



STIM CINEMA



I am a sensory-seeking body.

—Aby Watson, “Choreographies of Stimming”

October 1, 2025 – February 28, 2026

A moving image installation by the Neurocultures Collective and
Steven Eastwood

Curated by Christine Shaw

STIM CINEMA is an exhibition and moving image installation that explores neurodivergent perception, agency, and communication in an era increasingly defined by misinformation, polarization, and systemic distrust.

Curated by Christine Shaw, the exhibition features work by The Neurocultures Collective (Georgia Bradburn, Benjamin Brown, Sam Shown-Ahearn, Robin Elliot-Knowles, Lucy Walker), a group of neurodivergent artists, in collaboration with artist-filmmaker Steven Eastwood.

At its core, the project asks: What does it mean to trust one's own perception when dominant narratives privilege certain ways of sensing, knowing, and being? How do neurodivergent experiences of movement, repetition, and sensory engagement challenge dystopian conditions of control, standardization, and hypersynchronization?

STIM CINEMA critically intervenes in the dystopian

conditions where difference is pathologized, sensory processing is disciplined, and trust in institutions is eroded. Instead of reinforcing logics of neurotypicality, this project explores other linguistic and embodied possibilities for being in relation—where trust is built through sensory connection, shared experience, and an ethics of care.

In the **Blackwood Gallery**, the exhibition opens with zoetropes, historic moving image devices that rely on repetition and motion, connecting early cinema to the repetitive, self-regulating practice known as stimming: the practice of physical repetition as a way of taking sensory pleasure in recurrence, or of expressing and alleviating anxiety, and a common trait of autistic experience. Visitors are invited to spin the zoetropes themselves to make animations come to life. The centerpiece film, *STIM CINEMA*, is an 18-minute, three-screen installation following a neurodivergent protagonist during an

eye-tracking test. Rather than reinforcing surveillance or diagnostic control, the film subverts these structures, revealing hidden details and sensory richness often dismissed in a world structured by neurotypicality.

In the **e|gallery**, the exhibition foregrounds the project's collaborative process, showcasing mind maps and ephemera generated through visual thinking and iterative dialogue. These elements highlight neurodivergent-led production models that cultivate alternative forms of trust between artists, audiences, and the sensory environments they co-create. To complement the Collective's mind maps, the gallery has been turned into a studio which promotes group research and learning, featuring related readings, stim toys, and sensory aids. With ample tables, chairs, and materials related to the exhibition, the e|gallery provides an inviting space for classroom and community engagement.

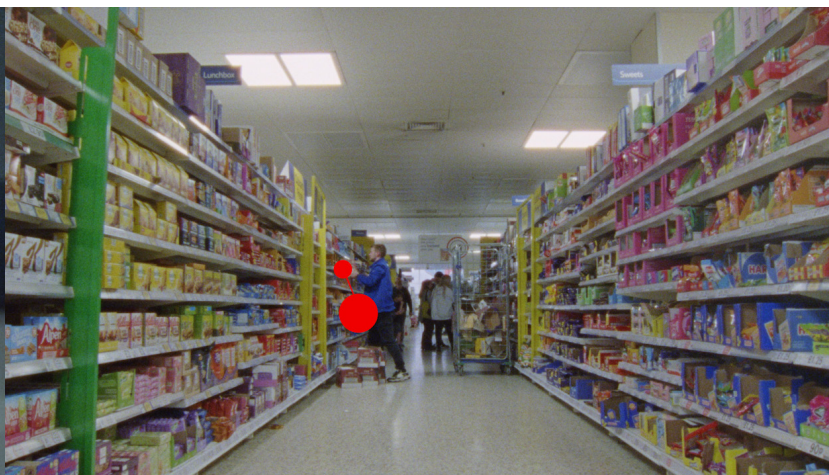
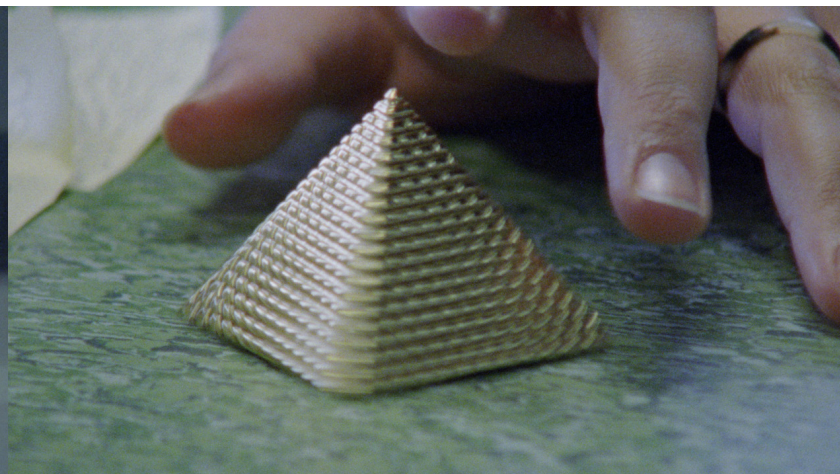
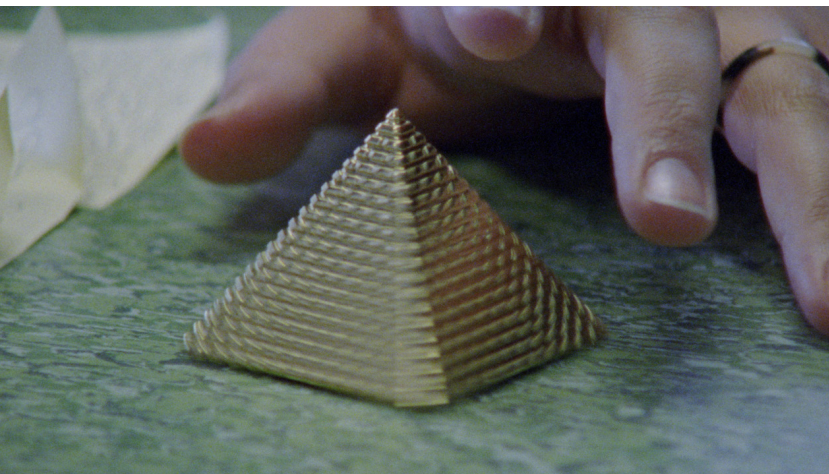
Accessibility

This exhibition has been designed with a commitment to accessibility and neurodiverse inclusion. Visitors are invited to make use of stim tools, including tactile objects, fidget items, weighted blankets, and textured seating that support sensory regulation and embodied engagement with the space. The gallery has been calibrated with soft lighting and a visually calm layout. The free-standing projection wall has been safely built with a soft lean to elicit trust in the work and trust in the gallery. The zoetrope plinths vary in height to enhance accessibility for all visitors, including wheelchair users and children.

The exhibition also offers multiple points of access to the artwork. Core content is presented in layered formats, including audio descriptions and a large-print guide.

Staff are trained in disability and neurodiversity awareness and are available to support your visit. If you have specific access needs, we encourage you to reach out in advance or speak to a team member on site.

The Blackwood acknowledges that accessibility is an ongoing process. We welcome feedback and dialogue to continue to make our spaces more inclusive and responsive.



Desire, distress, requirement, repetition, release, repetition.

For what these repeated acts tie us toward is *perseveration*, or what I might otherwise describe as a bodymind's compulsion to ruminate and rehearse. Perseveration is sticky. Its Latin origin, *perseverat*, translates as “strictly abided by” (Lexico, n.d.; Oxford English Dictionary). Autistic author Judy Endow describes perseveration as “repeat[ing] things over and over.” Perseveration is typified by capital-R Redundance, by excess, by insistence, by sameness, by stuckness. According to psychologist Timothy Pynchyl, perseveration is an action that persists “beyond a desired point.”

Redundance, excess, insistence—beyond a desired point.

I contend that perseveration is not (merely) the pathology that psychiatry suggests. In saying that perseveration is not merely pathology, I am not saying that it is never experienced as bad or terrible (because it often does feel just plain bad and terrible, especially when you can't stop mentally tallying how many times you've checked your stove

and fear you might have burned down your entire neighborhood).

I propose that perseveration may at times provide us a performative framework—an unruly, indecorous framework—for writing and multimodally composing, for creating scenes and disrupting, for crippling and defying and spiraling.

—M. Remi Yergeau, “Composing Perseveration / Perseverative Composing”



The Neurocultures Collective and Steven Eastwood, *The Stimming Pool*, 2024. 70 min. Production stills.
PHOTO: RACHEL MANNS. COURTESY OF WHALEBONE FILMS.

In Italian political Philosopher Adriana Cavarero's book *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude* she deconstructs the implications of moral rectitude in favour of a relational ontology of subjectivity, claiming that the vertical solid self cannot bend towards the other. She remarks “[t]he geometry of the inclined subject helps us expose that both teachers and pupils are always already *in* situation and *in* relation and, hence, indebted to the past and previous generations, finding themselves in a condition of constant dis-possession and re-orientation.”

Cavarero's provocation proposes that the pedagogical task is not to choose between erectness and inclination but about knowing, in our complex times, when to stand erect, embodying the posture of the 'door-man' who guards against unwanted intruders, and when to be inclined, that is when to stretch, bend and lean to the limit of one's capacity in order to take care of and pass on the things that matter the most.

—Lovisa Bergdahl and Elisabet Langmann, “Pedagogical postures: a feminist search for a geometry of the educational relation”



Blackwood Gallery

A

The Neurocultures Collective and Steven Eastwood, *Zoetropes*, 2023

Steel painted black, diameter 40cm, mounted on plinths.

COURTESY THE ARTISTS.

Repetitive movements from the Collective's films are transformed as drawings spinning in a set of zoetropes, sculptural objects that represent the very first form of moving images. Rather than familiar sequences of galloping horses and juggling clowns, these zoetropes depict subtle gestures glimpsed in the video installation: soft-serve ice cream being served, a figure making a self-soothing arm movement, and a box being placed onto a shelf. These looping animations highlight that the joy found in repetition is not only central to autistic experience but also embedded in

the origins of cinema itself. The inclination to watch an action repeated has deep roots: first fulfilled by devices like the 1830s zoetrope, early experimental filmmakers continued this exploration with mesmerizing circular imagery. Today, an interest in looping remains prevalent through the widespread popularity of GIFs. The Neurocultures Collective begins here—at the intersection of stimming, GIFs, early cinema, and the avant-garde—envisioning a world where stimming is embraced as a desirable state.

B

The Neurocultures Collective and Steven Eastwood, *STIM CINEMA*, 2023

Three channel video installation, Super 16mm digital transfer to 4K. 17:43 loop.

COURTESY THE ARTISTS.

In *STIM CINEMA*, a young woman sits in a clinical setting, taking part in an eye-tracking assessment commonly used in autism

diagnoses. During the test, she is shown a series of video clips representing “neuro-typical” environments, such as a bustling city street, a shopping mall, and a gymnasium. As the red dots generated by the eye test apparatus trace the subject's gaze, it becomes clear that these places are filled with naturally occurring repetitive, stim-like actions. Guiding our own gaze to the peripheries of the frame, *STIM CINEMA* invites us to examine every part of the scene more closely. Flanking the central screen, the left and right present deconstructed views of these scenes that uncover subtle movements and hidden rhythms, bringing attention to the sensory delight found in repetition and stimming.

Throughout the assessment—and unbeknownst to the off-screen facilitator of the eye tracking test—the participant notices a figure in the background of the footage: a young woman in a striking green coat. Drawn to her, a silent connection begins to form. This figure too appears to be quietly negotiating the sensory overload of the neurotypical world. She desires to move with the freedom of a blade of grass swaying the in wind, but feels constrained by the social conventions in spaces like her workplace or a crowded pub. Eventually, she discovers a space of liberation—where both she and the film installation itself are free to stim, sway, and move without restriction.

STIM CINEMA invites viewers into an active, immersive mode of looking—one where delight is found in every corner of the frame, much like a series of spot-the-difference games. Echoing the choreographed ensembles of Jacques Tati and the forensic gaze of Ridley Scott's *Esper machine* in *Blade Runner*, *STIM CINEMA* embraces a fluid, ever-shifting cinematic form. In doing so, the Neurocultures Collective foreground the aesthetic and sensory pleasures

of repetition, pattern, and micro-detail—sensibilities often resonant with autistic perception—while asserting that such modes of attention lie at the very core of moving image itself.

E Gallery

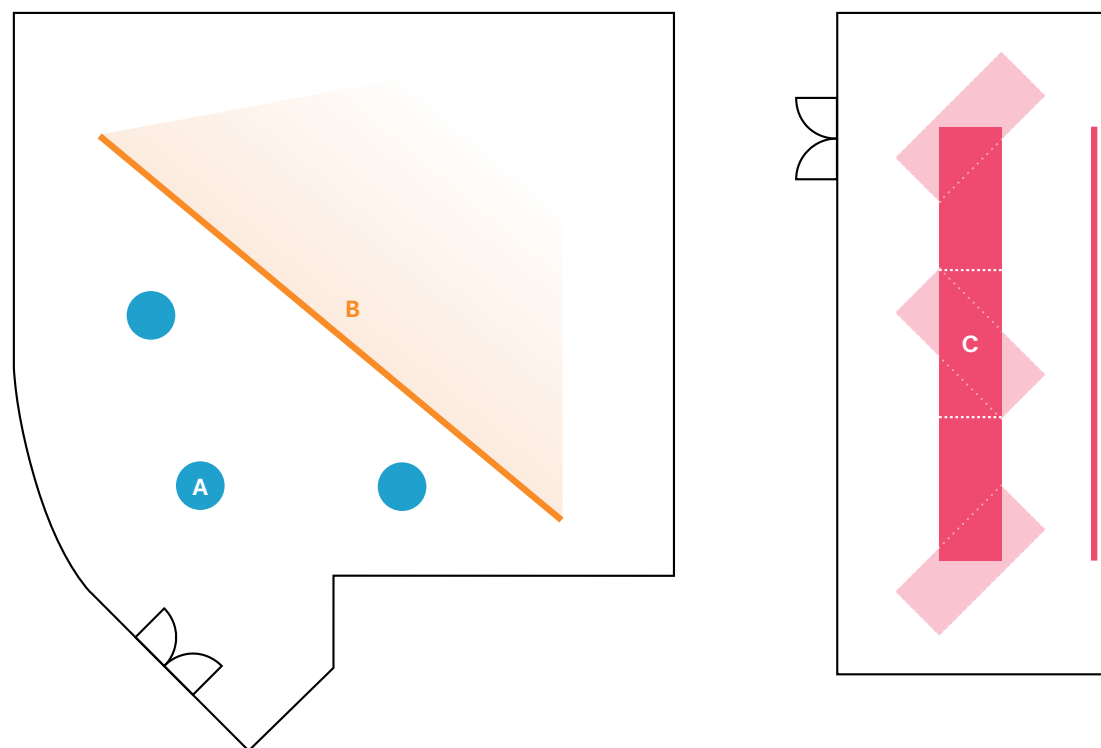
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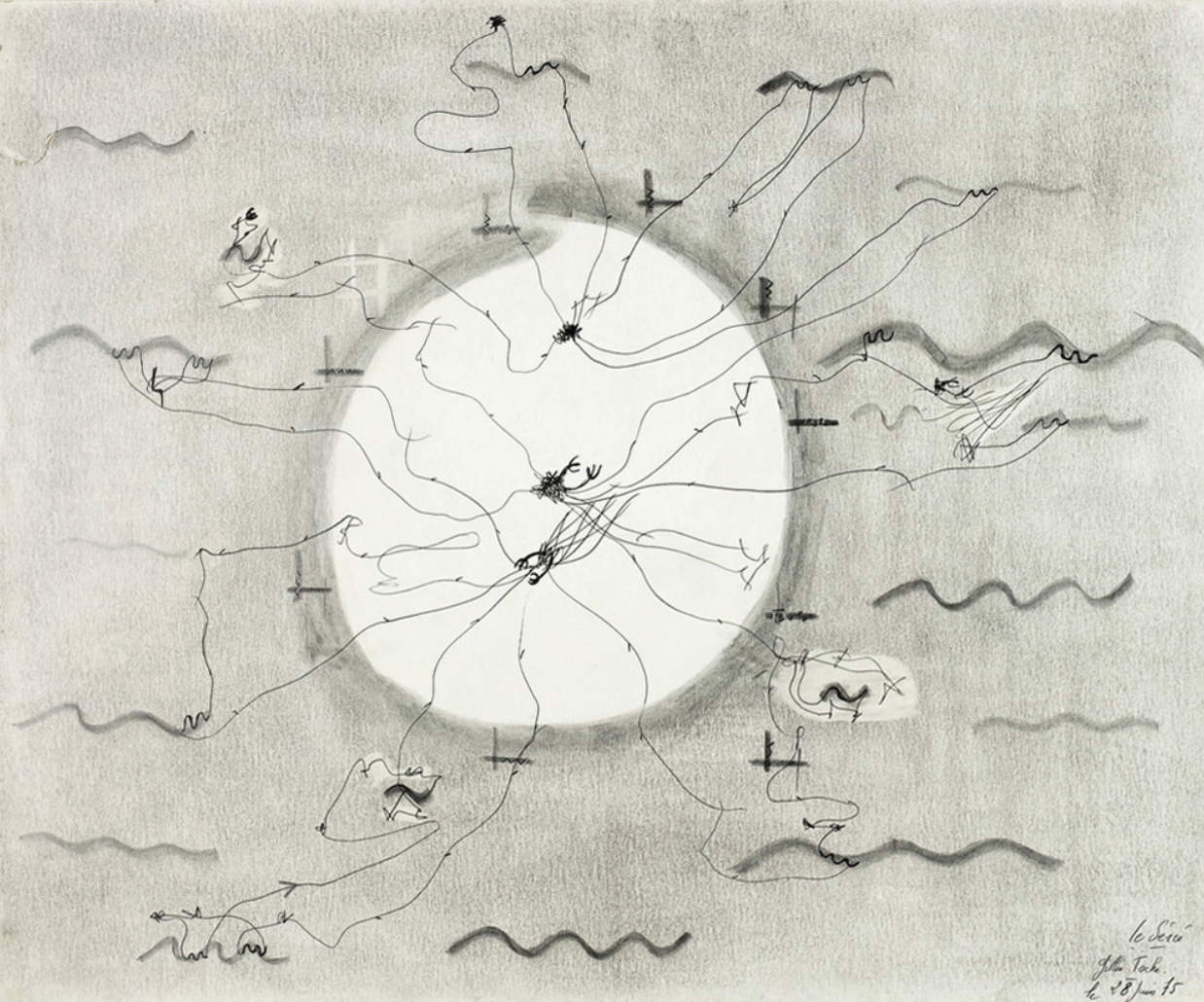
Co-Creation Studio

Reading and co-working space with related publications, stim toys, and a mural of the Collective's mind maps.

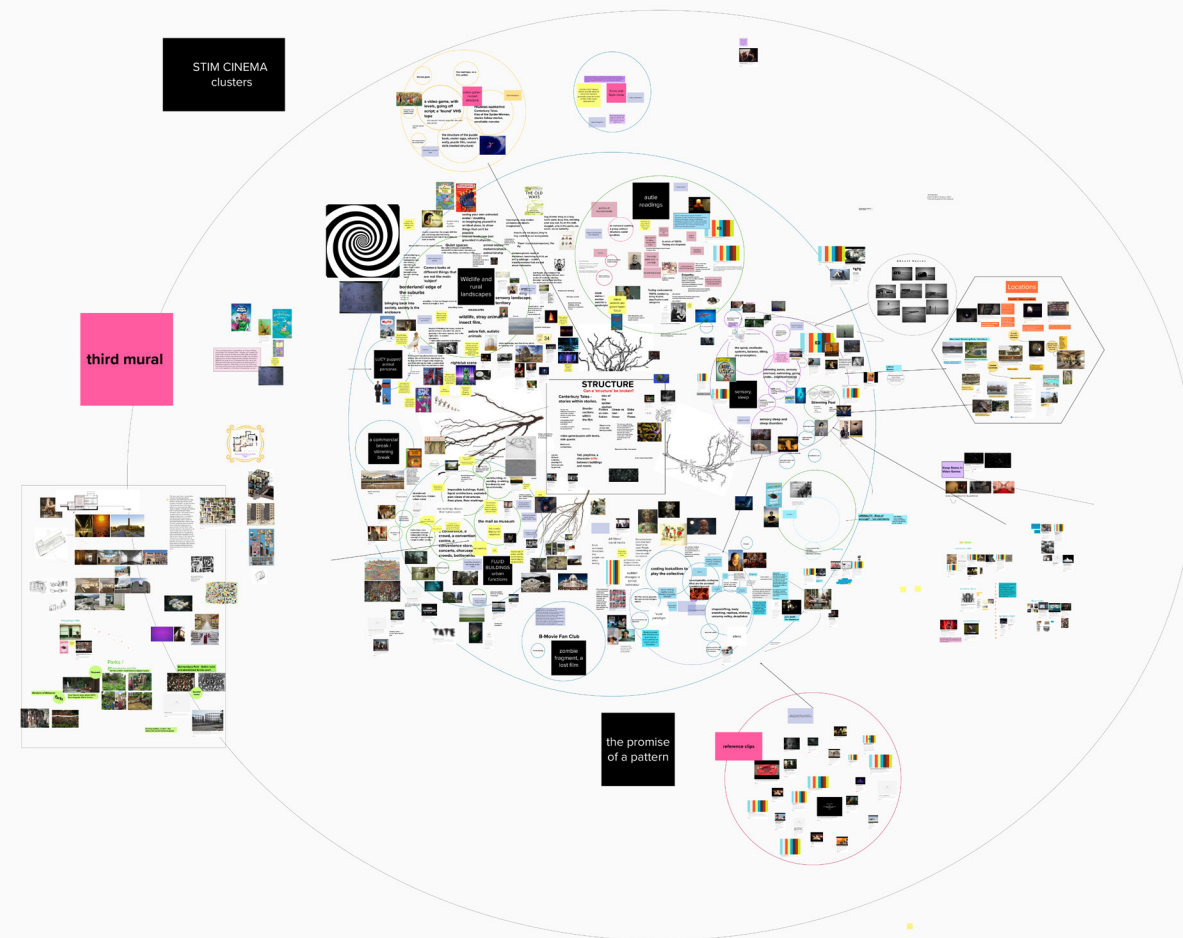
This section of the exhibition puts a spotlight on the collaborative methods of the Neurocultures Collective. Featuring mind maps borne from their visual thinking and ongoing conversations, these materials visualize the Collective's long-term examination of the connections between autism and cinema. They also serve to emphasize production models led by neurodivergent creators who are too often expected to justify their identities rather than shape how they are represented. As the Collective shares, this “co-creation method offers opportunity, inclusion and visibility” and seeks to create “new vantage points into the complex ecologies of collaborating.” Together, they foster forms of trust and connection between neurodiverse artists, audiences, communities, and the sensory spaces they collectively shape.

To further support this ethos of collaboration, the gallery space has been transformed into a sensory-friendly studio environment that encourages group research and learning. Outfitted with tables, chairs, stim toys, and a variety of materials tied to the exhibition's themes, this co-creation studio offers a welcoming and inclusive setting designed to engage visitors and nurture creativity, dialogue, and collective exploration.





A map of movements by Janmari (student of Fernand Deligny) traced by Jean Lin, June 12–13, 1975. Reproduced in Fernand Deligny, *Cartes et lignes d'erre: Traces du réseau de Fernand Deligny, 1969–1979* (Paris: Éditions L'Arachnéen, 2013).



The Neurocultures Collective and Steven Eastwood, *STIM CINEMA* co-creation process, 2023.

The Neurocultures Collective's practice links to the investigations of the anti-psychiatry pedagogue Fernand Deligny whose observations of autistic children in France inspired the concepts of *pri-mordial communism* and the *network as a mode of being*. Our process of co-creation cultivated its own unique methods, working with slowness and deep listening, and continually reframing how art happens collectively. **This reciprocal process makes hierarchies level, and deliberately intervenes in cultural and social acts of *looping*—philosopher Ian Hacking's term for the effects of the classifiers, classification, and classified on each other—in this case, how autistic readings of expert models, for example, theories of mind, can give rise to resistance and change.**

—Steven Eastwood, "The Neurocultures Collective: Co-creating Moving Images"

The concept of the ‘**double empathy problem**’ has the potential to aid a reframing of autism itself from a social communication disorder to a description of a broad range of developmental differences and embodied experiences and how they play out in specific social and cultural contexts. If this were so, it would lead to a radical change to current diagnostic criteria. This is most important however when considering best practice models for supporting autistic people in a variety of settings. **Instead of focusing on perceived social deficits and normative remediation, the concept suggests a position of humility in the face of difference, the need to build rapport and understanding and not assume a lack of capacity for understanding. Ultimately, the concept reminds us of the social situatedness of the lives of autistic people and those who support them.**

—Damian Milton, “The ‘double empathy problem’: Ten Years On”

DeafBlind essayist, poet, and Protactile educator John Lee Clark advocates the revolutionary capacity of Protactile, a distinct language of taps, signs, and reciprocal contact for DeafBlind people. Protactile emerged in 2007 from the inadequacies of ASL—a visual language even when pressed into someone’s hand—with the power to upend centuries of DeafBlind isolation and ***distantism***. “When hearing and sighted people stay at a distance, they do use their distance senses of hearing and vision to maintain a connection across those distances. Members of the DeafBlind community know that the distance senses of sight and hearing keeps the whole world at a distance.”

Clark’s writing and teaching serves as a dynamic appeal to rethink the meanings of disability, access, language, and inclusivity, and to **reach for a future we can create together, with new sensibilities, forms of embodiment, sociality, and modes of existence.**

Clark encourages us to overthrow cultural impulses to “not touch” and instead to ***“reach out and get in touch because the world is right here, right here, just waiting for us.”***

—Christine Shaw, in response to John Lee Clark, *How to Communicate and Touch the Future: A Manifesto in Essays*

Public Programs

Responsive programming runs alongside *STIM CINEMA* including screenings, workshops, campus walks, performances, and a 4-day interdisciplinary seminar series.

All programs are free and open to the public.

Reader-in-Residence

Throughout Fall 2025 a lunchtime Reader-in-Residence series on UTM campus will offer group readings, discussions, and embodied activities led by guest contributors whose ethical, political, and social commitments complement the exhibition. Centring the practices of UofT faculty, staff, and graduate students, these sessions offer multimodal responses to neurodiverse cultures, aesthetics, and modes of perception.

Each session will be held in the exhibition's Co-Creation Studio, located in the elgallery, CCT Building lower level, and will include:

Reader-in-Residence:

Andi Gilker

October 15, 12–1:30pm

Reader-in-Residence:

Anne McGuire

November 5, 12–1:30pm

Reader-in-Residence:

Julia Gruson-Wood

November 19, 12–1:30pm

Register to attend on the Blackwood website.

Autism Through Cinema

Film Screening

January 2026

In January 2026, a film program presented in Toronto will explore the rich and multifaceted nature of an autistic apprehension of the world by looking with autism rather than at it. Bringing together a diverse selection of short films from documentary to animation, and genre-twisting fiction to experimental filmmaking, this program asks how cinematic language can be challenged and changed by autistic perspectives.

A Brief History of Circles, Georgia

Kumari-Bradburn

Drawing on Autism, Alex Widdowson

ScrapBook, Mike Holboom

The Mask, Sharif Persaud & Tim Corrigan

In My Language, Mel Baggs

Autism Plays Itself, Janet Harbord

We've created these invisible systems

and structures, Sophie Broadgate

A is for Autism, Tim Webb

Visual Disturbances, Eric Faden

***Oughtism* is my name for the ways we are trained, habituated, conditioned, and rewarded to think along dominant lines of production. How we ‘ought’ to behave. A tendency towards the already known. A regulatory refrain that whispers how bodies ought to look like, ought to behave like. Oughtism is neurotypicality in its production of embodied relations of normopathological repetition; it is the sweeping regime of the obvious, a vocation of lines and their secretions, a rush to solutions. [...] In these moments of wars, angry lines, and angrier flames, may we be visited by outstretched arms and offending requests to toss away the crippling fixation with neurotypical goals.**

—Báyò Akómoláfe, “Oughtism”

Oughtism... I would prefer not to

Multimodal Seminar Series

February 5–8, 2026

Blackwood Gallery, CDRS, E Gallery, MiST Theatre (UTM)

Organized and hosted by Christine Shaw

In Winter 2026, the 4-day seminar *Oughtism... I would prefer not to* will deepen interdisciplinary conversations of neurodiversity, disability, creative practice, and collaborative methodologies. Awarded the prestigious 2025 UTM-JHI Annual Seminar, *Oughtism* will explore autistic politics and perception, distantism, the empathy epidemic, choreographies of neurodiversity, Protactility, and other modalities that refuse neurotypical logics. *Oughtism* will begin with a screening of *The Stimming Pool*, a feature film by the Neurocultures Collective, and discussion on collaborative research and production methods by visiting members of the Collective. It will then unfold through a series of keynote talks by Báyò Akómoláfe, Amelia Groom, Janet Harbord, and M. Remi Yergeau, and experiential learning, movement, better listening, and co-creation workshops with neuroqueer choreographer Aby Watson, the Library of Dysfluent Voices (SPACE), and Protactile advocate John Lee Clark.

Biographies

The **Neurocultures Collective** formed in 2020 and collaborated with Steven Eastwood to co-create *STIM CINEMA* and *The Stimming Pool*. The Neurocultures Collective comprises:

Sam Chown Ahern, a visual artist working with drawing, illustration, bookworks, photography and sound. Sam was also the co-host of the CH4 documentary *Are You Autistic?*

Lucy Walker, a member of the Project Artworks Collective, working with costume and puppet making, drawing and small set building, all involving alter egos;

Georgia Kumari Bradburn, a short-film maker whose work focuses on metamorphosis and transformation, and an embodied autistic phenomenology of cinema;

Robin Elliot-Knowles, an associate artist of the Project Artworks Collective, whose practice includes painting, drawing, and graphic-novels, considering themes of intersectionality, post-colonialism, and transgender (Robin is also the curator of the B-Movie Fan Club, a monthly screening at Hastings Electric Palace);

Benjamin Brown, a film programmer/curator whose creative practice involves drawing, video, and photography, with a particular focus on sensory ethnography (Ben also runs a film club called Citizen Autistic).

Steven Eastwood is an award-winning artist-filmmaker whose work often involves participatory and co-creation methodologies. His recent films and moving image artworks include *The Stimming Pool* (2024); *STIM CINEMA* (2023); *ISLAND* (2018), *THE INTERVAL AND THE INSTANT* (2017); *BURIED LAND* (2010); *The Hiss of the Blow* (2009). Steven is Professor of Film Practice at Queen Mary University of London.

In 2018, The Blackwood presented Steven Eastwood's *THE INTERVAL AND THE INSTANT* in the 5-part exhibition series *Take Care*, curated by Letters & Handshakes (Greig de Peuter & Christine Shaw). Steven's participation in *Take Care* included "The Interval and the Instant: Inscribing Death and Dying," a conversation with Dr. Naheed Dosani, Dr. Jenny Lau, and Dr. Kim Wedger as part of the 3-day event *Running with Concepts: The Empathic Edition*.

Acknowledgments

Blackwood Staff

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Jacqui Usiskin, Interim Project Coordinator
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DCM Thistle Printing

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STIM CINEMA and the related feature film *The Stimming Pool* were both outcomes of **Autism Through Cinema**, a five-year collaborative investigation into the relationships between neurodivergent thinking and cinematic creation. Through the formation of a collective of autistic filmmakers, a reimagining of medical films, and an exploratory podcast, the project sought out the rich interactions of autistic embodied experience with the moving image. Autism Through Cinema was led by Professor Steven Eastwood and Professor Janet Harbord.

Project Advisors: Damian Milton (The Participatory Autism Research Collective); Tim Corrigan and Kate Adams (Project Art Works); Maggi Hurt (BFI); Sam Chown Ahern (artist and Collective member).

Commissioned by FLAMIN Productions through Film London Artists' Moving Image Network with funding from Arts Council England. Funded by Arts Council England and Wellcome Trust with support from Queen Mary University of London.

STIM CINEMA is a touring exhibition that launched at Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery, November 25, 2023–April 14, 2024, curated by Gilly Fox.



The Blackwood
University of Toronto Mississauga
blackwoodgallery.ca

