‘I Dwell in Possibility’: Emily Dickinson’s Affective Ecologies

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De-pathologizing Dickinson:

"partially cracked poetess" (quoted in Brenda Wineapple)

"unlike many poets [Dickinson] tended to use the same symbols over and over again...[making her] a reasonably satisfactory substitute for the free associations of a living patient" (John Cody, 8).

"Dickinson's sceneless analogical collections, by their very lack of "outer" situations, forgo that playful competition between experience and its interpretation." (Robert Weisbuch, 18)



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Autistic Parallels

how is emily dickinson a role model or representative for neurodivergent women? (i am not retroactively diagnosing her with autism, to be clear. i am proposing that her life and work are relatable to those who are neurodivergent, including myself.)" – anonymous reddit user



Autistic Parallels

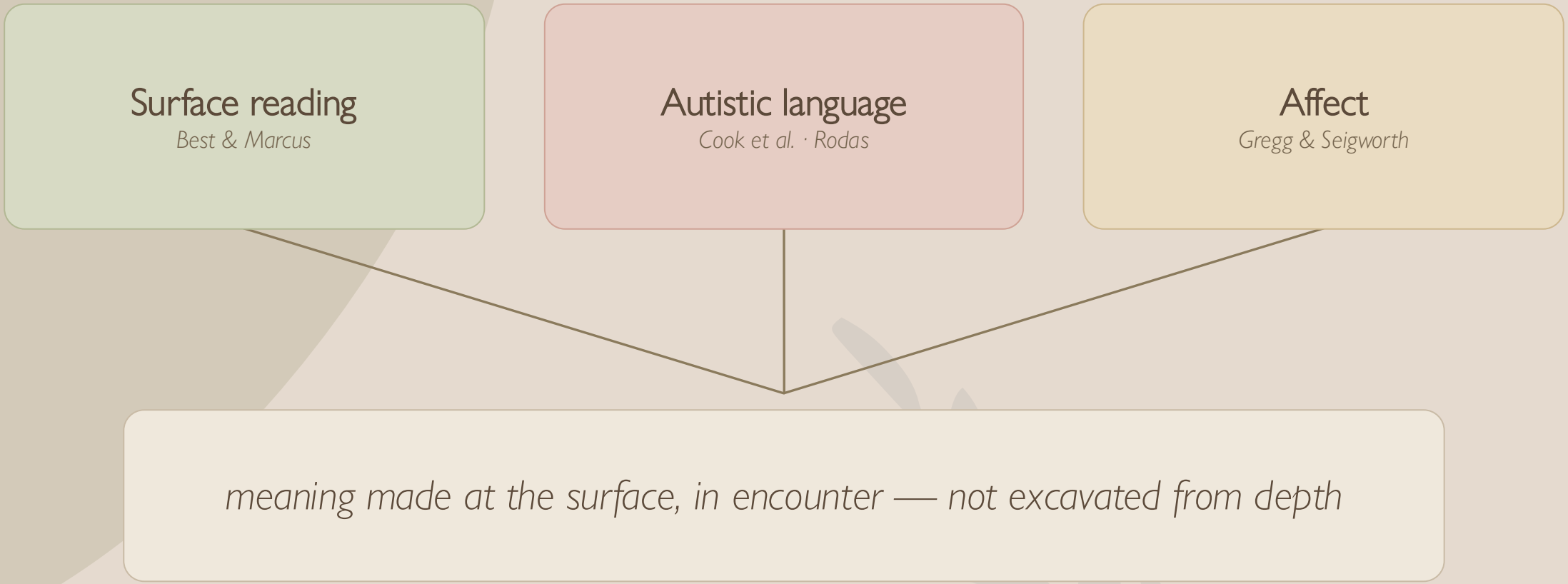
“autism is basically a disturbance of the ability to reach out to the world’,” (Bettelheim, 174)

“abrupt · absence of “I” · absent · abstruse · ad nauseam · adept · aphorisms · arbitrary · astounding vocabulary · barrenness · circular · circularity · creativity · despair · dictatorial · eccentric · echolalia · ejaculatory · empty space · erratic · evasive · exclamations · fragmented · futility · hermetic · hermeticism · hiding · idiosyncratic · inflexible · irrelevant · labyrinth · labyrinthine · large vocabulary · like a professor · like an adult · linguistic zero · listing · literalness · local coherence · logorrhea · mechanical · metaphorical communication · noncommunicative · nonconversational · nondialogic · nonreciprocal · nonsensical · nonsocial · obsessive · oddness · parroting · pedantic · perseveration · polysyllabic · private · pronominal reversal · puns · repetition · returning to the same topic · rigid · robotic · self-sufficient · semantically valueless · silly · solipsistic · staccato · stereotyped · stereotypy · switches abruptly · systemizing · telegraphic · translating coded communication · unintelligible · unnatural · valueless · voluble · without context · without intention · wittiness” (4)

Speaking autistic

“Because there is no specific genetic marker, no blood test, no brain scan, no physical test of any kind, the autistic body is inseparable from autistic voice” (11).

Reading at the surface



I Dwell in Possibility

'I dwell in Possibility' –
A fairer House than Prose –
More numerous of Windows –
Superior – for Doors –
Of Chambers as the Cedars –
Impregnable of eye –
And for an everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky –

Of Visitors – the fairest –
For Occupation – This –
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise –

Autistic affect in Dickinson

To read at the surface — at face value — is itself an autistic mode (Cook et al.; Rodas). Her house lets its surfaces speak.

A fairer House than Prose — the body as dwelling, refusing 'woman' as empty vessel

Windows — Superior — for Doors — thresholds of encounter: to see, and be (un)seen

Of Chambers as the Cedars — the boundary made living; an edge is contact, not lack

spreading wide my narrow Hands — affect moving through and beyond the body's limits

Autism queers affect

READ AT THE SURFACE, DICKINSON'S 'SCENELESSNESS' BECOMES RELATION, NOT LACK.

SURFACE PLAY — "DEEPLY ROOTED IN AUTISTIC PERSPECTIVE AND EXPRESSION" (RODAS, 105)

"EVERY SURFACE COMMUNICATES" (THRIFT) — AFFECT LIVES AT THE THRESHOLD

THE 'ABSENT CENTRE' REFRAMED AS POSSIBILITY — DE-PATHOLOGISING GENDER AND COGNITION AT ONCE

'POSSIBILITY' IS 'PARADISE' — THE ABOUT-TO-BE, GATHERED IN NARROW HANDS.

thank you

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