Autism Multimodal Activism. Negotiating a Pallet of Identities on the YouTube Social Media

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Abstract

Background: Despite recent developments in the field of multimodality and disability there are only a few attempts to incorporate its theoretical developments for the study of disability and autism. **Purpose:** The present paper addresses this gap by attempting to explore the multimodal practices of an autism activist in a video posted in the popular YouTube media. **Method:** Drawing on an integrative multimodal design, it proposes a novel exemplar for identifying the complex interplay between the identities pronounced and their association with the underlying multimodal resources used. **Results:** Through a detailed analysis, the paper shows how the activist enacted a range of identities situating herself in differential positions with regards to the mainstream understanding of autism. Examining the role of the wider semiotic resources used but also the interplay between them, the paper tries to reshape the understanding of the social actions depicted by the activist. The use of such means as a way to contest the conventional societal views about autistic activities is discussed. **Conclusions:** Overall, the paper considers the intricate relationship that exists among meaning making resources, their use in multimodal (inter)action and the inevitability of escaping hegemonic discourses which secondarily delimit autistic lives through their pathological associations.

1. Introduction

Since their initial conception, autism spectrum disorders have attracted consi-

derable attention within several disciplinary contexts. With autism often marked as a "boom industry" (Hacking, 2009), much of the public dialogue about it noted an unprecedented growth framing its definition, identification, and therapeutic remediation (Nadesan, 2008). Surrounded by a multiplicity of discourses, autism witnessed an unstoppable flow of representations with unforeseen consequences (Murray, 2008). The heterogeneous descriptions of autism led to an overt contesting of autism as a diagnostic entity (Waterhouse, 2013). Despite these groundbreaking changes, the burdensome attributes of autistic life still provide the diachronic accompaniment upon which they can be storied and thus lived (McGuire, 2016).

In general, autistic individuality is mostly structured by bio-medical discourses, which secure autistic personhood inside pathologizing and also subordinate subject positions. The powerful effects of these medicalized representations extend into two interconnected realms. First, they alienate autistic people in distinctively damaging ways, secondarily leading to their social ostracism. In this way, everyday humanity can be thought as celebrating its normative status against autistic bodies (Hacking, 2009). Second, they fuel societal attempts to fight against autism in a logic permeated by militarist discourses. In this sense, autism is considered an unnecessary component of social reality that should be fought against (Waltz, 2008).

Inside this context, autism research unfolds within two broad trajectories. On the one hand, positivistic research essentializes autism, providing a mechanistic and thus individualist understanding of the condition. The positivist perspective is centred around the idea of "truth", which regards autism as lying on concrete etiological roots. On the other hand, qualitative research is grounded on the idea of perspectives and is thus much more oriented toward capturing the subjective nature of the condition. This type of investigation considers autism from a much more idiographic viewpoint that tries to account for the way autistic lives are experienced. Instead of thinking of autism as lying on biogenetic foundations, this type of research examines the multiple technologies of representation that frame it (O'Reilly et al., 2016). Autism, in this sense, is to be considered the result of the diverse interplay between cultural ideas and the materialization of autistic life itself (Georgiou, 2014).

2. Disability, Multimodality and Online Activism

Despite recent attempts to establish a new genre of "social media" activism in disabled populations (Bumiller, 2008), there is a lack of research that focuses on this area. However, multimodal methods can efficiently re-arrange the generation of knowledge with regards to the experience of disability in a triple fashion. First, they can enrich the understanding of digital practices of disabled people by exploring the meaning potential that is communicated through them within a particular epoch. Second, the study of multimodal activities of people with disabilities could offer novel understandings in terms of the properties of identities

that circulate inside instances of social participation and social inter-activity. Third, though building and expanding the knowledge about multimodal communication both disabled and non-disabled populations can interrelate in more symmetrical let alone mutually inclusive ways.

Although multimodal studies in disability are still in their infancy, current examples reveal the potential of these methodological designs. For instance, Al Zidjaly (2011, 2015) utilized a multimodal framework to investigate the relationship between discourse, technology, and disability. She noted that she adequately exemplified how a disabled person utilized the visual modality to reclaim his lost sense of agency using multimodal strategies. Overall, it was shown that disabled citizens could achieve a greater sense of social inclusion through multimodal practices.

Similarly, Doak (2019) relied on a hybrid multimodal design to analyze classroom interaction between a child with autism and his/her caregivers. This author suggested a flexible implementation of multimodal sentiments blending multimodal (inter)action analysis with conversational analysis within an ethnographic framework. According to her the child, multimodally managed to choose a "dispreferred action" during lunchtime, resisting the anticipated action intended by his caregivers. The content of this higher-level action evoked issues of power dynamics and the way these were negotiated during a typical communicative event. The way this child mediated his social action enabled a new way of being within the classroom which relied on further inclusion through enhancing his sense of agency.

Other authors underscored the role played by internet communities with regards to autism and disability. Drawing from a Wittgensteinian perspective, Davidson (2008) concluded that the internet is a preferred modality for autistic people wishing to advocate for themselves. Advocacy in online communities, she claimed, occurs through a wide range of "language games", constituting diverse communication styles. The author further reported that while autistic communities predominantly activate their voices in online contexts, this significantly impacts real-life situations through ways that are still unexplored (ibid). Likewise, Parsloe (2015) attended to the online voices of an autism community, underlying the powerful effects of their discursive activity leading to a positive, non-biomedical appraisal of their identity. Even though these investigations add considerably to the bulk of research about online activities of autistic communities, there is a profound lack of multimodally inspired research. This paper will therefore try to show that through the use of multimodal methods, a reshaped understanding considering the online activities of disabled people can be achieved, expanding our views about their communicative performances.

3. Method

This paper, as part of a larger project which investigates the discursive deployment of autism in clinical and non-clinical cultural environments, will present

the findings of a multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) on a video posted on the popular YouTube digital platform by an autism activist. This video, entitled "In My Language", pictures a young woman synthesizing a complex multimodal landscape about her daily occupations and has been viewed by more than a million people. The analysis is informed by a hybrid multimodal design that attempted to capture how the activist multimodally assembled a pallet of identities as part of the social action of filming and posting an autobiographical video on the internet. The actions exemplified in the video were produced through the orchestration of several multimodal means allowing the activist to meaningfully engage with her immediate environment to present herself to the online audience (Adami, 2009).

The analysis of the data focused on three main areas of concern which allowed for an insight into the whole panoply of the protagonist's social-semiotic activity: 1) The identities made visible by the social actor but also those that remained latent in the complex multimodal landscape (Norris, 2008); 2) The co-regulation of the local and the distant perspective or what has been conventionally articulated as the micro and the macro analytic sentiment in the theory of discourse analysis. According to this integrated logic, disability could be re-assembled as the materialization of the social into the local order of the senses, the body and the surrounding materiality (Schillmeier, 2007); 3) Finally, the analysis employed the concept of "voices" as this is appropriated within mediated discourse research (Blommaert, 2005; Scollon & Scollon, 2004) to capture the dialogical activity of the activist which occurs within a profound heteroglossic context.

The hybrid multimodal model described is mainly borrowed from multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) (Kress, 2001) and also multimodal analysis of (inter)action as this is outlined by Norris (2004, 2019). The central analytic interest oriented upon the study of mediated actions of the protagonist, pointing to several identities made visible inside the video. The main element of the analytic components related to the site of engagement notion, introduced by Scollon & Scollon (2004) and Norris (2019). The site of engagement is understood as a window of interaction that provides the possibility of setting up a series of mediated actions. The analysis in this investigation attended to the site of engagement, opened and then sustained by the up-loaded material on the web page. Finally, the analysis was also permeated by the notion of nexus, which allows for an integrated attention into the micro and the macro-level of discourse (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). The idea of the analytic nexus as incorporated here mostly tried to understand the way local interactions are associated with broader social issues.

The present methodological formulation crystallized in a series of research questions which crucially informed the conduct of the research as follows:

1) How does the author of the video synthesize her social actions throughout the video, and how does she move between these different discourses, managing and producing a pallet of diverse identities?

2) How do these identities inter-relate throughout the video, and with what consequences in terms of meaning-making?

3) What is the effect of the different modes and cultural means for making particular identities more visible than others?

4) What is the role of power dynamics in making some "voices" more audible or silenced than others?

5) How do particular latent identities increase their visibility through the successive captions of the video, bracketing or recycling certain customary societal positions such as those that belong to the disorder-difference dichotomous views about autism?

6) How does the body's materiality influence the notions of disability, and what are the consequences of this positionality for the idea of autism activism?

Data selection, transcription and research ethics

The selection of the YouTube video as research material was based on the contemporary logic that crosses social sciences and mental health. As O'Reilly and Parker (2014) pointed out, research in the mental health field increasingly relies on digital media and relatively small data samples to generate unique research formulations. In this regard, it is suggested that the internet can provide an interesting topology for conducting qualitative research about mental health phenomena. Several authors note that this type of research is naturally driven, participant-generated and could thus prove more sensitive when trying to account for people's constructive and spontaneous attitudes (Brownlow et al., 2017). Also, this type of research highlights the need to engage in designs that do justice to the voices of the participants while being relatively unbiased (Raymaker & Nikolaides, 2013). Based on these tenets, the present study focuses on the negotiation of the notion of autism in everyday societal environments and, most importantly, outside of the mainstream area of mental health.

The particular video was selected among several others through a layered approach in which various criteria were applied to large amounts of video data. The idea behind it was to delimit the data while also locating footage that exemplified a personal account of autism within an activist framework. The indexical criteria applied comprised of 1) age, 2) popularity of the social media platform hosting the video, 3) unofficial instead of an officially produced video, 4) the popularity of the video, 5) it's amateur self-report logic and style, 6) the durability of the video and finally its non-clinical content.

Ethical issues were also paramount during the data selection phase. The rise of internet methodologies has multiplied the ethical concerns of online research, as Moreno et al. (2013) stated. While the terrain of online ethics is far from settled, this study relied on the McKee and Porter (2009) framework, which tends to be overly systematic and straightforward in its design. Following the application of their four-axis model, it was decided that no consent should be obtained since 1) On the level of the private/public axis, the protagonist intentionally shared this video on the YouTube platform without showing any signs of non-voluntary

exposure. 2) On the axis of topic sensitivity, the conclusion drawn was that while autism as a mental health topic can be associated with delicate ethical issues, the character, the style and the content of the video does not point in this direction. 3) The interaction axis was self-evident since no direct contact between the researcher and the subject would be possible, as perhaps in the case of Skype, face to face interaction or any other type of data generation. 4) Finally, with regards to subject vulnerability, no action was made to compromise the protagonist's self-integrity. However, for reasons of enhancing confidentiality, the face of the person is meticulously covered with a visual mosaic.

The transcription of the data was also taken into consideration. This study relied on a fine-grained approach to transcription. Echoing ideas from scholars such as Baldry and Thibault (2006), Hammersley (2010), and Norris (2019), a transcription method has been devised which followed a decision-making rationale, guided through questions concerning: 1) the level of analysis that should be reached; 2) the emphasis on verbal/non-verbal aspects; 3) and the entextualization of non-linguistic details such as music or image. In summary, the technique followed consisted of:

1) Seeing transcription as a kind of critical practice (Tilley, 2003) which meant trying to capture both the micro and the macro level of the video material. In this sense, attention was paid to issues of power and the way they were reflected in the vocabulary used for articulating the protagonist's actions. For example, the idea of "repetitiveness" in autism affords negative connotations for the subject and therefore demanded a less clinically saturated term throughout transcription.

2) The dynamicity of the video material was another component of the transcription phase. Following Bezemer and Jewitt (2010), who advise a dynamic process of entextualization, a decision was made to add a "dynamic descriptive narrative" that could narrativize the complex activities of the protagonist.

3) The identification of the different modes synthesizing the multimodal landscape was the last tenet of the transcription rationale. Inspired by the notion of mode as a social-cultural artefact (Kress, 2010), the process of transcription incorporated a complex procedure that consisted of a recursive, multimodal viewing of the material. This attitude revealed many variable dimensions, which were then examined against the research aims and questions. This labour-intensive process also included the genealogical investigation of different modes and their inter-semiotic relatedness, influencing the analytic emphasis from time to time. As part of this process, the researchers' own autobiographical experiences were influential, such as the transcription of the musical mode that appeared in large amounts in the broader site of engagement.

4. Results

4.1. Nexus of Resistance and the Unfolding of Identity

The nexus of resistance comprises several local actions that pronounce some

general identity orientations for the social actor. The notion of resistance draws from the work of Foucault (1997), who defined it as a productive reaction against mainstream cultural dynamics. The first analytic assemblage becomes informant of those "textual" moments that are more salient for practices of resistance and its corresponding identities through this notion. In the first vignette, the protagonist creates an introduction to her audience. While she utilizes a complex modal organization, the mode of text becomes the most salient, enabling her to introduce the authoritative, independent and valued identity elements. The protagonist could be seen as actively incorporating a disability-free identity in a top-down fashion (Norris, 2011), through the discursive reservoir of disability and activism.

4.2. Dynamic Narrative Transcription

The video's opening frame is nodal since it introduces the audience to the higher-level action of film-making. The author in this caption could be thought of as trying to control or shape the first impressions of the YouTube audience. Through interconnected modes such as print, font, written language, English language and the contrasting black and white colours, the author creates a professional, let alone educational atmosphere.

The granular analysis of how the different resources interrelate in this vignette reveals a series of interwoven identity elements that overall "silence" the signs of autism. As shown in Figure 1, the mode of print is apocalyptic of the protagonist's orientation in introducing her identity on the level of language ability. The series of frozen actions pictured in the introduction also marks the identity on the level of digital competency. The mode of print exemplifies high modal density through the intensity invested in it. Print also interrelates with the mode of colour to provide a documentary layout in the introduction while establishing a serious genre. The protagonist utilizes contrasting visual information to orient the audience's perceptions to the title of the video. In this sense, the title becomes the central message which is situated upon a moving, grey, fleeting background of minor importance (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Commercial filmmakers have regularly utilized contrast to shape the audiences' perceptions about their products (Vestergaard & Scheroeder, 1985).

Through the mode of written language, the protagonist configures her identity in the opening of the video. At the same time, the choice of the title secures visibility and popularity in social media (Lakkaraju et al., 2013). In the present case, a short generic title constructed as a noun clause foregrounds a verbal identity, which becomes individuated through a personal linguistic narrative. In this vein, the protagonist builds her agency and authorship through crafting a language of her own and through the deictic "in my". This is important since language becomes a personal attribute that folds the person's identity into a neo-liberal agentic framework. Stemming from a neo-liberal ontology, the individual voices personal ownership issues, placing herself in a capitalist ideology where identity

can be framed as a linguistic property (Butler, 2005). Language in this sense becomes a kind of continental trademark, an I-language that flows in a universal language marketplace (Bouvier, 2015).

What is also striking in this first caption is that within the title and the introduction of the video, all referents regarding autism are omitted. It could be claimed that the author strategically tries to avoid any reference to autism in order to craft a preferred identity through functionalizing its properties. This kind of identity formulation is discussed by Machin and Mayr (2012), who underline that the value of identities increases when pictured through their

Plate 1a 0.1 sec   Plate 1b 0.2 sec

Figure 1. Introduction.

The opening of the film is a visual representation of the title given by the creator. The viewer can read a still message on the foreground while separate words of this message are mirrored in the background. The words roll in opposite directions creating a kind of "highway effect". The letters are all in the same regular Palatino Linotype font style but they differ in terms of their size, producing a certain three-dimensional visual sensation. The complete message is written in the smallest font size and upper-case letters are selected for the first letter of each of the three words. A visual contrast is created between the black surface and the written words. The reader can clearly read the clause in the middle of the screen but this is not happening with the rolling words that allow only for small bits of them to be read. No sound is added during the first second

New inputs are introduced in the 0.2 sec of the video. The first thing to be added is the vocalization aspect which seems to be brought abruptly. This is followed by the progressive fading in of the visual image that pictures a woman facing towards the wide window. The visual frame is relatively distant allowing for several environmental attributes to be recorded. We see a place that looks like a room that has a wide window in one of its outside walls. There are objects that cannot be clearly distinguished due to the blurring image created by the fade-in effect. The room seems to be situated within an urban district with some buildings appearing opposite on the right side. There are also some features that seem to correspond to a more rural landscape like trees. The absence of leaves on the trees and the relative darkness indicate that the recording must have taken place in late autumn or winter. No special lighting is used inside the room, creating a rather dark, folk, amateur, black and white, candid-camera aesthetic. The person inside the frame is wearing a simple jumper with dark colors and no other visible characteristic on it. The hair of the person or the anatomy shown cannot indicate whether it is a man or a woman. Generally, the corporeal information visualized is relatively little since the person appears more like a shadow and only an idea of the upper extremities is given through the video. There is certainly a polyphony of information which progresses with an accelerated tempo.

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functional abilities and occupations. By overshadowing the element of autism while pronouncing its language abilities, the author actualizes an identity that is not saturated by the autism referent. On the contrary, by prioritizing language ability and authorship, she develops a more competent, disability-free identity.

4.3. Nexus of Disability

The main question addressed within the nexus of disability is: "how is the protagonist doing her identity through mediated actions, and how is disability implicated inside everyday scenarios that display the use of cultural objects?". A theoretical understanding of the person's entanglement with the material objects was imported to explore the above question, which resided in a post-humanist understanding of life (Braidotti, 2002). In this sense, the person is viewed as co-existing with material objects in a mutually constitutive relationship. Within this framework, neither the object nor the person contributes through a pre-existing representation of the world, but on the contrary, the person-object environment is always in a dialogic relationship of mutual definition (Barad, 2007). Material objects then could be understood as carrying their own historical-cultural timelines, which blend with human agents. Similarly to people, objects can inscribe their own manifestations of power, allowing certain functions to become embedded in cultural expressions. The two fragments of such human-object intra-actions quoted here display the protagonist's agonizing attempts to provide an idiomatic usage of these objects within notably disabling scenarios.

The three consecutive screenshots pictured in Figure 2 provide a different visual framework from which the identity is registered. This excerpt is assembled through a diverse range of semiotic means. While the body occupies most of the visual landscape, other background information becomes apparent. Modal complexity is built through the modes of the camera positionality, the hand gestures, proxemics and finally, the movements of the head and gaze, which in their complementarity provide higher modal density to the social action of book handling. In terms of the identity elements made relevant here, following the identification strategy provided by Norris (2019), it could be said that while there is a fleeting reader identity, the "disabled" identity becomes apparent through these consecutive actions (Figure 3).

The visual focus now shifts to the interior of the room. The protagonist uses the left hand to touch the knob of a dresser. It contains two drawers. The drawers are opened and allow a partial view of their internal contents. Although most of the clothes are irregularly organized, we can see the upper part of a woman's underwear in a light blue color. Should this be an indication of the gender of the protagonist? Unless we are shown that she is sharing this room with other individuals, we can probably infer that the protagonist is indeed a woman and could now refer to her as such.

The handling the knob action is also paramount since it represents a sensory dominated activity that transforms both the person's and the correct potential of the object. Similarly to the previous action, this one provides an extension of the cultural affordances of the particular object. This sensory-dominated activity's pathological interpretations prevail, spotlighting the woman's disabled self (Barnes, 2016). This social action is fabricated through multiple modes such as music, sound, the recording frame, the woman's bodily expression and also the non-human environment. Several different resources interrelate, providing an idiosyncratic sense of the person's visual register. The close visual caption aligns with the trembling quality of the camera, producing a very distinctive visual scanning, which is often associated with a dysfunctional visual perception in

| Plate 4a 2.21 sec | Plate 4b 2.36 sec | Plate 4c 2.39 sec |

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Figure 2. Handling the book.

Dynamic transcript narrative.

This is the longest shot of the second movement. The first image shows the woman looking at a book. We only get a flavor of the back page of it. The image on the page does not appear very clear. The size is quite large so it might be a magazine. From the way the book is manipulated we can infer that the book cover is not that soft. The woman is sighted. We can now get an image of her facial appearance. She is a bit corpulent. Her hair is black and is quite short. Throughout this vignette, the woman rocks back and forth while diving inside the book and touching her face through the pages. She does not stop at any time but consistently makes circular movements with her head. When her face distances from the book, she riffles quickly using her thumbs. On the background, we get another view of the room. We see the two doors on the right. The first door is opened inwards and is the one that appeared in previous excerpts. It is clear that this is the outside door, but we see no lock on it. Perhaps this is a residential placement, and for reasons of security, there are no locks on the doors. Behind this door, a similar one appears, but we see that this opens outwards. It is not clear, however, if this door leads to a bathroom or another facility in the room. On the left side, we locate the dresser, but now we get a much more comprehensive picture of it. There are still clothes on it so we cannot say if the video is shot in one day or more. Next, to the dresser, there is a white laundry basket with no clothes in it. There is also a floor lamp which is not switched on. Behind this lamp, we see the tall bookcase with several books on top. The books are arranged carefully. Other objects and boxes in the bookcase are not so well placed. There is also a wheelchair on the right side of the visual frame.

biomedical discourses about autism (Davidson & Orsini, 2013). Throughout the action, there is an agonizing quality that is built through repetitive locomotion, the lack of directionality of the movement, the musical dynamics and the trembling quality of the picture. This effect is further intensified by other semiotic choices, such as the close caption of specific bodily parts with the exclusion of others, which on the whole provides a fragmented picture of the body.

Interestingly, during this excerpt, the protagonist exhibits a rather uncanny, non-identifiable higher level action. Milton (2016), echoing Deligny, introduced the idea of "camering" as a specific type of autistic consciousness that is based on a random visual scanning of the environment. Similarly, the protagonist films an action that does not rely on a specific cinematographic plot. By doing this, she is defending an autistic perceptual reality providing a window on her subjective intake of the physical world while asking the viewer to follow and empathize with it. In this sense, a notably autistic identity is put forward together with an activist identity, overtly reproducing discourses stemming from the social model of disability. At the same time, alternative modes placed lower on the attention/awareness continuum also point to identities that remain latent within this scene. Features such as the furniture inside the room show the ground for these alternative identities through their historical and architectural ideologies. The drawer, for example, except from its functional properties, articulates how people rely on it to sustain housing, secure social status through design, and also fabricate an identifiable lifestyle. In this figure, the old and utterly messy style of furnishing portrays a "bohemian" identity. As such, it could be argued that the person does not only craft disability as an isolated state of being but also through a bohemian lifestyle, which has regularly been associated with opposition and resistance against social elites (Wilson, 1999).

4.4. Nexus Emergence; Flattened Identities and the Construction of Indigeneity

In the last nexus, the author establishes a new configuration of her interactional activity. Language, both in its written and spoken formats, figures high on the
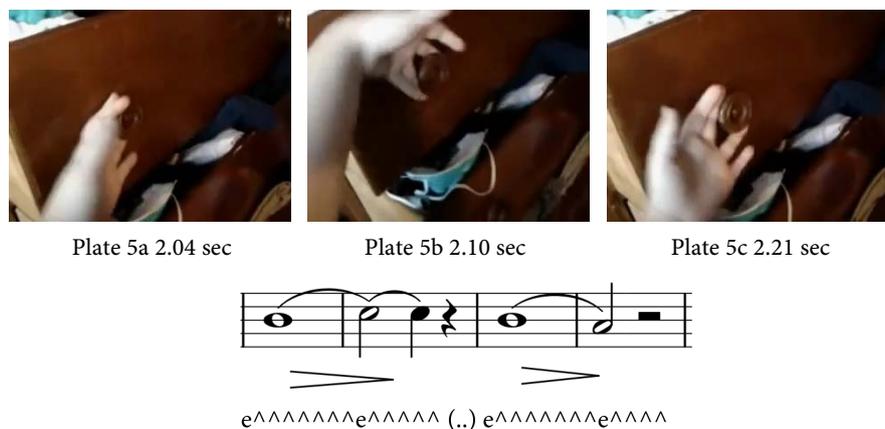

| Plate 5a 2.04 sec | Plate 5b 2.10 sec | Plate 5c 2.21 sec |

e^^^^^^^e^^^^^ (..) e^^^^^^^e^^^^

Figure 3. Handling the drawer knob.

foreground-background continuum complemented by other semiotic means, which on the whole pronounce a "cinematic manifesto". The analysis emphasizes three crucial levels: 1) The level of transitivity, which stands as the way the actor linguistically frames her actions (Machin & Mayr, 2012); 2) the way language is treated as a concrete object postulating to indigenous identity; and 3) the way social others are treated throughout the social action reflecting the protagonist's bias towards the non-social world. In summary, the final nexus is underpinned by the idea of social protest, which on the level of rhetorical organization is framed by an attempt to obliterate others and divide the social world in an "us-them" dichotomization.

1. A translation
2. The previous part of this video
3. was in my native language.
4. Many people have assumed that
5. when I talk about this being my language
6. that means that each part of this video
7. must have a particular symbolic message within it
8. designed for the human mind to interpret.
9. But my language is not about
10. designing words or even visual symbols
11. for people to interpret.
12. It is about being in a constant conversation
13. with every aspect of my environment.
14. Reacting physically to all parts of my surroundings.
15. In this part of the video
16. the water doesn't symbolize anything.
17. I am just interacting with the water
18. as the water interacts with me.

The mediated action shown in Figure 4 conflates an identity that is based on the idea of a non-mental, two-dimensional, flattened state of being. Too often, autistic individuals are considered deviant because they tend to prioritize a sensory dominated experience instead of a mentalized one (Goodley, 2016). This

Figure 4. 3.14 sec.

excerpt figures high density through high modal complexity and is constructed through the higher-level action of explaining the physical movement. The grammar of the shot is synthesized through extreme close-ups, a vertical camera frame and physical sounds, which are embedded inside the actor's tactile interaction with the water. Yellow subtitles complement the visual apparatus but, through their faint colors and small fonts, communicate a kind of relative insignificance in relation to the visual images. The synthesized voice complementing the visual flow is rather mechanical, while the female tone points to a gendered identity. Both the written and spoken language are placed high on the attention/awareness continuum providing a reflective accompaniment to the physical action portrayed. The written and spoken language are paramount for this particular action since they provide the primary register for all other modes. Through the use of a psychological vocabulary, e.g., "symbolic message", "purposeless", "interacting", the author connotes a vivid psychological ecosystem that she subsequently rejects as alien to her self-states (line 4 - 18). Such a construction creates a rhetorical protest to the psychological-ontological framework of modernity, where the individual is defined through his/her interior life (Gergen, 2011). In other words, the protagonist advocates for a social world and an identity that is located outside the disciplinary context of psychology, paving the way for her activist's concerns.

What is also crucial inside this excerpt is the distribution of social power (Gee, 2018). Two contrasting categories of social actors exist inside the text, which are distinguished through their conflictual motivations. The first group is pictured through their rival impetus and is generally perceived as being blind to autistic difference. Through the use of the quantifier "in many people" (line 4) and also the masking of their identities through collectivization, the opposite social group is effectively shadowed (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Additionally, through the meta-prepositional verb "assumed" (line 4), the beliefs and ideas of this group are further criticized. The above transcript indicates the rhetorical goals of the protagonist, first starting with demarcating others through discrediting their "voices" and then allowing for crafting a unique everyday self-accountability. This structure is based on a careful organization of the multimodal landscape from which the author can pronounce her idiomatic language grounded to the preference for the physical experiences of the environment. The notion of double empathy becomes evident here, which explains the two-way failure of empathic understanding between autistic and neurotypical populations (Milton, 2016).

9.   But my language is not about
10.   designing words or even visual symbols
11.   for people to interpret.
12.   It is about being in a constant conversation
13.   with every aspect of my environment.
40.   However the thinking of people like me
41.   is only taken seriously

42.   if we learn your language,

43. no matter how we previously thought or interacted.

44.   108. And in a world in which those determine

109. whether you have any rights

110. there people being tortured, people dying

111. because they are considered non-persons

112. because their kind of thought

113. is so unusual as to not be considered

114. thought at all.

115. Only when the many shapes of personhood

116. are recognized will justice and human rights be possible.

A complicated multimodal practice is also portrayed in the last vignette. What is again primary here is the role of language coupled with other semiotic means, which facilitates the devising of a minority group based on the idea of indigeneity. This is succeeded through carefully crafting others as a social aggregate acting through their colonizing intentions. The use of overlexicalization (Halliday, 1978) allows the producer to characterize others as a) being judgmental; "people claim" (line 30 - 31), "people doubt" (line 69), b) unreliable as in "many people have assumed that" (line 4 - 5), and also c) critical, "they judge my existence" (line 32). As such, the social reality created by the protagonist is based on a simplified dichotomy, achieved through an "ideological squaring" (Van Dijk, 1993). This oppositional deployment is further promoted by the cinematic realism of the iconographic landscape and mainly by the fact that others are completely extracted from the visual topography of the wider "text". The result is the development of an indigenous universe that functions through an idiomatic, multimodal logic folded into the proposition that "this is my world".

Language, therefore, is not the only medium where meaning is inaugurated. The multimodal landscape is flooded by images that denote a powerful sense of authenticity, promoting an indigenous identity instead of an autistic one. As pictured in Figure 5, the protagonist chooses to accompany her talk about

Figure 5. 4.59 sec.

valued relationships, with an image that pictures an intimate relationship between herself and a dog situated inside an environment that looks naturalistic and intimate. While the gaze of the woman is directed towards the window of the room, the whole framework foregrounds the naturalist identity of the actor without leaving any traces of autistic functioning. On the whole, by enacting this filmic organization, the protagonist seems to deploy her interactional attitudes based on the widely exercised prose: "I am a proud autistic" (Grue, 2011).

5. Discussion

The analysis of this video indicated the multimodal challenges encountered by an autism activist in her online quest for self-representation, self-recognition and self-validation (Thomas & Boellstorff, 2017). The arrangement of the three nexuses as deployed in the analytic section demonstrated a skillful orchestration of the various semiotic resources, which helped the activist conduct a "political protest" against those everyday discourses that distribute autism in trajectories of pathology and problematic life. Overall, the multimodal "text" reflected those disconcerting voices, encapsulated in the neurodiversity movement (Davidson & Orsini, 2013), which articulate serious doubts with regards to pathological elaborations of autism (Goodley, 2016).

Through the first analytic nexus, the activist multimodally attempted to guide the perceptions of the YouTube audience by constructing a disability-free identity. The assimilation of the neuro-typical linguistic identity, reflected in the title of the video, foreclosed overt signs of pathology while framing the subject through its linguistic agency. By defending a disability-free identity, the protagonist practised resistance through the idea of private disclosure that currently frames the cultural practices of celebrity and amateur filming (Redmond & Holmes, 2007). As such, the actor attempted to authenticate her experience and also her identity through the manipulation of various semiotic modes and mostly through practising a do-it-yourself citizenship (Ratto & Boler, 2014). In this vein, she relied on images drawn from her domestic placement, offering a raw sample of her own private reality.

The first analytic nexus was characterized by verbal and non verbal material that overtly tried to pronounce a naturalistic, native identity. In a previous study Brownlow (2010), opined that autism online activism is associated with the idea of attaching value to the segregated autistic self, through normalization strategies. This way autism activists often use the online environment to create valued communities that rely on positive relational experiences. In this vein, crafting a positive identity became paramount for the protagonist of the video, who therefore attempted to assimilate the identity of the neurotypical subject. Relying on an individualist ontological framework through the title of the video (In My Language), the activist operated through a capitalist discourse to create an individualist framework through acquiring her own language. Consequently, the activist seemed to pave the way to the subsequent analytic nexuses through estab-

lishing a valued framework characterized by a disability-free context from which the audience could view and understand her identity.

Having already established a valued persona, the protagonist then managed to further enact a disabling image of herself colored through idiomatic punctuation but also without risking negative judgments. In this sense, both the action of the book (Figure 2) and the drawer (Figure 3) associated with disabling scenarios that showed how the interplay between human and non-human materialities perpetuates the dysfunctional character of autistic life. The protagonist relied on these practices to indicate how objects can become vectors of pathology when they do not materialize the body through culturally inscribed plots (Schillmeier, 2007). The footage analyzed exemplified the protagonist's effort to re-invent these everyday objects by emphasizing their unexplored ideofunctions while trying to allocate the disabling features onto the objects rather than the individual self. The dismantling of pathological signs occurred both by showing the power of ideofunction against the technofunction and by fertilizing those activities through preference, agency, and diversity.

The second nexus was strongly associated with the self-advocate's will to disclose the "weird" components of her daily life in order to bypass the disabling interpretations of them. The impact of the physical world on the everyday activities of the activist indicated a departure from the normative materialization. The ligament between the body, the senses and the material surrounding indicated a failure for cultural reciprocation through the production of a disabled identity. The second nexus operated through a complex multimodal ensemble which mainly utilized the ideological framework of amateur filming which most often makes used of the personal, confessional practice. Overall this nexus was in perfect alignment with the social movement of neurodiversity which overtly tries to normalize the idiosyncratic perceptions of autistic individuals. This way the political agenda of the self-advocate recycled the well practiced idea of bringing dignity and legitimization to autistic experiences.

The final nexus tried to secure the preferred identity of the activist by celebrating her personal voice against the voices of others. The alignment of several multimodal means, such as the static images emphasizing isolated bodily parts and the foregrounding of written and spoken language, provided an almost monological landscape. As a result, the YouTube audience became morally dichotomized (Adami, 2009) through the dilemma: "are you with me or against me?" This rather fixed position of the activist encapsulated in the semiotic organization of the "text" resembled the idea of "micro-fascism" of the film as introduced by Evans and Reid (2013). The deployment of this dynamic became crucial since it molded the activist inside the dominant rhetorics permeating the activist world that are mainly pronounced through oppositional discourses (Waltz, 2005). The indigenous identity then constituted the cornerstone of the activist's political ambitions, which consisted in fighting for restorative power against those forces that diachronically subjugate autistic minorities.

One of the most important criticisms and limitations of Multimodal research is that it is very often a highly "impressionistic" approach (Jewitt, 2009). Most critics tend to question the way researchers justify the meanings produced during analysis and therefore try to discount them as arbitrary meaning units. As shown by the preceding analysis however, multimodally informed research is far from producing realist claims which can secondarily explain the way the actors organize their everyday activities. On the contrary, its constructionist rationale and also its epistemological background could provide a new reading of the social actors workings. In this sense, it could be stated that it offers alternative readings of situated activities that while not truer than others can critically enhance our understanding of them.

As such, this research could be taken as offering an alternative reading into the autistic world of the protagonist. Although limited in its data sample, it could be seen as providing a deep understanding of the iconographic material. Also, the findings of this research are not to be taken as generalizable to larger samples of populations but should point to a way of approaching autistic realities in general. By de-emphasising the linguistic nature of life, while attending to the multimodal resources informing everyday actions, could critically alleviate the pathologising dangers, haunting autistic worlds, while offering new windows to autistic consciousness. Future research could therefore rely in multimodal designs not only to offer emancipating readings of autistic experiences, but also to inform their everyday interactions inside notably inclusive societal spaces.

6. Conclusion

The multimodal activity presented in this paper revealed a range of identities assimilated by the autism activist. The flow of these identities pointed to the activist's attempt to break the pathological conditioning of autism through a careful orchestration of multimodal resources within a notably protesting character. This attempt was by no means unproblematic, since it revealed several tensions that reflected the activist's dependency on dichotomous rhetorics. Not only did the activist rely on pathology-laden discourses to craft the multimodal landscape but, paradoxically, she framed identities that seemed to depend on them in order to craft her own. While this can be a very disturbing conclusion, it certainly points to the inevitable discursive positionality that permeates autistic lives. According to it, autism is always haunted by the ghostly presence of the human in unforeseen and ultimately paradoxical ways (Goodley, 2016).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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