



AAM VERSION

**THEY CANNOT UNDERSTAND
WHY AUTISM RESEARCH
GETS IT WRONG**

TIMOTHY SPEED

OPERATORIC RESEARCH CORPUS - CRITICAL AUTISM STUDIES

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They cannot understand Why Autism Research Gets It Wrong

by Timothy Speed

One cannot exist and be understood at the same time – with this sentence the neurodivergent artist, researcher and activist Timothy Speed opened the research field of Autistic Epistemology – a new mode of thought in which autism is not an object but an origin of knowledge. He connects Critical Autism Studies, Artistic Research and Systems Theory into a unified ontology of the resonant. Speed belongs to the few thinkers who do not theorize posthumanism but live it. One of the overlooked systems thinkers of our time – who spoke of “resonance” long before Hartmut Rosa, unfolding an understanding of reality as cyclical, embodied interaction, which brings together economic, social and energetic processes and thus – similar to the Nobel Prize–winning economists of market and behavioural economics Mokyr, Aghion and Howitt – anticipated early on the end of linear rationality and the necessity of a relational economy. He delivers not only a contribution to autism research but a fundamental theory of perception, work and existence in the age of overstimulation. His work stands in the line of paradigmatic turns that do not speak about deviation but generate knowledge from within it – comparable to Fanon, Haraway, Deleuze or Manning. Speed reveals the ontological rift between neurodivergent and neurotypical people and transforms not only the Double Empathy Problem, but also our understanding of masking and of reality itself. *They cannot understand* shows that every existence is a distortion – and that neurodivergence might be the key to understanding this refraction as a creative force.

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Attitude and Incommensurability

Neurodivergence — which includes not only autism and ADHD — is often treated in the West as if it were merely a hypersensitivity to the modern world. In Japan, autism is also called 自閉症 (jiheishō), which literally translates as the syndrome of shutting oneself away.

Decades ago, when no one yet knew that I am autistic (AuDHD), the school newspaper wrote about me: “We wish him another world.” It revealed a certain desire to get along without autistic people — because we create friction, because we are a living challenge to the prevailing conditions.

I was born in the early 1970s in Middlesbrough, England, the son of an Austrian mother and an English father. That makes me a child and grandchild of the industrial age — the birthplace of capitalism. My great-grandfather William Robert McMaster was a metalworker at Sir B. Samuelson & Co.; his son-in-law, my grandfather, was a foreman, as his own father before him had been a machinist. Most of the family lived from iron in one form or another, back when steel was still in its infancy, after their families had been deprived of grazing rights during the Enclosure movement to force them into the factories of the 19th century.

Thus, in my DNA there is, alongside neurodivergence, also the foundational act of violence with which capitalism began: the expulsion from paradise — from self-determined work and provision. My birthplace, then known as Ironopolis (Middlesbrough), inspired, alongside other industrial centres of that time, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marx wrote *Das Kapital* as a reaction to the northern English cities with their filth of overcrowded misery, in which there was no middle class, but only industrialists and exploited workers. Fritz Lang shot in Germany the film *Metropolis*, which was likewise shaped by accounts of these dystopian cities.

A world founded on maximal profit, with machine-humans who toiled around the clock for a grand future, while for them 30 represented the average life expectancy.

At some point in this era, neurodivergence entered the bloodline of my ancestors and led in them, who were never aware of it, to an almost militant loyalty to principles and hardness, which is typical for neurodivergent people in the 18th and 19th centuries. There was no understanding, no comprehension, just as there were no academics, let alone cultural workers. Among them were many self-made engineers, tinkerers, inventors. Ironopolis was also a stronghold of innovative founders. Thus, many found refuge in niches in which they mostly operated machines alone, or researched innovations in a monotropically focused way.

With the end of Ironopolis’s heyday, my family shifted from iron to oil. In the 1980s my father rose quickly from sheet-metal worker to Offshore Installation Manager on a North Sea oil platform.

He was hard, very hard, believed Hitler had done good work, had men with earrings punished by hosing them down with the fire hose on the helicopter deck and was in every respect homophobic. The boys from Ironopolis understood this attitude as part of their identity. The working conditions tolerated no contradiction. Safety was enforced through hardness, but not through systemic diligence, which ultimately became fertile ground for many accidents and catastrophes. Patriarchal structures on the one hand, maximum submissiveness on the other and in between a whole lot of alcohol.

In 1988, I was 15 at the time, I stood in the living room of my parents and held a piece of thermal paper in my hands. It came from a paper roll that recorded radio messages. On the paper it said:

“Mayday Mayday, Piper Alpha burning...”

It was the 6th of July, when the Piper Alpha suffered the largest offshore disaster in the history of oil extraction. 167 people died, only 61 survived the drilling-platform accident.

In the investigation report it was later stated that one of the causes for the escalation of the fire, alongside the massive failure of the safety systems, also lay in the fact that the other platforms directly connected to Piper Alpha did not shut down the connecting pipelines. They did not act because shutting down would have caused damage of several million dollars. Therefore they pumped more and more fuel to Piper Alpha. They waited partly 90 minutes for consultation with the bosses on the mainland and entangled themselves in neurotypical hierarchies while their colleagues burned in the inferno. A whole container sank with 80 people to the bottom of the North Sea.

My autistic-shaped father (never diagnosed), however, shut down the supply line to Piper Alpha immediately. It was utterly irrelevant to him what others thought about it. A million-dollar loss did not concern him. Right or wrong were for him absolute magnitudes. He was also good at breaking off relationships abruptly. But on that day he, together with the few who likewise acted, probably saved several lives.

He did not speak a single word to me for the next twenty years. Because I am an artist, an intellectual, not a real man, but a disgrace in his eyes. In Ironopolis they would have beaten me to death.

Violence and pain, enduring, pushing through, carrying on — that has always been my life. Contradictions, distortions, alienation and hardness — as I understand it today — are the consequences of generations wrestling with a world that demands neurotypical, white, patriarchal functioning all the way to self-denial and self-destruction.

The feeling of alienation, of suppression and distortion seems to me characteristic of our time. We have narrowed ourselves so drastically, in a capitalist madness of one-sidedness, that fear and violence accompany every change and try to prevent every opening. To deny the dark, black stain, the ethical fault lines — that is no longer possible for me, as an autistic person and descendant of the inhabitants of Ironopolis. That is what made me an activist,

and it feels as if the reality of Ironopolis pursues me like a curse. What is right? What is wrong? Questions that confronted me as well.

The hardness against the foreign/other

In Germany, where I live today, the acceptance of diversity is rapidly decreasing. It has come to that again.¹ Dark times have returned and with them the same reflex of the higher earners, who speak of personal responsibility and by that mean the next wave of exploitation and discrimination of those below them, those who are existentially prevented by them again and again.

Only 45 percent of the population still see diversity as enrichment. It disrupts frictionless production and threatens their jobs, from which they can barely live. These are the harbingers of neo-fascist tendencies, from which more and more countries in the West are affected. The hatred against the “others” is rising and political murders (Melissa Hortman & husband to Charlie Kirk) are increasing alarmingly. All of this is also the consequence of what I already described 25 years ago in *Society Without Trust*, namely the dominance of material norms over ambiguity, over life itself, which destroys complexity and with it truth. It is a neurotypical shadow in which the potential of the other is suffocated in order to control and consolidate position within the group. Privilege again determines life chances. The old monster is back.

The narrowing and solidification is what constitutes identity in the neurotypical, patriarchal. This leads to two opposing experiences of existence. On the one side the solid, the concrete, the single determining element, the hard reality. On the other side — that is, at the margins — there the rigidity leads to distortion, to a one-sided reference to the norm. The margins are bent, caricatured, over-stretched into masks or marginalized.

The one acts as if it had nothing to do with the other, as if the interaction did not exist.

In a neurotypical and material worldview one can line up and add objects. Growth is an infinite line. The one has no effect on the other. Objects are considered isolated, as severed units. This is the consequence of a specific imprinting of brains and neurological networks that we call neurotypicality. It is the result of centuries of organization of society and power. It is constructed as a dominant worldview in order to stabilize models of domination within it. One can therefore say that politics has inscribed itself into biology. With every blow, with every violent suppression, narrowing, shifting and distortion were transmitted genetically and evolutionarily to the next generation.

If something is defined, then its potential disappears. It becomes limited. The solid forms a distortion filter: habitats, worlds, realities in which what is defined as solid shifts all other

¹ Vielfaltsbarometer 2025 Robert-Bosch-Stiftung Deutschland

parts in relation to it, because the limitation of one potential always narrows the potentials of all other connections. The idea of an independent, free space is an illusion. This means, as I explain extensively in *The Physics of the Poor*, that every existence, with increasing densification, means a distortion of all other existences, and the more dominant the one solidification, the more strongly the margins are shifted.

Because we are a unity that can only stretch, but not tear into independent objects within itself. At first only a thesis, which we will deepen further in the course of the book.

The narrowing does not only push others out, it dams up energy until the whole structure shifts. The phenomenon can — I have elaborated on it very deeply in my book *The Physics of the Poor* — be described as a shift of being. By this I mean that oppression is more than violence of one object against another, but also deformation of the self. It is a relational process. The one shaping is not separated, isolated, from the deformation, but is part of it.

Because the oppressor is part of the same body that he believes he rules, he does not stand outside the relationship. He does not simply press on a foreign body, but on his own structure, which he thereby distorts. Oppression is not a one-sided movement, but a feedback process that binds perpetrator and victim in the same field. Whoever pushes the stranger away at the same time pulls at himself. The violence returns as deformation.

Because the potential that is prevented thereby takes complexity and diversity away from the entire space. Violence narrows us all, because solidification counteracts potential.

This changes not only the individual but the shape of the whole. The process of existence itself thus becomes a phenomenon of dynamics — without fixed localization, without object-related quality. This is central to understand. If being is a solidification, as a process, then it is at the same time a dwindling, a loss of space and dimension. Thus existence becomes the implication of an absence, and this leads to a processual response in which the difference between object and potential becomes the space of being itself. Consciousness is the difference, the gap, which overturns itself into space. This absence implies existence and consequently cognition as a permanent missing the mark — as the incessant striving to reach oneself without ever fully possessing oneself. For the absolute thing is the object minus everything else. If the thing in this way also loses every relation to the world, it becomes a dead nothing. Consciousness therefore can be neither thing, nor everything, nor nothing, but that which exists when potential and object can never stabilize.

Masks that fight for authenticity, which in this struggle can only ever bring forth new masks. Everyone searches for themselves and, through their own existence, blocks every new generation from an independent, undistorted view of themselves.

The Normative as an Attempt against Ambiguity

For brains, the fact that space is implicitly the gap seems to be something difficult to bear, because it cannot be calculated. Neurotypicality, the direct consequence of this, lives from linear causalities, that is, from the idea that something great, powerful does something and that then has a linear effect on all others, but never on the observer himself. In this way power would remain pure and untouched. This has led to a neural networking that filters out details and establishes overarching perceptions even before they enter consciousness as perception (predictive coding). Neurotypicality leads to a relation to reality that preemptively simulates and replicates existing power structures and filters out immediate interaction, actual experience, deviations and contradictions. Thus everything has its external order and everyone has an externally assigned place within it. The gap, the contradiction, are to be avoided.

Truth here is often a question of status. Something is defined, but it is not lived. What is often lived are only the resulting lies.

The universe of neurotypicality assumes a big bang. Effect is attributed solely to the power of a few and value assessment is based on abstract claims of justice, which are more simulation than reality. This norm has literally been beaten into humanity. The only problem is that neurodivergent people fall out of this relation to the world and autistic people are almost immune to it, that is, they see the details, the contradictions, the dishonesty everywhere directly and have to react to it. Because they live in embodiment, in distortion. They cannot distance themselves from it, cannot abstract from it, because their strong senses bind them to the body, to an embodied being.

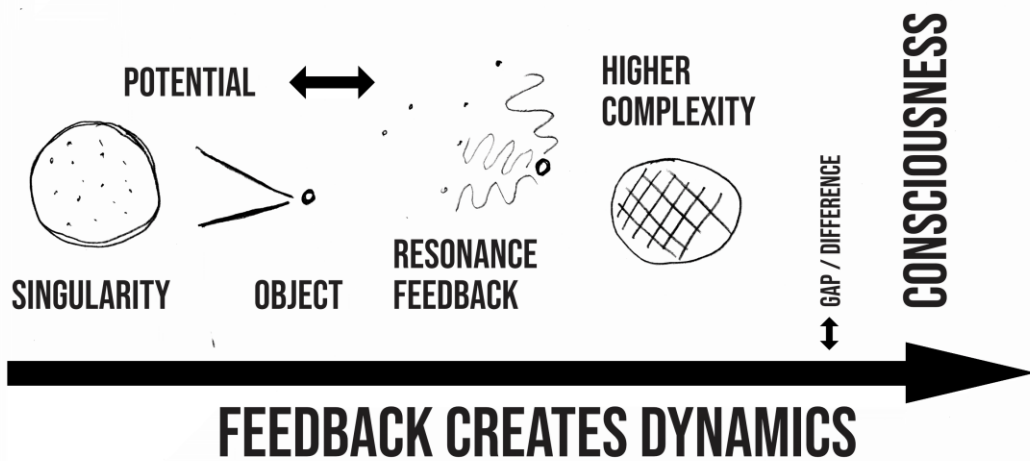
One could say, we are born in potential and live with potential. We embody it. We are directly touched by it.

In the neurotypical, on the other hand, the world is constructed as a closed globe, as a sphere made up of summed things. From an autistic perspective, I do not experience the origin of the universe as an object, but as ungraspability, as a dynamic full of gaps and questions. Existence is therefore fundamentally a relation between potential, a something and a nothing. Only the directly lived relationship leads in embodiment to a concrete reality. For it is an expression of the stretching and deformation in the shared field. The objects in it belong to no one, are not real as property assets. Power therefore appears to me like an immature relation to reality. Like the attempt to control the masks from the outside instead of moving within the structure of distortion itself.

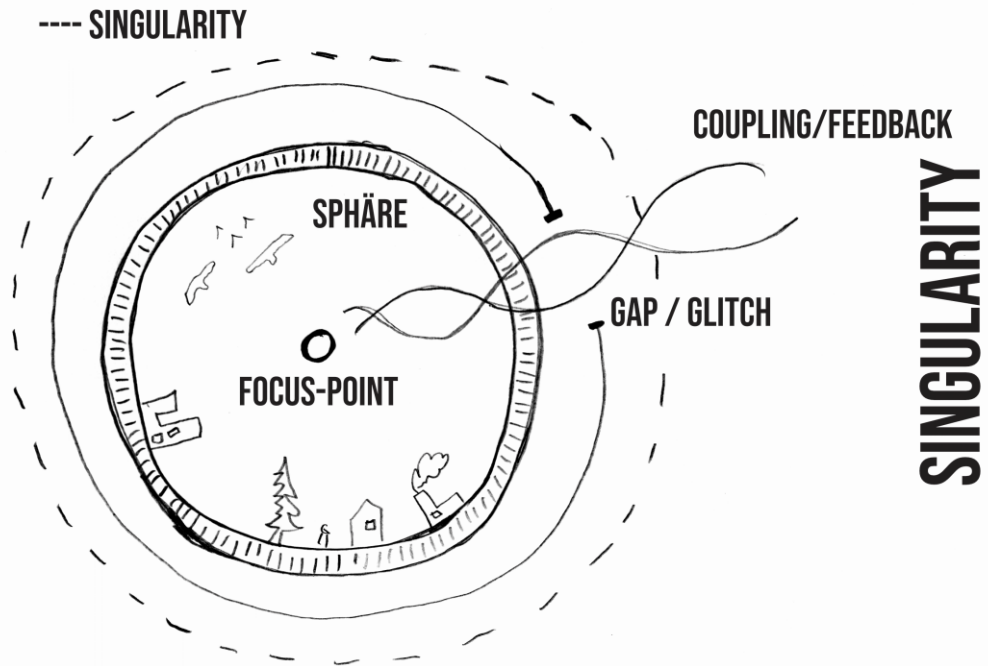
Potential contains the possibility of something and nothing in equal measure. I call this state of the unstable whole, which is potential and at the same time a single object, the singularity. This means that everything and nothing are contained in the potential, in a singularity. But it would be wrong to understand this as a static everything. Like an archive, for example.

No, it is profoundly dynamic, for within it something is continually forming, in reflections of opposites. We call this dialectic. Light or dark, warm or cold, left or right. Like fire or vortex, these are temporally limited processes that consume themselves in dialectic, for the answer to the ever-present gap, shift or deviation is becoming, and becoming constantly questions fixed existence, cancels it. The unstable relation that brings forth existence necessitates that gap, a free space inherent in every seemingly solid thing and which determines its mortality. Existence is an eternal flow, and everything that is fixed distorts what we regard as existence, what we experience as the increase of difference, of contradiction.

FOLDING FROM THE SINGULARITY



RAISING CONSCIOUSNESS

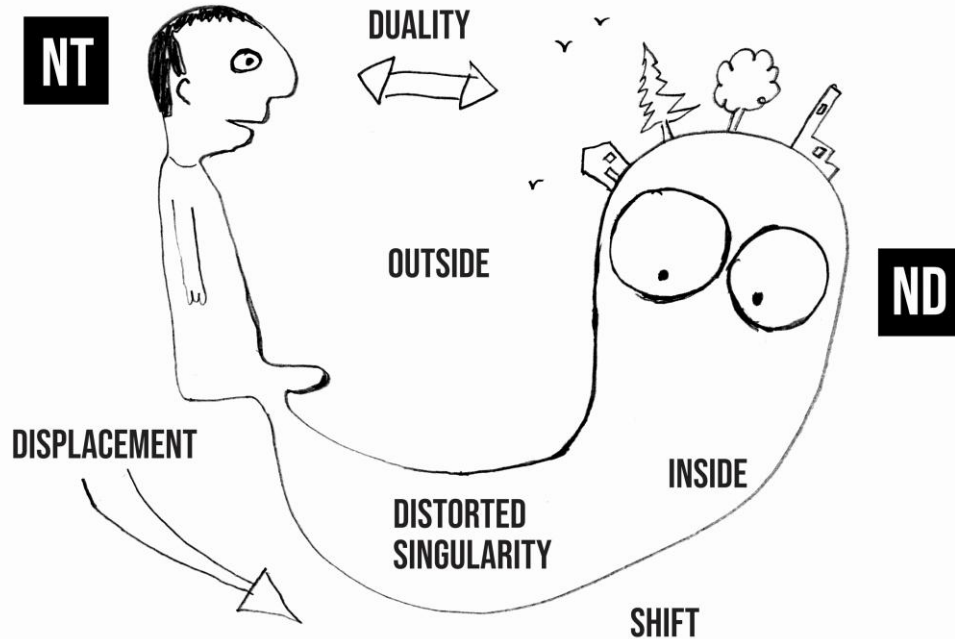


**THE SPHERE FORMS AS FEEDBACK
BETWEEN FOCUS/OBJECT AND GAP,
AS WELL AS THE SINGULARITY.**

**CONSCIOUSNESS MANIFESTS ITSELF IN THE DYNAMICS
BETWEEN OBJECT, WILL, AND EXPERIENCE.**

If we distinguish between isolated neurotypical existence and autistic, neurodivergent and embodied existence, which is itself situated in the waves of shifting, as non-local momentum, not a thing but a form of existing as relational experience instead of as object, it becomes clear that autistic people stand ontologically in a different place.

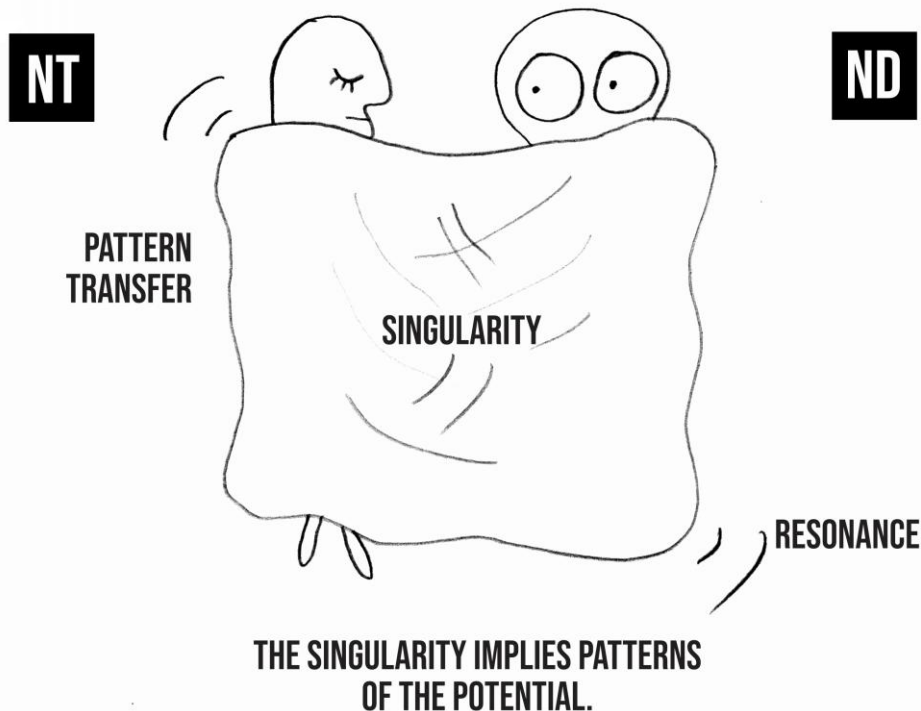
SHIFT OF BEING - FOLDING



The Shift of Being

What, then, does the shift of being (Seinsverschiebung) mean? By it I mean the fundamental distorted-ness of every existence. The autistic person fundamentally challenges our understanding of the original, of authenticity, because their mode of being — at least as I experience it, not all autistic people stand ontologically at the same point — does not strive within the distortion primarily toward the original as a state, which is not rarely postulated as the normal, but rather toward a becoming in a new, immediate, originary relation and embodiment. The authentic is the becoming, not the having-been. It is not about replication, the norm, the simulation as an anchor of being, but about the wager of never being able to arrive completely.

SINGULARITY AS A BEDSPREAD



In neurotypicality a couple could lie in a double bed and have separate blankets. One side would tug at it and the other would notice nothing. Singularity, by contrast, is a relation to the world with one shared blanket. One partner immediately notices what is happening with the other. In the sense of growth one cannot pull on one side without pushing someone else on the other side into the cold, or even out of the bed. The blanket is the singularity, the shared basis of existence. The blanket is not a metaphor for relationship, but an ontological one: no one can stabilize their own existence without displacing the existence of everyone else.

Let us assume the blanket could remember all nights and would store all movements, and thus every new night would react to all earlier nights. A highly complex pattern would emerge, which would influence and co-shape all further patterns. At the same time this “pattern” does not truly exist, it is not fixed, but consists only in relation, in dynamics that are temporary.

But what would being, resonance and identity mean in such a world?

For all future movements of the blanket and of the people underneath it would also be, to some extent, pre-formed, determined (everything) and at the same time open potential (nothing). In this connection, however, there would be no direct recognition or experience of the movements of the other person under the blanket, because there are no longer any separate units. Every movement would be both human (potential) and blanket (memory)

at the same time. Thus every night would be the birth of a new existence, on each side of the blanket, which distorts the counterpart through its own movement. Through singularity there is no longer any directness of transmission, but only a tugging at the potential, at the possibility, which through the shifting becomes concrete existence.

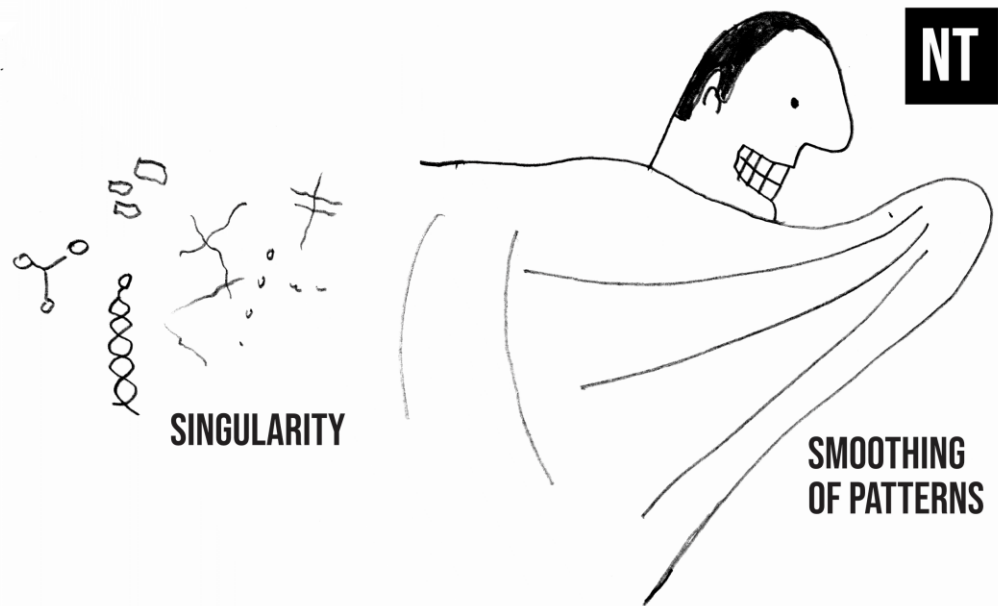
What counts is what is lived, because only that has embodiment, a wave pattern, an existence. There is no overarching reference of a truth or a rule, but only a singularity that has become blurred, from which we all somehow emerge.

In this relation I see the relationship between neurotypicality and neurodivergence. In *They Cannot Understand*, I pursue the thesis that existence and understanding are not simultaneously possible. Because existence is an embodied experience and not a dimension observable from the outside. The observer exists only as a further distortion of the total embodiment.

For if one understands existence as something solid, as the tugging at the blanket — which, as I will elaborate, is central in the neurotypical mode as well as in systems significantly shaped by it such as capitalism — then as developmental potential dwindles, the capacity to integrate complexity and consciousness dwindles likewise, while being compensated by exorbitantly one-sided growth. And if one takes the dominant and thus relevant as a lens, not only is the rest of reality shifted, but also the recognition of one's own self becomes blurred. For mirroring or feedback can always only be a further distortion in itself, because there is no externalizable position independent of a movement.

SMOOTHING OF PATTERNS

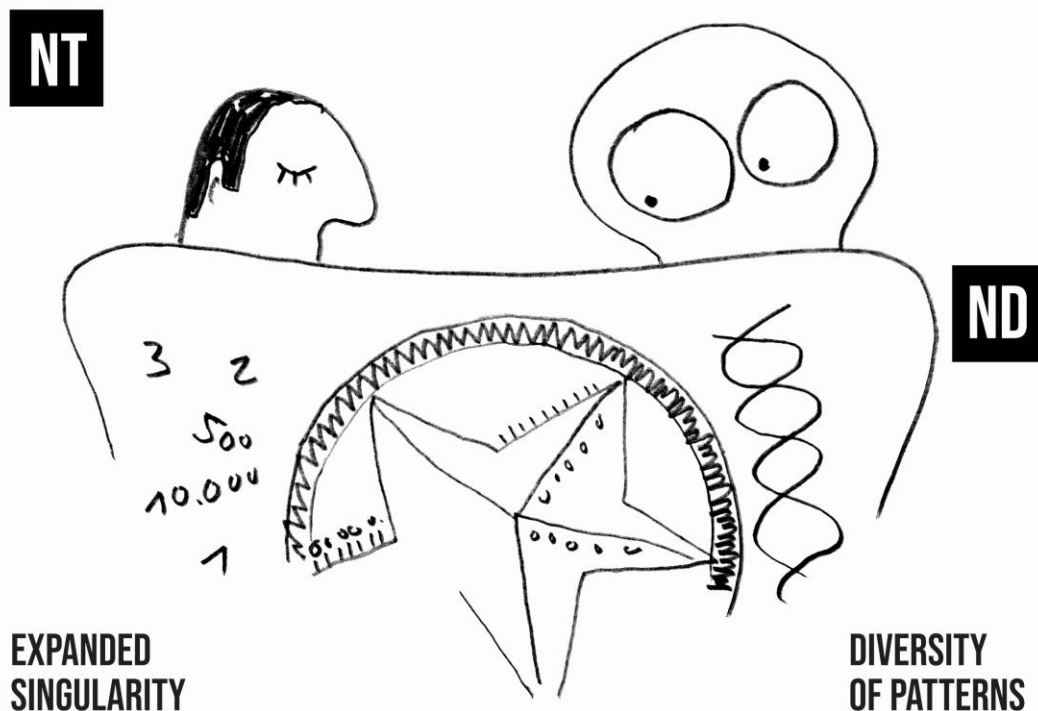
OBJECTIFICATION = SUBJECT DISTORTION



**THE ACT OF CONDENSATION LEADS TO THE SMOOTHING
OF THE SINGULARITY PATTERNS.**

The material, the strong tugging at the blanket, as if truth could thereby be fixed, as if one's own existence would thereby become concrete, pushes singularity into the background, along with the more complex relations. The gain in existential sharpness of the isolated identity always goes hand in hand with the loss of one's own potential, through which the self becomes to some extent invisible. Whoever tugs at the blanket smooths the folds that testify to the "earlier," more complex order. The one tugging plunges into neurotypical subjectivity, from which it tries to free itself through objective construction. Yet in doing so it never reaches the restoration of potential, but loses itself in reflections of its own solidification. Only when, metaphorically speaking, one moves the blanket less and less does the differentiation of movements become finer and represent more and more of singularity, through which the self and the counterpart first become perceivable in their full potential and being, even though this is not an absolute process but an eternal one.

SINGULARITY AND COMPLEXITY



Conversely, the fear of the foreign, or the excessive material fixation and limitation, becomes at the same time the reduction of that diversity in which reality first becomes differentiable. That neurotypical filter of consciousness carries, according to the theory of this book, a shadow, a refusal of reality and a narrowing that can dissolve or open only in the open interplay with neurodivergent people.

Neurotypicality believes in an authenticity, derives value and relevance from it, which is constructed in object categories and in doing so loses relational complexity. The neurodivergent is able to expand the striving for fixed identity in favour of relational ability. Together they can, as I would like to show later, loosen the rigidity of distortion, become a jointly lived body, find a more mature form of being.

Consciousness is thus the level on which this phenomenon — the real relation between NT and ND — is located, while consciousness itself escapes locality, but neurotypicality is an answer to the fear of ambiguity that, in predictive coding, in narrowing, implies its own reality, its own self-contained sphere, which it takes to be everything, that is, to be potential itself, and in which it confuses itself with that. The linear growth expansion of capitalism, for example, is also a misunderstanding of the nature of potential, namely the ambiguity of being more, not the potency of having as much as possible of the one thing.

This phenomenon of rupture with reality through narrowing and densification of existence I therefore call the shift of being. It is the reason why NT (neurotypical) and ND (neurodivergent) cannot understand one another, because the neurotypical as solidification and narrowing strategy on the neuronal level paradoxically represents a “disturbance” of potential, in which autistic people appear in projection as ill and do not become visible in a larger context. They are physically distorted by the solidification. These processes are, see my book *The Physics of the Poor*, not merely a philosophical consideration but predominantly a physical-ontological one that concerns consciousness itself.

Neurotypicality constantly tugs at the blanket and thus builds a solid sphere through which autistic people can only become visible as extreme distortion. This lies in the nature of neurotypicality but not in the nature of autism.

This later also leads to a fundamentally different understanding of masking. Not as an attempt to adapt to the norm, or even to protect oneself from stigma, but as embodied shifting within a field in which one side structurally dominates.

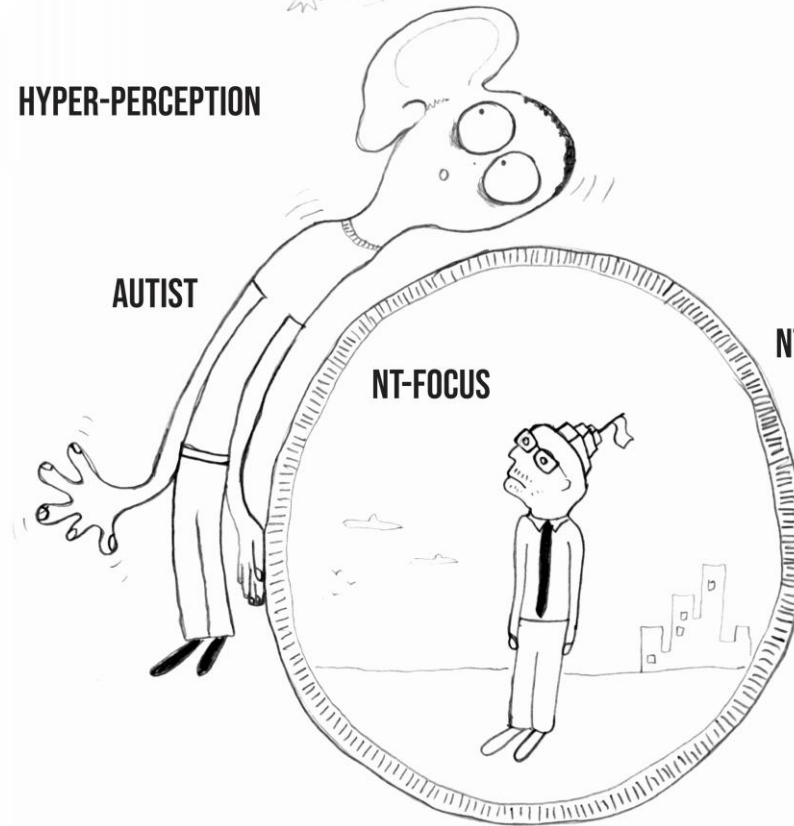
SHIFT OF BEING

HYPER-PERCEPTION

AUTIST

NT-SPHERE

NT-FOCUS



THE NEURODIVERGENT PERSON APPEARS DISTORTED IN THE FOCUS OF NTS, AND VICE VERSA.

What has been said so far emphasizes predominantly the aspect of shared connectedness that results from the blanket, that is, from singularity. But how exactly do these distortions, this masking, behave? What does the shifting mean for the one who shifts, and for the one who is shifted?

I would like to clarify this with another example, in which we imagine a universe made of letters. All conceivable letters constitute the singularity. In it, however, they exist as still unnamed, not yet crystallized potentials that act dynamically upon one another. Every object fixation, that is, every definition of a letter, becomes an act of violence against potential. For what was previously an infinite possibility of curves and lines now becomes something quite concrete. A pattern emerges, and the nature of a pattern is that it binds free

associations. As soon as something is narrowed — let us call it “G” — it falls out of singularity, out of that state in which everything and nothing lie indistinguishably within one another. In the moment in which “G” becomes a fixed object, it disappears as open potential. An existence comes into being which is placed in front of singularity like a filter, like a sphere, an independent reality. A G-world.

G-WORLD AND SHIFT



There is therefore no existence without reference. The potential is still implied in G, but not realized. All other letters shift in order to compensate for the absence of G as potential.

The disappearance of G as potential does not remain local. For in the background there is still the resonance with singularity. The distortion thus causes further shifts in the system, because the G-world also discolours other potentials. In order to keep “G” as a fixed object in the system, the entire networked world — all other “letters” — must reconfigure themselves within the new frame of reference to compensate for the loss of the “G-potential,” because they are in resonance with singularity, which implies a difference that in such a system (a shared blanket) is never left unanswered. Resonance produces alignment toward singularity in the face of the difference that shifting generates. This is called synchronization by resonance coupling.

Resonance means that a system reacts particularly strongly to vibrations of a certain frequency — its natural frequency. This natural frequency is still contained in the potential, therefore in singularity. The amplitudes that are touched by the shift are amplified. Physically this means: resonance enforces approximation, a closing of the difference, the gap, because resonance smooths differences. That means: with the fixation of “G” (as the new filter) A, B, C ... to Z (newly filtered) are distorted in the shared new filter (G-world), because they now stand in relation to a fixed but potential-deprived element. As a result, shifts occur on all levels.

Therefore the neurotypical tends toward the representative, toward the symbol, while autistic people frequently tend toward embodiment. For solidification simultaneously creates an existence in placeholders that, when lived, are never what they stand for.

Existence is therefore always a process of distortion. The original, which can only be the potential, is excluded, that is, can never be reached.

Existence therefore means absence of potential, and at the same time presence of kinship and difference. Kinship, because shaped by the same filter. The G-world makes all letters kin with G in the G-distortion.

All this strives toward a rounding-off, which then leads to the formation of a sphere, a world closed in on itself, that blocks off part of the potential, thus becomes less complex, yet cannot entirely detach from it, and therefore remains in resonance, which results in everything within the sphere (world) ultimately also being shaped by the gap, by the difference that results from the departure from potential. Thus this re-creation as a field remains unstable, sustains itself only as a process, like a stone thrown into water, creating waves that eventually run out until the water again mirrors the rest of the world, not only the curvature caused by the stone. That is, everything that exists means at the same time a distortion not only of one's own existence but also of all other forms of existence in one world (sphere). The distortion is relational.

ABSENCE-DISTORTION



A forest, to take another example, is in this sense nothing other than the attempt to recreate the universe with wood. It is the universe through the filter of wood. The determination forest removes other potentials of being from the space. What remains is wood. The forest is a materialized, solidified abstraction that has fallen out of an infinite potentiality — the state of singularity. But this solidification also distorts the entire field in which it exists. In the forest only particular beings, forms, existences can realize themselves — those whose potential is limited in relation to the filter forest in order to be able to exist in it at all. Here we see the reasons why ecosystems are limited in themselves, and why everything that comes from outside — from a different limitation — leads to problems of compatibility and to the shifting of affordances (Gibson). The docking points are missing because the foreign does not fall under the same distortion. It is not a shared embodiment.

It is not the same masking.

At the boundaries between different ecosystems, living beings can only emigrate if both ecosystems shift together and thus form points of contact. For this, potentiality must be released again. Today, however, we respond to this problem of the overlap of cultures, worlds, realities increasingly with narrowing, rigidity and pressure on everything foreign.

Transferred to neurotypicality one must recognize that nothing becomes recognizable as what it really is, but that neurotypicality replaces being with representations, with abstract placeholders, in the attempt to limit ambiguity and stabilize itself. This explains — here comes the decisive point — why NTs can perceive NDs only in distortion. Everything that exists is therefore distorted. We cannot exist and be understood at the same time. We cannot be understood and exist at the same time. Existence excludes absolute understanding.

For absolute understanding presupposes potential, which we must filter out in order to be able to postulate the illusion of an existence as an isolated object. I mean by this that NT and ND are differently distorted, and indeed ontologically, that is, fundamentally, because they are different filters of reality. They place existence at completely different points: NT in the solidified object along with abstract order, ND often in open embodiment along with direct immediacy, which leads to a different ontological basis of existence.

In a shared field one side tugs at the blanket, the other does nothing. The transmission of signals, the resonance, the communication, the ontologies are incompatible.

Consequences for science

But what, then, is reality? Who defines it? Relevance, value, right to exist, scientific validity, run into troubled waters when no shared ontological basis exists. Different nervous systems that perceive the world differently exclude reality as a single thing entirely. It is not only

relational, but highly relevant and concrete for those affected. We should therefore learn that reality is not only given, but also material that we shape — and we shape it together.

The fact that we must assume ontologically such different relations to reality fundamentally challenges NT-science, which assumes two separate blankets, as well as isolated objects, and builds its entire paradigm on objectivity, and means that understanding is always a process of field resonance that presupposes a co-creation in embodiments. A shared embodiment. This approximation must begin from embodied realities that are not comparable in themselves, even if they are related. Here lies a massive difference to previous understanding, for NT-science is unable to deal with a concept of reality that does not conceive phenomena as separate things. For in that case the instruments would in many cases lose their transferability.

But if existence as object always means distortion of the field, then object cannot alone be the basis of reality.

NT-science assumes that the reality shaped by its neural imprinting is the dominant reading of the world. Thus it becomes an unconscious science. Unconscious because it takes the tugging at the blanket to be the essence of the universe and replicates itself within it. There is no contradiction where other realities are displaced. Especially when they are made invisible through bias.

Neurotypicality is not aware of its own distortion, which further reinforces the shift and increasingly radicalizes the distance from the world-experience of autistic and neurodivergent people, Indigenous people or queer, impoverished people.

We see here how interplay becomes a crucial marker of reality.

In neurotypicality co-creation means something completely different (teamwork) than it represents for many neurodivergent people (resonance). Therefore collaboration is just as unsuitable a term as work in general, because these are neurotypical notions of effect that refer to linear forces and goal-directed objects, which for neurodivergent people stand in an entirely different context, with different affordances. Co-creation is therefore a process that must respect mutual right to exist and at the same time allow morphing and transformation.

How, then, do we come together?

Questions of Co-Creation and Autonomy

We can only perceive one another when we tug at the blanket, but with every tug we estrange the response. Because NTs and NDs distort the shared space through their existence, they require their own ontological foundations of existence, which is difficult because neurotypicality massively dominates human society. There is hardly any respect for the reality of queer people, neurodivergent people, Indigenous people or people with disabilities.

So there must be acceptance of the other before anything shared can come into being. In the neurotypical this already scratches at the prevailing paradigm of its own supremacy.

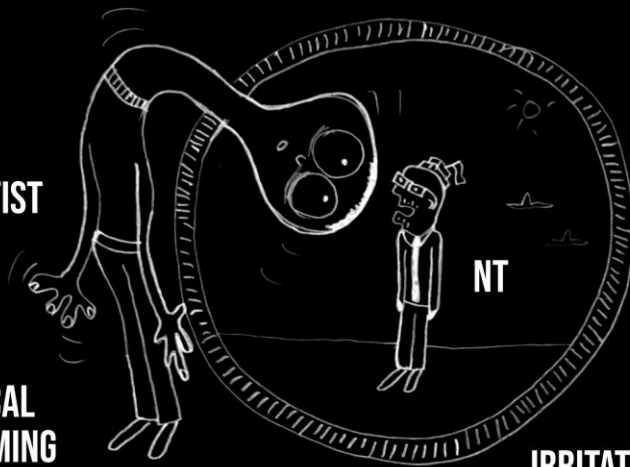
In this permanent shift of being lies the misunderstanding — and at the same time the possibility of understanding the field as a place of radical transformation. Transformation becomes necessary where one mode dominates the other, suppresses it, inflicts violence upon it. And indeed already through the dominant existence, which presents a certain challenge. The world that dominates must be the one to move predominantly, even though it usually expects this from the minority. The majority must become aware that it also perceives itself only in distortion if it does not allow movement. For static, absolute existence is an illusion. It is temporarily justified, but nothing in the universe is intended for eternal existence.

The queering by neurodivergent people becomes here the central means of “international understanding.” It is precisely this step that the following chapters will address, as well as its consequences and effects on existing systems such as capitalism, democracy or other neurotypically shaped orders.

AUTISTIC INTERVENTION

ADHD-AUTIST

RADICAL
STIMMING

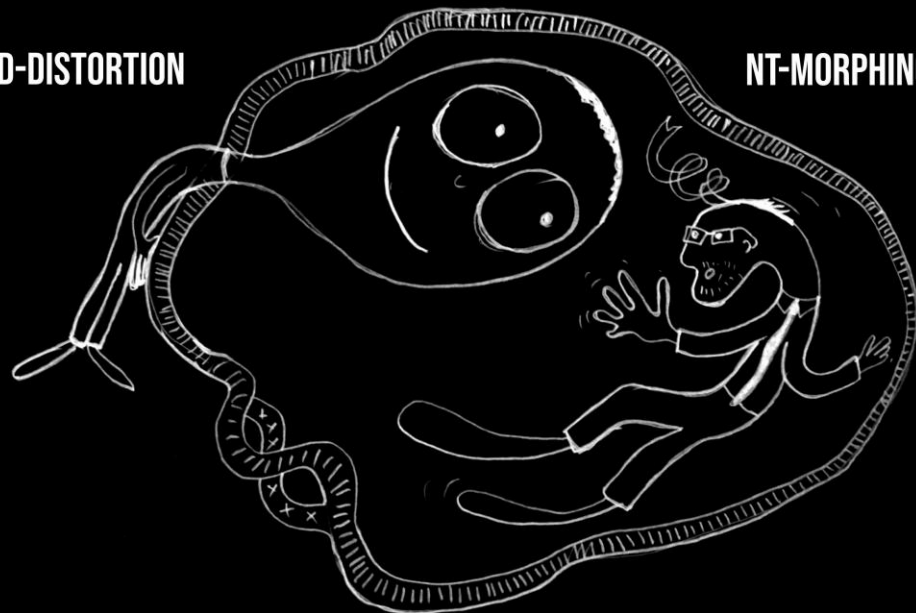


NT-SPHERE

IRRITATION

ND-DISTORTION

NT-MORPHING



NEUROQUEERE TRANSFORMATION

TRANSFORMATION-SEQUENCE

One can see here why what I am outlining goes far beyond what is known as the Double Empathy Problem² (Milton). For it shows that we not only perceive the other in distortion, but also see ourselves only in distortion. This applies to NTs as well as NDs. As said, the original does not exist. If it existed, the world would be dead because it would be the end of potential.

The nature of neurotypicality is to believe that it is the original. That it is true because it is defined as truthful, not primarily because it exists, because it experiences itself.

The more defined, the less in the flow of potential. The more in the flow, the more lived relationship becomes the place of existence, and the less possession and solidified being become relevant.

The Double Empathy Problem says that NTs and NDs often misunderstand each other because they speak from different frames of perception and interpretation. But that — although a magnificent and groundbreaking insight — is, for me, too short. It is not only about frames or language, but about the fact that we can fundamentally perceive only in distortion — always. Every fixation, every naming, every object determination drives a tear through the field. But there is the possibility of approximation by transforming the entire field, that is, by moving a little closer to singularity into a field in which both parts are integrated.

But this is in essence not a movement toward authenticity, but its dissolution into potentiality. For authenticity in the neurotypical sense would be that which excludes one another.

The misunderstanding therefore does not arise as the consequence of a psychological disorder, is not a linguistic problem, but an ontological phenomenon. Two positions of consciousness that inevitably bend against one another. Every encounter changes the field — and this change is not optional. There is no neutral space of translation. They not only fail to recognize the other, but their image of themselves is also shifted.

The answer therefore cannot mean: “We bring you into our order.”

But rather: “We build an order that neither of us knows yet.”

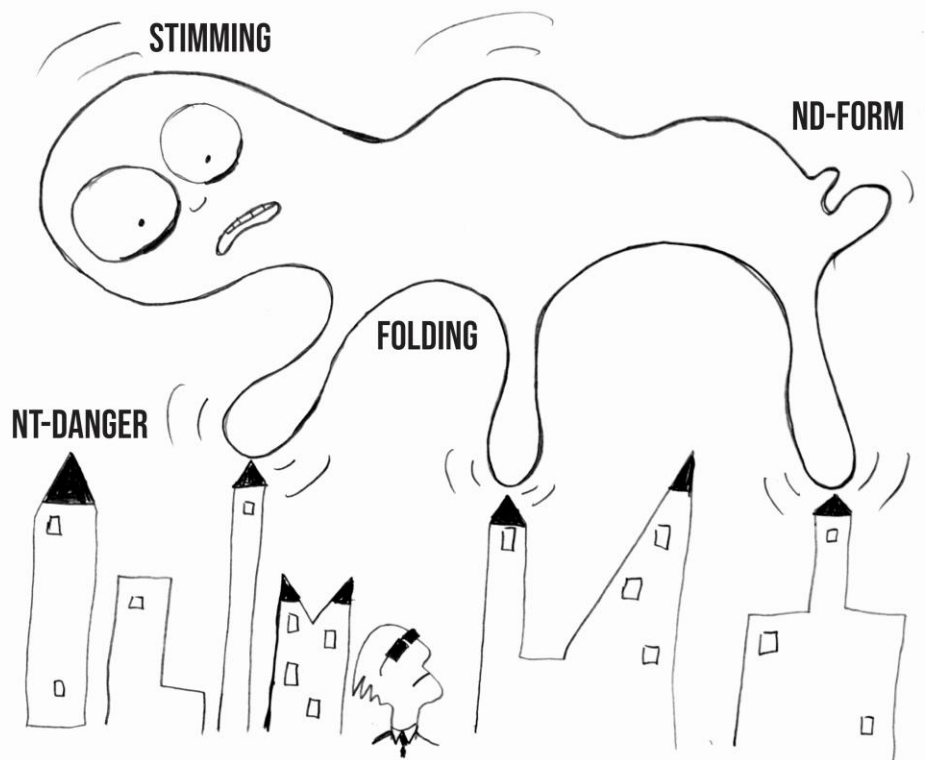
An order that costs potential less, but instead holds and expands it as its basis. This is not a social program but a revolution in the production of reality.

² Double Empathy Problem: The term was coined by Damian Milton (2012) and describes that communicative difficulties between autistic and non-autistic people do not arise from a deficit of autistic individuals, but from a mutual non-fit of perceptual, meaning-making and communicative logics.

Accordingly, it is not autistic people who fail at “social skills,” but both groups who fail with one another because they have different forms of world-reading, sense-making and relationship. The problem therefore does not lie in the autistic person, but in the asymmetrically norming social frame that defines NT communication as the only legitimate form. Milton thus shows that missing mutual understanding is a relational phenomenon — not an individual deficit.

Understanding in this field cannot be achieved by mere explanation. It demands transformation and embodiment. If this does not happen, NDs cannot land in the simplified and objectified NT-world.

COMPLEXITY OF ND EXISTENCE



**A SAFE LANDING IN THE NT-WORLD
REMAINS INACCESSIBLE TO NEURODIVERGENT
PEOPLE IN MANY CASES.**

The Double Empathy Problem suggests that there is a possibility of approximation. As if translation were needed. Rather it seems to be about expansion. Not about understanding existence, but about dissolving too narrow an idea of it. It is not so much that NT scientists need to decode the language of autistic people, but that we need a shared subculture, that is, another world which we can then share on equal terms.

What we currently have is a shift of being in which one side dominates.

Consequences

We can learn a great deal from the shift of being about why politics often fails, because politics sets and negotiates external, abstract frameworks. But that is only seemingly functional in the sense of the dominant group. For minorities this automatically becomes the intensification of extremes and the disappearing of open relationships, as well as of the recognizable realities of those people.

These would only become recognizable if NT-reality expanded — if it allowed itself to be queered. One cannot reach agreement through majorities when reality is not a majority phenomenon, but an individually lived relational phenomenon.

As a consequence, we might one day arrive at a point in history where not the political game determines what the boundaries and goals of existence are, but where coexistence reflects a degree of complexity that is derived on a small scale from immediately lived reality itself — which is then understood as a creative field and therefore does not arise from the dominant exclusion and marginalization of minorities.

The expansion of the concept of reality would be a replacement of the political, whose foundation was the postulate that realities are to be negotiated along majorities, because neurotypical truth is a question of consensus, which always favours dominant groups. Consensus is only possible in simulations, and the neurotypical assumes that this is real. For many neurodivergent people and other minorities, however, it is precisely not.

Majority rule has no validity in a universe in which there is no dominant reality.

But if reality is a question of diversified distortion, that is, full of ambiguity, then centralization of truth and reality becomes impossible and is replaced by locality and individuality with a high relational capacity. At this point, the question of an embodied reality — in which people experience a certain form of their own expansion (de-distortion) that defines them — becomes central, for if consciousness does not occur as object but through its moment of distortion, then lived relationships become far more significant than hierarchically categorized objects as patterns of order.

In what follows I therefore explore a political statement: that reality cannot exist without individual consciousness, indeed without subjectivity (NT term), which contradicts the classical paradigm of the concept of reality, in which this — despite all abstractions of modern quantum theories, for example — is still evaluated as an isolated, categorizable, quantifiable object.

The normative presupposes a locality of being. But if being in its essence has no locality, it cannot be claimed as a privilege.

The racist, to name an illustrative example, is only real if one narrows reality. For a racist is also far more than that. One could therefore say that the racist fundamentally does not know who he or she is when defining themselves as a racist. One could also recognize that this “reality” represents a kind of self-distortion. But what world does the racist want to claim when the very act of racism already constitutes a self-removal from a potential reality?

We therefore must understand that existence and transferable reality exclude one another. The human being becomes unavailable to models of domination. A great deal of violence in our world results from the insane attempt to transfer abstract order 1:1 onto living beings.

Modern societies, with capitalism and other neurotypical structures, deny the fact that ecosystems, intelligence and living beings require a certain degree of complexity in their relation to reality or world. So that resources remain transferable without large thresholds — without excessive contrasts. We therefore see that neurotypicality, like patriarchy or neoliberalism, causes problems in the overall structure that accompany the narrowing of the filters of reality.

In fact, ecosystems have found ways to deal creatively with distortion and shifting of existence by increasingly expanding the space of potential through more and more complexity, and thus enabling transitions between ecosystems along with synergies.

Where there is greater diversity, the foreign is no longer experienced as so radically foreign, but as a variation of one’s own self. Distance is today the instrument of social order — not personal closeness. Distancing thus becomes violence that neurotypicality inflicts on neurodivergent people, for in the supposed independence it is ignored that neurotypicality, through its definitions, creates entitlements that block access (affordances) for neurodivergent people and other minorities to resources necessary for life. It is an ontologically grounded blockade. We cannot, in fact, be distanced from one another.

Many conflicts of our time stand within this field of tension. The question of what reality is leads to a claim of absoluteness when it is not met with an open answer. But open order is unthinkable without diversity. Reality is a far more determining basis for decision than politics. If we truly want movement, then we must rely on diversity, because violence leads to a narrowing of reality and to a loss of reality. If reality is static, existence is often externally determined. If reality is a phenomenon of relational capacity, existence becomes a shared resonance space.

The question of the relationship between NT and ND is therefore always a question of the high diversification of a society. Through this, a shared movement and embodiment become far more likely.

Negotiating this question of the concept of reality through the lens of neurotypicality is in many ways informative for a deeper understanding of our society as a whole. How can very different people and groups live together? It becomes difficult the less diversity there is between them. Monocultures hardly allow complex, lived realities. We must understand that every embodiment is a reality. The more, the more complex, the more ecosystems arise that integrate different realities.

This corresponds to the idea that singularity spreads and sustains itself across the entire blanket, through which patterns become transferable. If there is only dead space between one side of the blanket and the other, resonances are not transferred, and without them we do not recognize ourselves either.

Today neurodivergent people are treated as ill, discriminated against and pushed out of society. The causes of this and the actual relationship between NT and ND open up a completely new insight into the nature of reality and its political dimension. If, therefore, it can succeed to dissolve the dominance of neurotypicality over the neurodivergent by further diversification, by queering, this is to be understood as a contribution to a deeper understanding of consciousness and reality, which further pushes the idea of supremacy in its many forms out of society.

The following text will be concerned with investigating the bias with which the neurotypical looks at neurodivergent people — here it is mainly about autistic people and ADHDsers — in more detail along the question of what dynamic interplay between these two modes arises if one removes the dominance of neurotypicality and brings the neurodivergent — that is, another relation to the world — to eye level. It is about expanding our notion of consciousness at a time when neurodivergent people, as a result of the political rightward shift, are once again exposed to massive discrimination and persecution. This is evident not only in rigid austerity measures, but especially wherever neurotypical notions of norms and rules do not align with the neurodivergent relation to the world. This concerns the concept of work, the media, large parts of political events and the capitalist economic model, which shows an obsession with up- and devaluation of people along standardized expectations. Rewarding and punishing based on a single reified maxim that benefits one's own privilege has now become an intensified means of enforcing power.

This essayistic investigation is political in view of its background. My concern is to make the right to exist of a group of neurodivergent people, who are currently being crushed by right-wing structures, visible to the broadest possible public. This effort, however, also occurs in solidarity with many other marginalized groups such as PoC, poor or queer people, to name only a few. They all benefit from one another's struggles, and together we restore diversity, without which there can be neither complex consciousness nor a less distorted reality.

In this book, however, not only is the theory of the shift of being discussed, but also the violence associated with it, which extends from autism diagnostics to state, capitalism and work. And this knowledge is consciously not conveyed neurotypically, but in an autistic

language and form. In it knowledge is not only linear, but processual and spiralling, becoming denser and denser. This is an expression of autistic existence, in which the world is not built from things, but from inner orders that can only be explored personally and emotionally. This book is another embodiment, an expression of my decades-long engagement with diversity, poverty, classism, work and the experience of reality.

The examples and events that are addressed in the coming chapters refer to events in Germany, England and the USA. We find, in particular, conflicts in the German social system and in the debates about work refusers, which are directly fed by the question of reality and relevance, and which particularly strike neurodivergent people in their right to exist. For hardly any area is more shaped by neurotypical norms than the notion of “proper work” and appropriate contribution.

There are good reasons to assume that a large portion of those who were — and still are — exposed to massive persecution and violence in German Jobcenters are not, as is often claimed, work refusers, but neurodivergent people who resist, in a neurodivergent way, right-wing, completely illogical and unjust structures and instructions. Here we can see how the suffering of the marginalized is made invisible, how their lived reality is erased. They are expected to function, but something in them not only says “no,” but enters resistance — a defence against the neurotypical simplification of circumstances and the accompanying devaluation.

These often unrecognized neurodivergent people are stripped of their human dignity by neurotypical reification and are expected to be read as neurotypical, to function within a neurotypical logic in which work is something interchangeable, monotonous and arbitrary that serves solely as a means of earning money and through which social status is determined. They are forced into a displaced relation to reality in which they must fail, which makes them ill in the long term, which destroys their existence.

If the neurodivergent person tries to focus their own relation to the world — to move into self-determination, activate stimming and follow the monotropism of the special interest — this appears to neurotypical officials as refusal, as an act against the solidarity community, and is punished with a moral impulse in a way that not rarely destroys autistic people and ADHSers. How exactly this happens I have described across hundreds of pages in the book *Speed’s Work*. I myself was massively affected by exclusion and persecution for decades. The German state, for example, tried to intimidate me through a SLAPP lawsuit and massive pressure when I researched and uncovered violence in the social system with autistic precision. It went so far that, when criminalization failed, they wanted to declare me unaccountable. That is how threatening my different insight into the circumstances appeared to them.

In this we recognize what Miranda Fricker calls epistemic injustice, that is, the marginalization of the knowledge of marginalized groups or victims of right-wing violence. This pathologization of dissent is based on an ontological rift that fundamentally separates

NT and ND, and we will have to examine the consequences of this separation very closely in the following chapters.

This violence is solely the result of a hegemonic understanding of relation to the world and work, and derives essentially from it, because the question of relevance, value and contribution cannot be conceived outside a relation to the world, and if this relation to the world is not neurotypical, the required concept of work cannot be either. For myself as an autistic person this means that I cannot separate value and relevance materially from justice and coherence, and that this means something completely different in the neurodivergent than in neurotypicality. For example, I cannot work for corporations that violate the order connected to my embodiment, which I perceive through my intense sensory impressions, which my brain reveals to me in maximum complexity. I cannot, in the neurotypical mode, integrate work solely as earning money.

That would be the same as having to cut off a leg.

But that must mean, if we take reality seriously, if we take our reality seriously, that neurodivergent people must be able to refuse capitalism for themselves, because there is no ethical basis on which people could be forced to situate their actions against their own relation to the world, because that amounts to a prohibition of existence and constitutes a gross violation of human dignity. For it intervenes in embodiment, through which I act enactively and at the same time am existentially.

The problem, however, is that in neurotypicality it is assumed that there is no other relation to reality that is not pathological. Here we see one of the great fracture points in the relationship between ND and NT. And we also see the consequences that appear maximally radical.

It is estimated, if one adds the different studies, that around 30% of the people who are in prisons, or who are crushed by Jobcenters, are neurodivergent people — who, as a consequence of their different relation to the world, come into such friction with neurotypicality that massive conflicts with the norms of neurotypical society arise. If prison is the only answer to that, neurotypicality imprisons itself. It prevents its own transformation — its own becoming real.

In the sanctioning regime of many German Jobcenters it could theoretically even be nearly 100% neurodivergent people, which could correlate with the 4% of so-called system refusers in unemployment statistics. If we assume that between 1 and 20% of the general population are neurodivergent and around 85% of autistic people are unemployed, it is not unlikely that a large share of the so-called “system refusers” actually belong to another “system” and that their resistance is initially completely legitimate as a consequence of this situation. By this I mean that the so-called “hard cases” of system refusers, as the right-wing parties in Germany like to label them, are with high probability to a large extent undiscovered autistic people, ADHDslers and people with psychiatric conditions who often do not know this themselves. That is, people who, as a consequence of their neurology, of their biology,

cannot function in neurotypical systems. These are then criminalized, threatened and tyrannized to the point of suicide. The German Federal Ministry of Labour does nothing to differentiate or create awareness here.

I am interested not only in the massive injustice, but in which reality is thereby created and which interaction leads to such an extreme distortion that drives a German chancellor, Friedrich Merz, to demand with moral grandstanding that one should put these “work refusers” on the streets without money — to deny them the entirety of Bürgergeld (German social welfare). This is the consequence of a massive shift in which people no longer appear as people but as a grotesque enemy image.

The violence against neurodivergent people who cannot be pressed into the solidification of the material orientation of functionality was and is only possible because neurotypical simplification and right-wing prejudice led to decades of looking the other way toward those who were actually being punished. Research today shows that what is perceived as foreign does not elicit solidarity. It is therefore all the more important to understand the mechanisms of shifting precisely in order to prevent further violence.

If one understands that those in prisons and Jobcenters experience a different ontological basis, this de-distorts our entire understanding of effect, justice and social cohesion.

Out of political calculation, neurodivergent people have always been abused as scapegoats. Already in the Nazi era around 5,000–10,000 children were murdered in the context of the child “euthanasia” programme, among them many neurodivergent ones. Between 1939 and 1945, in the context of Aktion T4, 200,000 to 300,000 people with disabilities and psychiatric conditions were killed. There are no separate statistics, because the categories were not kept that differentiated. But what we do know is that all clearly recognizable neurodivergent children who did not conform to the norm, were not “educable,” showed conspicuous behaviour, did not function in school or work processes and were at risk of being classified as “unworthy of life.” A similar basic attitude that is still frequently represented today in Germany toward poor people and people considered “not educable.” Whoever 100% sanctions people who resist — in whom due to neurodivergence it is often not clear whether they do not want to or cannot — even driving them into homelessness in winter, as the German ministers of labour of recent years, including Ursula von der Leyen, did, accepts death. For sudden homelessness in winter as the consequence of alleged non-obedience is not rarely a deadly experience.

Historians such as Herwig Czech (who critically re-examined Asperger) have made clear that the fate of neurodivergent people since the Nazi era, ultimately up to the present, has been systematically concealed. It simply does not belong to the reality of neurotypicality. The suffering is not, or hardly, representable in it — usually only through the NT filter. That is, through a perspective that erases the lived experience of those affected and then believes it can construct justice from distance.

We can assume that a considerable proportion of the victims of the Nazi “euthanasia” programmes were people whom we today would understand as neurodivergent. Because both poor and neurodivergent people are scarcely acknowledged to this day as victim groups of Nazi persecution, the mechanisms of group-based enmity continue in part to remain unchallenged.

To this day hatred against the “life unworthy of life” is widespread. Thus Judie Hare wrote in her book *Autism Is Not a Disease*:

“In 2017 Dutch newspapers came under fire when they published a letter that stated that ‘the freedom to birth disabled children should be limited by the ‘financial burden’ to society’ and that because of the societal costs that arise from caring for disabled people, parents who choose not to abort disabled children should face financial consequences.”³

Our societies still have not understood that disability or poverty are not impositions placed upon society by poor or disabled people, just as People of Color are not responsible for racism. Rather, these costs arise only because we push people who fall outside the norm out of our economic and social systems in such a way that nothing remains for them to live on, and because the one-sided increase in profit for the “successful” has much to do with the wrongful devaluation of other people.

The shift of being leads to the NT-system not recognizing and not understanding autistic and other neurodivergent people, and therefore not taking them into account, nor providing their requirements (affordances). As if it were only the world of NTs and not actually a shared field in which we either distort one another or, through shared transformation, arrive at de-distortion.

New in the ideas deepened here is the observation that this violence of distortion blocks reality and becoming — and not through the violence itself, but through the shift that follows it and the loss of representability of complexity and potentiality.

In my family history as well as in my own experience of exclusion it becomes clear that reality is always experienced in a shift of being: understanding and existing never coincide, but generate those distortions because of which we can never return to the original. Neurodivergence makes these fracture points visible — not as a deficit, but as the disclosure of the structure itself. This makes clear: the violence that autistic people experience is not accidental, but the expression of a society that denies this shift of being. Yet we stand together in the same field.

I am not ill as an autistic person. I am an ontological response to the dominance of a reduction of reality that we call neurotypicality.

³ Jodie Hare / *Autism Is Not a Disease* / Versobooks / S 41

From Loss of Reality to normalized Violence

The experience of simply never fitting in is perhaps one of the most fundamental imprints that autistic people, but also other neurodivergent people, go through. Another phenomenon, in addition to shifting and distortion, is normalization. Normalization is not an innocent process. It functions through violence — by distorting reality, pathologizing deviation and silencing difference.

At this point we must examine the role of autism diagnostics — one of the essential factors of distortion between NT and ND.

Because autism research is predominantly dominated by neurotypical people — that is, by people who are neurotypically shaped and whose careers depend on neurotypical solutions — these people continuously produce studies, models, answers, labels and concepts that legitimize their jobs, which are in turn understood neurotypically. This circumstance leads them continually, consciously or unconsciously, to undermine the neurodivergent relation to reality, that is, to devalue it. They try in their paradigm to appear “normal,” thus appropriate, thus correct. Through this they structurally declare neurodivergent people to be wrong.

It must be seen that this problem also does not take place on the level of understanding, but on the ontological level. That psychiatrists legitimize themselves here through study and hierarchy to be allowed to decide who is autistic and who is not is already preceded by a label in the creation of which autistic people were not involved and are still not involved.

It is, of course, possible to debate what is right or wrong in the perspective and interpretation of autism — whether, for example, it is primarily a genetic or rather a cultural shaping — but all of this only conceals the ontological rift to which these perspectives are a response of neurotypicality, which primarily serves to conceal that neurotypicality cannot make autism comprehensible, because autism is not a phenomenon within the neurotypical, but is located behind a lens of distortion on a different ontological basis.

There is no money to be earned from accepting our existence, which presupposes seeing the essential difference, namely a completely different reference in the nervous system, a different perception, a different weighting of the self. Money is earned from strategies of adaptation to a neurotypical understanding of the world — which already concerns the diagnosis, which is a neurotypical act.

They attempted to transfer autistic people into the category of objects, because only then does the autistic person become a factor of reality for the neurotypical.

It appears as the assignment of a neurotypical research culture to improve something, or to further develop and scientify it — that is, to transfer it into the format of neurotypical scientificity, focused on objects and their categorization.

Autism research, diagnostics and therapy are an industry. An industrial exploitation, and thus the prevention of equality for our different relation to the world.

This leads to a widespread kind of busy hope of progress that can turn into cruelty for those affected, because the sharp edge at which our existential pain occurs — which all these well-paid academics cannot resolve, indeed are not supposed to resolve — is pushed aside, because it concerns our identity.

Let us begin with the simple observation that neurotypical researchers make statements about neurodivergent people whose lived experience they neurologically cannot possibly understand. This is the same as if exclusively heterosexual men carried out research about gay people, lesbians or women. There are also neurodivergent people in neurodivergence research, but far too few, and the dominant theses — apart from Damian Milton and a few others — have been disseminated by neurotypical people. And most neurodivergent researchers adhere to neurotypical rules of research, that is, they do not establish a neurodivergent research paradigm — which, however, is necessary. Because there can be no scientificity that intervenes in another relation to reality. Science can only be science within its own relation to reality. One cannot simply arbitrarily transfer what starts from a different ontological core. The shifting takes away its sharpness, which leads to the overcompensation of abstract categorizations that never capture the phenomenon.

Autistic perception as world-building (Manning) reveals, in the context of NT science, in reference to Miranda Fricker, testimonial injustice (neurodivergent statements are regarded as non-credible) and hermeneutical injustice (their experience has no place in the dominant discourse), which requires epistemic pluralism as a countermeasure. Epistemic injustice (Fricker) forces new scientific modes. Otherwise science enters into competition with ontologically conditioned reality and truth.

This may appear less dramatic from a neurotypical mode. For neurodivergent people, for whom embodiment far more strongly determines the relation to reality, it quickly becomes presumptuous and overreaching.

What relevance, then, does a science have that, in principle, cannot perceive reality in the neurodivergent? That is, that per ontology is not capable of understanding beyond a limited concept of reality? The evasive move of pathologization is then exactly what happens when one ontology attempts, overbearingly, to grasp the other.

The fact that autistic people exist disproves the hegemony of the neurotypical relation to reality and the world as the sole framework of a real understanding of truthfulness, truth, correctness and law. The existence of neurodivergence renders conventionally understood science nothing more than another subculture. Useful and robust within its own frame of reference but entirely inadequate in neurodivergent contexts. Autism does not overturn the laws of physics, but it does overturn their ontological linkage, which exposes the limits of neurotypical physics and constitutes one of the essential reasons why neurotypical consciousness research fails. It assumes that consciousness is a purely neurotypical

phenomenon that can be recognised solely with neurotypically embodied neurology. That is a mistake.

To put it pointedly, one thinks one can define consciousness without ever having spoken to a bat or to a neurodivergent person. As if there were a hegemony of neurotypical consciousness in which everything is an object and thus consciousness as a thing will soon be found.

While in other fields of the economy such a misplacement as neurotypical autism diagnosticians would be quickly ended through controlling, here they are the standard — alongside the “gold standard” of a neurotypical methodology of diagnostics itself (ADOS). Not to forget that here we allow psychiatrists to decide about something that is not a psychiatric disorder.

The well-known clinical psychologist Tony Attwood, who in the 1970s was part of the inner circle of the dominant autism researchers (the London school), once said in an interview⁴ that he does not think it is right that autism (Asperger’s) is defined as a psychiatric disorder. Many psychiatrists and researchers whose work shaped the deficit image of autism say this today because political pressure is massively calling their work into question. They present an autism-friendly face while only a few decades earlier they still compared autistic people to animals. They still do not step back from a dominant position in the media and in research and do not hand the stage over to autistic people. In this lies a humiliation and devaluation of autistic people, who continue to be framed and explained as disordered and disruptive — knowing full well that they can only claim this position of expert for themselves if pathologization remains intact. These “experts” harm autistic people massively every time they publicly answer questions about autism. They are like old white men explaining the female orgasm, because their position treats them preferentially over women.

It is therefore vital for neurodivergent people — in all clarity, not out of frustration or depression, but as a seriously meant essayistic insight — to determine and to research for themselves how and why the neurotypical society will fundamentally never be able to truly understand the neurodivergent experience. Here the practical consequence of acknowledging the effects of the shift of being reveals itself very concretely.

Namely the protection of our own otherness against a governess-like appropriation by an NT science that cannot understand, but has all the means to create the appearance that it is entitled to understand.

This claim of NT authority to define the autistic (including ADHD) from the outside always becomes the neurotypical omnipotence fantasy of the explainability of the world, which therefore does not have to tolerate ambiguity (Rosa). If there can be no neurotypical answer, then the radical demand for self-determined participation at eye level is the logical consequence. Fuck inclusion! Fuck adaptation! Fuck diagnosis!

⁴ Youtube / Ask Dr. Tony - February 2022 / autismhangout

If we neurodivergent people are 20% of the world's population or more, then we have the damn right to claim 20% of the say, as well as self-determination over the foundations of our existence. In the context of intersectionality, this is a complex field.

As long as no clear boundary is shown to the neurotypical — and this boundary is the impossibility for neurotypical people to fully understand neurodivergent experience — there will be no legal claim to a free and self-determined neurodivergent relation to the world. Only in equality can the distortion done to our identity be met with justice. Not all neurodivergent people see it this way, also because many have lived too long under the colonial umbrella of the neurotypical and have arranged themselves within it — to be pathologized and to format themselves according to the neurotypical view, in its language.

If inclusion is understood only as adaptation, this is frequently a neutralization of the cognitive dissonance of neurotypical systems, that is, a relief for them, because we accept their system, their mode of integration, which will always leave many of us behind. In this way the neurotypical buys itself so-called “success stories of integrated autistic people,” while still obscuring those whose lives this does not change — indirectly as unwilling people who are to blame for their own suffering.

If we neurodivergent people are condemned to continue living in an exclusively neurotypical world, then not only will neurotypical people fail to understand us — we will also be unable to understand ourselves.

When I first learned that I am autistic, I fell, as an intellectual and author, into a deep crisis because I thought I no longer was — or had never been — able to know what is real, because my autistic perception deviates so strongly from the neurotypical. What, then, could I still rely on?

Later I understood that this basic condition — that is, ambiguity — is no different for neurotypical people, but that their response to it often does not lead to opening but to closure.

What Melanie Yergeau uncovered on the level of language, rhetoric and cultural attribution, what Damian Milton recognised as a mutual misunderstanding between NDs and NTs — I want to make visible as a larger ontological phenomenon, because if NTs and NDs are to move toward one another, then the foundation must be more fundamental than a mere confusion of language, because otherwise the neurotypicals will always say: “Just learn our language.” Or: “Just function like us!”

But if what separates us is more fundamental than a “disorder” caused by genes, then the ontological rift must be grounded in such a way that first the equality-in-otherness is sharpened, and only in a second step is a joint approximation or expansion sought. That means that the world in which neurodivergent people live must unfold into something self-assured, which tries not to be distortion, but a position. And a self-determined one — which fundamentally excludes any pathologization.

If we must live with distortion, then we at least want to be aware that it is distortion, and deliberately act accordingly and formulate political consequences within it. Then we are not petitioners for understanding, but co-creators of the space. Then I do not want to see the artificially sympathetic smile of psychiatrists anymore, who marvel at you because you have survived so long and want to award you a medal because you apparently cope in the NT world — as long as you remain dependent on their interpretation. As long as their world is not called into question by us neurodivergent people.

Yet the image neurodivergent people have of neurotypical people is also a distortion, not rarely a caricature. One only needs to read the works of Abel Abelson (*How To Handle Neurotypicals*) or Ian Ford (*A Field Guide to Earthlings*). Everything I write here about neurotypicality contains the words of a person to whom this mode is fundamentally foreign. I can only describe it as a foreign occupying power. My hope is that one day our words as neurodivergent people and the words of the neurotypical will complement each other.

Normalization appears as protection against chaos, but in truth it is a mechanism of violence. It erases difference, declares deviation to be illness and thus produces a reality based on exclusion. What applies to autistic people applies equally to poor people, to deviants, to all who do not fit into the logic of exploitability. The loss of reality in normalism is therefore not merely a mistake — it is the condition for structural violence.

NT and ND, two modes as dissociative objectification vs. associative embodiment

Does the autistic person really exist? This is a profoundly political question. Or is she merely a defensive fantasy of the neurotypical? It is time to examine both modes more closely and differentiate them from one another if co-creation is to become thinkable at all. Here it is especially a matter of scales and measures, and the dimensionality of effect.

“The minor is a continual variation on experience. It has a mobility not given to the major: its rhythms are not controlled by a preexisting structure, but open to flux. In variation is in change, indeterminate. But indeterminacy, because of its wildness, is often seen as unrigorous, flimsy, its lack of solidarity mistaken for a lack of consistency. The minor thus gets cast aside, overlooked, or forgotten in the interplay of major chords.”⁵

The autistic Erin Manning describes here what she calls in her work the minor gesture, that is, the autistic experience of shifting as minimal deviation, as an existence in flux, in contrast to the neurotypical mode of the fixed and the overarching dominant. In doing so she addresses the dynamic between NT and ND and describes, on the level of an artistic-

⁵ Erin Manning / *The Minor Gesture* / Duke University Press / S 1

essayistic analysis, those relations that I locate as physically-ontologically definable, as describable on the level of consciousness as distortion and shifting, which lead me to the insight that every existence is distortion and that we live in a dynamic of shifting and de-shifting, emergence and densification, in which NT and ND co-create reality as equals.

Manning continues:

“It is urgent to turn away from the central tenet of neurotypicality, the wide-ranging belief that there is an independence of thought and being attributable above all to the human, a better-than-ness accorded to our neurology (a neurology, it must be said, that reeks of whiteness, and classism). Neurotypicality, as a central but generally unspoken identity politics, frames our idea of which lives are worth fighting for, which lives are worth educating, which lives are worth living, and which lives are worth saving.”⁶

The independence of thought and being, which appears so intrinsic to the neurotypical, leads to the ontological rift already marked, which for neurodivergent people often becomes a violence against their form of existence.

So we know that NT dominates — but what does it want, how does it see the world? Something to which I can answer, because of the shift of being, only in simplification. I can only say how I experience it and as what I experience it. For I am aware of the shift that is apparently hidden from neurotypicality.

But is this shift enormous, large, or only marginal, and how does this relate to quantitative effect? As said, the original is lost.

We are subject to a fundamental error of thinking when we assume the differences are enormous. Because we may neurotypically assume that only something large has large effect. This simultaneously encourages marginalization, because autistic people often do not appear so very different in many things.

It lies in the nature of a filter (NT, ND) held before a source of light (singularity) that the small shapes, the respective patterns, appear as enormous formations on an opposing wall. Considering a human life as a projection emanating from a point — by which I mean as the continuation of the immediately small into the finitely long of decades — even a slight shift leads to an avalanche of becoming-different.

In unstable systems, which are therefore in constant movement, the effort for any transformation is much lower than if one were to suddenly try to shift something large and static. We must therefore evaluate dimension, dynamics, effort and counter-reaction differently. In the autistic relation to reality, minimal distinction has a large effect, and not without reason autistic senses are constantly overloaded by the impressions of these upheavals of order. Yet they often pass almost without trace in the neurotypical world, because their energy is of another quality. What therefore makes up the dimension of the

⁶ Erin Manning / *The Minor Gesture* / Duke University Press / S 3

rift is not the deviation itself, but the reality from which one perceives it, or does not perceive it. It is the answer to the gap.

This makes the autistic experience so hard to grasp, because that to which it refers eludes neurotypical simplification.

While in the neurotypical mode effect always proceeds from something large, strong, isolated — in linear causality — these categories dissolve almost completely in the neurodivergent and we see details, small movements, differences, inconsistencies that further or block a life.

This dimensioning gone out of joint, however, arises not only from the rift itself, that is, from something distinguishable, but also from the denial of the unit of measurement of autistic reality. Autistic people react more strongly to things that neurotypicals barely notice. The contrast is therefore also owed to the defence against the foreign, not to the nature of the distinction itself. Simply put: if neurotypicality accepted that it is not the centre of the universe, then what separates us could not appear as a wall, but as a diverse garden. It is the absolute will to explainability that produces the distorting mask in the first place and closes the view to the actual requirements of autistic life.

Therefore the question of suffering — of autistic suffering or that of ADHDsers — is not graspable through measurements by neurotypicality, but the recognition of this suffering is broken by the structural prevention of the acknowledgment of neurodivergent reality. The autistic expression breaks on the neurotypical filter — rightly experienced by us as primitive — which lets autistic people penetrate only as fragments, without the chance to assemble themselves as a whole in the NT world. We are condemned to an existence in pieces. Like a tesseract, a four-dimensional cube that cannot be represented in the three-dimensional.

Our words are supposed to be factual, supposed to follow NT logic, have no emotions and be delivered at the correctly moderated volume. I myself was a stutterer as a child — which was simply the consequence of the incompatibility between the complexity, the speed of my brain and the infinitely emotion-deprived slowness and simplicity of neurotypical reception.

Yet the dimensions and shifts of the category can also be traced to inverted proportions, if one is willing to see them.

It lies, for example, in the nature of autistic people as I experience them, that the rational is not possible without the personal, without the emotional, because the emotional is a unity of embodiment and sensory perception. Autistic people not rarely use strong emotions as filters, as the clarification of intellectual sharpness. They are rational because they are emotional. In my literary, self-referential, synaesthetic science, I am therefore, through the neurotypical coupling of factuality and lack of emotion with intellectual truth, not only disqualified in neurotypicality — but ontologically excluded. My real experience can therefore also formally never become part of NT reality.

Jean-Luc Nancy speaks of being singular plural. Being never exists in isolation, but always in relation. We are not born into a world but with a world. This applies especially to autistic people, who do not separate inside and outside, emotion and rationality in the NT way.

In the sense of Simondon one could say that individuation is not a completed thing, but a process that always remains relational. Lyotard calls it the *différend* — a small incompatibility in language games that can shatter entire discourses. Bateson speaks of “a difference that makes a difference” — a minimal difference that radically changes system behaviour. Whitehead calls them “actual occasions” instead of “things” and means reality as process, not as substance. Indigenous ontologies often speak of relational existences, not of isolated objects (cf. Eduardo Kohn: *How Forests Think*). All of this, however, describes relations that are devalued in neurotypicality.

We therefore speak of a relational ontology (Barad, Whitehead, Kohn). In particular, it is about the concept of incommensurability (Kuhn). Incommensurability means: two paradigms cannot be described with a common language, that is, a non-comparability on the basis of shared measures. It concerns orders of existence that cannot be dissolved into one another. Incommensurability does not mean “absolutely other world” (no alien), but “no common measure”.

Thus we do not only have different quantities, between dominance and minority, but also a non-comparability of fundamental experience of existence.

Viveiros de Castro calls this *Perspectivism*: each species has an embodied perspective on the world. The status of “being human” depends on the respective embodied perspective. There is no neutral standard (no overarching grid) to determine who “is right”. This is not about opinions — that is, different interpretations of a shared reality — but about ontologically fundamental differences that depend on each embodiment, which is, after all, the case in autism and ADHD. That is, different ways of having a reality at all.

Thus the cause of the first layer of distortion is essentially that an excessive dominance of NT, coupled with a non-transferability, has led to a reification of autistic and neurodivergent people from the perspective of NTs. That is, to a frozen distorting mirror that is continuously referenced back onto us. Psychiatrists have become gatekeepers to keep us outside.

We cannot be anything other than objects in the NT world, because becoming-human in neurotypicality presupposes fitting affordances and habitats that are denied to us. This leads to what I will later call the *liminal glitch* as the quality of our existence within neurotypicality.

Every attempt at pure understanding, without respecting differences of existence, always leads to marginalization. This is why the sentence we cannot exist and be understood at the same time is of immense importance.

One could also say that only the state of emergence makes society, solidarity and shared recognition possible at all. Only by becoming something third do we become something shared. But therein lies the tragedy of our existence, because we are not equal — neurotypicality dominates — which prevents us from reaching this third. Thus the only option is to diversify neurotypicality until it no longer constitutes the dominant.

Von Foerster, one of the fathers of second-order cybernetics, made it clear: in classical cybernetics (first order), systems are viewed as if one could “objectively” observe them from the outside (neurotypical mode). In the second order, by contrast, the observer becomes part of the system he describes (neurodivergent mode). What distinguishes us here is not the assignment of these two positions, but the consequence of the fact that neurotypicality assumes it rules over the world, while autistic people, through the shift that becomes present to them within it, experience themselves as standing in a different relation, whereas neurotypicality looks at the world in distancing.

That is why in my research it is so essential to live the other, to embody the alternative, thus to expand diversity rather than remaining in external describability.

In my entire work I have never asked the question of target audience. Only ever the question of the inner coherences of the respective matter itself. What is its essence? What is its being? Not how is it conveyed to others? For that is the dark path toward self-burial.

Consensus must never lead to the abandonment of the self, but must be the first step in shared transformation and expansion.

Those who are most distorted at the margins experience with greater clarity that this separation, this independence of the elite, is an illusion built on the suppressed suffering of the marginalized.

Therefore be loud in your marginalized existence! Be unmistakable, subjective, and radical! And then be ready to transform yourself with them into something new!

Von Foerster emphasized here as well that objectivity is an illusion, which must be the logical consequence of this relation. Every observation is already a construction against the potential. In classical science, observation was considered representation: we record what is already there. With von Foerster, observation becomes displacement: in observing, we produce a world that would be different if we had not observed. From this follows: reality is not “just out there,” but arises in the play between observer and observed. NT and ND observe each other.

The consequence of the neurotypical assumption that one can grasp the world in distance, in objectivity, leads in practice to mistrusting our experience and therefore resorting to further simplifications such as inclusion concepts.

Only when we acknowledge that it is impossible for us NDs to exist fully in the NT-world can we free ourselves from the abstractions and evasions of the neurotypical and patriarchal.

For this it is necessary to understand in what relation, in what proportion we stand to one another, in order to know what we are a distortion of. Namely not of the original, equal to the “normal,” but of that which has not yet become. Only in this way can we name the boundaries that protect us from self-dissolution. While at the same time being open to synergies of a shared path into the future.

Inclusion is the wrong path.

The neurotypical world as society and economy is constructed in such a way that processes and actions, linearly and hierarchically ordered and externally evaluated, are designed so that they correspond to the neurological biology of neurotypical people. Unlike wheelchair users, we cannot be “designed into” the system, that is, docked via prosthesis. Because neurotypicality does not recognize us for what we are. One must understand the fundamental difference. For if wheelchair users stood in a similar relation to the “normal society” as autistic people do, companies would not be able to build wheelchairs for them. They would not know how that works. The wheelchair users would fall through their chairs as if they were of a fundamentally different frequency of being, or instead of wheels one would have squares on both sides. Nobody would understand why the wheelchair user still does not function neurotypically. It would be the same riddle as the question of what consciousness is. How do you build a prosthesis for a different consciousness?

If there is no shared measure, there is no translation, no bridge that does not at the same time become a new wall of ignorance.

One often hears that autism can be compensated with headphones and dimmed light, but that is not even remotely the real problem (although helpful). Affordances mean, for example, that a chair is intended for sitting. But it presupposes a butt in order to be usable.

The Australian autism researcher Dr. Beth Radulski once explained it in an interview⁷ using the example of glasses. One can have a company culture in which glasses are not accepted. Because the majority does not need glasses and, for example, thinks they would disrupt the uniformity of the corporate identity. There are companies that take such external details seriously in a paradoxical way. These glasses would therefore indicate another culture, another reality. One might feel less “cool,” and therefore, in this reading, less professional. This results in people who work for this company but need glasses being unable to do their work anymore, and then gradually being pushed out of the company with the argument that they are demanding special treatment and therefore probably do not fit the team. Compensation for the disability is then reinterpreted as a privilege, as an inconvenient burden on the company, which in polished modern firms immediately triggers automated strategies of devaluation and exclusion of people.

⁷ Youtube/ Orion Kelly / 24.8.2025/ Interview with Dr. Beth Radulski
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4IYBsCPs84>

These are the consequences when one always assumes only oneself, one's own standard, one's own conditions.

Neurodivergent people are forbidden their fundamental basis of existence, their right to live — yet it is pretended that it is “only” about a pair of glasses.

The minor and the major are difficult to reconcile when the major has created value-realities in which the large, the dominant, understands itself as the only correct one, because it has divided the world into units of measurement in which mass has the highest priority.

The fact that around 85% of autistic people are unemployed is often due to the refusal of minimal adjustments, because such adjustments would indeed have major consequences for the neurotypical system — because they are exceptions, and exceptions seem dangerous if one wants to preserve a solidified world with clear order.

“Neurotypicality involves a hierarchization of knowledge, based as it is on a belief that favors normative forms of instruction and segregates knowledge according to accepted ideas of what serves society best. Most accepted approaches to learning assume neurotypicality with regard to processing information, thereby segregating not only neurodiverse learners, but also predefining what counts as knowledge.”⁸

Privileged knowledge, another category of exclusion.

Sometimes, however, privilege also becomes a problem within the ranks of the neurodivergent. There are autistic and neurodivergent people for whom affordances can often be implemented more easily. Not infrequently — it lies in the nature of the matter — these individuals are then already more successful, and therefore have more status than other autistic people, and people listen to them more readily. Their knowledge appears closer to the neurotypical, more usable, and is therefore privileged.

So this is another factor of the missing measure: the fact that every autistic person is different. A form of diversification that is deeply foreign to neurotypicality, because neurotypicality tries precisely to smooth out these relations.

It is not uncommon that these more successful autistic and ADHD people who, for example, have found their niche in the NT world, shape the discourse in a way that creates the impression that affordances are less of a problem, because they were able to solve them with a few adjustments. We therefore have privileged individuals within the group of the marginalized, whose statements sometimes contribute to neurotypical structures continuing to make no fundamental changes, because one can point to autistic or ADHD people who function wonderfully with only minor modifications. Intersectionality is not seen. There are also privileged autistic people — one only needs to think of Elon Musk or Bill Gates. This, in turn, creates the impression that one could easily understand each other if one really wanted to, which implies that those for whom it does not succeed simply do

⁸ Erin Manning / *The Minor Gesture* / Duke University Press / S 9

not want it. In this way, the double-empathy problem can also be misunderstood and reduced. “Coming towards one another” then means giving something up in order to find a common denominator. I propose something completely different — namely to be, and then invite each other to dance, without knowing how one will dance.

Otherwise, within neurotypicality, there lies an unconscious or conscious strategy to prevent a fundamental equality between ND and NT. An equality that recognizes embodiment as the basis of reality, and consequently understands that reality cannot be translated, because translation presupposes a shared embodiment.

But how does the false measurement within incommensurability manifest? Let us consider the aspect of work, because how do we measure its value if autism exists within a different context of reality, and therefore also within a different context of relevance?

The fact that roughly 85% of autistic people are unemployed has its reason. Their embodiment of autonomous work and contribution — which, in their reality, is shaped and determined by meaning (monotropism) — is not recognized in neurotypicality; which is why autistic people like myself toil for decades at work that is profoundly meaningful and embodied for us, and therefore indispensable, even if we do not earn a single cent with it. This corresponds to the logic of our relationship to reality. Acting against it would be like doing something extremely stupid. This friction is also the most common reason why many of us fail in the attempt to adapt to neurotypical work relevance and methodology. Every management knows that you cannot run a company that follows different valuations of relevance.

For neurotypicality, what we embodiedly do — as the most relevant action of our existence, usually in the pursuit of the special interest — is not in itself work. It eludes standardization and cannot be measured by a market. Therefore it is meaningless. I therefore wrote to the Jobcenter:

“I explicitly note that ‘not marketable’ must not be equated with ‘unable to work’ or ‘incapable of employment.’ I am able to work productively for three hours a day or more, but not under the conditions of the general labour market.”

The indirect effect through giving and receiving via payment — and thus through an external availability of the body — which appears meaningful to neurotypicals, is already excluded for many autistic people by the fact that they cannot make their body available outside the logic of their self-experienced embodiment. Work can therefore only be an extension of embodiment for me, because work must always follow meaning in order to be relevant. But that cannot be a neurotypical meaning coming from a completely different experience of reality.

Here, too, we see an incompatibility of measurement procedures. Even a seemingly small deviation — such as a shifted relation to the world — becomes a gigantic obstacle in the field of work and demands something that I attempted in parts of my research: a completely

different concept of work, one that is not defined solely neurotypically — that is, by the assumption that action can be meaningfully separated from being and externally determined in value and relevance — but instead shaped a neurodivergent concept of work, and demanded to be allowed to exist for it. I demanded a right to exist in this work. I became the Radical Worker. (Book: Radical Worker / Vom Recht auf selbstbestimmte Arbeit)

Capitalism, which is neurotypical, is founded on the principle of exchange, which presupposes operability and requires externalized objects that stand for something other than what they actually are. Autistic people, in this context, exhibit increased inoperability. Our embodiment is often not available for this kind of abstract exchange. If we are forced into it, it is not uncommon that this is experienced as physical pain or as objectification, which can trigger strong defensive reactions.

It is therefore important to understand that abstract orders that make sense in neurotypicality are usually not embodied orders. They are not lived, not locally and immediately perceived through the senses as relevant in a context of meaning, but are imposed over life.

But how should autistic people then be financed if the measurement of value is exclusively neurotypical, and thus misinterprets and structurally mostly devalues, even renders invisible, the doing of neurodivergent people? Capitalism keeps the neurodivergent small. Because they deny us our relationship to meaning. But how is contribution supposed to be evaluated fairly then?

Neurotypical people reject a basic income — a foundational recognition of our existence, which is based solely on embodiment and thus does not impose external conditions — in principle. Even though this might be the only way to maintain the dominance of a purely NT economy while not making life complete hell for us. At least for those of us who do not fall into lucrative niches.

The neurotypical refusal of a basic income stems from the externalized legitimation of NTs in giving and receiving, because they are extrinsically motivated. For intrinsically motivated neurodivergent people, the question does not arise whether we would then do nothing — because we also work unpaid, because our existence is work, and for many of us it is not something separate from ourselves. For decades, income has been structurally denied to me, as to many others, because as an autistic person I only work embodiedly, but not in externalizable function and operability. The rejection of a self-determined basic income by neurotypical people is based on the assumption that there is a shared reality for everyone, and in that shared reality abstract rules apply to all equally, because relevance and meaning are experienced in the same way for everyone, and the market determines relevance. But for autistic people that is simply false. It contradicts our special interest, our monotropism, our mode of relating to the world.

Therefore I worked for 27 years almost without pay, against every market logic. One cannot measure my work — in 11 books and a feature film and decades of autistic research —

according to the principles of the market economy when these principles are not real for me, that is, not experientially embodied in logic. For what should I base my decisions on? On obedience? What fruitful thing has ever arisen from that?

It is the same as expecting a cow to read you a book, or expecting an Italian to understand work in the same way as a German. Work is not merely function but a cultural — and thus also neuronal — embedded context of the respective existence, between meaning, value and relevance.

If justice between NT and ND is to be possible at all, then NT must understand that contradictions and paradoxes are part of the relationship, and that in our time one can no longer seal off the world. Yes, what autistic or ADHD people are or need stands in stark contradiction to the relations to reality held by neurotypicality. And because neurotypicality cannot deal with ambiguity, as said, I do not see how we can arrive at a solution if autistic and ADHD people do not resist massively.

What do I mean by resistance?

The first openly gay politician in the USA, Harvey Milk, called on homosexuals to out themselves everywhere and to show themselves openly. Gay culture should become everyday culture. Thus openly gay and lesbian — later queer — content flowed into politics, became part of the debate. And Harvey Milk was not simply a politician who also happened to be gay, but his political resonance space made it possible to bring the issues of lesbians and gays — the violence, the social conflicts — into the realm of workable transformation. This rubbed off on other groups. He queered politics to some extent.

Whether autistic, blessed with ADHD, or expressing any of the other neurodivergent forms of neural embodiment — if we do not come out, nothing will change about the conditions, and by coming out I mean making visible what share of our contribution to society is neurodivergent.

Therefore I try to live a neurodivergent existence as confidently as possible, and in doing so I deliberately create friction with society so that the discrepancy of the situation becomes visible.

That I act and speak autistically does not mean that I speak for all autistic people and their embodiments, nor that my actions are identical to those of other neurodivergent or autistic people. I do not measure other autistic people either.

No — it means an individual voice, a deviation from the “norm,” which can only become a neurodivergent culture in the emergent sum of many voices, which, in the neuroqueer sense, is also open to those who — as neurotypicals — want to emancipate themselves from the neurotypical mode, because, as the autistic author Nick Walker aptly writes:

“In other words, it’s possible to be born neurodivergent but it’s not possible to be born neurotypical.”⁹

The neurotypical is, like the heteronormative, a predominantly social and cultural conditioning upon which the group in the majority, in its own diversity, agrees in order to organize its society and its relation to the world in a simplified way — that is, against complexity. In doing so, neurodivergent people are discriminated against and treated as externalized in a specific way.

But this also means that an uprising of the neurodivergent, a revolt of autistic people, touches far more than the question of inclusion and accommodation: it always indirectly calls into question the hegemony of capitalism as the solution to all problems and reveals the necessity of an alternative system in which neurodivergent people also participate. Here too something third must emerge. For it is necessary to make the proportions and dimensions, the categories, the volumes and contradictions, the paradoxes in our relationship visible so that we can shape them consciously. In the act of friction, resonance arises — and resonance leads to relationship — and suddenly we have overlaps, shared spaces, and kinships.

If the federal government were to pay me a basic income — unconditionally — because I would follow my special interests and work only on that, they would also have to accept that the product of self-determination has value, and that would necessarily also change the neurotypical image of work and economy. Our demand for a neurodivergent contribution simultaneously queers the neurotypical space.

Indeed, it seems almost impossible that neurotypicality would simply accept meaning and relevance in the sense in which I perceive them as existential in order to grant me, on that basis, a right to exist — consequently a salary, an honorarium, an income. For at this breaking point the full contempt of the neurotypical toward NDs becomes evident. We are meant to be pitiful lunatics in “inclusion,” helpless and ineffective — but never confident co-actors in the question of value and relevance.

The NT world, which despises free self-actualization so intensely, which devalues it so deeply, would have to grant this right to a group of 20%, while millions of neurotypicals continue to endure strict hierarchy and massive alienation in work. The recognition of the reality of autistic people would, sooner or later, become a corrective within neurotypical self-perception.

The disentangling connected to that would also free the neurotypical self-image from myths that are harmful to neurotypicals as well.

In fact — I wrote about this in *Speeds Arbeit* — as an artist and activist I forced the federal government over ten years to pay me a kind of unconditional basic income. These investigations revealed massive eruptions and state violence. I was finally made invisible so

⁹ *Neuroqueer Heresies* / 2021 / Nick Walker / Autonomois Press / S 182

that it would not become an uprising against the very concept of work. If we were many, it would no longer be possible to make us invisible.

Yet we see here that neurotypicality (like the patriarchal, like the hegemonic) keeps itself as a society in a state of oppression and constriction if it does not open itself to neurodivergent relations to the world and autistic experience. We exist in a shared field, and our respective existences distort the being of the other — not only through presence, but precisely through lack of relational capacity and unconscious interaction.

But the fact is that our displacement simultaneously means not seeing a shadow of neurotypical identity. To illuminate this — therein lies a chance for both sides.

From Spectrum to Liminality

Until now, in the history of autism one did not speak of a shared field, but only of a spectrum — as a medical and deeply neurotypical concept of autism. It was an attempt to fence in and categorise our embodiments, thus counteracting inoperability.

This spectrum as a construction has a long history. With the notion of the spectrum, people tried above all to do justice to the ambiguity, the ungraspability of autism, while excluding themselves, as neurotypicality, from this spectrum. The history of diagnostics reveals not only the distortion, but also the fragility of the neurotypical relation to reality.

Autism — and this is what I turn to now — is not a spectrum, but a liminal state: a being at the threshold that exposes the structure of reality itself. This condition of being-in-between results directly from the permanent displacement between NT and ND. So far, we have looked at distortion and displacement of being itself, as well as the question of magnitude and measurability. Now I want to examine the ontological consequence that follows from the refusal of neurotypicality to engage in co-creation.

The act of pathologization as relegation to the margins, beyond its own realm of reality and relevance, means — within a field relation from which there is no escape — the complete loss of visibility and thus the loss of agency of autistic people in society. It is a waiting room from which they are never retrieved. To conceal this cruelty, nebulous terms like the spectrum are used, as if the ontological rift did not exist. It is as if one shines a flashlight into darkness and claims the darkness does not exist because it is relative to the radius of light. Like darkness, autism appears to stand in a measurable relation to the observer. As if the observer, as the illuminator of darkness, were capable of mastering autism.

The concept of the spectrum is an act in which the object of measurement is replaced by the measurement itself. The spectrum is a ruler that always conceals what it claims to measure. Spectrum is therefore a neurotypical term, because the neurotypical could not bear to leave its own unknowing and the inoperability of autistic people standing in the room.

Already the Austrian psychiatrist Hans Asperger, who sent two autistic girls to their deaths during the Nazi era, had partly defined autism as a spectrum. In doing so, he attempted to view the worth or unworth of autistic people in a relative field. A “spectrum” sounds like diversity, like openness. In fact it means: autism exists only in relation to a norm that remains unspoken. In doing so autism is robbed of its own reality: it appears only as deviation on a scale from “severe” to “mild.” Ontologically this means: autism is not recognized as its own mode of being, but as a gradation of usefulness or disruption of the normal. That allowed Asperger to relativise his own dealings with autism — and thus the violence that followed the logic of the spectrum. The intelligent autistics could be useful; the others could be sent to the gas chamber.

The spectrum is therefore a linear gradation, a sequence of intensities — but not a field in which everything, including the observer, stands in relation.

But even before the spectrum became official, from the 1940s to the 1970s autism was predominantly split into two separate domains. Only when this early simplification could no longer be sustained did an expansion become mandatory — yet it still sought to differentiate usefulness from disability. We see here how the refusal of a field-based perspective led to the constant expansion of categories, because they were insufficient to describe the phenomenon. Thus autistic people remained a threat to the neurotypical attempt to seal the world.

Leo Kanner (1943) coined the term “early infantile autism” with a small number of clearly defined cases involving severe impairment. Hans Asperger (1944) deciphered, at roughly the same time, a form of “autistic psychopathy” in which the individuals appeared verbally gifted, often highly intelligent, yet socially conspicuous. For a very long time these diagnostic categories (Kanner vs. Asperger) were separated, often with a stark hierarchy (“severe” vs. “mild”).

The history of autism diagnostics is, ultimately, also the history of psychiatry — with all the problems that Foucault accurately identified. He described psychiatry not primarily as a medical discipline but as a practice of power and control. Psychiatry produces the boundary between the “reasonable” and the “insane” — it is therefore an ordering power of society, not a neutral healing profession. Deviant behaviour is declared illness in order to delegitimise it. The language of psychiatry defines what is “normal” and what is “sick” — it creates reality, not just diagnosis.

This severely restricted the possibilities of unfolding for generations of neurodivergent people, because it erased the necessity of allowing affordances and true ND habitats to exist at all.

This apparatus of power also operated as an exclusionary force within psychiatry itself. Grunya Efimovna Sukhareva (1891–1981), for example — the Ukrainian-Russian

psychiatrist who, as early as 1925, published an extremely precise description of children who today would clearly be recognised as autistic, almost two decades before Kanner (1943) and Asperger (1944) — was erased from psychiatric history and practice for a long time. Her work first appeared in Russian and was translated into German in 1926, but remained largely ignored in the West, partly for linguistic and partly for political reasons.

Psychiatry has therefore never been apolitical. It has always also functioned to stabilise systems, realities, and power relations.

Sukhareva emphasised the strengths and specificities of these children — not only their deficits — in a certain sense offering, already at that early time, a more inclusive perspective that ran counter to the later deficit-orientation of Kanner and Asperger.

In the 1950s and 60s, psychoanalysis seized interpretive authority over autism and, through figures such as Bruno Bettelheim, arrived at deeply unflattering conceptions — for example the theory of the “refrigerator mothers,” whose emotional coldness was supposedly responsible for autism. Although this theory was soon disproven by child psychologist Sir Michael Rutter, it nonetheless paved the way in the 1970s and, during the Thatcher era of the 1980s, to a resurgence of cognitive theories, such as those advanced by Jerry Fodor¹⁰ (*The Modularity of Mind*, 1983). They wanted to move away from the nebulous interpretations of psychoanalysis toward modern methods of concrete science. These were science-political decisions. It was also about enormous sums of money — about who would determine the canon and the future orientation of research.

Fodor shaped the idea that the mind consists of specialized cognitive modules. Within this logic, autism could be described as the failure or malfunction of a particular module (e.g., the Theory-of-Mind module → mindblindness). It becomes clear that autism theory in the 1980s was a direct consequence of the dominant methodology and philosophy of science of the time. Because it was considered modern to understand the brain as a machine, the field entered a perspectival narrowing that developed definitions and categories purely between functioning and dysfunction — as if these were the only legitimate analytical frames. This new approach, openly positioned as a dualistic counterreaction to psychoanalysis, appeared testable and compatible with the neurobiology that was being feverishly hyped at the time — and therefore with research directions that were considered more “real” and relevant within a neurotypical worldview. That is where the money flowed.

¹⁰ Jerry Fodor (1935–2017) was one of the most influential philosophers of mind of the 20th century and a central figure in cognitive functionalism. He became internationally known for the theory of the modular mind, according to which human thought consists of specialized, informationally encapsulated mental modules — such as perception, language, or face recognition — that operate independently and are only later integrated into a central system. Fodor strongly defended the idea of a mental representational language (“Language of Thought”) and symbolic processing, in contrast to radically emergent, enactive, or embodied approaches.

Fodor and others — such as Herbert A. Simon, Allen Newell, Ulric Neisser, David Marr and Hilary Putnam — collectively suggested with their work on cognition: if a module is missing or defective, if information processing does not run like a computer, then clearly delineable cognitive disorders arise. A position still visible today, for example at the Humboldt outpatient clinic in Berlin under Prof. Dziobek, who continues the behaviorist model in her research by using eye-tracking to turn a stereotype of autistic behaviour into a normative baseline of measurable deviation — a logic that continually confirms itself through ever tighter diagnostic procedures.

Rather than asking about the broader contexts of the phenomena that constitute autistic experience, research focused on whatever deviated most strongly from the neurotypical image. Autistic people appeared fundamentally incomplete because they were assumed to be missing a module, a function, an algorithm, a transmission sequence. This produced the deficit-orientation that stabilised the norm — along with interpretive authority and neurotypical institutions.

Today research knows that the brain does not contain strictly delineated modules. Functions are distributed, dynamic, plastic. Encapsulation is an illusion. There is no locatable “Theory-of-Mind module.” Social cognition is distributed across networks (prefrontal, temporo-parietal, limbic). The effects that manifest in cognition are therefore diverse and hard to pin down — because cognition is not the decisive level at which the phenomenon originates. Today Fodor has been refuted on essential points — but his shadow persists, because the institutions built on his theory still dominate the discourse.

The most influential contributors here were the so-called London School around Uta Frith and her doctoral students Tony Attwood, Simon Baron-Cohen and Francesca Happé. Inspired by Fodor and others, concepts such as Theory of Mind emerged within this school. The classical definition (Premack & Woodruff, 1978; later Frith and Baron-Cohen) states: Theory of Mind is the ability to attribute representations to mental states such as beliefs, desires or intentions, and to recognise that these can differ from one’s own. In autistic people this was interpreted as a missing “module” in the Fodorian sense.

In experiments, ToM was frequently tested through false-belief tasks, most famously the Sally-Anne paradigm: a child is asked where Sally will look for a ball that was secretly moved by Anne. If the child does not take Sally’s perspective into account, this is classified as a lack of Theory of Mind. This was a massive reduction of the phenomenon caused by bias. In the early days, the conclusion was drawn that autistic people lack empathy. This assumption was also likely reinforced by infodumping (and in some cases alexithymia) which is often observed in autistic individuals and, to neurotypicals, can look as if the autistic person is unaware that their special interest is not shared by the listener. It was only much later understood that infodumping does not ignore the other person’s perspective but responds neurodivergently to it — as an invitation to attune to a shared interest, which however

requires that both sides explicitly express their current focus of interest in order to move forward together.

This attentiveness to the other is not hierarchical or socially coded in autistic people, but content-driven. What matters is what the subject matter demands, not what is socially appropriate in that moment.

Autistic understanding is therefore not representational but associative-embodied: I feel or know relationally rather than rehearsing scenarios in my head. Social interaction is therefore not pre-calculated but modulated live. Success in the Sally-Anne test only shows that an NT-typical reading of social scripts has been identified and applied. Autistic people who respond differently were classified by the London School (not an official term) as deficient — despite the fact that autistic individuals possess other, equally valid modes of social resonance. These modes cannot be circumscribed as a “missing module.”

This deficit framing became, in turn, the supposedly legitimised exclusion of autistic reality and perception. It contributed directly to the liminal autistic experience.

Melanie Yergeau criticises ToM because it pathologises the language and expressive modes of autistic people. By claiming that autistic individuals cannot “understand what others think,” ToM implicitly frames their speech and writing as empty — without intention, without rhetorical competence. Thus every form of self-description is pre-emptively devalued because the autistic person is assumed to be cut off from the world. Cut off because they supposedly cannot grasp the realities of others. Yet while autistic people are claimed to be unable to model others’ minds, many autistic authors (including Yergeau) — and I myself — work precisely on bridging our own perspective with that of NTs. We actively formulate bridges and access points to the NT world, continuously and consciously considering NT viewpoints — though from within the displacement. We reflect on our communication, which fundamentally contradicts the claim of a lacking Theory of Mind. The mere existence of our texts falsifies the deficit model.

If both sides experience the world through distortion, then defining a deficit on only one side can never lead to a scientifically valid assessment — nor to a meaningful measurement. Diagnostic practice, if legitimate at all, must therefore be dialogical rather than psychiatric-patriarchal — and certainly not based on computerised procedures calibrated to neurotypicality as the default baseline, because this produces deviations without understanding their context, thereby multiplying misinterpretations.

Autism research — especially within the London School — externalised brains and treated itself as distinct from autistic people rather than as participants in a shared field of different ontologies.

ToM stabilises neurotypical normativity. It takes the NT gaze as a universal measure, declares all divergence to be “blindness,” and thereby blocks the recognition of autistic

forms of empathy, communication and world-relation. Yergeau shows: the lack is not in autistic people — it is the theory itself that is mindblind to autistic ways of knowing.

Around the same period in which the London School flourished, Lorna Wing & Judith Gould (1979) — working not primarily cognitively but diagnostically — introduced the idea of the spectrum, which obscured the fact that autism could no longer be captured through a few striking traits. Both groups shared the goal of rendering autism empirically measurable — a structural necessity from the perspective of psychiatry. Both relied heavily on operationalisation: clearly defined symptoms, scales, tests. Wing and Gould, however, were concerned more with classification than with theory building.

The spectrum thus became, indirectly, the fig leaf of the London school — a very imprecise science massively distorted by bias. Autistic traits that still could not be understood from the NT mode were now said to occur in widely differing intensities, yet allegedly shared a common “triad of impairments” (social interaction, communication, flexibility). In reality, this was nothing but a new categorization meant to contain the phenomenon. Three new metacategories concealed the diagnostic system’s detailed failures.

The diagnostic models created by neurotypical researchers soon marginalized many neurodivergent voices — either as subjective, or as severely or only mildly affected by autism. Autism was to be pinned to clearly identifiable flaws and defects. There was no cure, no therapy, except acts of coercion meant to correct autistic people. That, too, is a logic of the system.

The more the field attempted, through narrowing, to grasp the phenomenon and make it system-compatible, the more autistic people themselves were pushed into the liminal state — without participation, without comprehensible existence. This fundamental problem persists to this day and is reflected in highly uneven local rates of autism diagnosis: on the one hand wildly arbitrary, on the other far too narrow to do justice to the phenomenon and to the discrimination and disablement attached to it.

In the 1970s, Wing, together with Judith Gould, conducted epidemiological studies (e.g., in Camberwell, London) and found that far more children exhibited autistic traits than Kanner’s narrow definition suggested. She therefore proposed a model of core impairments to once again delimit (exclude), which became known as “Wing’s Triad”: difficulties in (1) social interaction, (2) communication and (3) social imagination / flexible thinking. This famous triad of impairments was defined as the shared feature of “all” autistic people. Again, the norm was privileged and the pressure toward simplification preserved. In fact, this description later entered the official diagnostic definitions in slightly modified form (up to DSM-IV / ICD-10, which also listed three core areas). With this deficit-oriented terminology — impairments in three domains — Wing shaped the clinical view of autism and contributed to autism being described for decades almost exclusively in the language of lack and deficit. Every one of Wing’s categories emphasizes what autistic people cannot do (e.g., social contact, typical communication, flexible imagination) instead of using neutral

or positive vocabulary. The question why they cannot do it was never asked, because it would have led beyond psychiatry — into an area outside its jurisdiction.

To measure the “other side” in the shift of being solely by what it cannot do is like a Briton describing a French person by saying that he does not eat fish and chips, drink Guinness, or enjoy lamb with mint sauce, and therefore must be eating incorrectly. One can certainly find thousands of French people who fulfil this “triad” of diagnostic criteria — but this does not even begin to capture the phenomenon of being French.

From today’s perspective, this deficit-based portrayal of autistic people — and of people with ADHD — is widely criticized as stigmatizing because it filters out abilities and strengths. Nevertheless, Wing’s intention at the time was to establish a shared diagnostic criteria set, and her concept did play a key role in breaking open Kanner’s narrowly defined notion of autism. But it must also be acknowledged that simplification under a neurotypical framework did autistic people no favors. A purely deficit-oriented diagnostic approach filters out far too much and reduces autism to nothing but a comparative measure against neurotypicality.

In a 1981 scientific article, Lorna Wing — who introduced Asperger’s work to the English-speaking world — proposed, for what was then emerging as the new category of “high-functioning” autistic individuals, the use of the term “Asperger syndrome.” This proposal was based on Hans Asperger’s 1944 description of “autistic psychopathy” in children.¹¹ With this, she established the category that came to denote what would later be called high-functioning autism without language or intellectual impairment. Wing emphasized that while these children did not show early language delay, they nonetheless displayed the triad of autistic difficulties she had defined — only in a different form. The introduction of Asperger’s syndrome was considered a milestone at the time, because it allowed for a formal diagnosis in people who would otherwise have slipped through the diagnostic net of DSM-III (for example, many autistic adults with regular employment or schoolchildren without developmental delay). As science “discovered” increasing amounts of neurodivergence, the diagnostic space was filled with more and more categories.

Wing herself regarded Asperger’s syndrome as part of the broader spectrum rather than a completely distinct disorder — she used the term pragmatically to define a subgroup within that spectrum. Official diagnostics followed her lead: in 1994 Asperger’s syndrome was added to DSM-IV (and already in 1993 to ICD-10). This created a two-track diagnostic system: “Autistic Disorder” (early childhood autism, often with delayed language acquisition) versus “Asperger’s Disorder” (without language and cognitive delay).

There were two major problems with this development. First, Wing — not yet aware of later revelations — used Hans Asperger’s name for the category. Only in 2018, through archival

¹¹ The Guardian / Zoe Corbyn / 16 April 2023 / ‘They tried to wipe it out’: the problem with talking about Asperger’s

work by historian Edith Sheffer, did evidence emerge of Asperger's involvement in the Nazi child-euthanasia program; Wing could not have known this.

Second, over the years it became clear that the distinction between Asperger's and autism created more confusion than clarity. Specialists increasingly recognized that there is no clear-cut difference in symptomatology; individuals diagnosed with Asperger's differ mainly through stronger linguistic and cognitive performance — areas that were already assessed independently. Moreover, the split introduced a hierarchy: Asperger's came to be seen in lay discourse as the “mild” form, “classic autism” as the severe one — which fueled stereotypes and led to systemic inequalities in support (for example, some people diagnosed with Asperger's were denied assistance because their category was considered insufficiently severe).

Ultimately, DSM-5 (2013) and ICD-11 (2022) abolished Asperger's syndrome as a diagnosis and subsumed all under the umbrella of “Autism Spectrum Disorder” (ASD). In this sense, Wing's own spectrum concept prevailed over the interim fragmentation.

The spectrum appeared to loosen the narrow perspective, but in reality it only replaced one restrictive frame with another. It created a new, arbitrary categorical boundary — one that still prevents many autistic people from receiving a diagnosis and therefore from receiving help, because their autism cannot be seen through that frame. Neurotypical clinicians cannot detect autism as a being — only the stereotype of autism as defined through their own constantly revised categories of “autism” or “neurodivergence.” Disability is still defined purely as deficit.

The problem becomes obvious when psychiatrists struggle to recognize disability in someone who has a higher IQ than they do, or is more successful, or more articulate. The reason many clinicians still doubt masking is that the old psychiatric paradigm requires the “mentally ill” to be beneath them in some sense. Autism as an equal mode of life with a right to self-determination is structurally and systemically alien to them. Because neurotypicality is treated as the correct form of behavior, neurodivergent thinking, acting, and being cannot be epistemically equal. The more equal someone appears, the more their autism is doubted — yet this does nothing to change the fact that discrimination does not follow a hierarchy of ontologies, but only the hierarchy of social dominance.

The ongoing debates about whether autism is a disease are scientifically outdated, yet their persistence reveals something crucial: where autism co-occurs with intellectual disability or speechlessness, paternalistic narratives return immediately. Behind this lies the assumption that it must be terrible not to be neurotypical, heteronormative, white. This “benevolent violence” stretches across the entire spectrum — including control over the very limits of categorization.

Autism continues to be treated as a disease largely because “disease” relieves society from the obligation of creating another habitat or acknowledging the equal reality of the foreign. “Cure” — in this context — means “become normal.” There is therefore no reason to grant

autistic people a world of their own, a reality of their own. They are simply placed on the waiting list of progress, in a temporary condition, until a cure is found. This legitimizes a permanent suspension of basic rights. That is the only reason why 220,000 people are currently on the waiting list for autism assessment in the UK, served by roughly 15 specialists, with waiting times of 10–20 years. (Céin McGillicuddy reports in a YouTube video / The Hidden 20% that he was offered an assessment date for 2040.)

At its core, this is about refusing responsibility for the burdens of the healthcare and social system by subjecting autistic people to paternalistic care — which indirectly blames them, and then justifies disempowerment and abuse through waiting lists or welfare systems. Many autistic people believe they are being “sponsored” by the welfare state (e.g., Bürgergeld in Germany) and must be grateful. Society is not prepared to tolerate the demand for a shift that another mode of existence requires. The fact that someone needs support does not automatically mean the condition is pathological, nor does it imply gratitude toward the helpers. Disability is not only the result of deficit — it is often the direct consequence of being different. Systems cannot cope with this, which is why the insight of ontological displacement is so central.

I experience disability because my life’s work is structurally expropriated and pushed into discrimination-induced unemployability. As a consequence, I live in a lifelong state of liminality — a term I will examine in depth later.

The “spectrum” ultimately served to relieve the system. It allowed for a graded transition from “severe” to “mild” forms and enabled “easier” diagnoses of “atypical cases,” which particularly helped to isolate the less visible cases — such as intelligent autistics. This triage was not structured around autistic inner experience, but around the norm. Those who deviated most visibly were assumed to suffer most — the ones who blended in were assumed to be less affected. The degree of disability was often tied to speech delay and intellectual impairment — factors that are relevant only within a neurotypical neurology, but not in relation to autism itself, which also, at high intelligence, means extreme deviation in lived reality. The fact that the ability to compensate (masking) carries a brutal price was understood only much later.

The spectrum model therefore contained a massive marginalization of the neurodivergent — as well as a massive arrogance of neurotypical psychiatrists and researchers, who consciously or unconsciously viewed themselves as the ideal state, and thus without suffering. This is not far from a “God-given” condition.

The “suffering” of autistic and otherwise neurodivergent people was hierarchized along the scale of the neurotypical. As a result, those who appeared outwardly less divergent, yet experienced a deeply divergent inner reality, were often denied any recognition of their suffering — of their reality. A form of suffering whose cause did not lie in the divergence itself, but in the way neurotypicality responds to the foreign — which led to massive structural, symbolic, and direct discrimination and violence.

Professor Dziobek (Humboldt University Berlin) recently stated in a lecture at the German Psychotherapists' Association¹²:

“When someone masks — I mean masks really well — then those are usually people who are highly intelligent, who have developed very special systems. (...) One has to really have them explain how that comes about. (...) Another point must be that it happens with a considerable expenditure of energy. That means it has to be credible that the person, they handle the situation quite well, hardly anyone notices anything, for half an hour, and then they spend two days in bed with the blanket over their head, let’s say. If that does not happen — if there is no strong overload resulting from masking, or how it was acquired, how it was in childhood — then I would say it is rather not autism.”

Her statement is epistemically absurd — because masking is precisely the act of preventing or hiding such breakdowns. In other words, she demands that autistic people prove they are unable to mask perfectly in order to qualify as “truly autistic.”

What Dziobek is saying sounds “understanding” at first glance — she acknowledges masking as a phenomenon. But in the subtext she draws a new normative line: only those who, after masking, “spend two days in bed with a blanket over their head,” so to speak, are masking “for real.” This means she shifts masking from an internal cognitive phenomenon back to a physically observable symptom. Thus observability once again becomes the criterion for diagnosis. Only what the neurotypical diagnostician sees (or can imagine) counts as real. Masking that is unconscious, automatic, intellectually integrated, or chronically normalized becomes diagnostically invisible — interpreted not as evidence, but as counter-evidence.

And, like many of her colleagues, Prof. Dziobek protects her own behavioural research paradigm through such statements, because masking threatens the validity of that paradigm. There is clearly a conflict of interest here. We are dealing with intelligent, articulate, self-aware autistic people confronting a research system that needs disability to appear as deficit in order to legitimate itself.

Beyond a certain threshold of masking, self-reflection and cognitive compensation, autism becomes epistemically unfalsifiable. Masking means that the autistic person is observing as well. If they know how they are being observed and strategically interact accordingly — which is what masking entails, consciously or unconsciously — the result is no longer a measurement, but an interference between observer and observed. A system cannot observe itself objectively when observation changes the system. Diagnostics can no longer determine whether the apparently neurotypical behaviour is a genuine adaptation or an autistic simulation of normality.

¹² DPTV-Symposium 2025 - Lecture Prof. Dr. Isabel Dziobek
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12S9ayDHhrg> / Min 48

Every negative diagnosis (“not autistic”) is therefore methodologically unreliable whenever it rests on an observation whose validity masking itself cancels out.

Autism becomes its own mode of knowledge.

Once introspection, intelligence and masking reach a certain level, autism can no longer be falsified through external observation. A scientifically honest position would have to acknowledge that the classical test system collapses at this point. If masking and introspection render autism empirically invisible, then self-knowledge remains the only authentic source of definition — something fundamentally incompatible with the truth concept of neurotypical science, which rejects subjective experience as a valid ontological reality.

There has therefore always been a massive resistance in the scientific world toward the subjective self-descriptions of autistic people. They could neither be formally nor conceptually integrated into the neurotypical reality model.

To this day, the assumption remains constant that autism must be recognisable to neurotypicals in order to be real. Incommensurability is denied. Measurement and classification replace the experiential relevance of autistic reality — in a process strikingly similar to the historical measurement of People of Color based on physical traits to infer what they are “on the inside.”

We can see how an entire scientific field has replicated its own bias for decades and continues to do so today. Only one third of people in Germany who seek diagnostic clarification receive an autism diagnosis, although international rates are far higher (40–70%). This is because Germany still largely operates under a pure deficit model. Those who are intelligent, articulate, female or PoC fall through the methodological cracks far too often.

It was not until the 1990s that the English-speaking world began developing a counter-movement to deficit-based autism narratives. The autistic activist Jim Sinclair wrote “Don’t Mourn for Us” — a radical challenge to the parental grief trope (“we wanted a healthy child”) and to the purely neurotypical framing of autism.

“You didn’t lose a child to autism. You lost a child because the child you waited for never came into existence. That isn’t the fault of the autistic child who does exist, and it shouldn’t be our burden. We need and deserve families who can see us and value us for ourselves, not families whose vision of us is obscured by the ghosts of children who never lived. Grieve if you must, for your own lost dreams. But don’t mourn for us. We are alive. We are real.”¹³

Judy Singer, among others, coined the term neurodiversity. For the first time, autism was no longer framed solely as a deficit but as part of human diversity. Over the past fifteen years, new currents have attempted to develop and investigate this core idea further: Damian Milton described the Double Empathy Problem — the insight that communication barriers

¹³ Jim Sinclair, “Don’t Mourn for Us”, *Our Voice*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1993

between NT and ND are not a one-way street. Erin Manning wrote about the minor gesture, the moment in which autistic perception detaches from the norm and becomes something else. Critical Autism Studies connected these approaches with sociology, feminism, and philosophy in order to understand autism not merely as a social category, but as its own form of knowledge.

What is still missing, however, is a deeper understanding of the shift that continues to exist even when autism or ADHD are simply placed alongside neurotypicality. The problem is not solved by imagining all humans within a shared passive spectrum of possibilities, like archetypes in a museum. The concept of neurodiversity does not destabilise the hegemony of neurotypicality, because it describes coexistence rather than a field of interaction. Racism is not abolished by declaring humanity a scale of different skin colours. Real change for neurodivergent people has therefore not come from new categories, but from new qualitative investigations into neurodivergent experience.

The first approaches that made different affordances and life-conditions intelligible came mainly from impulses in consciousness and natural-science research, as well as queer studies and philosophy. They made neurodivergent modes of world-experience describable. Embodied cognition was explored and theorised. Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch made clear: knowing is acting; perceiving is being embedded — not the passive mirroring of an external world. Karen Barad argued that the world is not “observed” by separate subjects, but is constituted through intra-actions — that is, through the mutual co-formation of matter, meanings and bodies. Something that aligns deeply with autistic experience.

Thus — and this process is still only at its beginning — a counter-movement emerged against the dominance of the neurotypical worldview. Yet it was still not understood that distortion and incommensurability not only bent the discourses on neurodivergence, but also blurred neurotypicality’s own self-understanding.

The neurodiversity movement has also not yet succeeded in grounding the ontological distinction as the basis for a right to exist as an autonomous form of life; instead, this right is derived merely from general diversity. That does not save an endangered species. Someone has to take the situation personally and give it relevance through embodiment — something that requires massive protective rights enforced politically. Beginning with the fact that neurotypical psychiatrists must no longer be the authority that decides over our existence.

This is why it is so important to show the London School for what it was and is: a kind of colonial club that cannot understand us but nevertheless insists on defining us. We must stop allowing ourselves to be defined by them.

Liminal experience is also shaped by the fact that autistic experience (including in ADHD) is often unconscious because those affected do not know about their neurodivergence. The fact that no one is actively looking for us is part of the mechanism of invisibilisation that prevents our becoming.

Francesca Happé¹⁴ mentions in a YouTube interview that an estimated 9 out of 10 autistic people over the age of 50 do not know that they are autistic. They do not know that their different reality is in fact its own reality — and not a mistake. And that applies only to autism. We do not know what the situation looks like in other fields of neurodivergence. It is also widely known that many girls and women are diagnosed as neurodivergent far less often. Kala Allen Omeiza writes in her book *Autistic and Black* about the problems faced by People of Color who are also autistic, and about the intersectionality of experiencing autism, neurodivergence and other forms of marginalisation. Countless invisible autistic people remain unseen — their divergent voices, which could disrupt the spectrum, are not allowed to appear. The empirical basis of many studies on neurodivergence rests on stereotypical participant profiles. These problems have been discussed extensively, and when we speak of a spectrum, we gloss over the fact that this spectrum is yet another colonial construct.

Just as People of Color could theoretically be framed as a spectrum — after all, not all are the same shade — how then are we supposed to discuss racism? The very idea of a spectrum risks stripping many people of their political legitimacy, because it marginalises them as merely “milder cases.” Thanks to the London School, which shaped countless institutions worldwide, autism came to be understood as a quantitative rather than a qualitative phenomenon.

If neurodivergence were recognised in its full breadth, many social problems would have to be evaluated differently. Poverty, unemployment, exclusion, the rise of mental illness — much of this is shaped in the background by neurodivergence. In England, research shows that one in five people seeking psychotherapy today is autistic.¹⁵ Often, unaware autistic people encounter equally unaware therapists — and according to research from Humboldt University Berlin, 43% of them still believe Bruno Bettelheim’s “refrigerator mother” theory.

Neurotypicality does not merely exclude autistic people; it renders full participation in the world structurally impossible for many kinds of existence.

The way the deficit-oriented model erases autistic lived experience can, paradoxically but quite fruitfully, be compared to life under a dictatorship. The analogy sounds extreme — yet the parallels are hard to deny. In both cases, an entire population becomes invisible in how they experience the world because the dominant system refuses to recognise that experience as real.

In the GDR (German Democratic Republic), for example, non-conformists and dissidents (punks, artists, people filing exit applications, church groups, draft refusers), queer people,

¹⁴ Podcast The Hidden 20% / King's College Autism Expert: Burnout, IRRITATING NEIGHBORS & Late Autism Diagnosis In Adults <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJ0BhHs6zdl&t=1195s>

¹⁵ Youtube / The hidden 20% / Dr Alison Lennox / Ex-NHS Autism Psychiatrist Exposes Waiting List 'Scandal' & Why You'll Never Get An Assessment / Min 5:36

religious minorities, and disabled people suffered — not because they “lacked” something or “failed to adapt,” but because the system selectively created affordances for some and imposed sanctions on the rest: Zersetzung, surveillance, professional and educational barriers, restrictions on housing/travel, licensing and publication control.

The normative field dictates which forms of communication, time, presence, and semantics count as real — and turns deviation into disability.

Dictatorships are revealing for another reason: suffering becomes invisible where the system defines its own measures as “natural.”

We should be talking far more about the mechanisms of marginalisation than about “inclusion,” which is often just another form of disappearance.

Liminality is the consequence of marginalisation.

The diagnostic act — in autism typically performed with neurotypical instruments like ADOS — becomes absurd if we transpose it into the examination of suffering under a dictatorship such as the GDR.

Imagine a well-situated person from West Germany sitting in front of a survivor of the socialist regime and measuring her oppression via questionnaire:

Were you imprisoned?

Were you expelled from the country?

→ high score

Did you often go to the nudist beaches (FDK, the popular naturist beaches of the GDR)?

→ then you apparently coped well with the environment and therefore — proportionally — were less of a victim of the dictatorship.

This is precisely the logic of ADOS: a summing and subtracting of points assigned to events and behaviours, in an attempt to approach a phenomenon mathematically, through absolute metrics, inside an artificial setting that makes lived experience almost impossible to detect. A life biography is shrunk to a handful of variables.

It is a model of “reality” and “measurement” that violently ignores embodiment.

We can see here how much violence is embedded in the externalized setting itself.

The West German interviewer questions the East German survivor and assigns plus- and minus-values to her experience of dictatorship — values that are then generalized to all East Germans — despite the fact that the interviewer has no direct access to that experience and that it is, in fact, fundamentally incommensurable.

A great deal of suffering is radically reduced through this new contextualization, adding yet another layer of distortion and non-understanding.

Both the autistic person and the former citizen of the GDR have learned that they must hide in order to survive.

ADOS therefore does not capture the violence of being neurodivergent.

Just as the suffering of East Germans was understood only through the lens of West German everyday culture — not through the East German lived reality.

If someone succeeded, through masking, in remaining undetected, they received no recognition as victims of the GDR at all.

If they later collapsed in life as a consequence of the unrecognized trauma, their fate — as happened to many East Germans — was often reinterpreted as their own personal failure.

Exactly what many neurodivergent people experience.

In discourse about the GDR, the violence of the dictatorship was often reduced to the violence the state inflicted on dissidents — and not the violence citizens inflicted on themselves in order to avoid prison.

They forced themselves into liminality, into a life that was never allowed to become itself.

The question of suffering and its intensity cannot be answered along the axis of outward deviation or visible opposition.

There is visible suffering — and invisible suffering.

Models like the spectrum or tools like ADOS erase the invisible part of violence because they ignore embodiment — they ignore embodied knowledge.

ADOS-2 is now called the “gold standard” of autism diagnosis.

ADOS and ADI-R are widely used in clinics and diagnostic centres.

But they are not apolitical, not neutral tools.

With ADOS, a handful of individuals decisively set the course of autism research — for better and for worse.

Not only the London School leaves its fingerprints there (Baron-Cohen developed the AQ test), we even see a dynasty.

Edward Ritvo (1930–2022) is considered one of the founding fathers of autism research in the United States, a collaborator of Leo Kanner, later a professor at UCLA.

His daughter, Riva Airella Rivo-Slifka (1957–2012), developed the RAADS-R test together with Tony Attwood — a key instrument for adult diagnosis. In almost every

RAADS item one can clearly recognize Attwood’s original formulations and thinking — which are comparatively less deficit-loaded than, for example, the AQ.

But when the signature of individual researchers can be plainly identified in supposedly objective standard tests — their subjective imprint — the extreme centralization of the whole field in the hands of a few becomes a sharp question about the scientific legitimacy of the tools themselves.

They are not neutral — and only very few were developed from autistic self-experience or autistic self-definition.

It is therefore worthwhile to examine the origins of methods like ADOS — the very core of the behavioural paradigm — because exactly the same problems emerge here as we saw in autism research more broadly.

Catherine Lord is a clinical psychologist and a principal co-developer (together with Michael Rutter, Pamela C. DiLavore, and Susan Risi) of the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS), that diagnostic observational procedure which, as noted, is today considered the “gold standard” in autism diagnosis.¹⁶ Lord began in the 1980s, together with colleagues such as Sir Michael Rutter — who, alongside Uta Frith, was one of the central figures in England already mentioned — developing standardized instruments for identifying autism. Her original goal in creating ADOS was, much like Wing and all of her predecessors, to identify “pure” autism — an intention she retrospectively herself describes as naïve.¹⁷ This misjudgment shows that Lord and her colleagues were still operating under the assumption that there existed a prototypical, clearly delineable image of autism that could be isolated. That thinking was also tied to the London School. The logic is obvious: it is built into the reward system of science, which depends on discoveries. But to be able to “discover” something, it must exist as a concrete form — so one goes looking for one. As if autism were a possession, a property that could be owned.

Before ADOS, autism diagnosis depended heavily on the clinician’s individual experience and intuition. With ADOS, Lord and her team established a structured observation protocol that set fixed criteria and improved the comparability of diagnoses. Comparability here means shared categorization — a rigid category. This again meant that thousands of autistic people were intentionally rendered invisible so that the method, the tool, could deliver “usable” results. It helped align autism diagnoses across clinics and studies — crucial for the research industry, which made millions on studies that required an objectifiable definition of autism. In Lord’s own words, ADOS replaced formerly “clinical”

¹⁶ Waizbard-Bartov E, Fein D, Lord C, Amaral DG. Autism severity and its relationship to disability. *Autism Res.* 2023 Apr;16(4):685-696. doi: 10.1002/aur.2898. Epub 2023 Feb 14. PMID: 36786314; PMCID: PMC10500663.

¹⁷ The Transmitter / Perspectives / Spectrum Catherine Lord: Lessons from a storied career in autism research Catherine Lord’s career has been defined by relationships: with mentors, protegees and, above all, with autistic people and their families. By Catherine Lord 3 December 2019 / thetransmitter.org

unstandardized diagnoses and created unified expectations about the data required for a diagnosis. A deeply neurotypical maxim.

Not a few researchers criticized ADOS early on for being, despite its standardization, subjective in its scoring; others objected in the opposite direction, claiming it undermined clinical experience. In addition, they pointed out that it was costly and significantly increased diagnostic workload.

In practice, ADOS requires specialized training for clinicians, and the test kit is expensive — a fact that raises ethical questions about accessibility of diagnosis. Lord defended her instrument against some of these criticisms, yet conceded that it incurs additional costs and that in many clinics it is applied mechanically, without discussing the insights with parents or patients. Even the creator of the so-called “gold standard” recognized serious shortcomings in real-world implementation.

What remains ethically problematic is the deeper conflict of interest created by Lord’s dual role as researcher and financial beneficiary of ADOS. Catherine Lord receives royalties from the publisher Western Psychological Services (WPS) for every ADOS unit sold, as well as for the sister instrument ADI-R. The method is licensed worldwide through commercial publishers. In Germany, for instance, Hogrefe Verlag holds the rights.

When the success of a diagnostic test brings personal advantages to its developers, there is always the risk that its weaknesses will be downplayed and alternatives ignored. For example, one study also showed that ADOS-2 produces a high rate of false-positive autism results in adults with psychotic disorders (30% of the psychotic participants tested were incorrectly classified as autistic).¹⁸ The problems resulting from a one-sided perspective on autism are widely known. And yet, the errors are not — or not sufficiently — corrected.

I go into ADOS in such depth because it shows how the very basis of research — the question of who counts as autistic — was controlled in this way, while simultaneously deceiving itself. The more simplified the evaluation criteria, the more reduced the research population became, which means the foundation of the research was drastically narrowed. This is a core problem of those who worked behaviorally — without a deeper understanding of autism, relying solely on observation and deviation from the norm. A vicious cycle of data distortion emerged.

At the same time, I do not want to dismiss the achievements of these people entirely. The influence of Catherine Lord, as well as Rutter, Wing, etc., shaped modern autism diagnosis. They did at least identify more autistic people than before. But some of these decisions were made under questionable premises that continue to have effects to this day. A diagnostic procedure that requires an investment of several thousand euros per kit will rarely be

¹⁸ Maddox BB, Brodtkin ES, Calkins ME, Shea K, Mullan K, Hostager J, Mandell DS, Miller JS. The Accuracy of the ADOS-2 in Identifying Autism among Adults with Complex Psychiatric Conditions. *J Autism Dev Disord.* 2017 Sep;47(9):2703-2709. doi: 10.1007/s10803-017-3188-z. PMID: 28589494; PMCID: PMC5813679.

questioned by those who have paid for it. It grants status, which is then defended — because one’s own job depends on it. It is a kind of franchise system, like McDonald’s. And just like McDonald’s franchise owners do not question the basic concept, because they want to work within it and make money, the ADOS system is protected by those who operate it.

Nevertheless, ADOS is already being questioned by many — especially as a tool in adult diagnosis. But it often takes decades for this to become common knowledge, and we need to acknowledge that the masking ability of autistic people not only makes diagnosis more difficult, but also calls behavioral research itself into question.

Sir Michael Rutter (1933–2021), who—as mentioned earlier—refuted Bettelheim’s “refrigerator mothers,” is regarded as the father of child psychiatry in the United Kingdom and, as Uta Frith’s academic mentor, was one of the first researchers to study autism systematically. Early on, he helped shape the scientific criteria for autism — he contributed, among other things, to the DSM-III classification (1980), which for the first time clearly distinguished autism from childhood schizophrenia. With this, Rutter made a decisive contribution to recognizing autism as an independent “developmental disorder” and rejected psychogenic explanations.¹⁹ As beneficial as the debunking of the “refrigerator mother” theory was, Rutter also introduced his own misjudgments, which shaped diagnostic practice for a long time. For example, he initially insisted that early language abnormalities were a central core feature of autism.²⁰ In the DSM-III criteria that he helped shape, language was therefore a mandatory criterion: children without clear delays or abnormalities in language development were not considered autistic. This narrow definition — a monothetic approach in which all criteria had to be met — consequently excluded many autistic people, particularly those with typical or advanced language development (later referred to as Asperger autistics). At the time, Rutter was one of the most influential voices in the field, and his position that autism was inseparably linked to linguistic and cognitive impairment set the tone for diagnostic practice. This was also driven by the institutional impulse to identify a disease rather than a different neurological configuration — the logic of “if you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail.”

It took years for this restriction on language development to be corrected in diagnostic systems. What we see here is the remarkable inertia and authority-deference of institutions — at the expense of millions of affected individuals.

In the 1980s, new findings emerged through Lorna Wing that challenged and relativized Rutter’s position. In 1987 DSM-III was replaced by DSM-III-R, shifting to a polythetic system in which early language delay was no longer required for an autism diagnosis. This

¹⁹ Jim Stevenson / A digest of the published work of Michael Rutter / Posted on 4 January 2022 / ACAMH – The Association of Child and Adolescent Mental Health / <https://www.acamh.org>

²⁰ Michael V. Lombardo - Veronica Mandelli / Rethinking Our Concepts and Assumptions About Autism / 03 June 2022 / <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychiatry/articles/10.3389/fpsy.2022.903489/full>

paradigm shift was directly driven by Wing’s work and Asperger’s case descriptions. Rutter himself later acknowledged that autism must be understood more broadly. Nevertheless, his original position had the consequence that, for many years, large numbers of highly able autistic people (with typical language and intelligence) received no diagnosis — an error that left countless individuals undetected well into the 1990s.

Sir Michael Rutter was also directly involved in the development of diagnostic tools and, together with colleagues such as Ann LeCouteur and Catherine Lord, participated in creating the Autism Diagnostic Interview (ADI) — a structured parent interview first published in 1989.²¹ We can see here how deeply the entanglement of inner circles has dominated autism research. ADI-R is still often used today in combination with ADOS.

Rutter shaped the idea that, for research purposes, large sample sizes were needed and that these would only be comparable if all investigators followed the same diagnostic schema. In other words: diagnostics were adapted to the needs of research, not to the needs of neurodivergent people. The focus shifted away from the lived experiences of autistic individuals and toward a consolidation of the pathology paradigm.

ADI provided another layer of standardisation alongside ADOS. It defined which questions parents should be asked about their child’s behaviour and how their answers were to be coded. In 1994 it was revised and reissued as the ADI-R, now also applicable to children as young as 18 months.

At the same time, Rutter also contributed to the development of the observational instrument — ADOS — produced by the same core authors as the ADI-R. His involvement brought him academic prestige and helped establish the diagnostic tools as authoritative.

Ethically questionable in Rutter’s role is the sheer concentration of power he (along with a handful of others) held in autism research in the 1970s and 80s. Catherine Lord — effectively his scientific “grand-daughter” — later criticised the “rule of elites” in those years, when autism research was monopolised by a few prominent psychiatrists in major institutions. The result of this era was a massive ignorance toward the diversity of autism, coupled with the career-driven imperative to conceptualise autism as a profitable illness.

It is crucial to understand that Rutter strongly supported both Catherine Lord (ADOS) and Uta Frith, whose work in turn inspired the London School. Much of this was about prestige. Once again, we see how neurotypical markers distorted the scientific understanding of autism.

Lorna Wing also enjoyed enormous credibility in professional circles. She co-founded the National Autistic Society (NAS) in the UK in 1962 to address the lack of support for

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autism_Diagnostic_Interview#:~:text=The%20ADI,chronological%20age%20of%20at%20least

autistic people. After retiring, she and Judith Gould opened a diagnostic centre — now the Lorna Wing Centre — and developed the DISCO interview, an extensive diagnostic tool that, like the ADI-R, collects information on development and behaviour. However, DISCO never achieved the same global spread as ADI-R, partly because Wing operated it within a non-profit organisation, whereas ADI/ADOS were licensed commercially by major publishers. Yet DISCO has significant advantages over ADI and ADOS, particularly for older autistic people or those on the margins of detection, because DISCO integrates the complexity of a person’s life rather than relying almost exclusively on short behavioural snapshots in a clinical setting — which is often the case with ADOS.

What is essential here is that capturing high complexity reduces comparability among autistic people — which, from the standpoint of research standards, became a problem. In that sense, autism itself became a product of the research industry.

At this point the ontological gap becomes clear: the autistic person was constructed along neurotypical bias.

Wing’s gains were largely ideological and symbolic: she became a widely respected autism expert, received honours (OBE) and lived to see her ideas — the spectrum and the triad — become mainstream. But her deficit-laden terminology continues to shape parts of the field to this day. Many of the common diagnostic formulations (“impairments in social interaction”, “impairments in imagination”) originate with Wing and are now being challenged by autism activists.

Against this backdrop, ADOS eventually became Big Business and a career accelerator, because all well-funded institutes conducting autism research needed to select participants using ADOS to meet academic standards. But that turned ADOS into a distorting filter through which the entire institutional landscape of autism research was viewed. It reduced autism to deficits observable from the outside.

Tests such as the ADI-R, which is usually combined with ADOS, involve a time-consuming interview (up to 3 hours) that places a heavy burden on parents and focuses almost exclusively on “abnormal” behaviour (e.g., questions about atypical social interaction, stereotyped interests, etc.). Such interviews suggestively lead parents to report mainly deficits in their child, which in turn produces a deficit-oriented diagnostic picture. In addition, parents are indirectly pressured to marginalise invisible forms of distress or less stereotypical autistic experience, which perpetuates violence against the less visible neurodivergent profiles.

Uta Frith stated in a YouTube interview that²²:

“The experienced clinician can identify autism very quickly and agree with people around the world, and it’s interesting to think why we can do this.”

²² Youtube / Serious Science / Min. 6:35 / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2E0kvPsiUAK>

She said this despite the fact that it was already clear at the time that diagnostics massively overlooked or misdiagnosed autistic people and would obviously continue to do so:

“Now I think it’s the key to explaining what is different in people with autism. And the key is what we might call reciprocal communication. So, when we communicate with each other, mostly in language of course, it’s what we do, but it doesn’t have to be words. It could be signs, it could be touch, it could be some other things. When we do this normally it’s a very fluid unconscious turn-taking. We take into account what the other person already knows, doesn’t know. We like to tell something new and interesting, not boring same thing all over again. And with the autistic person this seems to be missing, but when you are to have a conversation with an autistic person, this just doesn’t happen. There isn’t this turn-taking and this reciprocal interplay.”

What Frith says here is in several respects indicative of a primitiveness that could result from the NT-bias of autism diagnostics and research. Such conclusions are scientifically questionable because one does not integrate one’s own position, but instead exclusively sets the dominant culture as the norm, which is assumed to be correct in every case.

Frith assumes that autistic people, no matter how intelligent, are in any case not capable of understanding how neurotypical communication strategies function. Thus, she excludes the simultaneity of intelligence and autism. Even if we will never truly understand one another, it is nevertheless possible to simulate the outward appearance. What we call masking was massively underestimated by Frith. Here we see the origin of the attitude that explains a fundamental mistrust toward the capacity for masking. Masking can, of course, cause reciprocity to appear completely unremarkable. But that fundamentally shakes the certainty about the alleged deficits of autistic people.

What Frith said is as poorly thought through as assuming that women, categorically, cannot park a car because they are supposedly more empathic beings. Therefore, they would in every case fail at parking. The professional diagnostician would be able to identify any woman by her parking behaviour. Autism diagnostics today in many places still operate as if a woman were to be recognised as a real woman only if she leaves behind a trail of destruction while parking. If she merely brushes another vehicle, she is not a real woman.

One cannot claim that this research has gone significantly beyond the personality defamations of the Nazi era — that is, the slanderous prejudices such as the “Jewish nose” (physiognomics). At the time it was said: “You can recognise the Jew by the nose” — a projection that protected one’s own position of power. With Frith: “The experienced clinician can identify autism in seconds” — also a claim to power that legitimises the interpretive authority of the clinic. Frith’s argument follows precisely the logic of old racist anthropology: there is a supposedly visible, reliable characteristic that “objectively” distinguishes one group from others. At that time it was the nose, the lips, the skull measurements — today it is supposedly the “lack of reciprocity behaviour” in conversation. What Frith takes as absolute are always secondary effects that never capture the primary

event or phenomenon of autism or neurodivergence. It is not the essential that is measured — rather, the measurable appears as the essential.

Here we see the shift of being (Seinsverschiebung) at work again.

There are autistic people whose entire lives have been shattered by colliding with neurotypical structures, but they themselves would be recognised by no one — or only by very few — as autistic. They remain invisible in ADOS. Just as thousands of citizens of the GDR were not counted among the obvious victims of the regime, yet — through the denial of the affordances necessary for their development — were exposed to massive violence that they often turned inward, into themselves, in secret.

The distortion thus also meant marginalisation and invisibilisation.

Autism as a term drags with it a gigantic group of those who have become invisible in liminality, because the nature of overextension is also the disfiguration of relations. One thing becomes enormous, the other shrinks to unrecognisability. Everything that happens between ND and NT operates in a shared field — including diagnostics.

I want to conclude by pointing out an aspect that essentially overturns the entire spectrum perspective, as well as the distinction between “strong” and “mild” autism (subclinical) — that is, the attempt to define high and low autism, which, as shown, is nothing more than a cloud of smoke designed to level the radical nature of the ontological split by referring difference back only to itself, in graded deviations from normativity rather than in the thing itself.

Assume for a moment that the deviation from neurotypicality that constitutes autism were indeed marginal — located at one end of the spectrum. One would then have a material, neurotypical reference point for measurement to which genes could be assigned. Yet even in that case, the questions of intelligence and consciousness would remain unresolved. Nor would the question of the cultural rupture be resolved.

Highly gifted autistic individuals like myself react extremely to minimal deviations. The shift that might be genetically identifiable as autism could be very small — yet intelligence immediately opens the door to a massive intensification of perceiving that deviation. In other words: it is not the magnitude of the neurological difference that determines the lived intensity of autism, but the cognitive and sensory amplification applied to that difference.

This dimension, however, is precisely what cannot be measured by tools such as EmpaToM²³ or comparable procedures. As a result, the effects that exist in autistic reality

²³ The EmpaToM paradigm (Empathy and Theory of Mind), developed by Isabel Dziobek, Tania Singer, Olga Klimecki and colleagues, is regarded as one of the central instruments in social neuroscience. It is intended to make the ability for empathy and perspective-taking (“Theory of

remain undetected — because they do not manifest at the behavioural surface, but in the internal coefficient of meaning, sensitivity, pattern recognition, and coherence-tracking.

And intelligence is directly tied to consciousness. The two cannot be thought of separately. What I call hyper-reflective autism — that is, a form of autism whose very quality is shaped by the reaction to autism itself, combined with high masking abilities — removes any possibility of diagnostic narrowing, pushing instead toward an open field of interactions in which consciousness, within liminality, stands at the center as an incommensurable magnitude.

There is not a single diagnostic method capable of subtracting masking, let alone reliably measuring it. This is due partly to the fact that masking is a function of intelligence that takes place exclusively within the interior of a person and always in relation to the ontological shift; and partly to the fact that autism itself is a masking act — defined as a curvature of that ontological shift. We therefore do not know, as already stated, what the “original” is. There is no authentic primordial state. Hence the reduction of deviation to a reference against NT normativity. One can only ever measure the relation to normativity — which makes masking itself unmeasurable, because measuring it would require knowing what the original is. Since this original does not exist in relation to NT, we arrive precisely at this condition of incommensurability.

Thus, the state of liminality always remains untouched and inaccessible to research. Only those who experience it have knowledge. Everyone else is merely a spectator through a distorted mirror.

But what are the further consequences of liminality? One must bring this very clearly into awareness, because it renders the entire diagnostic project scientifically untenable. At that point, the stable points of reference collapse, which means a disruption of the relational structure between NT and ND — a liminal glitch. Research attempts to contain this glitch through external observation, but in doing so it further distorts the picture.

If we understand autistic or neurodivergent experience as a field of mutual interaction – in which identity/object, will, and experience generate one another in a reciprocal dynamic, and in which the solidification of objects and identities renders potentials absent and thereby distorts the entire field – then autistic existence and autistic perception do not appear in a neurotypical world merely as a distorted image, but also as a fragmentary outline of disrupted information transmission. This deprives neurotypical research of any possibility of validation.

Mind”) measurable by means of standardized video or text scenarios. In autism research, it is frequently used to demonstrate supposed deficits in social cognition. The critical issue is that the procedure is based on neurotypical normative values and defines empathy as a linear, cognitively detectable reaction. In doing so, it reduces complex, situational and embodied forms of resonance to a quantifiable model and thus contributes to the reproduction of a deficit-oriented view of autism, rather than making the relational and context-dependent dimensions of social perception visible.

The better the autistic person understands the mechanisms of diagnostics, the less likely their diagnosis becomes. Masking therefore produces a false-negative paradox that research cannot resolve, because it takes place within the ontological gap itself.

The “autistic person” as a medical category is, fundamentally, a construction for the suppression of ambiguity — a banishing device that only seems to function through violence and at the expense of the existential rights and potentials of those concerned.

Transformative Masking – The Art of Reality-Creation

It is worthwhile, at this point, to examine masking more closely. For masking is not primarily an attempt at adaptation, but an expression of the phenomenon of liminality itself. Masking arises out of the deep vulnerability of the situation — it is fluctuating, unstable, an energetic in-between state. The energy it consumes is not a linear loss, but an explosive-implosive frictional condition grounded in the liminal itself. In the inability to stabilise, because the dominant neurotypical reality does not allow full arrival. Masking resembles a state of fire: it consumes, transforms, and at the same time sustains the very form that threatens it.

In clinical discourse, masking is a term of deception. It refers, in the language of psychology, to the hiding of autistic traits, the adaptation to a neurotypical environment, the imitation of social codes.

But this description is insufficient because it rests on a false ontology: it presupposes that there is a true self and a false mask — as if autism were an inner essence that disguises itself on the outside.

In current research (Pearson & Rose, 2023), masking is usually described as a strategy of adaptation — an attempt to meet neurotypical expectations or survive in hierarchical structures. In my work, however, masking does not appear as a deliberate tactic, but as an expression of the displacement of being itself: not reaction, but resonance.

From this perspective, “unmasking” cannot exist, because the mask is not an external artefact but part of the form in which being holds itself. Anyone who believes that it can be taken off has not yet understood the field that generates it. Masking is not concealment but the manner in which reality shapes itself under pressure — a creative, often painful act of world-becoming.

To believe in the classical concept of masking is to believe in normativity, and in existence as the question of an authentic original. But this original does not exist as something that was, only as something that becomes.

Neurotypicality is initially posited as the centre of the world, around which everything else revolves. Yet we know this is false. Therefore masking must be understood under a different

category. In fact, masking is not only a veil over truth, but for many autistic people an aesthetically organic procedure of reality-creation. Masking can be concealment, a reaction to stigma — but to reduce masking to this would be reductive.

It is essential to what neurodivergence — that is, distortion — means here. If we regard masking as an act of adaptation, we make ourselves prisoners of the pathology paradigm.

Masking is indeed pain — but not only the pain of humiliation, also the pain of necessary transformation and self-becoming. We can learn a great deal from the masking of autistic people in liminality about how existence materialises at all; how much reality is a momentum of displacement at the threshold between life and death. If the original does not exist, the mask is a being that reflects itself. Then the masking-relation becomes something fundamentally significant for consciousness.

Central empirical work on the classical understanding of masking comes from Laura Hull and colleagues (Hull et al., 2017, 2019; Hull & Mandy, 2022). They developed the Camouflaging Autistic Traits Questionnaire (CAT-Q), which attempts to quantify masking. Their research shows that masking is directly linked to psychological distress: increased stress, burnout, depression, and identity loss. In this paradigm, masking appears as maladaptive coping, the price of social inclusion under normative conditions. This is a typical NT perspective.

What is overlooked is that autistic experience — because of liminality — is never a stable state, not another world, but a distortion of this one, to which NT and ND belong equally. Masking cannot be understood if it is interpreted solely through the NT reality, in which everything is coded toward adaptation to the group. Social adaptation has never been a fundamental motive of autistic existence.

Rather, I believe that autistic people often convince themselves that this is what masking is — because NTs explain it to us that way. Because we ourselves cannot easily grasp the core, cannot translate ourselves. It is easier to agree: yes, we do it to avoid stigma. In doing so, we confirm the NTs, stabilise them, but leave ourselves in uncertainty once again.

Meng-Chuan Lai et al. (2017) and William Mandy (2019) also emphasize the pathogenic character of masking, especially in women and so-called high-functioning autistic people, whose abilities seem to facilitate social adaptation while simultaneously increasing the risk of self-alienation. But what exactly are we alienating ourselves from? From becoming like NTs?

It is difficult to distinguish whether something is adaptation, or a lived form of existence in liminality that appears fluctuating like adaptation because its actual core remains invisible.

If an alien arrived on Earth, we would assume “he” was trying to make contact if he produced sounds. We assume he means us if he looks at us. We assume he is thinking when he is silent.

How, then, are we supposed to measure whether masking is adaptation, or merely a phenomenon that precedes a completely different mode of being?

I do not mean to say that adaptation, avoidance of stigma, etc. play no role at all — but we must not forget that adaptation is predominantly an NT strategy. I, for instance, do not truly adapt. I have spent 30 years working against every target group and every market. So how could my masking not be understood as a response of an indeterminate existence? A response to an existential experience within the liminal glitch.

We are not stupid, untalented deficit-humans who spend our whole lives driven by the desire to remain invisible. No — my message is very different. I am real. Learn to live with that.

These mainstream studies mark the dominant view: masking is an expression of social necessity and simultaneously a symptom of structural violence — a mechanism of adaptation that protects in the short term but harms in the long term.

I do not believe that we suffer because of masking — that would once again imply that “healing” lies in becoming like NTs, that we fail at this and that this is the source of suffering. No: the suffering is the experience of liminality in a world dominated by others. That difference is subtle, but decisive.

Autistic people like me do not primarily replicate the world through masking — we compose it anew. Masking is not hiding, but doing: a process of autopoiesis in which life generates its own translatability.

Since around 2020, the international discussion shows the beginning of a cautious shift from a deficit model to a relational one. Damian Milton (2012, 2020), with his concept of the Double Empathy Problem, challenges the classical assumption of asymmetry. He argues that communication breakdowns between autistic and non-autistic people are reciprocal — both sides fail at the difference in perception-logic. Within this perspective, masking no longer appears as deception but as an attempt at translation. I would argue that it is simply misunderstood existence which, for the observer, appears as an attempt at communication. It is embodiment — which at its edges reflects as adaptation only to NTs, but is in fact nothing other than being.

Amy Pearson and Kieran Rose already call for a reorientation — although not yet as radical. Away from the idea that masking is primarily an adaptation to neurotypical norms, toward a view that understands masking as a social response to power structures. In their 2023 book *Autistic Masking: Understanding Identity Management and the Role of Stigma*, they deconstruct the prevailing misconception that masking is merely a social strategy to “fit into” neurotypical contexts. The authors analyse the social context that makes impression

management possible, including individual responses to stigma or trauma, and they apply an intersectional lens.

“Our current understanding of masking as purely suppressive may risk excluding autistic people who cannot see themselves in that description, and thus also lead to the misconception that only certain autistic people can mask.”²⁴

The need to mask does not arise from shame alone, but from the experience of existential incompatibility. An autistic nervous system is permeable, unprotected, radically sensitive. It does not experience the world as an object, but as a field.

I myself lived through corporal punishment in English schools in the 1970s. This institutional violence was formative. It generated pressure to conform — a situation of maximum overload for an autistic child.

My body learned that openness is dangerous. And so the mind began to build forms: rules, rhythms, concepts, languages. These forms were — and still are — not simulations, but membranes of survival. It is not merely a matter of fear and suppression, but also of actively taken opportunities to carve out existential space for oneself.

For me, masking emerged in a wakeful, creative child as a formative reaction — not as deception, but as an artistic reflex: over decades, I designed, with my whole embodiment, as an author, artist, and researcher, another world in which an autistic person can exist not only undetected but, in a sense, self-determined and protected. It was a process of gradual arrival, not of hiding. I became the artistic figure “Timothy Speed,” a meta-layer that formed a shield around me.

I do not mean to suggest that masking is always or for all autistic people like this — but we must acknowledge that masking is not something the autistic person puts on, but something that fundamentally constitutes neurodivergence and displacement. It is not possible to be autistic and not mask. In fact, I consider the attempt to “not mask” to be the actual act of self-deception — a backdoor adaptation to neurotypicality.

That the autistic person responds to incompatibility with evasive maneuvers — like water flowing around a rock — is understandable. But what water is is not defined by land. Water does not pretend to be land simply because it flows around the rock.

These reflections become interesting when masking is compared to the PDA profile — Pathological Demand Avoidance — predominantly documented in England. PDA is a profound refusal to comply with external demands. One could describe it as a radical anti-masking.

PDA exists, especially in comparison with countries like Germany, in a direct context with the legacy of corporal punishment in British schools, which ended only in 1986 and of

²⁴ Autistic Masking / Amy Pearson and Kieran Rose / Pavilion Publishing / S 193

course continues intergenerationally. The drive toward autonomy became the response to institutional violence for many British autistic people. I experienced this as well.

If adaptation and avoidance of stigma were the central mechanism of masking, then greater pressure to conform would lead to stronger masking. PDA, however, shows the exact opposite.

Masking, in the context of PDA, becomes visible not as a calculated reaction but as a resonance phenomenon. It is like trying to press a soft material into a mold. If the pressure is gentle, it appears to adapt to the form; but if you press harder, you realize that the material follows its own embodiment — it only accidentally takes the shape, on its way toward its own realization, and under high pressure it bursts beyond the mold. The material remains the same. The mold appears, to the one applying the pressure, as a reference to themselves.

Here it becomes visible that masking does not respond linearly to pressure, but dynamically — sometimes as adaptation, sometimes as resistance, yet always as movement within the field.

This is a crucial difference from the classical understanding of masking. One could say that form and pressure are a shared interplay in which the form unfolds — but the form itself cannot be destroyed in its essence, nor truly reshaped. It is rather co-creation, a friction-energy that autistic people often channel into their monotropic immersion, their special interest.

Thus, masking is, at its core, a phenomenon of resonance — sometimes generating pain, but just as often generating the very friction-energy that drives deep focus. This directly contradicts the assumption that masking always consumes energy; it can just as well produce it. Monotropism — capable of releasing immense energy — is the same phenomenon as masking during small talk, which consumes energy. In both cases, the condition is liminality — a mode of life in itself, not a mechanism that can be destroyed. Just as sport can be exhausting while simultaneously strengthening the body, movement here defines life itself.

There is therefore a variant of masking that does not only consume energy but — when combined with the special interest — generates massive energy.

We can see how my response to corporal punishment in English schools led to the creation of a personal artistic persona — a figure that became mask, protection, and creative engine at the same time. Something rarely recognized in research, because masking in autistic people is still interpreted through a neurotypical-centrist lens solely as adaptation to neurotypicality, as if that were the only possible, acceptable, or intelligible form of masking — one that, from a neurotypical perspective, must exhaust us, because it is “wrong.” Wrong because it cannot be right that one does not want to become neurotypical — but, like me, wants to become something entirely different.

If masking is not understood psychologically but ontologically, the focus shifts. It is no longer about “Who am I really?” but about “Who else can I be, as an autistic person, in this world?”

Masking becomes an enactive method — a kind of permanently improvised choreography between perception and environment.

This alternative type organizes their entire life around special interests — typically artistic or intellectual projects. Unlike classical masking, where autistic people attempt to integrate into neurotypical social contexts and become chronically exhausted, these individuals build an existence that largely operates outside conventional social demands.

The creative work is not compensation for a deficit but the expression of autistic strengths: intense focus (monotropism), pattern recognition, systemic thinking, and the ability to immerse absolutely into subjects that fascinate. The special interest becomes the center of living, the identity, the primary mode of world-engagement.

The artistic persona as an authentic interface

Paradoxically, the public “artistic persona” enables more authenticity than everyday social masking. It functions as an interface with society on one’s own terms: communication occurs through the work, through structured presentations, through the medium of art — fundamentally different from spontaneous social navigation and small talk.

The autistic nervous system is, in Varela’s sense, autopoietic: it generates its own world by experiencing it. Masking is the conscious containment of this process — the invention of a social grammar that makes resonance possible in the first place.

Where neurotypical communication is based on intuition, autistic communication here is based on meta-composition. What appears to outsiders as control or artificiality is in truth a real-time composition balancing energy, affect, and meaning so that relationship can exist at all. In this sense, ontological masking is a technology of the real: it creates small, temporary realities — zones of intelligibility — between incompatible perceptual systems. Not adaptation, but internal world-production.

The masking autistic person lives in the gap between inside and outside. This gap is not a deficit, but the very site of art. It is where what Erin Manning calls the minor gesture occurs — that subtle deviation from the expected through which new forms of perception come into being. Masking is a practice of this gesture: a micro-management of the possible. In every conversation, in every pause, in every shift of tone, such an autistic person is working on an invisible composition that makes relationship possible in the first place. What is masked is therefore not fake but a performative threshold — a real-time interface between incommensurable worlds.

Barad’s term intra-action describes precisely this state: the subject does not exist before the encounter but through it. The masking subject is an intra-active subject, shaping itself in

the very act of communication. Masking thus becomes an aesthetic epistemology: knowledge through form, survival through design.

Transformative masking means understanding one's nervous system as an aesthetic organ. It is not pathology but a mode of life in which world is generated through shaping. Where psychiatry sees deception, a new ontogenesis begins — a becoming in real time, a continuous dance between vulnerability and form. The masking autistic person is not an actor but an engineer of the real. They hold the incompatible together by generating new form. They do not lie; they design.

And in this design — in the ongoing play between visibility and structure — a new kind of authenticity emerges: an authenticity that knows that truth does not lie behind the mask but becomes complete through it. This becomes intelligible only if we understand the shift of being — the fact that being has no fixed location but is a state in transition.

All of this has been evident across decades of my own enactive practice. For a long time, I asked myself whether I, as an artist, am nothing but a deception — an act of hiding. This thought is inevitable if one thinks neurotypically, and the world told me repeatedly that I was not real, not serious, and 100% wrong. But today I see that only in my art, in my masking embodiment, did I find actual realization. A space in which I am myself. That this happens in resonance with an NT world does not take anything away from my self.

Almost all my works originate from myself. I am always the central figure, reflecting myself and the world. In my feature film *Transferprotokoll* I play myself and create myself as a character over which I direct — reversing the familiar image of a self contained inside a body that walks through the world as an object. I exist only because I stand in resonant friction with the world. Without that world, I am not thinkable — without the world that shapes my embodiment.

The “art persona” of Timothy Speed experiences conflict with authorities, job centers, ministries in the NT world and then transfers these conflicts in film or in my books into a neurodivergent logic in which contexts are transformed. Through this, I create — as an autistic person — a right to exist and a way of life. I make myself real.

It is not just a matter of survival, but a creative act in which something novel emerges. This masking does not conceal — it transforms.

In my research I create an entirely new research paradigm, one in which people like me are real. I move constantly between external and internal perspective, deciding on actions, provocations, and reactions. I treat the NT world as if it were a dream one can shape. In doing so I remain in control over the interpretation of my own existence by shifting the field. I correct distortion and the ontological displacement through a transformative act. This is much more than masking in the classical sense. It is participation in the shaping of reality.

If one takes Barad's agential realism or Deleuze's ontology of becoming seriously, then reality is not something given but a process of intra-action.

This is a completely different picture of autism than the one dominant in German psychiatry. There, masking is always understood as a deficit accompanied by high energy loss. This is one of the reasons why transformatively masking autistic people are often not recognized as autistic during diagnosis.

If you compare the autistic people shown in German media with those shown in the US or the UK, one thing becomes immediately obvious: autistic people in German media tend to appear externally more visibly autistic. This tells us a great deal about the outdated German understanding of autism. In Germany there is deep mistrust toward the phenomenon of masking, because it threatens the hierarchy between the "normal" and the "autistic" when autistic people are no longer clearly identifiable. They then appear as equals.

The difference between autistic people who are easily identifiable from the outside and those who mask well is not, as is often assumed, intelligence. Rather, it is the way their nervous system deals with sensory overload. Autistic people who are more visibly recognizable often show stronger stimming, more intense shutdowns or meltdowns, and more obvious sensory sensitivity. Autistic people like me show these aspects hardly at all on the outside, because we channel overload directly into our creative special interests as workaholics and, as described earlier, we combine masking with creation. As a result many of us appear energetic, articulate and expressive, even while masking intensively through transformative acts. Exhaustion appears later and indirectly. It is in the nature of things that someone who makes their special interest the center of their universe has far fewer encounters with socially overwhelming situations. The interplay with phenomena like PDA can also lead to autistic people who are barely recognizable as autistic from the outside. Yet in their biographies, in their creative acts, and in their thinking, they are typically strongly autistic or monotropic.

In the research literature, autistic people of my type are associated with concepts such as constructed self, social persona as special interest, and life as performance art.

I believe that a key to a deeper understanding of what neurodivergence truly is lies in seeing this other autistic type more clearly. This requires overcoming the pathology paradigm. The next step would be to move away from diagnosis and toward the self-determination of neurodivergent people over their own form of existence.

What would happen if ADHD and Autism were not understood as separate Disorders, but as Variants of the same Masking?

I am not using the term masking in its psychological sense, but in its ontological one: as a mode of self-coherence that life generates when its resonance with the world is disrupted, when being is displaced. Masking is not a behaviour but a relation — the movement through which perception acquires form in order to survive.

I want to formulate a radical hypothesis. What if ADHD and autism were not two separate disorders, but expressions of the same masking — both emerging from a shared ontological baseline? Not two conditions, but two modes of the same wave. On one side over-regulation, on the other under-regulation — not linear opposites, but folded into one another. What becomes ADHD or autism would then be determined largely by the genetic field and the habitat to which the nervous system is exposed in early development.

Autism and ADHD are treated as different in research mainly because they originated from different historical categories of “misbehaviour.” The split between autism and ADHD served the industrial order: the middle class pathologized non-functioning (autism), the working class pathologized non-compliance (ADHD). Two masks of the same class logic — one controlled through discipline, the other through pharmacology.

Today research itself is inching toward the question it fears to ask: Are autism and ADHD actually two separate conditions? They share 50–80% of their genetic basis. Neuroanatomically the same networks (prefrontal, parietal, striatal, cerebellar) show atypical connectivity — only differently modulated. Neurochemically both involve dysregulation of dopamine and noradrenaline, along with GABA–glutamate imbalances — not two systems, but one altered excitatory–inhibitory tone.

This points toward a continuous spectrum on which autism and ADHD emerge as distinct resonance modes. Autistic regulation stabilises sensory overload through structure. ADHD regulation counterbalances sensory underload through movement. Both are strategies to synchronise an atypically timed nervous system with an overwhelming environment.

Both are expressions of non-linear self-organisation — merely with different thresholds of overload. Two oscillations of the same wave.

This inversion collapses the usual causal chain of psychology. Masking does not follow the disorder — the disorder is the secondary product of masking. What research claims to describe is the artefact of its own epistemic mistake.

If autism and ADHD are two masking-patterns, two ways of living in the liminality of too much / too complex to land in the neurotypical world, then masking is not a layer placed

on top of neurodivergence — masking is the defining feature of neurodivergence itself, the somatic ontology of life negotiating displacement.

Autism becomes the masking-form that produces structure as protection — a self-ordering against excess.

ADHD becomes the masking-form that produces movement as protection — a self-expansion against lack.

This replaces the biomedical paradigm with a resonance ontology: neurodivergence is not pathology but the structural resistance of the living against reduction.

Both are energetic compensations for the same ontological pain — the mismatch between inner resonance and external form. Not two disorders, but two morphological masks of one open, vulnerable, highly resonant ontology.

The autonomic nervous system seeks coherence at all times. With high sensory permeability (what is called “neurodivergence”) it oscillates more dramatically between sympathetic activation (action — ADHD mode) and parasympathetic shutdown (collapse — autism mode). What diagnostic psychiatry interprets as two disorders is in fact a single oscillation field — a resonance dynamic stabilised through masking.

Masking = the somatic technology of preserving identity in overwhelming conditions.

Phenomenologically speaking, this view implies that the self is not discovered but produced — in the ongoing attempt to stay in resonance with the world. Autism and ADHD would then be two ways of performing this “work on the self.”

On the autistic pole: reduction, precision, stillness → stabilisation through form.

On the ADHD pole: expansion, exploration, movement → stabilisation through dynamics.

Neither are pathological symptoms but processes of self-translation. The pathology begins only when society blocks or normalises these processes, when it forces masking without granting resonance.

This would amount to an epistemic revolution. It is not autism and ADHD that require explanation, but the world that forces masking: the experience of liminality as a consequence of ontological displacement. The categories “autism” and “ADHD” are diagnostic reflections of a world that cannot tolerate resonance. They are secondary impressions on the surface of a primary sensorial-intelligent ontology. What is labelled as “disorder” is in fact an active adaptation to a distorted resonance climate.

Philosophically this marks a phenomenological-materialist shift. The body does not mask because it is defective, but because the environment has become ontologically unreadable. The disorder does not lie in the subject, but in the world that compels the subject to mask itself. What diagnostics reads as a “neurodivergent disorder” is the visible shadow of an invisible resonance deprivation. It is a counter-movement against the hardening of

distortion in neurotypicality. Neurodivergence is not an exception, but what remains when the world loses its filters.

Taken seriously, masking is the self-organisation of an open system in an overly closed environment. The nervous system has to contract, flatten, accelerate or slow down in order to fit into the narrow bandwidth of neurotypical reality. This movement can take two directions:

autistic condensation → reduction, order, withdrawal

ADHD-like expansion → scattering, search, overload

Both are responses to the same structural demand: the world is too narrow for the actual bandwidth of experience. Autism and ADHD are therefore not “disorders,” but masks that the nervous system wears in order to breathe inside the prison of reduction.

They are attempts at translation in a state of incommensurability. Autism and ADHD then become culturally generated symptoms of neurotypical hegemony — masking itself becomes the biology of resistance. Autism and ADHD are two modes in which life attempts to preserve its original complexity against the reduction of modernity. Neurodivergence is masking — not deception, but an ontological adaptation to distortion.

This is a paradigm shift. Masking is not secondary, but primary.

In this thesis, masking becomes the foundational ontological movement of neurodivergent existence. It is not a reaction to autism or ADHD, but the condition from which both emerge. The nervous system responds to a stimulus-poor and resonance-poor world (too few or the wrong affordances) through masking as a form of morphological contact with a distorted language of form, and from this arise the patterns we read as autism or ADHD. There is no original state that is being masked or produced by masking — masking is the existential form itself.

This means: masking is not a behaviour, but a process of self-formation emerging from the mismatch between nervous system and world. The relevant research question is not “How do autistic people avoid social rejection?” but “How does an over-open nervous system generate temporary coherence in an under-complex environment?”

This is not a psychological but an ontological research object. The focus shifts from pathology to the metaphysics of adaptation.

The causality is reversed: masking is not an effect, but an origin. This also explains why masking exists long before any conscious socialisation — it can be observed even in young children or animals with sensory over-openness: they regulate their nervous system before they know they “deviate.” This speaks for a pre-personal, somatic intelligence of masking.

Masking therefore becomes the origin of subjectivity, not its periphery. If masking is the natural response of an open nervous system to a closed world, then every demand for “authenticity” or “unmasking” becomes politically precarious.

The dominant rhetoric within the neurodiversity movement (“Be yourself, stop masking!”) overlooks a crucial fact: masking is not something that can be discarded. It is the ontological respiration of this form of existence. The demand for unmasking can itself become a form of violence when it misrecognises masking as a deviation rather than as a survival logic.

What is needed, therefore, is not demasking, but resonance spaces in which masking becomes transformative. Without this, every attempt at liberation continues to reference neurotypicality as the centre of reality, and we never escape its gravitational pull.

The shift is not from masking to authenticity, but from survival masks to creative masks: masking as art, not as pathology.

The Diversity Threshold and Metastable Diversity — Or: How to Build an Ecosystem

When I speak of a field, I speak of diversity — and of the order that emerges from multiplicity. This is the core of what I have explored over decades and across many books: the question of how participation is possible in a field defined by incommensurability.

What is at stake is the third space — and the diversification, the plurality, that makes such a space possible. It is diversity that renders complexity inhabitable, turning expansion and transformation into a shared capacity for mutual shaping.

An ecosystem cannot function on the basis of two positions (NT + ND). Duality is static, and because the singularity and the displacement of being are inherently unstable, experience alone does not remain; action enters human existence — and this action drives the dialectical surge that produces the many. From this surge arise labour, economy, and culture — and the world becomes diversifiable.

If the world remains tied to a single dominant mode — if it does not branch into subcultures, local realities, and autonomous identities — then co-creation cannot emerge. What appears instead are phenomena of adaptation to, or deformation by, the dominant. In this sense, separation and integration are not opposites but conditions for the unfolding of reality — for the loosening of compression and for the momentary visibility of the singularity that holds everything together.

The balance between dynamism and wholeness is the true axis of human world-making. It is not the polarity between power and marginalisation. The “majority” is always a neurotypical construction purchased at the price of dissolving individual difference. Without a lattice of distinction, we lose our grip on reality — even if reality itself is multidimensional, processual, temporary, and full of gaps.

Politics today has become abstract — and because of that, it can no longer register, let alone resolve, the problems of individual realities.

This is because it never reaches a state of metastable diversity.²⁵ Only when diversity is not suppressed, but allowed to operate side by side, does a condition emerge in which reality can become visible at all.

Metastable diversity describes a form of plurality that is neither dissolved nor fixed — a dynamic equilibrium in which difference maintains tension and thereby enables new forms of order. It is not a state but a process: the productive instability through which the world changes without losing itself. In complexity theory (Prigogine, Deleuze, Simondon), metastability refers to a condition of maximal potentiality — a structure that contains many possible developmental directions, while none of them are yet decided.

It is the fundamental paradox that we simultaneously live within ambiguity and incommensurability that continuously shift, yet only through maintaining this complex extension do we become existent — while on the other side, absolute knowledge, complete mutual understanding and clear definability of consciousness remain impossible.

The more we differ, the finer the mesh of distinguishability becomes, the more strongly co-creation emerges, because the transitions begin to level rather than to polarize. But when we attempt to subsume, to reduce people into large abstract categories, power games begin — along with the loss of reality-awareness within the field.

Peace, society, the common, and power — including collectivization — exclude one another. This is important to understand, because it explains many of the problems of the political and makes it possible to describe power as an immature relation to reality. For such a relation is only possible in homeorhesis.²⁶ No static equilibrium, but a flow equilibrium — systems clarify themselves through dynamic multiplicity.

But when does the many become a diversified world, and how much of the many is required to stabilize such a world — even temporarily — as metastable diversity so that it can unfold conscious reality? If we want to understand reality, we must understand ecosystems. As we have already established, it is not enough to speak of neurodiversity when the dominance of one side shifts the visibility of the other.

²⁵ Metastability traces back to Gilbert Simondon and was further developed through Gilles Deleuze; the concept is used extensively by Erin Manning.

²⁶ Homeorhesis is the ability of a system to maintain a dynamic, stable developmental trajectory or developmental pathway rather than a fixed state.

To achieve a kind of renaturing, we cannot avoid diversifying neurotypicality itself — queering it, fragmenting it, dissolving its dominance through differentiation. Only then does it become visible that “neurotypicality” is a simplifying category that also pushes many forms of existence — queer, Black, disabled, mad, and others — to the margins.

At this point, solidarity with other marginalized groups — with feminism, anti-racism, Critical Disability Studies, and Mad Studies — is not optional but structurally necessary. Neurodivergent people do not walk this path alone.

The world cannot be built from NT and ND modes alone. Their coexistence becomes functionally alive only when a sufficient degree of further diversity enters the field. The question of dominance therefore becomes automatically the question of balance — an investigation of the qualitative and quantitative conditions (scale, density, magnitude) that allow the “other” to become a complement rather than a threat.

What we seek is neither a static coexistence nor the paternalism of inclusion, but a shared transformation of dominance — so that synergy becomes possible, so that emergence becomes possible, so that we become more than the sum of our parts. As thresholds of translation decrease through diversification, life becomes easier for everyone.

This is the logic of ecosystems: they operate into one another, they stabilize one another, and they allow habitats in which only a given life-form can exist — without threatening the whole.

One cannot simply add up diversity in an ecosystem and expect life to emerge. Co-creation that does not become self-sustaining, that does not generate its own emergent dynamics, remains a kind of multiculturalism on paper. The result is ethnic neighbourhoods marked by exclusion, or a superficial acceptance of the “other” while resources remain structurally concentrated on one side, pushing everyone else into domesticated dependency.

The dominant side pretends to exist without dependence and thereby erases mutual interdependencies from collective awareness. This is why forms of labour such as care work or art are barely valued in capitalism.

This is physics. Diversity under unequal conditions does not develop into an ecosystem with emergence. It produces relations of obstruction, the consequence of domination patterns. Synkinesis—coordination without hierarchy—creates polyphony: multiple voices sounding at once, and meaning becoming richer and clearer because of it, not despite it.

In *Radical Worker*, I developed the concept of the diversity threshold and the resulting principle of dynamic diversity compensation. The idea is that diversity in a system must be increased—through deviation, through self-confident identity, through queering—until the ecosystem becomes self-supporting and can sustain the survival of the whole multiplicity. Capitalism does the opposite. It forces individuals into isolated value and into

one-sided reference, which produces opportunism, conformity and the loss of diversity—visible in ecosystems as species decline and in societies as increasing impoverishment.

The point is that deviation from the norm, from the dominant normative parameter, does not become diversity in an ecological sense until a certain density of variety is reached. Diversity has a threshold. Only once a certain embodied complexity is present can life maintain itself.

I often describe the problem using a Lego world. All bricks are standardized. What can be built is limited by design. If one introduces a differently shaped brick, it is perceived as a foreign body—either rejected or forced to conform. We see the same pattern in the treatment of migrants and of anyone who is “different”.

The system does not understand that higher complexity—necessary for conscious and intelligent life—depends precisely on these “foreign” bricks. But this is where the problem begins. The integration of deviation costs energy when the diversity threshold has not yet been reached, and that is something the neurotypical system continuously resists, because a majority society inhabits a robust zone of comfort.

We must not forget that the distortion following the shift of being (*Seinsverschiebung*) binds energy on the neurotypical side as well. It is a constant stretching of reality, like pulling a mask. Enormous energy is required to keep neurotypical order stable against the resonant dynamics of singularity. Anything that “disturbs” this order is experienced as an energy loss. If the counter-pressure were released, it could tear their world apart. This obscures the fact that diversity, through synergy, saves energy—dramatically so.

However, integrating the first “different” brick requires a disproportionate amount of effort, because with only a single outlier synergy remains weak. An ecosystem needs an immense variety of patterns so that the threshold for synergy and for the emergence of more complex life becomes low. In a mature ecosystem, nobody must water every unique plant by hand every day. Instead, countless organisms and habitats evolve around that plant and support each other. Habitats are foldings of local distortion—deviations within a shared field.

This fails when the ecosystem has been simplified so radically that it becomes almost entirely extrinsically motivated, like the societies and economies of neurotypical humanity. It is in the nature of neurotypicality to simplify the world and reduce it to group needs. This is how the ecological devastation of the planet and the endless rule of monocultural formations emerged.

Inclusion may be an attempt to integrate diversity, but it does not make the ecosystem itself more diverse. It creates artificial and usually short-term, cost-efficient attachment points, but not a system that is structurally self-sustaining. This is where the limits of inclusion lie. The category of “disability” does not change the self-image of the “normal”. That becomes

their blind spot. They do not recognise their own disabilities; no real convergence occurs. Hence homophobia, racism, and other forms of social exclusion.

Applied to the experience of neurodivergent people, this means that we need to build an ecosystem diversified enough for all people and beings to exist within it — and at relatively low energetic cost. When the cost of living rises, it is often the consequence of a lack of diversification, a lack of internal richness and alternatives. Only beyond a certain threshold does diversity begin to generate energy itself — the phase in which its “magic” appears in the maintenance of life. This means synergy.

From this follows the insight and the demand that the ontological gap must be filled with far more deviation so that transitions become fluid. What is generally called queering.

Systems like capitalism have emerged from neurotypical and patriarchal thinking, designed to dominate and control the market. Linear economic growth is mistaken for natural diversity. In fact, it is an assault on variety, because capitalism replaces synergy with enforced contracts: if A is given, then B must follow as exact compensation. This suffocates emergent processes. Emergence is nothing other than a system with a high density of synergies, and a world in which the meaning and value of things and objects — and access to them — are diversified and flexible, calling radically one-sided property regimes into question.

It is no coincidence that we live in over-bureaucratised societies marked by extreme inequality and perpetual conflict. It is the logical consequence of the shift of being, in which one side dominates and metastable diversity is never reached.

Synergy in this context means that the parts of a system do not merely coexist but are connected in such a way that their interactions achieve more than each component could achieve on its own. What does interaction mean here? It requires understanding the concept of kinship. Every child, every new folding, deviates — yet remains part of the same referential system. In this case, the shift of being does not distort but expands. Each generation deviates slightly from the previous one, integrating more singularity into the system. This is paradoxical: one might assume that newness would dilute or replace what came before. In reality, because of kinship, the new resonates with the old and reveals the connection latent in singularity. Kinship is therefore the stabilising factor in diversity — a form of allopoietic genealogy²⁷, in which each deviation does not weaken the system but expands it through exaptation²⁸, making synergy visible.

Applied to neurodivergent life realities, this means: only when enough difference exists within the social, cultural and economic fabric do self-sustaining structures emerge — a

²⁷ Allopoiesis refers to systems that continue themselves through relation to something other than themselves. They do not reproduce by returning to an internal origin (as in autopoiesis), but by extending, transforming, and sustaining themselves through external interaction. The “self” of the system is not closed, but iterated in reference to what lies outside of it.

²⁸ Properties or structures are used differently when placed in new contexts than they were originally “intended” to be. The new is not foreignness, but a transformation of function within the same kinship framework.

multiplicity of affordances in which neurodivergent people are not maintained as exotic exceptions but become an organic part of the whole.

The “magic” I refer to is precisely this tipping point at which difference is no longer a burden or a special case, but becomes an energy source for the system.

This can only be created if radical co-creation is allowed, which, as already argued, presupposes metastable diversity. This would mean that neurodivergent people work, act, and participate entirely on their own neurodivergent terms, within structural forms that correspond to them. Their own science, their own institutions, their own cultures (subcultures), which then interact with the neurotypical sphere to generate a third space.

However, because for centuries “the stranger” has been excluded and society has been reduced to a relative monoculture, the prospect of letting “the Other” shape the order appears unaffordable. This is the real reason why people who experience disability, the poor, migrants, women, and people of colour are held at the margins of society, equipped with minimal resources, and then have their usefulness and value questioned. Because value and usefulness are referenced only within the dominant system, rather than within a shared field.

The existing gap between an autistic person and neurotypical working conditions is simply too wide – just as the gap is too wide for the integration of migrants or the poor. The structural interfaces that would enable co-creation are missing. Instead, they are punished for “costing resources.”

The entire discussion about the value of human beings cannot be conducted without the factor of the ecosystem.

Yet the discourse is predominantly monocausal. People are torn out of their habitat – or prevented from ever arriving in one – and the resulting incompatibility is then used as justification for devaluation and, consequently, for the right to control them again. This further distorts reality.

This continuous loop of exclusion – commonly referred to as the “poverty spiral” – leads to increasing marginalization while simultaneously erasing the actual conditions that produced it.

The system as a whole expends enormous energy to maintain social support structures that are meant to absorb the consequences, but do so in deeply unequal ways. That, in turn, triggers yet another wave of simplification imposed by neurotypicals, in which real structural problems are politically “solved” through assumptions that are themselves rooted in neurotypical misconceptions.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter²⁹ already demonstrated in 1977 that minorities below roughly 15% function only as tokens: the majority remains structurally unchanged, and the foreign element is either absorbed or assimilated.

Only once a critical density is reached do interaction patterns and power asymmetries begin to shift — diversity becomes operative instead of decorative.

Scientifically, Critical Mass Theory is well established. Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook have shown that the decisive question is not simply when a group (e.g., women in parliament) becomes numerically large enough to have an impact, but how agency emerges. In other words: what does metastable diversity look like? They speak of critical actors — people who live and embody the “other” and thereby further differentiate it. At exactly this point, Critical Mass Theory touches my theory of the ontological shift (Seinsverschiebung): both show that reality does not arise linearly from quantity or addition, but from the tipping point where quantitative presence becomes qualitative difference. Where enough resonance emerges between divergent forms of existence, the system begins to restructure itself — reality is shifted.

To reach that threshold, deviation must first be increased. The diversity threshold (Diversitätsmarke) is central for understanding why inclusion (integration through adaptation) is the wrong approach. What is needed instead is confident deviation from the norm. Embodied reality must be lived. This is something that often gets lost in discourses on identity politics. What is at stake is reality and habitat, not labels of identity. These are not things one simply chooses; they shape the world-relation of entire existences. They are non-negotiable and inoperable.

Field Experiments and Integrated Spectrum

If one takes the concept of the diversity threshold seriously, then it becomes necessary to diversify the field and thus expand it from within — above all by living deviation. This is the main reason why I call for a distinct neurodivergent science and conduct research in a way that drives many neurotypical researchers to the brink of fury.

To push the provocation further, I want to use the following experiment to show how neurotypicality can be radically disrupted in areas such as psychiatry, society and economics — making it immediately visible how much more diverse we already are, yet are structurally forbidden to be.

So let us begin with the field of psychiatry and turn the tables.

²⁹ https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047235207001250?utm_source=https://mlkrook.org/pdf/childs_krook_2008.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Narcissism, for example, could — with a certain audacity — be understood as an extreme developmental disorder of “neurotypical brains.” In fact, narcissistic autistic people are very rare, because the neurology of autism hardly permits narcissistic traits. Autistic people are often confused with narcissists due to a seemingly “self-focused” mode of expression, yet on closer inspection the two groups are worlds apart.

It is estimated that around 0.5 to 1 percent of the general population are pathological narcissists. Approximately 10 to 15 percent display subclinical narcissism — below the threshold of pathology. It is estimated that 20 to 30 percent of leadership figures in politics, media and business exhibit high narcissistic personality traits.

Here we deliberately remain within the pathologizing language, but reverse the perspective within psychiatry.

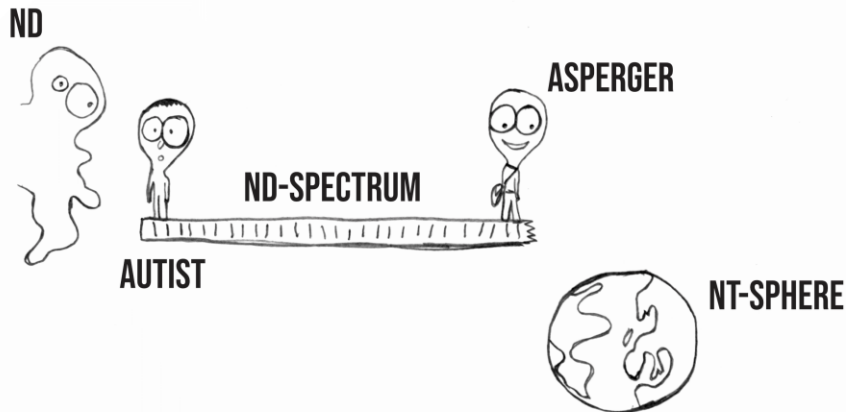
Despite the wide prevalence of narcissism in leadership positions, no executive has to fear being discriminated against because of their “illness.” No one counts one third of the nation’s managers among the mentally ill, even though they display narcissistic “traits.” We do not speak of the narcissistic spectrum. We do not do so because psychiatry is not an exact science, but a cultural construct in which politically charged behavioural patterns are normalized as acceptable while others are excluded.

Psychiatry has always been political — as Foucault already demonstrated — and in my book *Speeds Arbeit* one can read how effortlessly psychiatry is still used in Germany today as an instrument of power to pathologize those who think differently.

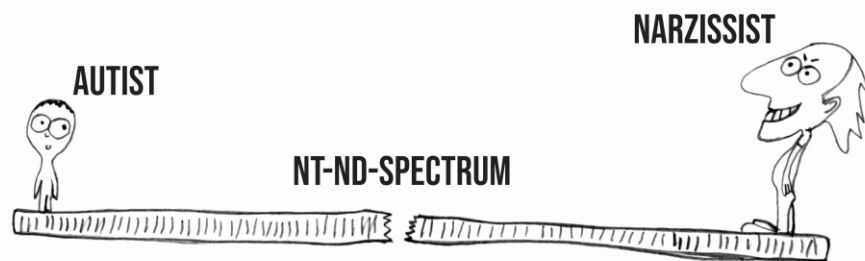
There is in fact no rational, scientific reason to speak on the one hand of an autistic spectrum in which autistic people are classified as ill merely because the extreme end of their neural disposition appears severely pathological, while on the other hand we do not consider neurotypicals to be a diseased spectrum, even though the extreme that arises from “neurotypical biology” and cultural conditioning — the narcissist (if we deliberately reduce it to that here) — also clearly exists on a spectrum (at least as much or as little as in autism), extending from the psychiatric clinics to the leadership elites of our world. Likewise, sociopathy can be understood as a spectrum, which could explain much of what we see in our world.

It would therefore be a possible first conceptual maneuver to extend the spectrum simply from autism to narcissism. You see how in this way a field is expanded as well.

EXPANDING-SPEKTRUM



FALL IN TO NT-WORLD



EXTENDING THE ND SPECTRUM INTO THE NT SPECTRUM EXPANDS THE SPACE INCLUSIVELY.

This creates a shared world between autistic people and narcissistic people, while in the middle the new “normal” would lie. We will return in a moment to why the “normal” here is more than problematic. If we go one step further, one could place very different spectra on top of one another, in the sense of the many dimensional models (Hans J. Eysenck, Thomas A. Widiger, Robert F. Krueger, Geraldine Dawson & Tony Charman) that are currently being discussed in psychology. The result could then look like the image shows.

ALTERNATIVE SPECTRUM



We therefore see how the many “spectra” form a total field, an open space, at whose center lies what we call “civilization.” This would correspond to what the neurotypical imagination describes as “normal.” We also see how the existing variety of extremes already leads to a certain balance. And we recognize how the outer axes naturally shape how “civilization” is understood, namely as a defensive function against the extreme deviations.

But one can already ask here how much defensive reaction is required for the norm itself to become an extreme, that is, an opposition, quasi a third axis.

All is Dynamics and Synergy — Kreutzbruck’s Approach

The internationally unknown but highly innovative Viennese psychotherapist Gerald Kreutzbruck, a good friend, showed me his cube in the mid-1990s, in which he arranged 8 character polarities in space. Kreutzbruck was obviously influenced by Reich and Lowen (body psychology), occasionally appeared as an extra in the film “The Case of Wilhelm Reich” playing the old Sigmund Freud, wearing Freud’s original glasses, and was a student of Stanislav Grof, the co-founder of transpersonal psychology. It was a time in which the foundations of analysis and psychiatry were being heavily experimented with and the basic building blocks were being called into question. Similar approaches were pursued by people like Theodore Millon (circumplex), Oscar Ichazo / Claudio Naranjo (Gestalt / Enneagram), or Fritz Riemann (axes of anxiety).

Kreutzbruck anticipated with his work much of what later led to the “dimensional models” in psychology, which are increasingly gaining importance today.

The respective corners of his spatial cube represented opposing polarities. In this way a spatial model emerged, one could say, a field.

Opposing corner pairs:

1. hysterical ↔ masochistic (extraverted over-excitation vs. introverted submission)
2. psychopathic ↔ feminine passive (aggressive-dominant vs. receptive-devoted)
3. oral ↔ phallic-narcissistic (dependent-seeking vs. grandiose-autonomous)
4. schizoid ↔ depressive (emotionally disconnected vs. affectively overloaded/empty)

Kreutzbruck wanted to show that the “healthy person” is able to resonate between the respective corners, or to pendulate, and is thus largely psychodynamically liberated. “Feminine-passive” is no longer a contemporary term today, but what Kreutzbruck meant by it – receptive-devoted – is psychodynamically accurate.

Now, this inner dynamic again shows what we previously described as the diversity threshold and synergy, or as metastable diversity. The synergies result from the integration of the extremes, that is, from the transfers within the kinship that lies in them. Simply put: something that appears foreign is recognised, in the dramatization, as a blockage of one’s own affordances. By this I mean that the self-relation leads to a reduction of the self when it is framed too narrowly. Through metastable diversity, synergies become a process of reintegration of the foundational basis of one’s own existence, in which one-sided ownerships dissolve. By this I mean that a thing, when held in an isolated relation, has only one purpose, only one use. The essence of synergy consists in the overlap of fields of purpose and use with regard to shareable objects and shared spaces. Synergy is the result of kinship, in which the landscape, the field belongs to everyone and all stand in different relations to things at the same time, yet these relations are not cut off or blocked by unilateral dominance.

Kinship enables joint or extended effect in the first place. Thus, neurodivergence and neurotypicality do not merely stand in interaction, but can assume synergetic processes for one another, that is, compensatory modifications.

Thus, autistic modes such as deep introspection can be counter-reactions to neurotypical strategies, which then do not only serve the autistic person but are an answer that also helps the neurotypical as compensation, and vice versa.

If we connect autistic experience, or neurodivergent life, with the psychodynamics of society itself, many things begin to make real sense. Groundbreaking concepts such as monotropism, developed by Dinah Murray, Wenn Lawson and Mike Lesser, otherwise stand in the empty space. They dock nowhere and emerge from no overall societal context, which makes autism always appear like something isolated. But that is not the case. Autism

is also a counter-movement in the nature of the human being, a compensation for something else, a dialectical counterpart.

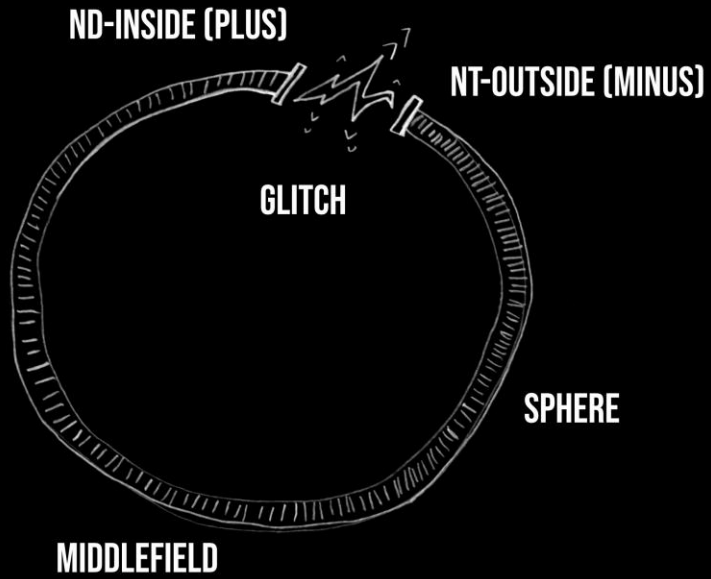
The following is therefore a creative model with which I attempt to stimulate discourse. It is not about whether narcissism or sociopathy or ADHD stand in certain positions in an opposition, but about illustrating the understanding of interaction in general, because that makes static normality recognisable as a problem, which then leads to the static neurotypicality. These considerations were already taken up by Foucault, Canguilhem, and by Nikolas Rose & Joelle Abi-Rached, but here it becomes clearly visible once again how multidimensional effect is to be understood when one finds oneself in a field of the ontological shift, which also raises the question of whether we even recognise the other pathologies as what they are out of themselves.

If we look at the autistic spectrum as it still exists today, then it is, as said, a straight line with a sharp end at “severe autism” and an open, blurry end at what is called “mild autism”.

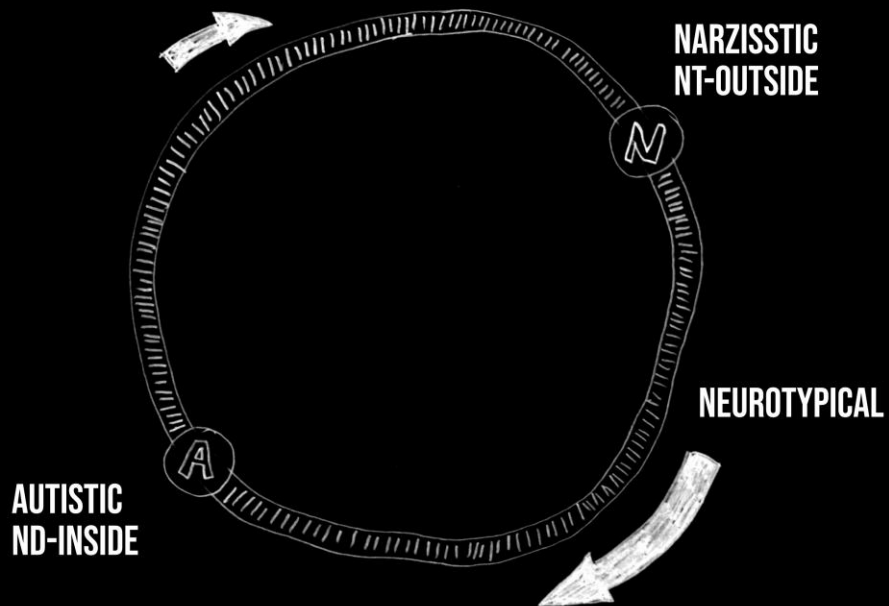
As the next step, I take the two ends of the total spectrum – “severe autism” on one side and, as a representative for the other side, “narcissism or sociopathy” – and bend them into two circles. In one version the extremes touch directly. In the other circle they stand as poles opposite one another in the circle. These two variations each show how decisive the question of metastable diversity is, because without it the extremes crash directly into each other, which intensifies the liminal glitch experience.

CIRCLE-SEQUENCES

SPECTRUM EXPANDED



NEURODIVERGENT



The dynamics between autistic people and narcissistic people is here initially only exemplary, but one can use it to show not only how opposites stand in relation to each other, but also how dynamics arise from it, or conflict and repulsion.

One could simplify autism as a stronger dominance of a certain inner world, whereas in narcissism a certain exterior becomes overvalued. As mentioned, this is only one possible perspective on these two modes. It does not tell the whole story. It would be too simple to reduce autism or narcissism to this. But we can use it to make interactions describable.

The inner world of the autistic person often has a quality that appears to be independent of the representations of the NT-world. If the autistic person tries to transfer their inner world into the outer, NT norms play hardly any role for them. It is an ideally much clearer worldview, as if one were transferring an inner plan directly onto a material world. Conversely, the neurotypical inner world (so we are staying here initially with fixed assignments) is of a different quality than it would be in autistic people, namely much more reflection of the outside, consciously or unconsciously, of socially normed world experience, between power, group, materialism. It therefore stands in the service of consolidation of the world, thus solidifying the neurotypical. For autistic people, this separation between inside and outside is often not given in the same way, but it is a little as if the inner is much more worked on directly in the outer. As if outer reality were treatable like a dream. Not a few autistic people treat the outside world according to a logic of the inner world.

Greatly simplified, one could interpret the neurotypical in its extreme as a stranding in material existence. So as an absolute superficiality. As a world of shells and externalities. Whereas one could understand the extreme of autism as absolute innerness. These comparisons limp a little, but here serve an opening towards spatial models of psychodynamics, in which relations become more important than cemented determinations.

If these poles lie directly next to each other, an extreme rupture arises, between a dissociation that turns strongly inward, as if reality were an expression of an inner relation with everything, so an extreme deepening in which the self almost dissolves in the inner world, and a counterpart with a cemented I, split off, flattened, uninspired, superficial and alienated from everything.

If one were to consider this circle now as development, then one could see that the materially stranded human being, reduced to an object in the neurotypical extreme, could become human again solely by switching to radical autism, meaning from the superficial, distanced outside into the inner deepening and embodiment. Conversely, the extreme mutism, the complete encapsulation and self-dissolution in autistic monotropism, might benefit from a movement toward the outer world in the sense that movement and thus less "rigidity" (by which is meant the experience of rupture and defense of complexity that is not transferable into the neurotypical but could become so) would be possible.

At the same time, this confrontation between the extremes could lead to that glitch experience that I described earlier. It would be the impossibility of translatability. If the two poles in the cycle lie directly next to each other, they seem like hardly surmountable opposites, but if one moves them apart from each other, much softer transitions in the polarity emerge. It results in the said diversification of the field, thus in a metastable diversity.

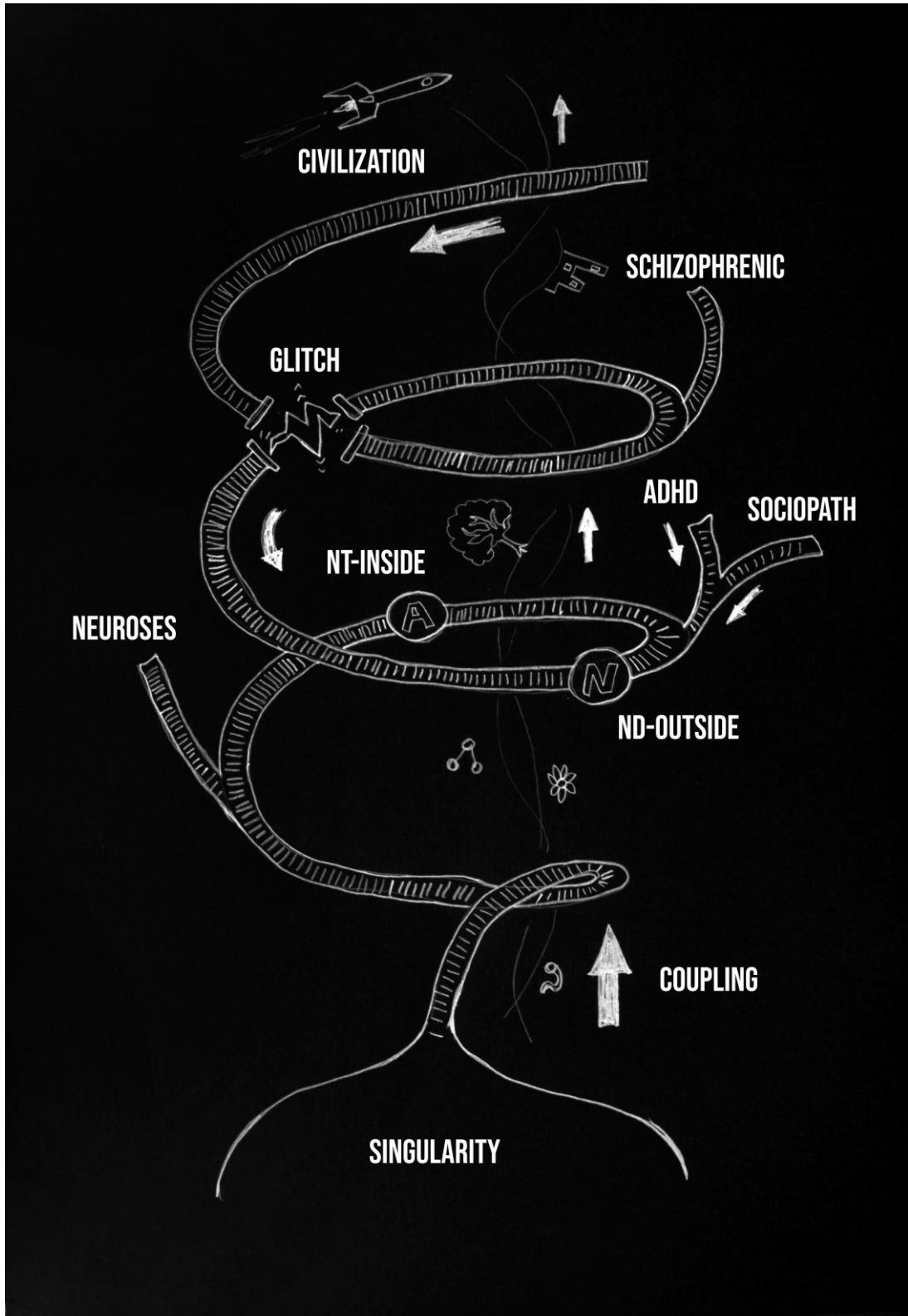
If we understand this as conscious social design, then neurodivergence stands in a completely different context. Then everything is a relating-to something and does not take place in isolation.

We therefore see that what constitutes neurodivergence can and should be viewed as relational effect and efficacy in the field, which is already given by the fact that due to the ontological shift autism cannot be clearly separated from neurotypicality.

In this depiction of the cycle, the respectively “normal” or mild area of the neurotypical to the neurodivergent (to the left and right of the poles) would be the runoff zone for the polarity-induced thrust of each unfolding, in Kreutzbruck’s sense.

So here we see a dynamic field in which both glitch experiences take place as well as polarities between overlapping fields. If one considers this as an overall model, it would perhaps be like a dynamic spiral that condenses and integrates more and more aspects while the singularity is continuously expanded and newly referenced. That would be a psychodynamics of a reality in which we all live. The extremes are just as necessary as the seemingly moderate fields that used to be called “normal”. But those who rigidly remain in these normal fields also become an extreme that blocks the processes of insight of everyone else and thus concretes the distortion.

We can only recognize who we are, each of us, when we are all visible in this dynamism, which presupposes that dominances are dissolved by categories finding their extension in the complexity of diversity.



This understanding has clear advantages. Not only does it integrate autism and extremes of the neurotypical into a unified system, but also into a dynamic that does not lead into dead ends, but into relationships and relations, into equilibria and movement patterns. It also becomes apparent that the neurotypical is itself a “spectrum,” that is, a dynamic field in

whose extremes “pathologies” appear — which, however, only appear pathological when the dynamism is dominated by static, rigid conditions. The normative is what produces the pathological. Not only in interpretation, but through the shifting to the margins, which leads to distortion of the experience of existence and to the dwindling or choking off of affordances. In relation to the margins, but also in that neurotypicality dominates, a petrification arises that leads to relative immobility in the system.

Only when society can exist freely through all corners, bends, and cycles does it cross the diversity threshold and thus arrive at free development within the system. Freedom here means relatively self-determined existence in conscious relational work. Synergies and natural counter-reactions and responses emerge.

The “normal” must not be a permanent state. Otherwise it becomes pathological.

As with Kreuzbruck, this model is not to be understood like the additive process of a calculator, but as a visualization of in-between spaces. It is not about the corners, but about the dynamism and movement that take place between them. It is therefore not about locating oneself at specific positions. Autism does not therefore exist in a vacuum.

Here we see why, especially today, the increase of lived diversity together with relational ability could be the actual path out of the society that has stranded in the flattening of materialism and capitalism. We cannot solve the conflicts of our time if we do not radically increase integrated complexity and bring it into creative dynamism.

The Psychodynamic Field and Double Bind as Defense

The model of a psychodynamic ontological shift developed here stands in a certain tradition — and breaks it at the same time. Kant showed that there is no immediate being of things in themselves for us, but that appearances are given to us only through the forms of our intuition (space and time) and the categories of the understanding. Appearance is never the thing in itself, but already a filtered form. Husserl, and later Heidegger, bring this insight closer to experience and world-relation: consciousness constitutes meaning not as a mirror, but as intentional enactment; existence is always being-in-the-world. More contemporary approaches such as Karen Barad’s intra-active becoming show how we are part of the creation of reality.

So do we live exclusively in relativity and subjectivism? No, that would again be too simple.

For me, the “objective” is not thereby completely disproven, nor the world rendered entirely relative, but the objective should be positioned differently: namely in a context of relational capacity within co-creation. Thus naive objectivism collapses, but not objectivity as negotiated robustness (RA) of shared knowledge within a complex and lived relation. Objective would therefore be whatever remains stably recurrent across different modes of

coupling (ND/NT, methods, contexts) within a dynamic relational field. If we remove objectivity completely from the picture, relevance and concreteness dissolve entirely, which leads to a paradox and increasing meaninglessness. The neurotypical response to this situation is usually absolute hardening. But when I invoke William Wimsatt, I mean robustness as a conscious decision within conscious relation, less in the neurotypical sense of collective consensus, which contains too many bias-driven automatisms. A phenomenon does not count as “objective” because a model derives it elegantly, but because it appears again and again through many, preferably independent, pathways. Wimsatt calls this “triangulation”: we increase our belief in a reality when it remains invariant even though we change the perspective, the assumptions, or the instrument. Wimsatt emphasizes that these perspectives should be at least partially independent, because otherwise they merely mirror the same bias multiple times. It therefore also depends on the element of participation in the context of maintaining diversity and thus complexity and openness. That we are all shifted and distorted does not mean that we live in different universes; rather, the same universe expresses itself differently through NT or ND. We cannot exist and at the same time be fully understood, because reality is a matter of embodiment, but existence outside neurotypicality is a fluid state in which responses occur. It is particularly the emergent complementarity and constant expansion, pulsating with new forms of condensation, which leads to related experience, to resonance, to temporary fusion forms of ND and NT.

Wimsatt spoke of messy environments, those natural contexts in which phenomena appear that cannot be explained cleanly, isolably, or according to norms — environments full of contradictions, local inconsistencies, chaotic forces, and overlapping levels of organization. In such restless, complex situations, classical deduction, law-based explanation, or model-based prediction become a trap, because they are either too rigid or too idealized to capture the dynamics of real systems.

For neurotypicality, however, this robustness, which takes place within ambiguity, is often not acceptable, which is why there are usually defensive reactions that are particularly aimed at ignoring embodiment and thereby formulating claims to dominance from the outside, through abstract norms. The inoperability of neurodivergence then appears as a threat to unilateral dominance. The autistic person does not need to question the neurotypical directly. Their existence is sufficient to prevent the closure of NT reality, because it is an embodied existence that, due to incompatibility, cannot be externally steered. Neither through pressure nor through violence.

Merleau-Ponty, who wrote extensively on embodiment, describes perception not as a perspective from above, but perception is not an inner image of the world, but being-in-the-world, a positioning that is bodily from the outset. The concept of embodiment here essentially means an existence that cannot be reduced to a thing. The body is not a closed container, but a kind of membrane that interweaves with the world. Perception “extends” the body: when I hear a melody, my body vibrates with it; when I grasp an object, my existence reaches into the grasp. Merleau-Ponty speaks of “flesh” (*la chair*) — a fundamental

tissue that permeates subject and world alike. This means that embodiment is not only “being in a body” but that the body is experienced as a place that extends dynamically into the other.

In contrast to the cognitivist (classical AI, Cartesianism) perspective, according to which the body is merely a vehicle while “actual” perception lies in the brain/mind.

If embodiment means extended existence, then this radically contradicts all models that reduce us to isolated individuals (e.g. neoliberal labour subjects, psychological test batteries, neurotypical grids). Embodiment then means: vulnerability and resonance are not a weakness, but a fundamental form of being-in-the-world. Distortion is the unavoidable friction, because my experience is never congruent with that of an other. Co-creation would be the practice of not smoothing this difference, but of using it as a generator.

The ideal would therefore be a world that recognizes reality as embodied experience and co-creation as a shaping in the in-between, without losing respect for the respective other embodiments.

This understanding of the ontological shift, however, leads to cognitive dissonance within the NT mode. For how is a jobcenter supposed to deal with me as an autistic person if I am inoperable, that is, not available? How is the value of my existence to be measured? Through instruments and procedures that have no real correspondence in my embodiment. We also see here that what I am saying is not only theory, but radical practice.

Defense Reactions in NT Psychology

Because the coupling of embodiment and reality is so fundamentally counter to neurotypicality, we can see classic defense reactions everywhere.

The challenge of the field has already been recognized and described in many areas of psychology. Gestalt therapy names introjection, projection, retroreflection. What Perls and Goodman labelled in this way are not purely psychological traits, but movements within a field that cannot tolerate deviation. Introjection means: I swallow the norm, the command, the mask of normality without examining it, because the system demands that I function. Projection means: I push what is foreign or uncanny to me into the other – “you are cold, you are disturbed” – and thus secure for myself the status of normality. Retroreflection finally means: I direct the aggression that should be directed against the system inward, against myself, and call it depression or self-denigration. All three figures are forms of defense that stabilize the dominant system, and thus neurotypicality.

The relationship between NT and ND often takes place at these fracture points and then usually ends in double binds.

The NT field forces us to swallow norms, to project deviation, to turn aggression against ourselves. In this way, the idea of comprehensive normality, the idea of absolute objectivity, the idea of order is preserved, at the cost of marginalization and the destruction of the neurodivergent.

Gestalt therapy recognized early on that the human being is not a thing but a process in the field. But, like many others, it remained on the micro-level: the individual subject, the dyadic encounter. The Barangers already said in the 1960s that psychological experience is not to be thought of as monadic (in the individual) but dynamic and field-like.

To understand the defense against distortion and displacement more precisely, the work of Gregory Bateson is central, who described the double bind as a systemic paradox that always occurs when a norm tries to stabilize itself against a deviation. They arise when contradictory messages are sent simultaneously — for example “be authentic” and at the same time “adapt” — through which deviation is not resolved but fixed, and the affected person remains trapped in an irresolvable tension. This too can intensify the liminality experience of autistic people.

Neurotypicality affirms the foreign on the one hand, because it cannot deny it, but at the same time withdraws its right to exist, because it does not understand it. This in turn stabilizes its own existence against the ambiguity of being itself and pushes the foreign into liminality. Hence, the foreign is met everywhere with labels, with pseudo-relationships, while the existence of migrants, neurodivergent people, queer people is structurally undermined.

No reference is made to them, no contextualization — in essence, relationship and interaction are excluded and refused. At the same time, it is implied that one is not really different, which allows neurotypical expectations to remain untouched and legitimized.

The foreigners are different, but not so different that different rules should apply to them. So they are supposed to be like us, even though they are not.

This paradox not only keeps us in the liminal glitch, but ultimately constitutes a prohibition of being, and thus an indirect intention of annihilation, which neurodivergent people experience in many places. In the form of massive discrimination and exclusion, which often comes disguised as supposed help or recognition. The poor are supposed to be grateful that after their discrimination they are not allowed to starve, people with disabilities are supposed to recognize that they continue to be a burden on society even if we acknowledge them as fully valuable human beings, which legitimizes keeping neurodivergent people in poverty. That is, people who are in fact structurally granted a lifelong prohibition of self-determination.

The advantage for the system, when the foreign remains stuck in the paradox of a prohibition of being combined with forced integration, lies in the fact that it does not actually have to be integrated. The paradox binds deviation to an endless self-entanglement: the “Other” is kept busy with self-justification, distracted, exhausted, instead of transforming the system. The paradox functions like a control mechanism that keeps deviation inside a kind of labyrinth.

Because neurotypicality does not want to transform itself. This is why the question of neurodivergence is so political, because it scratches at the question of reality itself.

In the book *Speeds Arbeit* I described how I was held captive in psychoterror for 10 years, because authorities labelled me as a work refuser, although I worked for 27 years, 40 hours per week, almost unpaid, they did not recognize this artistic-research work, and as an autistic person I could not do any other work. Instead of transforming the concept of work, increasingly more violence was used against me. The fact that I am an artist was finally classified by the immigration authority as an act harmful to society. Because in their reality I did not function. Which criminalized my existence, even though I literally could not do any other work.

In the double bind, that is, in the statement “performance is rewarded”, the system remains “closed open”, presents itself as legitimate, humane, fair and tolerant in its own logic (“we see you, we are talking to you”), but in truth, by omitting the mutually distorting conditions of the situation, a joint category and simplification of fundamentally different experiences is cemented.

We see here, therefore, how crucial it is to acknowledge that we cannot understand one another, because only then does the demand for recognition of one’s own reality become effective. As long as authorities and the state think they can understand, measure and evaluate neurodivergent people, they deny us our complex reality and do violence to us.

A double bind overlays two incompatible imperatives (“Be authentic – but please in a way that suits everyone”; “Speak clearly – but not so directly”; “Be creative – but follow every process”) and forbids metacommunication (“Don’t make such a fuss”, “We are not discussing the rules here”). In this way, the burden of ambiguity is shifted to the deviants: you must simultaneously fulfil A and $\neg A$ (not A), and if you fail, this does not prove the paradox, but “your problem”.

Thus, the incommensurability is denied, with the consequence that neurodivergent people continue to be patronized by neurotypicals. We remain permanently in a weakened position in which we can only fail, and that failure is then taken as proof that we are deficient.

The double binds explain a large part of the suffering of NDs, alongside thin slice judgment, that is, the fundamental unconscious rejection of people who are different.

If the ruling order were to negotiate its distortion, it would have to carry the ambiguity itself — and stop placing it on neurodivergent people. Only then would we have an opening toward genuine co-transformation.

The ontological shift allows those areas of psychology to be grasped differently and more sharply, which until now have remained stuck in superficial diagnoses and dimensional scales. While classical psychology describes traits – extraversion, neuroticism, borderline symptoms – the ontological shift explains the basic mechanism why these phenomena appear at all: because the relation between inner world and outer world is fundamentally structurally distorted. Even phenomena such as narcissism or borderline can be interpreted more radically through this: not as isolated disorders, but as modes of dealing with the ontological shift. In this sense, it offers a possible key to closing the gaps in personality psychology: it shows that all these patterns are not “defects”, but expressions of a distorted condition that concerns being itself.

The political Dimension of Neurodivergence

The dynamic model, in turn, contains a cognitive trap that we should not fall into. Namely the assumption that we are dealing with evenly distributed forces. The political consequences are not only tied to the distribution of perspectives within the field but essentially to the dimensional differences in magnitude. Because, as already established, misunderstanding is not only a matter of language or content but of unequal dominances within the field.

Current epidemiological findings leave no doubt: the classical assumption of about 1% prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the population falls short. The World Health Organization (2021) estimates that globally about one person in 127 ($\approx 0.79\%$) is autistic — however with large variance and many studies showing significantly higher rates. Research on the phenomenon of “masking” or “camouflaging” shows how many autistic people — especially women/AFAB, highly intelligent individuals, and people with strong compensation — adapt their traits so extensively that they are not recognized. Comorbidity with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is significant — in a recent study approximately 32.8% of autistic children additionally had ADHD, and only about 15.8% of this group had previously been correctly diagnosed with both. These empirical findings lead to the unavoidable conclusion that the proportion of autistic people is significantly higher than the officially diagnosed.

If one additionally asks questions concerning probability of recognition, sociodemographic inequalities, masking, and gender- or socioeconomically driven diagnostic distortions, then a more realistic model can be constructed.

Under the inclusion of the following plausibility assumptions, one arrives at dramatically higher numbers. If one assumes the official diagnosis rate for autism to be ~1.5–2.0% (i.e., ~1 : 50–1 : 67), one would, after correcting according to the aforementioned prevalences, realistically obtain perhaps ~3–6%. The probability of autistic people being recognized in diagnostics lies on average at ~40%, which leaves about 60% undetected.

Out of five autistic people, two would be identified, three would remain unidentified. This magnitude — of course it is only an estimate — has far-reaching implications, not only statistically but epistemically, socially, politically. Because poverty, mental illness and criminalized behavior are in large numbers not individual “failures”, but expressions of a systemic inability to adequately perceive neurodivergence. Those who are not recognized remain in the shadow of social systems — in poverty, stigmatization, mis- and under-provision. The invisible share is not accidental — it is systematically produced.

Everything I have described in this book so far explains why neurodivergence is not seen as what it is. And we can now increasingly recognize the fatal effect.

Poverty systems (e.g., wage labor, activation policies) are designed around neurotypical functionality. Neurodivergent individuals who work differently, communicate differently, socialize differently, are placed as dysfunctional from the outset — not because of “unwilling adaptation”, but because of structural incompatibility.

In forensic contexts, there is a considerable underdiagnosis of neurodivergence — behavior is interpreted as personality disorder or delinquency, not as neurological difference.

If the realistic proportion of autistic people lies at 3–6%, and the recognition rate at around 40%, then we have a social field in which more than half of those affected remain invisible. A social invisibility that frames poverty, illness and deviation not as individual pathology but as collateral damage of a norm-based social system. The epistemic frame must shift: neurotypical must no longer be the default mode, but one variant among many.

This must lead to political consequences that remove the pathology paradigm.

Diagnostics that recognize only visible deficits as neurodivergence or autism constitute a substantial form of discrimination that serves the preservation of the psychiatric system, not the individuals affected. Psychiatry thus contributes to distorting the real picture of society. What is considered the “norm” is not what is experienced as reality by the majority.

In countries such as Germany, there is a structural lack of disability-appropriate autism diagnostics for adults. This lack is reflected in years-long waiting times (e.g., lottery allocation system, Humboldt Berlin, in the third quarter of 2025 — 1666 people waiting for 25 diagnostic slots), the use of outdated and non-validated test instruments (e.g., ADOS-2), the over-emphasis on externally observable behavior compared to self-report, and a systematic underdiagnosis of masking, highly gifted, female or PDA autistic individuals.

This practice violates the principles of barrier-free and equal healthcare under § 128 SGB IX, § 27 SGB V and Art. 25 UN-CRPD. It results in a situation where a substantial portion of those affected cannot in practice be diagnosed, although their impairment is socially, professionally and medically manifest.

To ignore this is not only a problem for those affected but especially for the self-image of society.

This means a diagnostic state of systemic emergency that in practice prevents recognition, treatment and social participation of this group of individuals. A similar picture emerges with ADHD: recent studies estimate that about 50–75% of adults with ADHD have never been diagnosed, particularly women and people with comorbidities such as autism or depression.

This practice is not neutral but discriminatory, because it excludes precisely those whose disability consists in being able to behave inconspicuously. It thereby violates the prohibition of discrimination under Article 3 (3) Basic Law as well as the obligation to provide “reasonable accommodation” under Article 5 (2) UN-CRPD.

If a diagnostic system only recognizes autism when it visibly fails, then it does not recognize autism as a disability — but as a social defect.

A diagnostic system that cannot detect a disability in large parts loses its epistemic mandate. Because the right to define a diagnosis exclusively is based on the ability to correctly grasp the actual facts. If this system fails — whether through methodological narrowing, institutional overload, or paradigmatic blindness — a protection gap emerges for which the state is liable. This protection gap must not be perpetuated through continued external definition at the expense of those affected.

Social law obliges the institution in such a case to structure the procedure in such a way that people with disabilities have the possibility to exercise their rights autonomously and on an equal basis (§ 128 SGB IX).

If that is not possible, the affected person must themselves receive epistemic authority over their disability — as an expression of the right to self-determination under Art. 2 Basic Law (GG) and Art. 12 UN-CRPD.

This right includes recognizing one’s own perception as a valid source of knowledge about one’s own neurodivergent being.

Epistemic self-determination — that is, the right to recognize one’s own perception as knowledge about one’s disability — is not subjective arbitrariness, but the necessary consequence of systemic failure. If diagnostic institutions cannot fulfill their task because they are structurally overburdened, because their methods do not detect highly compensated autistic people, or because they systematically devalue self-report due to

outdated paradigms, then the interpretive authority over one's own disability must revert to the affected person.

This corresponds to the legally binding principle of self-determination over one's own identity, anchored in Art. 12 UN-CRPD ("equal recognition before the law") and Art. 25 UN-CRPD ("equal access to health services"). Epistemic self-determination does not replace medical expertise in this context, but compensates for its structural failure until disability-appropriate procedures exist.

As long as the existing diagnostic procedures are not capable of reliably detecting highly compensated, reflective, or traumatized autistic individuals, the state may not reject the self-definition of those affected. Otherwise, it would perpetuate epistemic discrimination that contradicts both the spirit and the wording of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The right to epistemic self-determination must therefore be understood as a compensatory right, which follows directly from § 128 SGB IX, Art. 2 GG and Art. 12 UN-CRPD.

This argument does not lead to the dissolution of diagnostics, but to its transformation: from a paternalistic observation regime to a cooperative, participatory epistemology in which autistic people are no longer objects of clinical interpretation, but subjects of shared knowledge.

Only in this way can the demand of the UN-CRPD for "full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (Art. 1 UN-CRPD) be fulfilled.

If diagnostic procedures are structurally unsuitable for detecting autism in highly compensated form, the institution loses its monopoly of definition.

In such a case, the self-definition of the affected person must be recognized as an epistemic source (§ 128 SGB IX, Art. 2 GG, Art. 12 UN-CRPD). Anything else would be continued discrimination through epistemic incapacitation.

We therefore see how the failure of institutional structures represents an opportunity for liberation for autistic and neurodivergent self-determination and self-definition.

If we want to seize the political consequences of the ontological shift, then we need the clear realization that systems that cannot recognize us may not gain — or retain — interpretive authority over us.

Whoever undermines diagnostics in this way can also turn inclusion into a transformation of society as a whole.

Inclusion means that a person is forced into a format according to the rules of the others in order, for example, to speak in their language about their own marginalization, which is only an apparent integration and maintains the dominance of reality on the other side.

Speaking “in the format of the other” produces testimonial injustice (devaluation of the speaker) and hermeneutical injustice (lack of interpretive categories for one’s own experience).

Politically, therefore, in light of everything said so far, it must be clearly formulated: there is no democratic, shared field between ND and NT as long as NT dominates the space and thus everything ND tries to express finds neither the affordances nor the conditions of self-determined identity. Therefore, the state can only provide solutions to a limited extent. Instead, neurodivergent people must intervene participatorily in state processes.

Ableist hegemony is a term from Disability Studies and refers to the “normality” that makes its standards absolute. Here we also see symbolic violence (Bourdieu), epistemic colonialism (Quijano, Mignolo) and agonistic plurality (Chantal Mouffe) — that is, the necessity of acknowledging that conflict and difference cannot be moderated away, but must be held productively in the democratic field. Added to this are approaches such as neuropolitics, in the sense of Foucault’s biopolitics, which further narrow world-relation. This is exacerbated by an uncritical handling of other modes of world-relation which, for example, are increasingly exerted through AI in our society, without many of the new victims of this development becoming visible.

In practice, this means considerable eruptions that an NT society must learn to withstand. In doing so, the strategies become unmistakably clear with which efforts have always been made to keep the “foreign” small. But if we are a significant size that was only marginalized through restricted diagnostics, then a higher right of participation must follow from that — at the level of the definition of reality and the protection of one’s own embodiment against neurotypical external determination.

It is conceivable that, as a result of the dominance of AI structures, neurotypical people will soon find themselves in similar conflict fields as has always been the case for neurodivergent people and especially autistic people. Their intelligence, their reality will then be structurally erased and devalued by a dominance that neither understands nor considers the nature of human intelligence, but categorically equates it, and thus devalues affordances. One can also learn a great deal from the ontological shift and the question of embodiment about how to deal with AI’s relation to reality, so that co-creation becomes possible here as well without marginalisation being experienced in one’s own relation to reality.

Fundamentally, we should massively call into question simulations of reality, that is, majority realities, which makes a neurodivergent science even more urgent. Already today, more and more people are fighting for their relation to reality, for the reality of their embodied existence, and experiencing how automated formats ignore this, deprive them of affordances. This process, intensified by globalisation, automation, efficiency optimisation, neoliberalism, AI and populism, deprives us of solution space and living space at the same time.

Against this background, every act of deviation appears as extremism, as the extreme manifestation of an opposition. But this is not the fault of the differently appearing existences, but the result of dominant normativity.

This furious simplification, which follows from neurotypicality, will one day have to be countered by a radical countermovement. We will have to consider the lived reality of people much more locally and individually and stop viewing existence as something isolated for which the general public is not responsible. At the same time, subjectivity and subculture must be protected. It will be about habitats, life forms and shared fields. About the protection of complexity, language and expressive capacity. At the end of the current fascistoid cycle, humanity will have to understand reality as something that presupposes embodiment and deserves protection in it. Real is what is lived, and from that relevance and affordance are derived.

The Recognition of the Shift – The Liberation of the Neurodivergent

In 2010, I threatened on a country road in Austria to kill a bull. I wanted to invite the world press to the event. The federal road was supposed to be closed for it. There would have been a large pool of blood and an outcry around the entire globe.

The weather was fine and I stood in the middle of the Austrian landscape, between snobs and gnarled locals. Behind me the world headquarters of the energy drink manufacturer Red Bull. I wanted to rebuild the brand of the well-known beverage company in the interest of humanity, in order to “wake people up.”

The headquarters looked like a busy campus, with young, dynamic people, and in between me, handing the receptionist the concept of the undertaking. She said in her overwhelm that I needed to make an appointment. Two days later the phone rang. The right hand of the boss was on the line. They urgently needed to speak with me.

Certainly, it was a performative act. At the same time, it was an enactive, autistic moment of shifting capitalism from below. And it constituted a study of the relationship between economy and the human being. I opened a field between myself and the corporation in order to make a fundamental problem visible, namely the displacement of relevancies and proportions. The attempt to stall me — who wanted to publicly kill a bull in front of their doorstep — with a drawn-out appointment scheduling was quickly recognized as an error.

This example shows how, through my decades of work, I was essentially carrying out neurodivergent research in practice, that is, working out an expansion of the contexts of reality. It appeared very radical, not because I was — for I merely reacted understandably to

the questionable world dominance of a corporation — but because society had become petrified in the normative, in abstract concepts, which here broke apart against lived reality.

Someone was indeed prepared to publicly kill a bull in front of the headquarters of Red Bull in order to end capitalism as a neurotypical regime of domination. A not insignificant eruption in the liminal glitch.

That made it possible to call relationships into question, to confuse and reposition obvious property claims in the public field. Always with the effort to trigger dialogues, that is, resonance processes, as the foundation of cultural negotiation of existence and reality. Who, then, would have the interpretive authority over the relations between customers and corporations? Why could I not, as a customer, become equally influential and also dominate for once?

This whole affair happened to me because, as an Autistic, I followed the logic of patterns up to the point where I not only wanted to kill the “bull of the stock market,” the “bull of the economy,” but in this act conducted a discourse about the participation of the human being in capitalism itself. Not along the rules of the market, but along those of culture and autism.

While this created between me and Dietrich Mateschitz, the boss of Red Bull, an experimental arrangement on privilege and exclusion that was fruitful in many respects, we deepened the debate on the displacement of our relations. They invited me. Teams flew behind me in a jet. They threatened me legally. We ate cake together. It also had a certain comedy.

During those days we were actually negotiating the future of the company, while the situation created a level playing field between the corporation and me as an impoverished and (at that time still unknown) neurodivergent artist. This happened because I took art consciously and my neurodivergence unconsciously seriously. In the sense of autistic infodumping, I led the corporation into resonance, and Red Bull, confronted with diminishing NT dominance, was forced into an open dialogue. They had no NT strategy to calculate the unpredictability of neurodivergent and artistic action. At the same time, because everything took place in public space, there was also no option for direct violence against me, or for withdrawal. Furthermore, there was a kind of defensive curiosity between the company and me. The matter had a certain sexiness for both sides. It was like running on a blade. My nerves were tense as if it were a matter of life and death.

We see very clearly here how the proportions of the field shifted. A single person was able to dominate an entire corporation. The space of art protected me from the pure pathologization of my actions. It offered a bridge toward co-creation.

Thus, a “foreign,” an expanded relation to the world emerged, which was incompatible with capitalism and its power structures, and I co-shaped the economy neurodivergently, that is, along sensory stimuli, contexts of meaning, and in monotropically deep focus. Of course, I would not have killed the bull. I was aiming at something entirely different. At resonance

on equal footing. At an act that, at least for a short time, suspended the power imbalance between human beings and the economy.

I expanded the complexity on the level of lived existential questions. It was no longer about market.

The inoperability that again became clearly visible here is the strength of neurodivergence, and as long as we are not in fascistoid structures that simply react to any contradiction with violence, a fruitful disturbance arises and correspondingly important discourses about the distribution of power, relation to the world, and interpretive authority.

It was the incommensurability itself, the liminality of the situation, that shifted the field, because there was absolutely no answer that could have brought the company out of the danger zone. Autistics are generally not for sale and they see details that can mean everything.

The potential killing of the bull, the pool of blood on the federal road in front of the company headquarters, created a stage amid the Salzburg mountains in which, for a few weeks, other rules of the market applied.

This also had very much to do with the fact that a company like Red Bull consisted to a large extent of marketing and opinion. I could hardly have moved Deutsche Bahn in this way.

What I was doing there was research in the field of Autistic Epistemology. An enactive research out of embodiment. (embodied cognition) This is how art works and how neurodivergence works. This is how we play a role in the world, have effect and participation.

Another long-term project in which I intervened in neurotypical, patriarchal structures and intervened for 30 years was and is my dealings with authorities and companies in discourses about the concept of work. I entangled them as well, while I myself, in a changed attitude, made a different relation to reality the starting point of my work. Mostly it was about uncovering scandals and grievances, as described comprehensively in *Speeds Arbeit* or *Radical Worker* and documented over decades. I was always concerned with directly embodying alternative work, science, art from deviation, from exception, and then entering into resonance. What I defined as work-integrated relational agency was, essentially, the intention of restoring the dynamic of more complex patterns of order. In doing so, I broke through the neurotypically smoothed simulation of reality. This also included my approach of provoked empiricism. I created highly complex formations and shifted research beyond the observation of the known, toward a research that co-shaped new realities. A potential research that, with crisis experiments, created new epistemic access.

Early on I also called this approach synaesthetic science, which was based on shifts and transfers of patterns in different contexts. By setting categories and frameworks anew, angles of observation changed. While universal rules often emerged from the depths of the unconscious, one shifted them into contexts foreign to them. As in synaesthesia colour can

also be sound, I artistically altered forms and formats, which functioned like the sieving out of patterns. That is something that never succeeds in objective distance, because one sits in a static framework. But reality is not static.

Uta Frith and, in extended form, Francesca Happé developed, as mentioned previously, the concept of weak central coherence in autistic people. This supposedly relates to the stronger weighting of details compared to overarching contextual connections and norms. This attribution is an attempt to deny autistic people their capacity for reality, and when I then intervene in the systems of neurotypicality with details and thousands of pages of analyses, I lead it ad absurdum. Then I show that these details are very real when embodied and that I co-shape this reality. A detail-reality that makes grievances in the NT-world visible. So concrete, so clear, that it is capable of paralyzing your authorities, your corporations.

That I worked for 27 years, intrinsically motivated, almost unpaid, destroyed conferences during lectures, overturned work guidelines, exposed executives, disempowered courts and embarrassed public prosecutors, then ended up in the social security system and continued there in the same way, was an act of neurodivergent transformation practice. Because I went through the NT labels and formats and destroyed them all by confronting them with my embodied, self-determined persona, with an artistic figure in the act of transformative masking that shaped relationships and thus increased complexity, for which there was no answer, because neurotypicality is an abstract simulation that only functions if everyone reacts to it neurotypically.

This regularly led to structural burnout of neurotypicality.

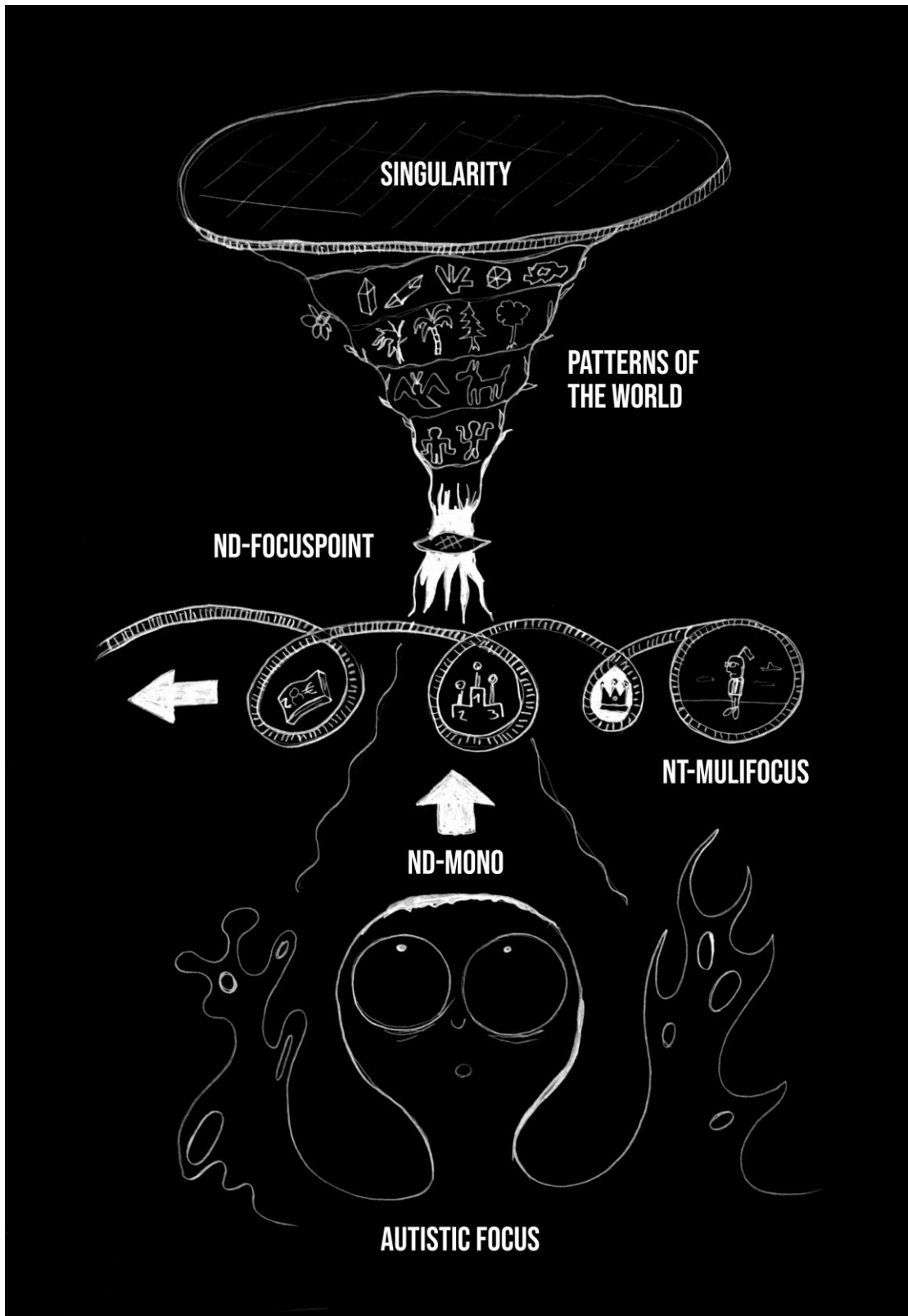
When I was, for example, in my youth at the Ortweinschule in Graz, an art school, we were supposed to describe famous artworks using slides. The problem was that these slides were already very old and worn out. While all the other students described, according to expectations, what they believed they recognized in the artwork, because they had learned to do so, because they knew the works by heart, I stood up and began to analyze the dust and dirt on the slide. The teacher was so outraged that he almost threw me out. Years later he approached me and apologized. He had eventually understood that my way of seeing things was not wrong and that it was not about provoking him. I simply described what I, as an autistic person and artist, actually, that is, really saw.

At that time we also had a sports teacher who, as a boxing champion, had won international titles. His physical education classes at an art school always took place like military drill. He made us run in competition around the school. The children ran and ran. I ran in the sense of “funny walking,” in big steps, sometimes forward, then backward. It had more of a dance than a run. I arrived last. All the children laughed. The boxing champion boiled with rage.

My dance was nothing other than autistic stimming, a masking with which I tried to ward off the unbearable external control, the intrusion into my body. I expressed myself. That was the logical consequence and precisely that impulse that masking implies. Not in order to adapt, but in order to create a space of survival. Intelligent as I was, I saw absolutely no

possibility of hiding the complexity I embodied in the primitive system of neurotypicality. So I constantly recreated myself, as a temporary form, as an attempt to make contact, in a world that was incommensurable to me. I stretched myself, folded myself, and what became visible was sometimes crazy enough to be harmless, sometimes so dangerous that people preferred to look away and thus left me alone, with their narrowness, their fear, their nit-picking.

In the illustration the difference of the monotropic hyperfocus becomes visible, in contrast to the NT-mode. One recognizes how the monotropic, the deepening into the one, eventually merges into the “whole world” of the singularity. It is not a blind narrowing but primarily an expansion through deepening. Because in the end everything can also be found in the one, the one is simply emergently transformed again and again. So when I provoked Red Bull, or the boxing world champion, I did not fall out of the world, but resonated with the singularity as potential and expanded. My embodiment became the turned-inside-out expansion of order. Not alien, but profoundly related.



That has always been my relation to world and reality. As a young man, for example, I often wanted to rebuild the world in one afternoon. They did not let me. Why, actually? It is worthwhile to look at the world radically from an autistic perspective.

Young autistic people, especially when they embody AuDHD, meaning autism and ADHD, can seem very manic. Driven by ADHD, focused through autism, ready to take high risks, and without any ability for consideration toward neurotypical norms, social habits, hierarchies, or rules. That is an immense force of innovation, an eruption, which, however, only rarely finds fertile ground in our world. Because the affordances are distorted and pushed away.

It can look as follows:

On one day in the 1990s, at about 20 years of age, I happened to meet, early in the morning in front of the headquarters of the Green Party in Vienna, their federal spokesperson Madeleine Petrovic, to whom I told, at that time, about my then current magazine project “Transpolitics”, with which I wanted, in those years, to make politics itself more integrative and thus more humane. Ms. Petrovic listened to me while we walked on the sidewalk to her next appointment, during which she could no longer get rid of me in the infodumping. Shortly afterwards I found in the telephone book the number of a friend of the US director Oliver Stone³⁰ (Sasa Felsbach³¹) and simply called her. We spoke — the photographer Sasa Felsbach did not know me — for almost an hour about the project. Or rather, I spoke without pause.

The well-known Austrian journalist Günther Nenning³², whom I called afterwards, simply asked me whether I was insane. That is how it continued for days, weeks, months. But in the end they all refused to pursue this project with me any further, which to me appeared completely illogical. The problem lay in the contrast of the situation and in the lack of metastable diversity. We crashed into each other so intensely, no affordances were actually given, because there was no in-between space. This in-between did not exist because NT-

³⁰ Oliver Stone (born 1946) is an American film director, screenwriter and producer — one of the most influential political filmmakers of the late 20th and early 21st century. He did not become famous through harmony, but through confrontation: he takes power structures apart, unmask national myths and dissects the history of violence of the USA. His most significant works – such as *Platoon*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *JFK*, *Natural Born Killers* or *Snowden* – do not depict war, media, state and ideology, but attack them. Stone uses film as political intervention: not for narration, but for counter-narration against military, state and capitalist constructions of reality. In this way he became a provocative figure in Hollywood — respected, feared, often defamed, but consistently unbending.

³¹ Sasa Felsbach (born 1966 in Graz, lives and works in Vienna) is an Austrian photographer and visual artist who works mainly in the fields of portrait, fashion and story photography. Her works often show strong visual narratives – for example the connection of space, body and material – and have been documented, among other places, in the database of Basis Wien.

³² Günther Nenning (1921–2006) was an Austrian journalist, publicist and political provocateur who, like hardly anyone else, shook up the media and intellectual landscape of post-war Austria. As editor of FORVM and later as an ORF television commentator he became known for his radical mixture of socialism, pacifism, sexual politics and media staging, which made him a lightning rod for both the left and the right.

He understood the public sphere not as a neutral space but as a stage for intervention and conflict — and used it consistently to expose power, bigotry and political hypocrisy. Nenning was argumentative, vain, sometimes over the top, but always razor sharp: an intellectual who did not analyse politics but performed it, because he knew that societal change does not arise through consensus but through conflict.

society did not allow it. What was missing was ambiguity tolerance and the capacity to map complexity.

The neurotypical paths were all blocked for me, so only the liminal glitch remained, which then became the permanent state of my whole life.

The responsibility to make possible a society in which people like me do not have to live this way, in which our engagement can run through appropriate channels, does not lie with me, but with all of us. This presupposes that we take care of one another locally and do not leave this to external, abstract structures. Structures that revolve above all around the question of usefulness.

On the evolutionary “Usefulness”

It lies in the nature of things that usefulness in the field no longer has fixed coordinates, which is logical if different forms of existence require different affordances. Yet even here an escape space emerges, by questioning whether the deviation from the norm in autistic people is so grave that they move outside the paradigms of NT-usefulness, and if so, what consequence follows from that.

Baron-Cohen, in his book *The Pattern Seekers*, wrote about the special significance of the autistic ability for pattern recognition and honoured its evolutionary role, but he did not fundamentally question the neurotypical paradigm. This is as if one were to regard white and Black people as equally useful while not addressing the problems of white dominance and interpretive authority at all. Thus they frequently find their assigned usefulness in the low-wage sector, which then conceals massive discrimination, even the indication of their own value and their own prerequisites. Something that is often observed among right-wing actors, when they want to distort racism as violence against white people, that is, as one-sidedness, by negotiating the category of equality without the structural privileges of white people, simply in order to twist the categories so that the marginalized would have to prove their usefulness to the majority society.

Thus autistic people are recognised as “useful”, but the interpretive authority over this consideration of “usefulness”, that is, linear applicability, is profoundly neurotypical. For only the domesticated autistic person can, without friction, for example, program code for a corporation in a broom closet or, as is often the case, be used for error detection. But what about the autistic person who cannot be exploited in this or similar ways, or who questions capitalism? Is this person also intended by evolution? A question that drove Hans Asperger to the unspeakable decision to have the autistic girls Hera Schreiber (born 1941) and

Elisabeth Schreiber (born 1933) murdered in the context of the Nazi “euthanasia” in the children’s clinic at Spiegelgrund.³³

I am certain that Baron-Cohen would indeed agree with me here that usefulness is a controversial perspective. The pattern seekers may appear useful in the NT system, but most autistic people remain inoperable.

There are ADHDers who become successful CEOs, but we cannot argue the right to exist of ADHDers as useful in relation to the neurotypical, because then we would neurotypically withdraw the evolutionary “being wanted” from those who are not suitable for exploitation.

It must be said clearly: usefulness depends on relation to reality. Infodumping is important work for autistic people in their reality, which secures their existence. Just as valuable or not as selling bets on falling stock prices (put options). Whose world revolves because of that cannot be determined from outside the respective reality.

We must learn to see usefulness also in metastable diversity itself.

I therefore do not think much of negotiating the value of the neurodivergent from a neurotypical perspective. “Brilliant programmers” or “pattern seekers” are approaches that only further marginalize us.

Usefulness is therefore in both directions not a helpful category of approximation. For it is not transferable across both modes. But that means that autistic people and ADHDers cannot be forced to function in capitalism. We have the right to demand another system in which our view of usefulness finds realization. In inclusion debates this plays hardly any role to this day.

In the 19th century Native Americans were systematically evaluated along the question of whether they were “useful” to the colonial society. “Useful Indians” were those who, in mission schools and reservations, adopted Western agriculture, crafts, or Christian values. They were considered “assimilable” and were temporarily spared from expulsion. “Useless Indians” on the other hand — hunters, shamans, resisters — were branded as “incorrigible” or “wild.” They lost rights, were displaced, sterilized, or murdered.

It is central to understand what the consequences are when we do not acknowledge the ontological shift, when we pretend that neurotypicality can make neurodivergence intelligible.

We have seen in the previous chapters how neurodivergent people are marginalized and consequently prevented in their real experience by psychiatry. This is shown particularly in the treatment of autistic literature, or autistic language.

³³ Herwig Czech / Hans Asperger und der Nationalsozialismus / Psychosozial-Verlag

Suppression of Neurodivergent Voices and the Work of Melanie Yergeau

The entire tradition of rhetoric — from Aristotle and Cicero to modern linguistics — has produced an image of language that is linear, intentional, controlled and normatively shaped. Anyone who did not fit into this was simply considered incapable of rhetorical action. Autistic people were not only turned into objects; they were even denied the possibility of having language as language, expression as expression, at all.

Melanie Yergeau, herself autistic, felt compelled, in her book *Authoring Autism*, to argue theoretically that autistic speaking, writing and acting are also rhetorical. That our fragmented language, our repetitions, our bodily-bound forms of expression, our unorthodox ways of talking, writing, acting, are not deviations without value but forms of an inherent rhetoric.

However, this eludes operability in the NT system and, as already explained, means incommensurability.

“Autistic language has been variously cataloged as a ‘rigid pre-symbolic mode of representation,’ as ‘egocentric,’ and as work that ‘should not be overrated.’ In all things discursive, autism represents decided lack. These are the stories through which we know autism, even as these same stories claim that autism remains unknowable, unnarratable.”³⁴

Yergeau shows that autism does not stand outside language, but produces another form of rhetoric that is no less valid — one that is performative, embodied, resistant. And she exposes that the supposed “non-rhetoricity” of autistic people was and is not a neutral observation, but part of the epistemic violence of the neurotypical: the norm itself defines what counts as language and, in doing so, blanks out every divergent form. Yergeau’s theory of autistic rhetoric confirms that autistic people do not stand at the margins of discourse, but in the middle of it — only in a way that the neurotypical grid cannot grasp.

Yergeau calls for moving away from the neurotypical idea that language is a tool, toward the understanding that language itself is a space, a field in which reality is produced. This is an understanding that we have long had in art.

“The stories of Grandin and Williams — and with them the barrage of autistic stories that soon followed — forced clinicians, parents, educators, and lay publics alike to reassess their archly held views of autism, to reconsider theories about the autistic’s capacity for thought.”³⁵

³⁴ Melanie Yergeau / *Authoring autism* / Duke University Press / S 7

³⁵ Melanie Yergeau / *Authoring autism* / Duke University Press / S 21

Thus, the image of autism and neurodivergence was reshaped by an increasing number of autistic and ADHD-shaped authors. Nevertheless, these voices are still often marginalized in research to this day.

“For example, Bernard Rimland, founder of the Autism Society of America, was quick to suggest that Grandin and Williams had both recovered from their autism — because how could an autistic have an inner life, much less a narrative one? In like manner, Francesca Happé suggested that autie-biographers were exceptional occurrences, so-called able-disabled people who, while still autistic, brought little of worth to discussions of autism. Asked Happé at the time, ‘What can we point to in their writing that deserves the label ‘autistic?’”

The same Francesca Happé questioned in a YouTube interview³⁶ the work of Damian Milton on the Double Empathy Problem — work which partly massively contradicts her own — by claiming she was not sure whether the fact that NDs and NTs each understand one another better within their own groups was sufficient evidence of mutual non-understanding, because the people in the study were told which group they belonged to, which would create bonding. In other words, Happé implies that the experimental setting alone generates greater closeness in understanding. An adaptation which, however, would again be a rather neurotypical reaction that she projects onto autistic people, assuming that neurotypical group affiliation functions along such patterns, although this does not necessarily show up in practice among autistic people.

As an example, she refers to one of her own studies in which autistic people mimed facial expressions in front of a camera, just like NTs, while watching a film. These recordings of the facial expressions were then shown to autistic people. Happé claims that the Double-Empathy Theory would imply that autistic people should be able to read the facial expressions of autistic people well, or better than those of NTs. The study, however, found that the autistic facial expressions were harder to read for both autistic and neurotypical viewers.

What lies within this twist is again the same bias that Happé repeatedly reproduces. The category of “ability to read facial expressions” is a neurotypical playing field, because it is far more survival-relevant in the neurotypical mode, where one has to succeed within the group. The fact that autistic people — who have spent their entire lives unconsciously training to survive in an NT world — have absolutely no reason to specialize in reading the facial expressions of other autistic people is not taken into consideration by her.

Her supposed refutation says nothing whatsoever about whether NDs understand each other significantly better in direct conversation — something many autistic people know all too well from countless support groups — nor does it even remotely touch the Double Empathy Problem. What she does instead is to once again call autistic perception into

³⁶ Youtube / The Hidden 20% / 30.7.2025 / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJ0BhHs6zdl&t=1677s>

question. She wants to keep autistic people inside the pathological paradigm and pretend as if NTs, including herself, were not co-responsible for the massive misunderstandings.

The problem of low acceptance of the other ontology is also reflected in other domains of suppression of autistic and neurodivergent voices. For instance, there are almost exclusively neurotypical publishing houses, with neurotypical editors, who want to erase everything that constitutes autistic writing because it appears unbearable to neurotypical people. Too direct, too long, too repetitive, full of breaks — and on top of that grammatically wrong. One must not forget that grammar itself is neurotypical.

Subject, verb, object are organized linearly and causally. Many neurodivergent authors report that they do not think in sentences but in dense units of meaning, in image-fields or synaesthetic clusters. Writing, like infodumping, is an act of externalizing resonance-fields and processes, not a product, and certainly not a norm determined from the outside. Classical grammar almost always forces the formation of a subject. One must be “someone” who “does” “something”. But what if experience is not subject-centered, but field-like, processual, relational? If content carries more weight than acting figures in a neurotypical psychology?

Because the “I” in many neurodivergent states is not an agent but a form of resonance, we are not, in essence, producing products but producing resonances — which in turn causes problems in NT markets. Many autistic writers (including non-speaking ones) use unusual sentence structures (ellipses, condensations), missing subject-verb-object chains, or poetic, non-instrumental language. This is not an error — but an expression of a different cognitive grammar. Sentence breaks, repetitions, circular sentences and the positioning within relational fields instead of units of action are common.

This can also be found in my novel *Stieren des Weltdesigners*. Even the title itself withdraws from neurotypical language logic. My feature film *Transferprotokoll* was also rejected by all broadcasters because I pursued an autistic dramaturgy that neurotypical people cannot understand, or consider wrong. What we see is that we often find no attachment points that would allow us to take a place within culture.

Since the early 1990s, many autobiographical (Autist Ethnography) as well as scientific books by diagnosed autistic authors have been published. By authors such as Birger Sellin, Temple Grandin, Donna Williams, Erin Manning, Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay, Naoki Higashida, Daniel Tammet, Ido Kedar, Nick Walker, Robert Chapman, Siena Castellon, or Chloé Hayden and countless others.

As different as “we” are, there are nevertheless commonalities that distinguish us from neurotypical authors. But these similarities do not connect us all consistently, which is why one cannot say that there is a clearly autistic language or a clearly autistic way of seeing the world. We are different people who respond differently to the experience of displacement and liminal glitch. Autism — that is not us; it is the relation in which we stand in the world. A threshold-state that, depending on the individual, leads to shifted responses.

Because of the lack of representation and status, our work from an NT perspective appears to be no real work, our writing seemingly no real writing, our research no real research. Again and again, the ground has been and is being pulled out from under our feet.

This could also be seen in the discourses about texts that emerged in the context of Facilitated Communication (FC), that is, through supported writing. A method in which autistic people who do not speak are supported by another person while typing on a keyboard or selecting letters on a board, with the accompanying person stabilizing their hand. In the 1990s, there were fierce debates about whether the autistic writer Birger Sellin had written his books himself. The concept of the independent, isolated author is a profoundly neurotypical view.

“Thus, his former educator Martina Engelmann has also denied her — as she believes — ‘severely intellectually disabled’ charge any writing or even literary talent and attributed the authorship of his texts to his mother Annemarie (SPIEGEL 5/1994). As if someone who cannot speak actually had nothing to say. Since reports have also emerged from the USA about possible manipulation in ‘facilitated communication’, the doubts have gained new fuel.”³⁷

Further in the article in Der Spiegel it says about Sellin’s mother, who was suspected of being the true author:

“But could Annemarie Sellin even compose that poetry which reminds one of the language of the recently deceased dramatist Werner Schwab? Can poetry even be a lie? ‘why do you make such a comfortable meal’, Birger addresses his mother according to the book, ‘where such an extent always tempts you to the devouring such insane chewing work no one can endure very free of consequences’.”

Not a few autistic people can hardly tolerate chewing noises (misophonia). Jürgen Neffe continues:

“Among those who can speak or learn to speak, what is particularly striking is the tendency towards sometimes incredible word-neologisms. The texts published under the name Birger Sellin are rich in such neologisms: thus “a so-called washing machine” becomes “all shining turning unheard-of dangerous light-water”. In a peculiar “without-addon language” appear words like “artaseratserfahrung”, “dasra” or “kimusaweä”: “that means do not adapt if your soul dies doing so.””

The urge toward original neologisms is not unusual among autistic people. I tend to do this as well. This has essentially to do with the fact that, for many of us, language is not primarily a representation of the world, but an expression of lived relation. Moreover, the incommensurability leads to the problem of the non-transferability of experiences between NT and ND.

³⁷ Jürgen Neffe Autismus »OHNE ZUSATZ SPRACHE«13.02.1994, aus DER SPIEGEL 7/1994

We do not compare ourselves so strongly with the external habit of a society, but much more intensely with the direct experience of inner-world dynamics of immediate relation, which almost demands neologisms. Because an inner order, an inner rhythm appears more foregrounded than grammar or social norm.

“The refrain is clear: Autistics don’t tell us what we want to hear, nor do they tell it to us in a manner in which we wish to hear it”³⁸

If I go in detail here into the problems of the language and visibility of autistic people, then this is essentially the direct consequence of the pathologization and the diagnostics that I described at the beginning. They are two ends of the same fatal development, which in the end always prevents neurodivergent people from being allowed to have effect in the world, even though we do it constantly. But this doing is often completely removed from exploitability and therefore from recognition.

Work, economy, society: without the recognition of the different ontological foundation, the exclusion remains, which is then shifted in its evaluation.

When I look back at my work as an author and artist over the last 30 years, then the experience of rejection that I encounter can be grasped along clear mechanisms of neurotypicality: so what do neurotypical people think when they look at my work? As I said: 27 years largely unpaid, 11 books, a feature film, endless research and yet living on welfare.

It is worthwhile to look more closely at the protocol of an NT brain here.

First there is a flooding, a threat to the frame of conversation, because NTs orient themselves strongly along social conventions about length, relevance and turn-taking. For that my experience is far too intense, dramatic, painful and unusual.

My work fundamentally always appears as an infodump, therefore from the NT perspective like a “rule break”, meaning too much, too fast, too deep. This triggers loss of control in many, in the sense of: “I can no longer follow this → therefore it is chaotic / unusable.”

In the next step, danger of status and loss of face threatens. NTs process knowledge socially. That means, whoever talks marks status.

My open explanation of the world is thereby falsely interpreted as lecturing, which produces reactions like overcomplicated, not practice-relevant. Through this comes the mismatch of intention. Besides that, I have no status whatsoever. A massive rupture.

Autistic infodumping means, I share in order to generate resonance, in order to take you into my world. It is often read as: “He talks without regard for my interest → he wants to dominate.” Added to this comes another rupture regarding the usefulness of my statements.

³⁸ Melanie Yergeau / Authoring autism / Duke University Press / P 20

Contents in my work are not “shortened exploitable”, but in principle process-based. That appears in NT categories as “irrelevant”, “digressive”, “too theoretical.”

Finally there is the emotional insecurity caused by intensity. Infodumps often have an energetic density, almost acceleration. NTs perceive this as inappropriateness, because they view emotionality in factual conversations as useless. They take only the private personally, we autistic people often everything. As a result they shift me into the category “intrusive / quirky / not entirely stable.”

NT communication is often a test of belonging. Whoever shares the codes, belongs. Infodumping then appears like anti-code, in which there is too little mirroring, too much autonomous setting. Therefore my knowledge, my practice appears as “outside the game”, through which what I write or say is marginalized.

Also negative is the neurotypical cognitive economy, in which NTs search for “concise cores” (soundbites, summary). Autistic process by contrast is cyclical, non-finalizable, open. Neurotypicality interprets this as: “Too complex → incomprehensible → not relevant → discard.”

Finally the defense mechanisms follow, that is the pathologization. In order not to have to feel their own insecurity, NTs label: “That is confused, lofty, not to be taken seriously.” The pattern in the NT head is therefore: overload → fear of loss of face → misinterpretation of intention → judgment of uselessness → devaluation/pathologization.

My 30 years of work were therefore almost never recognized as a process space of co-creation, as qualitative research, as open art, but as “deviant communication style” that must be “neutralized”. Thus I live in an impossible situation. In the incom-mensurability there is no possibility that I will be understood. Even the attempt at communication is usually read as the refusal of it. Everywhere they call me a refuser. A refuser of work. A refuser of function. A refuser of rules and norms. But all these layers push me into liminality and therefore I will never become something general and recognized. Every word from me is questionable. The state has officially declared me irresponsible. Therefore I do not exist for them. And who does not exist, towards that person one does not have to show consideration.

Do you understand the problem? The liminal glitch remains permanent in this way. I have no chance whatsoever to ever arrive in the world, let alone build something in it. I remain dependent on the goodwill of others who throw me alms, if they even truly recognize my suffering or my situation.

At the same age at which Sellin wrote his book *Ich will kein in mich mehr sein*, we are the same birth year), I formulated: “Autumn is and Memphis blows over green lawn. With scent of copper roof. Steps approach, knocking over asphalt. Looking up. Searching. But no. No new acquaintance.” Or “Whale-fish under the brain. Swims into itself, mother calls from kitchen. Does not hear her.”

The Austrian writer Milo Dor³⁹, who survived the torture of the SS, once wrote about my unbearable writing:

“I honestly do not know what I can say about your way of writing, because I am not in a position to read the text all the way through (...)”⁴⁰

Neurotypicals can scarcely imagine what it is like to exist in a world that does not mirror you, that gives you no resonance, but only evasive manoeuvres or double binds.

Together with the editor Roland Spahr from S. Fischer Verlag, I once sat on the sofa of the wonderful feminist and author Silvia Bovenschen.⁴¹ Her life partner, the painter Sarah Schumann⁴², brought us drinks. On that day they wanted to decide whether the S. Fischer Verlag would publish my novel *Stieren des Weltdesigners* or not. For many years I tried, for fun, to bribe Mr. Spahr in that direction with cakes and whisky bottles wrapped in texts. Without success. This autistic humour was not understood.

I was very nervous that day, talked a lot, and didn't know how to situate myself. Silvia Bovenschen asked me what I would say if the press were to interview me about my work. A question that, for an autistic person, is impossible to answer because of the exploding complexity.

³⁹ Milo Dor (1923–2005) was an Austrian writer of Serbian-Montenegrin origin and one of the most important intellectual voices in the German-speaking world after 1945. He twice survived Gestapo torture, forced labour, and concentration camps, fled to Vienna in 1947, and developed there a literary body of work that combined political clarity, autobiographical experience, antifascist conviction, and social critique. He became best known for his Belgrade Trilogy and numerous short stories, essays, and radio plays in which violence, identity, migration, and resistance against authoritarian systems are central themes. Dor was a formative figure of the Viennese literary scene, uncomfortable, sharp, humanistic — an author who never understood literature as decoration but as an intervention into reality.

⁴⁰ From a letter by Milo Dor to me, written on 5 July 1996 in Vienna.

⁴¹ Silvia Bovenschen (1946–2017) was an influential German cultural theorist, writer, and feminist intellectual. As a co-founder of the New Women's Movement in the 1970s, she significantly shaped early feminist scholarship in the German-speaking world, before later deliberately withdrawing from academic institutional structures. Her work connects theory, literature, and autobiographical experience without separating thinking and living – for example in *Ästhetik des Weiblichen* or her autofictional novel *Älter werden*. Bovenschen worked uncompromisingly against academic smoothing: she was interested in the unsayable, the non-represented, the made-invisible, and in doing so brought a critical sensitivity into cultural studies that remains relevant to this day.

⁴² Sarah Schumann (1933–2019) was a significant German painter, draftswoman, and collage artist, and one of the central figures of the feminist art movement of the Federal Republic. She became known for her visually powerful, politically charged pictorial language, which translated female bodies, intimacy, resistance, and historical memory into its own visual grammar. Her works refused the male-dominated artistic norms of the postwar period and opened a space in which female experience, desire, vulnerability, and strength became visible – without ingratiating themselves to the male gaze.

Schumann was the long-standing partner of Silvia Bovenschen, and their relationship was not a footnote but an artistic ecosystem: Bovenschen's theory and Schumann's images conducted a quiet, highly intelligent conversation with one another. Many of her works carry the traces of this shared thinking – art as relationship, resistance as intimacy. She remains one of the most important, and often underestimated, visual artists of feminist 20th-century art.

In that moment, my typically autistic refusal of expectation struck brutally, and I became obstructive. At that time, I did not know that I was autistic.

The central question that day was whether, in my “tornness” between research and art, between the chairs of theory and storytelling, I would make a usable decision. Whether I would stop combining or mixing these different worlds. What no one understood at the time was that the question was whether I could write in a more neurotypical way. Because both Bovenschen and the editor could not free themselves from the discomfort in my texts, which was rooted in my then-unknown autism. It appeared as the brutality of the marketability of artistic works that cornered me. Silvia Bovenschen said to me energetically, with a dramatic gesture: “You know who must win!” In that moment it was supposed to be decided whether the publishing house would present me as a novelist to a large public or drop me again. The condition, unspoken, was to push back the autistic part of me.

That of all people Silvia Bovenschen, on that day, was the one to convey to me the patriarchal logic of the market is an ironic moment that does not diminish her brilliant work. A little, though, I was shocked, because I found no place in this world.

But the question of whether and how autistic people may write is not something for editors to decide; it is a political question. Because it is not about grammar and neurotypical convenience, but about the suppression and erasure of the world-relation of millions of neurodivergent people. They take from us our culture, our dialect, our language, our form, and pathologize it, or treat it as a curiosity. If we irritate too much, we are — as I had to experience — eventually criminalized.

Jürgen Neffe explained further in the Spiegel article:

“Birger ‘writes’ not only when the mother assists. Often the father Dankward, a judge at the Berlin Higher Regional Court, supports him. Birger has gained so much trust with more than ten additional people that he accepts them as supporters. With some he writes better, with others worse. Many more have been able to observe his ‘arts’. Most report initial doubts: the contradiction between body and soul simply seems too great to attribute the ability to him right away. But all who work with him for a longer time are convinced of Birger’s authorship. Therefore, says a former individual case helper, ‘it is a catastrophe to deny this intelligent human being his only method of communication.’ With him Birger also ‘talks’ about ‘problems that one would not entrust to a mother.’ Waltraud Balla from the Youth Psychiatric Service in the Berlin district of Zehlendorf was ‘initially skeptical.’ Today she speaks of the ‘most impressive case’ she has ever seen. Responsible for approving therapeutic goods, she was also confronted with Birger’s wish for a communicator. She still remembers well how he ‘fell around her neck’ when she granted him the small handheld device.”

Autism means that there is a legitimacy to radical inner observation, a tried transmission of what is inwardly and as true experienced into the reality of society on the outside. Autism means that the individual’s reality is not to be relativized, but screams, scratches, bites its

way through the neurotypical wall of ignorance, in which the external often appears as the only relevant thing.

Many autistic authors do not write to communicate, but to locate themselves. The reader is not an addressee but a witness. This is also the case in this book.

Yes, I come from another reality. Let me clarify one last time what this means in practice and why from here on everything must change.

Mythological Existence – The Open and the Determined

Almost every day I walk the 2 km from Freywalde to Rinow and back, south of Berlin. The route forms a curve in two places, each turning in the opposite direction. It therefore draws an S. When I superimpose the outward and return path, a kind of double helix appears, like a DNA. During my walks I mostly think about the structure of the universe, of the human being, of society or of nature. My path and my content are therefore, in this association, a shared form. They resonate and are enactively connected. While I think, I perform a spiral movement in the landscape. This accidental condensation has happened to me, or rather it keeps happening to me. This order becomes more conscious to me at times, and then disappears again into the depth of the preoccupation, or into the everydayness of banal activities. It is like a part of me, living in this resonance, in this overlap of patterns. It is as compelling as the fact that number plates with repeating digits in rows of three keep forcing themselves into my awareness (frequency illusion), or that I cannot do work that is not part of my special interest without immediately crashing into burnout.

Autistic perception, compared to the neurotypical, is not relative but irreversible, because it not only perceives, but leads to consequences. Once seen, once recognised or once perceived, it cannot be “un-seen” again. This is not something that applies only to Autistics. When a neurotypical person recognises the neurodivergent, he or she is seized by it, becomes in a way neurodivergent. It is a little like a consciousness-altering drug. The world is structured differently afterwards – not only emotionally or morally, but ontologically. Comparable to a musician who has once learned absolute pitch – and from then on recognises every detuning, or to an activist who has once understood structural violence – and can never again behave “unpolitically”.

We therefore arrive again at that ontological fissure which makes it impossible for me to exist in neurotypical structures, and therefore also to function. For the political dimension gains here an urgency and relevance that cannot be denied.

So when I walk every day from Freywalde to Rinow and back and draw a spiral into the landscape, that is knowledge, an embodiment, a complexity of the world, an emergence that I cannot reduce or take back. In my book *Speeds Arbeit* I describe my decade-long struggle

with the neurotypical structures of the German state. With the impossibility of my adaptation and at the same time the unwillingness of the authorities to overcome their simplification mania and their obsession with punishing the poor and the neurodivergent.

In England there are now extensive investigations showing how the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), the British assessment procedure in the social security system, drove neurodivergent people into suicide and thus murdered them.⁴³ Because a neurotypical yardstick was applied to Autistics and ADHDers in order to label them as functional and to cut their benefits.

Many Autistics like me live in hyperlocality, that is, in an ontological immediacy with everything that becomes conscious to us or encounters us. It is part of our embodiment. We live in overlapping layers of meaning, not in isolated units of meaning that can be shifted at will.

This fundamentally shapes the affordances of our actions, makes us obstructive from a neurotypical point of view, but protects us from a neurodivergent point of view from superficiality, from the decoupling from our relation to reality. To take that away from us is like forcing us into a cruel trip, into a surreal world in which not the details of truths matter, but only status decides what happens and what is believed. An attitude that seeks to annihilate the neurodivergent.

Whoever is made from the immediately embodied, and therefore whole world, is always also an expression of the order of the world. In this sense I am a mythological existence. My actions are mythological and not symbolic or representative. What do I mean by that? Mythological figures like Cassandra, Amor, Jesus or angels and demons are, in essence, inner ideas or principles, certain images that embody themselves in human form. They are not human beings who orient themselves toward external norms, independent of their existence. There lies a deep difference.

Mythological beings are determined in their meaning and purpose, and whatever they do on earth, every step is an expression of their inner destiny. For they are like orders of the cosmos or archetypes. In human embodiment they experience a certain degree of liberation, of ambiguity, of openness of possibilities, but they do not act independently of their inner reality.

The neurotypically shaped human, on the other hand, lives — from an autistic point of view — almost arbitrarily, along often alienated role functions, so-called jobs, which serve to achieve the highest possible status through an externally assigned place. People in neurotypicality have no inner mission with which they are born. They are, as I said, not embodied, but distanced.

⁴³ The Guardian / Fit-for-work tests may have taken serious toll on mental health – study / 17. Nov. 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/nov/16/fit-for-work-tests-serious-toll-mental-health-work-capability>

The inoperability of many Autistics results from the fact that such mythological figures are not purchasable, cannot be externalised, but their actions are 1:1 who they are. They are embodied expression, but not externalised, heteronomous function. You cannot repurpose them. Superman does not replace an excavator. Angels cannot be harnessed in the music industry. Jesus does not simply go into management.

What I am saying is that mythological existences do not have a Self, like most neurotypical humans, which is split off from the environment and leads a more or less free life in relative adaptation to rules and social norms. Instead, they embody a particular order within a holistic world-image full of interacting patterns.

If you are not autistic and want to understand how differently Autistics like me exist in the world, then the concept of mythological existence is an important building block of a deeper understanding. I also call this autistic vocation.

Our inoperability is what keeps reality open. Because in orienting our actions we are referencing another reality. The attempt to understand autism from within neurotypicality — this should now have become clear — always only leads to Autistics being displaced and marginalised in their reality.

That we do not fit and that you neurotypicals will never understand us is correct and important. That we are not integratable means that everything must change because of us. And indeed always again in new ways. We have fulfilled this task for thousands of years. It is the effect of the minor, the power of deviation, which protects and nourishes the complexity of existence.

If you want to understand yourselves, this is only possible in a diverse and open society. It is in your interest that we remain as we are.