the studio and broken items taken from home. These I wove and mixed and worked with to feel different kinds of embodied connections.

I documented my feelings and thoughts during the art-making process through a research journal. For example, in my work on autistic voice and memory on 20 May 2022, I worked intensively with the blog 'Jordyn's Rocky Journey: My Life in an Uncontrollable Body' (Jordyn 2022). In my journal, I noted the following insights that informed subsequent understanding and analysis:

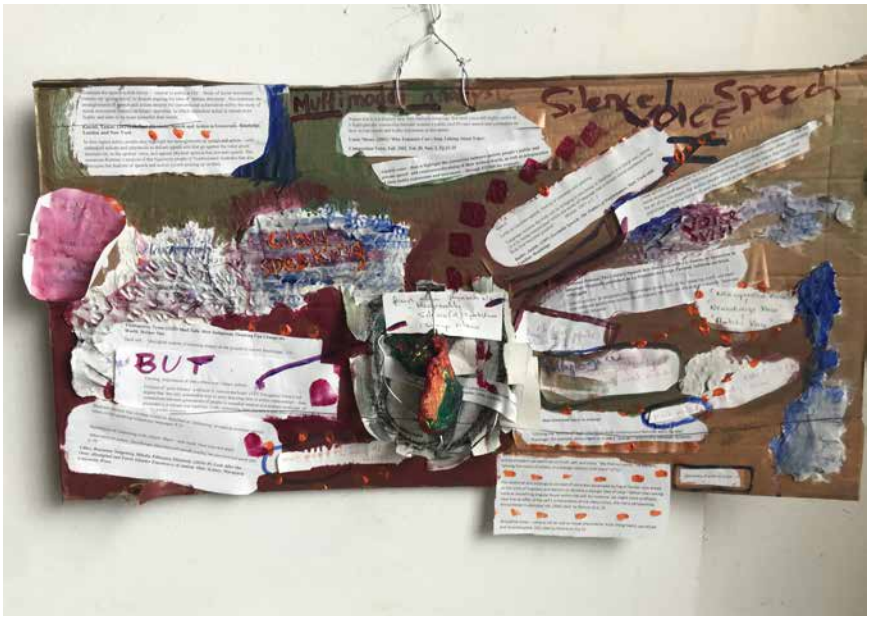

Figure 0.2. *Tongue-Tied* (2021). © Anna Reading.

Today I worked with small postcard-sized canvas boards, developing a picture to express parts of a whole and the idea of separation (non-integration) that Jordyn writes about in his blog and which he also documents through his film 'Rocky' which is the name he gives his body. His mind, he says, takes in information very rapidly in huge quantities, but his body is disconnected and won't do what he wants, including his mouth, tongue and vocal cords giving voice to his thoughts. He has learnt to use a letter-board which has enabled him to express this inner voice.

I worked specifically with white modelling clay, blue acrylic paint and a stone tool in my studio, using my hands covered in paint and clay to create 'bodies' and moulded 'heads'.

At first, I found it difficult to connect with the idea that my body was separate and would not do what I wanted since I was able to express and create the feeling images I had in my mind. Having said this, I then experienced moments when my hands created of their own accord in a 'non-intentional way'. I felt exhausted working in this way. And part way through I was aware of my body doing its own thing as Type 1 Diabetic in terms of my glucose levels dropping and then affecting my cognitive ability. My arts-based response was then curtailed through knowing that I only had a particular window of time to finish painting so that I could wash my hands and eat some lunch, to prevent hypoglycemia, first injecting myself with insulin. (Anna Reading, *Autistic Dreaming, Femmage Research Journal Notes*, May 2022)

Each chapter includes one or two photographs of artworks that arose from this method. They demonstrate part of the analytical research process, but they are not meant to be either illustrative or outcome-driven. Neither are they intended as additional data. The images I made are staged in the text to momentarily disrupt and interrupt your reading, and the normalcy of logocentric or word-centric research. They are there to remind the reader of the process that led to the written study. At times, they signal some of the processes and struggles in my own thinking, including disruptions, fissures, and gaps – which may also then become part of the process for you as the reader. Using such creative arts-based methods has long been established as transformative of thinking (hooks 1995), but in this case, it seemed critical to enable what other scholars have noted can be more diverse conceptions of experience (Noe 2000) that include what cultures of normalcy characterize as transgressive (Saarnivaara 2003).

The overall number of different autistic people's works explicitly cited and referenced in the final analysis was selectively reduced as I progressed with writing the book so that the reader effectively becomes familiar with a smaller number of autistic individuals. This is a qualitative study after all. Nonetheless, I was careful to include a diverse range of autistic artists and writers from different parts of the world with the caveat that the works were either originally written in the English language or had been translated into English. The thematic approach has the advantage that the discussion of the primary materials includes examples from a range of autistic works rather than focusing on one or several memoirs. The disadvantage for the reader is that it can be disorientating. Hence it is useful at this point to introduce the reader to the key autistic memory activists whose works I cite.

The following autistic people's works feature in each chapter. Dates of birth are provided to give an indication of age and generation:

Temple Grandin (1947–) is a US American autistic animal scientist who has published numerous books both on her experiences as an autistic person and on animal behaviour. She also has a website and has recorded numerous lectures which are online.

Carly Fleischmann (1995–) is a Canadian non-speaking autistic writer and broadcaster who has published with her father a co-written memoir, and who made numerous TV appearances and had a TV channel 'Speechless with Carly Fleischmann', which ceased in 2017. She has since disappeared from public view following allegations that she made about her father's boyfriend sexually abusing her. I felt that it was imperative in this case for her work to be included.

Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay (1989–) is an Indian– non-speaking autistic memoirist, poet, philosopher and filmmaker.

Naoki Higashida (1992–) is a Japanese non-speaking autistic writer and advocate who has fifteen published books, including memoirs of his experiences, fairy tales, poems, and books of illustrations. He has also contributed to two films.

Judy Endow is a contemporary US-born autistic artist, writer, broadcaster, blogger and consultant.

Amanda/Mel Baggs (1980–2020) was a queer and non-binary blogger and autistic rights advocate and filmmaker. There was some controversy concerning the authenticity of Amanda/Mel Baggs being autistic and non-speaking. On balance, though, this seems to arise from ableist and sexist assumptions that ignore how women and girls present and are perceived, as a result of masking, as neurotypical for earlier periods of their lives, which then results in breakdowns and burnouts in their twenties and thirties.

Anand Prahlad (1954–), an African American born on a former plantation in Virginia, is an academic, author, memoirist and poet.

James Owen Thomas (2001–) is a British artist and ecologist who lives in North Yorkshire, UK.

Donna Williams (1963–) (also known as Donna Samuel) is an Australian writer, artist, singer-songwriter, screenwriter and sculptor.

In addition, the following people's works are discussed in one or more chapters: Gregory C. Tino, a non-speaking autistic writer; Stephen Wiltshire, a Black British architectural artist and autistic savant; Alfonso Julian Camacho, a non-speaking Columbian-Latino American writer in his late teens; Chris Packham, a naturalist and broadcaster; and Greta Thunberg, a climate activist.

The work of a wider range of other autistic artists, writers, filmmakers, and bloggers, along with writers and artists from several anthologies, is additionally referenced and included at various points.

In all cases, autistic people are referred to by their full name or surname to defy the disempowering tendency to use first names only for neurodivergent creatives. Overall, I sought to achieve a balance between a diversity of stories and people, and respect for the wholeness of those stories through this reduced focus. Further context regarding, for example, the whole range of books, websites, artworks and films produced by these authors and artists would be too unwieldy to list here, and it is also easily available in the public domain.

I combined the above methodological approaches with the close reading of autistic texts that included memoirs, blogs, films and artworks. This involved reading actively and critically, noting key passages and turning points, turns of phrase, the particular ways in which language, words or images are used (see Owl and Gutierrez 2023) Thus, building on multimodal methods in memory studies – such as Marchetti's (2021) analysis of

memories of terror – I combine moments of interiority and self-narrative generated through autoethnography with thematic analysis and close reading while using different materials 'to make sense' of 'texts' through femmage. This enabled multisensorial ways to develop a more detailed narrative and semantic analysis of these works.

Using Alignment and Being Alongside

Studying autistic memory works, I argue, offers the potential for expanding our understanding of autistic activism and memory activism more broadly, but there is a need to be mindful of the ways in which academic research can crush how autistic experience comes into being (Dinishak 2021). Drawing on Miranda Fricker's (2003; 2007) work on 'epistemic injustice', Janette Dinishak argues that 'Even when autists are included in knowledge production concerning autistic experience, they remain vulnerable to forms of hermeneutical marginalization' (2021: 563). She uses the example of the reclamation of stimming or the repetitive performance of particular vocalisations or physical acts or movements. This, she argues, is more than a means of self-stimulatory and regulatory behaviour. It isa means of self-expression, meaning, communication and, at times, also a radical non-meaning. She urges scholars to be attentive to how autistic people's adaptations of language express experiences that 'may be a loose fit with neurotypical uses of the same words' (Dinishak 2021: 563). Thus, Elisabeth De Schauwer, Inge Van de Putte and Bronwyn Davies (2018) use the methodology of collective biography to explore what they call the space-in-between normativity and difference/disability. They argue that by working with the memories of disabled participants, they can explore 'the possibility of thinking differently about disability' (De Schauwer, Van de Putte and Davies 2018: 8). They explore the entangled agencies of memories with others and the 'human and nonhuman, material and nonmaterial' environment (2018: 8). They cite Shildrick (2002) to explain how the ruse of normative identity requires the abjection of the neurodivergent person. This, in turn, suggests that the neurotypically constructed memory requires the abjection of the neurodivergent memory. Within memory studies this has largely been done through what Shildrick (2002) suggests is 'the normative, ascendant category' of 'normal remembering' in contrast to traumatic remembering and traumatic memories. By drawing on critical disability studies and critical autism studies, this enables us to critique and deconstruct this binary thinking, which also separates off and, indeed, has largely ignored, neurodivergent memory within memory studies. However, the unequal power relations that this reproduces are currently largely unseen or constituted through its very illegibility (Butler 1997: 134).

De Schauer et al. (2018) challenge the idea of clear boundaries and separate entities, arguing that work on collective biographies opens a deeper understanding of the ways in which 'being in the world is experienced as both multiple and mobile, with meanings circulating in multiple directions' (Elisabeth De Schauwer, Inge Van de Putte and Bronwyn Davies 2018: n.p.).

This study partly builds on these insights to explore how we can move beyond the narrow sense of the 'individual of liberal humanism' in 'diffractive relation with one another' (Elisabeth De Schauwer, Inge Van de Putte and Bronwyn Davies 2018: n.p.). The researcher needs to pay attention to the mind as well as the whole body (Davies 2011: 137) while also using 'emergent listening' to recognize, explore and move with our own entanglements with emergent knowledge rather than sitting rigidly with what we already know (Davies 2014: 1).

A core part of the methodological and analytical process for this study involves tuning into the experience of the person remembering on their own terms. As Anand Prahlad in *The Secret Diary of a Black Aspie* writes:

> My experiences are of what I really experience, not what I imagine. If I say my skin is on fire, I really mean it. If you can bring yourself to hear me literally, to touch my fire the way you touch a book, or water, or an apple, you'll understand the world I live in so much better. (Prahlad 2017: 11)

When my son was younger and said, 'the rain is stabbing me' and cried with agony, I knew from the strength of his reaction that he was not saying that the rain *felt like* needles. He meant it. It was not a metaphor or an exaggeration. The needling rain was felt so strongly it prevented us from going outdoors with even the lightest of drizzle for many years. And now, when a noise or too much talk agonisingly cuts through my brain, I understand that it is because my brain senses the world in this way. To understand these sensory differences means understanding on the person's own terms.

What emerged and what I developed during the earlier stages of research is an approach that informs the methodology of the whole book and which I suggest is potentially helpful to memory studies as we go forward more broadly. This is the methodological and analytical practice of alignment with the memories of communities of interest being researched. I developed the idea of alignment from the works I was analysing and especially from the art and writing of Judy Endow (2009) who reminds us, as follows:

> Respect the experience of someone who experiences the world differently from the way you experience the world. We know when you consider our ways to be wrong and your goals is to fix us by forcing a behaviour change. We also know when you respect us, consider our ways to be an interesting difference and you join with us offering new ideas and ways to solve our problems and make our life more comfortable. Please work with us, not on us. (Endow 2009: 65)

Endow develops the idea of how to become aware of (y)our neurotypical bias in relation to sense-making – and, by extension, cultural memory sense-making. She argues for the value of shifting from a homogenous idea of sense-making rooted in the assumptions that we perceive and make sense of ourselves and the world in the same ways, to a heterogenous model of our senses, of perception and from this how we then process and make sense about the world. Endow argues that neurotypical people tend to assign meaning to behaviours based on what their own behaviour would mean 'were they themselves engaged in the behaviour' (Endow 2009: 75). This tendency results in neuro-conformism so that, for example, a person assigns the meaning of fussiness and pretensions to royalty to the Princess and the Pea without thinking that perhaps her behaviour is due to a highly attuned tactile sense (because she is autistic).

Endow (2009) suggests working alongside using a reimagination of 'context'. This demands that you/ I recognize and embrace heterogeneity: the neurotypical reader must become aware of their own position within a neurotypical frame of sense contingent upon context. Neurodivergent experiences are then accepted on their own terms rather than misunderstood and marginalized as lacking or deviant due to neurotypical bias as to what makes 'sense'.

Linked to this is the practice of alongsideness. This is an iteration of Endow's (2009) idea of alignment and means that as a researcher, one seeks to be alongside autistic memory texts without reducing, effacing, or subtracting the individual's agency. This serves to reshape how we perceive an individual's story more broadly. Inside-outside manifolds of appearance and subjectivity are not helpful: they can strangle expression and autonomy with idioms of entrapment. They convert the body into a prison and the individual into an inmate. Alignment in the way we research and sense ourselves is neither reductive or totalizing, but particular and contingent. The self is a fluid assemblage which is subject to change as one moves through time and space. This allows us to hypothesize about the expansion of subjectivity beyond the boundaries of embodiment and into more ecological states of being and sensing. Moreover, alignment in the way we sense the world and other people is a discourse of oneness predicated on total relationality, interchange, and mutual symbiosis with our environment.

What Endow (2009) insists upon is the neurotypical reader's reflection upon themselves to displace an almost voyeuristic cultural scrutiny of autistic behaviours for their social differences. Rather than holding up the autistic behaviour against the yardstick of conformist social norms and reading for deviance from those norms, she disrupts the dynamics of gaze, comparison, and othering. She insists on a newly subjective conception of sense and nonsense, treating people as individuals with individual experiences of reality, rather than referring to concrete notions of sense and senselessness. In so

doing, Endow (2009) provides a reminder that typically autistic behaviours are always secondary effects of perception, not (mis)behaviours to be trained or treated in and of themselves.

A Note on Key Terms

Several key terms are foundational to this study and are worth briefly outlining here before I proceed to a summary of the chapters to come.

First, the language used to describe autistic people is much debated and, like all language, it is continually changing and being redefined. Ionescu and Callus remind us that disability more broadly is 'conceptualised in a variety of ways' (2018: 10). Autism is 'not only *not* equivalent to impairment'. It is also '*not* only caused by socially created barriers', and like disability more broadly it is a 'fluid and ever-changing concept' (Ionescu and Callus 2018: 10, my emphasis). Likewise, media scholars Amit Pinchevski and John Durham Peters (2016) argue that autism is a constellation of different discourses derived from research, from cultural tropes, as well as from medical and psychiatric knowledge. At the same time, though, they remind us that for some, it is seen as 'a hell for exhausted parents'. For others, it is a 'self-declared identity'. It is, they argue, articulated through a discursive cast of characters that include 'the so-called refrigerator-mothers, Martians and machines' (Pinchevski and Peters 2016: 1–17). Further, the language we use has a real-world impact. Negative and deficit-defined vocabularies have a history of leading to violent and murderous practices, as in Nazi Germany (Sheffer 2019). Thus, identity-first language, such as 'autistic person', tends to be favoured over person-first language, such as 'person *with* autism' (Buijsman, Begeer and Scheeren 2023; Marschall 2023, my emphasis). I use identity-first language in this book in alignment with autistic activists, many of whom prefer to say that a person is autistic: they/we do not have autism. The latter positions autism as a disease that may be eliminated or extracted from one's humanity. Cristina Moretti (2021a), citing the cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, argues that culture needs to be understood as an adjective rather than a noun. Appadurai argues that one doesn't 'have' culture as a substance but rather a person is cultural as a 'pervasive dimension' (Appadurai 1996: 13). Similarly, critical autism scholars suggest that one doesn't 'have autism' but rather the person is autistic: being autistic is a central and valid dimension of human being.

The term 'neurodiversity' emerged in the mid-1990s amongst autistic activists. The term describes the natural variations in human perception and cognitive and communicative functioning (Blume 1998; Singer 1998; Walker 2008; 2020). Neurodiversity was first coined in a thesis at the University of Technology, Sydney in 1998 by the Australian sociology scholar, speaker and

author, Judy Singer. The thesis 'Why can't you be normal for once in your life' has since been published as *Neurodiversity: The Birth of an Idea* (2016). Singer describes her journey as the autistic daughter of an undiagnosed autistic holocaust survivor who then realizes that her own seven-year-old daughter is also autistic. She developed the term to capture the biological fact of diversity in which human beings are naturally cognitively diverse. She recognizes that people are differently minded and because autistic people are oppressed because of those differences (Singer 1999), neurodivergent people needed a movement and a community (Singer 1998).

Terminologically, an autistic person may be described as neurodivergent but not as neurodiverse since it is all of humanity that is neurodiverse. Human neurodiversity is a biological fact: 'It's not a perspective, an approach, a belief' (Walker 2021: 34). It is not a movement – that is the 'neurodiversity movement' rather than neurodiversity itself. Neurodivergent (sometimes abbreviated to ND) 'means having a mind that functions in ways which diverge significantly from the dominant standards of "normal"' (Walker 2021: 38). The terms were coined by Kassiane Asasumasu, a multiply neurodivergent activist (2021: 39). Some people are multiply neurodivergent – for example, someone who is autistic with attention differences or ADHD and auditory processing differences. Some forms of neurodivergence are innate, such as being autistic and therefore part of who a person is: the neurodiversity movement, in these cases, understandably objects to attempts to 'cure' people of these differences. Other forms of neurodivergence, such as Alzheimer's, brain injuries or the cognitive roller coaster of insulin-dependent autoimmune diabetes, for example, if taken away, would not then necessarily eradicate the person's sense of selfhood and 'in many cases, the individual would be happy to be rid of such forms of neurodivergence' (Walker 2021: 39). In these cases, while there is no objection to consensual attempts to cure or soften such neurodiversity, there is the rejection of any kind of discrimination. 'Thus, neurodivergence is not intrinsically positive or negative, desirable or undesirable – it all depends on what sort of neurodivergence one is talking about' (Walker 2021: 39). As with any concept or idea, neurodiversity is not homogenous or fixed (Russell 2020) but, nonetheless, shares a core idea of natural human cognitive (and perceptual, communication) variation that requires inclusion based on universal human rights (Kapp 2020).

It is important to acknowledge that the neurodiversity paradigm has, nonetheless, been critiqued by several activists and scholars who argue for the remaining importance of medical 'cures' for autism (J. Mitchell 2019) with studies that try to show both the perils and promise of medication for autistic people (Russell et al. 2018). Critics argue that the neurodiversity movement places too much emphasis on the cerebral dimensions of autism and underestimates the embodied experiences of autistic people (Kansen 2016; Ortega

2009). The movement has also been criticized for empowering some autistic people at the expense of marginalizing the experiences of autistic people who are severely disabled (Craine 2020). Neurodiversity is certainly a concept that is contested with variant uses and with ongoing important debates around who 'qualifies' as neurodivergent. A key reproach, for example, to the neurodiversity movement is the idea that it dichotomizes people by dividing neurodivergent from neurotypical (Russell 2020). However, Ginny Russell counters that this is a common critical trope to 'all identity' politics and the initial stages of a movement, and the critique is usually one put forward by those who already benefit from an unequal system.

Steven K. Knapp, in his collected history of the *Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement* (2020), offers a range of counterarguments to the critics of the neurodiversity movement. He documents the history of autistic advocacy and activism through essays written by autistic activists and scholars directly involved in the movement. He argues that the term has provided autistic people with 'an activist tool for change towards acceptance and inclusion' (2020: vii). It does recognize both 'strengths and weaknesses that amount to a difference and a disability' that are then amplified by structural and symbolic inequalities that result in social and cultural disadvantages for autistic people (Kapp 2020: vii).

The neurodiversity paradigm rests on the principle that neurodiversity is as natural and valuable as all forms of human diversity – from eye colour to height to skin colour. There is no 'normal' mind or way of neurocognitively functioning. The idea of normality and the 'normal mind' are cultural constructs (Walker 2021). The kinds of social dynamics that then arise with neurodiversity are like those manifested with other kinds of human diversity – such as unequal structural exclusion and social inequalities. Conversely, when human neurodiversity is embraced, this generates human creativity, genius and potential. While some people may use the neurodiversity paradigm – in developing educational strategies, for example – it is not the same as those who act as social justice activists within the neurodiversity movement, who include many of the writers, bloggers and artists in this book.

The premise explored here is that just as societies are neurodiverse, memory and cultural memory are neurodiverse, too. By way of contrast, within a neuroconformist paradigm, divergence from the norm is because of memory deficits or traumatic experiences that result in remembering differently, both individually and collectively. The latter has tended to dominate studies of memory.

To counter the normalcy of cultural practices and knowledge-making, there is the practice of 'neuroqueering'. Instead of defining autistic people through a prism of medical pathologies and deficits, autistic activists suggest the need to think through a set of possibilities which are heterogeneous and

may be considered in terms of a horizon which can shift and change rather than a trajectory leading to set goals and outcomes. To neuroqueer is a verb for the practice of 'queering (subverting, defying, disrupting, liberating oneself from) neuronormativity and heteronormativity simultaneously' (Walker 2009: 160). Neuroqueer can be used as an adjective to describe elements that are linked to those practices, such as creating a neuroqueer space, or developing neuroqueer theory. Neuroqueer is also a noun that some people prefer to describe an individual's identity. According to Nick Walker, it refers to 'any individual whose identity, selfhood, gender performance, and/or neurocognitive style have in some way been shaped by their engagement in practices of neuroqueering, regardless of what gender, sexual orientation or style of neurocognitive functioning they may have been born with' (Walker 2021: 161).

Neuroqueer practices which combine neurodivergent with intersectional thinking are not fixed or definitive. They are constituted through ongoing processes that involve various crossings and entanglements. They engage with the ways in which neurodivergence is entangled with queerness and/or the ways in which neurodivergence may 'queer one's performance of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and/or other aspects of one's identity' (Walker 2021: 163). Neuroqueer practices can be used to disrupt and trouble neuronormativity and heteronormative performances to restore 'one's uniquely weird potentials and inclinations' (Walker 2021: 163). Such practices might be used to amplify divergences from the norm; or they might be used to create media that 'foreground neuroqueer experiences, perspectives, and voices'. Neuroqueer practices can be used to develop 'critical responses to literature and/or other cultural artefacts, focusing on intentional and unintentional characterizations of neuroqueerness' (Walker 2021: 162). Finally, practices seek to create a world in which neuroqueer people and practices are 'permitted, accepted, supported, and encouraged' (Walker 2021: 163).

I also developed the term 'more-than-human memory', drawing on an earlier article that explores the importance of remembering both neurodiversity and biodiversity (Reading 2022). The term more-than-human memory builds on and extends ideas in memory studies that have previously explored how memories are entangled with landscapes (Schama 1995), the commemoration of ecocide (Crownshaw 2017; Bond, de Bruyn and Rapson 2020), discussions of memory and the Anthropocene (Craps, Crownshaw, Wenzel, Kennedy, Colebrook and Nardizzi 2018), as well as research on non-human memory (Knittel 2023; De Rebetz de Massol 2024). The significance of examining the autistic-memory-activism nexus is that it reminds us of the importance of both neurological diversity and ecological diversity in research, teaching and memory practices. Thus, more-than-human memory refers to the way in which memories are not only entangled between the environment

and diverse humans, but that diverse human memory is constructed through and with the more-than-human world. The earlier article (2022) argues that while the human is often – though not always – de-centred in autistic autobiographies and memoirs there is often – though not always – greater amplification of ecological memories. These might include deep memories of the earth as a planet, as well as remembering the matter and energy of objects and other living beings. The term 'more-than-human memory' also contributes to research terrain that enables crossings and connections between posthumanism, disability and memory, such as Stuart Murray's work (2017). The idea adds to Laszlo Muntean, Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelke's (2017) earlier insights that seemingly inanimate objects have agency that affects memory and forgetting. I also draw on earlier ideas of 'more-than-human' developed by the ecologist and philosopher David Abrams, who argued that human subjectivity is intertwined with our wider environment, including other living beings. These include viruses and fungi that live within and outside of our bodies, as well as plants and animals and other elements that Western thinking defines as non-living or abiotic, such as rocks, water and sunlight (Abrams 1997). As we shall see, autistic memories are activist in that they radically neuroqueer the pathological view that autistic people are cut off from not only wider human society but their environment. Such more-than-human remembering, as I show, connects with 'eco-centric' (rather than egocentric) psychoanalysis pioneered by thinkers such as Carl Jung (see Sabini 2016), emerging ideas in radical animism (Deer 2020) and some Indigenous ontologies (Yunkaporta 2020). The term 'more-than-human memory' extends our understanding of memory and remembering to include memories of and with rocks, water and sunlight but also into experiences with objects and artefacts – such as mirrors and chairs – that within Western ontologies are deemed to be non-living and inanimate. Furthermore, the more-than-human remembering that is evident in the autistic-memory-activism nexus challenges, as I shall show, a set of related conceptual bifurcations that separate memories of the living and the dead, the animate and inanimate, that are axiomatic to most Western human-centric views of memory. The idea enables an emergent understanding of memory and memory cultures that are both ecologically and neurologically diverse, animated by, with, from and through the environment around and within us.

Book Outline

Chapter 1, Forget (Full), explores the dissonances and resonances between popular memories of how autistic people remember and how they articulate processes of individual remembering. The chapter then explores how these

dissonances disrupt established ideas of how we understand individual memory within the field of memory studies.

Temple Grandin's sense of visual recall in *Thinking in Pictures* (2009) points to how different styles and modalities of sensing and thinking shape ways of remembering and, from these, individual and cultural memories. Within Western cultures, visual culture emerged as the prime form of sensory recognition, and within this framework of 'normalcy', autistic people's affordances of visual recall are valorized. Steve Silberman (2015) argues that Silicon Valley tech companies deliberately seek to employ autistic people for their abilities to remember hundreds of lines of code and, through that, to 'see' errors.

Within medical discourse and popular memory, autistic people's individual memories have been constructed in terms of hyper- or hypo-capacity, such as remembering too much or too little, or in terms of remembering details while forgetting the task ahead or the bigger picture. We see how autistic memory works resonates with both medical studies and with popular memories of autistic people but largely they challenge popular memories of autistic people as well as extending what is termed the 'ways of remembering' (Assman and Assman 2006), adding a rich new layer to the most recent ideas in memory studies that go beyond its humanist roots. Autistic activist memories suggest the importance of different 'ways of remembering' that involve valuing the labour of remembering both individually and collectively. They inspire us to question the metaphors we use to understand individual memory and universal ideas of mnemonic form and add to our ideas of the role of the media in generating individual identities and memory. The chapter sets the scene for the rest of the book with the questions it raises that are then explored more deeply in the chapters that follow, exploring themes of sensory memories and more-than-human memories.

Chapter 2, (Non) Sense, addresses the ways in which autistic memory works disrupt conventional relationships between sense and memory: they both reinforce and trouble a developing concept in memory studies termed 'sensory memory'. The chapter reframes theoretical questions of perception and reception through the lens of neurodivergent communication, drawing on evidence from autoethnography, autistic memoirs and secondary sources. I argue that memory theory rests on neurotypical assumptions about the normalcy of a relatively narrow range of accepted ways in which human beings sense and process the world. Medical discourse on autism within this framework characterizes autistic people as having disorderly senses in terms of their reception of the world. The vernacular memory of autistic people, from memoirs to art, from films to blogs, testify to and capture huge variations in human sense-making and sensory memory. The chapter then explores how, within the autistic-memory-activism nexus, there are heterogeneous ways in

which autistic memory works trouble ideas of senselessness and nonsense in terms of extended embodiment, multi-sensoriality, synaesthetic, fragmented, and amplified sensory memories. The chapter concludes by suggesting that these lived 'poly sensory' experiences 'reenchant' (Berman 1981) sensory memory.

Chapter 3, More-than-Human Memory, builds on research in memory studies, as with the humanities more broadly, that is concerned with environmental memories. This chapter extends this through its development of the idea of more-than-human memory articulated in the autistic memory works selected for this study. It argues that in so doing, it is important not to reinforce the simplistic association of autistic people with a greater awareness and connection with nature since this can contribute to the othering of neurodivergent people (Stenning 2020: 3). Rather, I make a carefully nuanced and complex argument that more-than-human memories (both animate and inanimate) are an important feature in the works examined in this book and that these connect with other strands of thinking within Indigenous studies and eco-criticism, for example, which in turn challenge cultural memory more broadly.

The chapter builds on research in memory studies that has sought to understand how memories are intertwined with landscapes (Schama 1995) as well as research on memories of the climate catastrophe and the memorialization of ecocide (Crownshaw 2017; De Massol de Rebetz 2019; Bond, de Bruyn and Rapson 2020). The chapter discusses how some autistic activist memory works have a common thread that includes a deep connection to the natural environment (McAnulty 2020; Packham 2016) which for some is articulated through a call to action to save the natural world (Thunberg 2019). Beyond this, in memory works that are not by autistic eco-activists or naturalists, there is also a sense of mnemonic connections with other species as well as memories that are entangled with and articulated through and in dialogue with the more-than-human world. In this way, autistic memory workers are activists in the ways in which they 'rewild' ideas in memory studies, bringing to the field conceptions and methods that challenge core ideas that autistic people are solitary, and beyond this, the assumption that social memory rests on a human-centric sociality. The autistic writer and artist Judy Endow, for example, relates the story of two young autistic men who are long-term friends, but their carers only learn of this when the two are separated and become upset. She argues that authentic relationships and communication can manifest themselves in non-typical ways: sociality for an autistic person may be sitting in silence to notice the wider world together (Endow 2013: 113). What the autistic-activist-memory nexus shows is the importance of deep eco memory as well as vibrant memories of matter and energy that are also integral to both individual and collective memory making.

The final chapter, Rewilding Memory Studies, concludes with a summary and synthesis of the findings of the three thematic chapters on individual ways of remembering, sensory memory and more-than-human memory, respectively. It then briefly explores some additional ways in which autistic memory works neuroqueer key axioms in memory studies. I examine how they articulate and document time and temporalities as well as questions of voice and having a voice. I align these insights to suggest the wider implications of the study both in terms of how this extends concepts and methods within activist memory studies and also, more broadly, how the study contributes to emergent research in critical memory studies. Finally, I ask what other areas of neurodiversity and memory research might now be anticipated in the future as productive areas of enquiry.

Conclusion

As you 'mind-meander' (Attius 2020) through the book, I ask you to hold in mind one of Judy Endow's poems in which she explains that it is in the betweenness of the cracks that we can find 'a relationship of equality based on our separate commodities of uniqueness' (Endow 2009: 208). She reminds us,

> There is more to jumping over the sidewalk crack.
> Instead, let's jump in it!
> You from your square
> And me from mine
> Together jumping into the crack between.
> (Endow 2009: 204)

Her work is suggestive of the idea that knowledge-making involves acknowledging our connections while paying attention to the messages that travel between us or what Michel Serres saw as the importance of between (Serres 1995). In the next chapter, I pay attention to the betweenness of the autistic-activist-memory nexus in terms of how vernacular autistic memory works to provide a greater diversity of understanding to individual remembering.

Figure 1.1. *Raising the Stain* (2021). © Anna Reading.