



VOL 8

**MASKING, EIGENZEIT
& ONTOLOGICAL INOPERABILITY**

TIMOTHY SPEED

OPERATORIC RESEARCH CORPUS - STUDIES IN WORLD-FORMATION

**Operatoric Research Corpus
Studies in World-Formation**

Section IV

Neurodivergent Epistemology

Volume 8

**Masking, Eigenzeit & Ontological
Inoperability**

Timothy Speed

2026

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.18997947](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18997947)

Impressum / Publication Information

Author: Timothy Speed
Independent Researcher
Straße zur Eiche 10
04916 Schönewalde
Germany

Email: info@timothy-speed.com
Website: <https://timothy-speed.org>

License:
© 2026 — CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

GND: [122901991](#)

VIAF: [37811735](#)

ISNI: [000000001636722X](#)

Wikidata: [Q138504206](#)

[Scholar ID: hBLHdoAAAAJ](#)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0143-5949>

Zenodo Community: [Operatoric Research Corpus Archive](#)

First published: 2026

This publication is deposited in the German National Library (Deutsche Nationalbibliothek) as
a network publication.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18997947>

Masking, Eigenzeit & Ontological Inoperability

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18997947>

Abstract

The present volume brings together three contributions that address a fundamental question of neurodivergent existence: under which ontological conditions do the conflicts arise between neurodivergent forms of life and the institutional, diagnostic, and temporal structures of modern societies?

The point of departure is the observation that central phenomena in autism and neurodivergence research—such as masking, autistic burnout, or the frequent biographical breakdowns occurring under administrative and labour-market conditions—are predominantly interpreted as problems of individual adaptation. The contributions collected in this volume systematically challenge this perspective. Instead, they develop an ontological analysis in which the conflicts between neurodivergent and neurotypical forms of existence are understood as expressions of different structures of world-relation and world-binding.

The first contribution develops a theory of masking that understands it not primarily as a psychological strategy of adaptation, but as an ontological boundary process. Masking emerges where neurodivergent modes of world-relation—characterised by open, relational, and not fully objectified experiential fields—must enter social orders organised through simplification, representation, and stable role structures. In this context, masking appears both as a creative form of world mediation and as a potentially exhausting performance when such mediation becomes the permanent condition of social existence.

The second contribution analyses the diagnostic consequences of this constellation. It shows that psychiatric and clinical models frequently interpret masking as a symptom of over-adaptation or exhaustion and thereby produce a structural misreading. Autistic competence, stability, or situational adaptability are often diagnostically interpreted as deception or compensation, whereas autism becomes recognisable as “authentic” only in moments of overload, breakdown, or burnout. In this way, an iatrogenic dynamic emerges in which diagnostic recognition is effectively bound to visible failure.

The third contribution extends this analysis through a temporal and institutional perspective. With the concept of *Eigenzeit*, it shows that many conflicts in neurodivergent biographies arise not primarily from individual deficits, but from a structural incompatibility between forms of intensive world-binding and the time-administrative regimes of modern institutions. Procedures, deadlines, and organisational routines replace real world-binding with simulations of responsibility, thereby creating conditions under which highly bound forms of existence struggle to sustain stable life trajectories.

Taken together, the contributions develop a perspective in which neurodivergent existence does not appear as a deviation from a normative model of human subjectivity, but as an epistemic and ontological boundary case of modern societies. The conflicts analysed in this volume reveal that many institutional, diagnostic, and temporal orders rely on simplifications that systematically overstrain or render invisible more complex modes of world-relation. Neurodivergence thus emerges not only as an object of clinical description, but as an analytical entry point into fundamental questions concerning reality, responsibility, and the conditions of viable social orders.

Keywords: autism, neurodivergence, autistic masking, camouflaging, autistic burnout, neurodiversity, autism theory, ontology of neurodivergence, world-relation, world-binding, ontological asymmetry, masking ontology, pre-ontological liminality, ontological field-fabrication, complexity gradient, double empathy problem, diagnostic misrecognition, psychiatry and autism, philosophy of psychiatry, autism diagnostics, iatrogenic harm, autistic competence, neurodivergent epistemology, Eigenzeit, world-binding and time, administrative time regimes, institutional time, neurodivergent biographies, autism and institutions, structural violence, neurodivergence and social systems, ontology of social order, neurodivergence and modern institutions

Contents

Masking, Eigenzeit & Ontological Inoperability.....	3
Introduction	5
Masking Between Existence and Understanding Pre-Ontological Liminality and Ontological Field-Fabrication in the Tension Between Neurodivergent and Neurotypical World Architectures	7
Masking Is Not an Exhaustion Symptom How Psychiatric Diagnostics Reduce Autistic Existence to Failure	19
Eigenzeit and Neurodivergence: Why Autistic and ADHD Biographies Collapse Under Administrative Time.....	30
About the Author	42
References.....	42

Introduction

This volume forms part of a broader research project that investigates the ontological conditions under which reality, responsibility, and social order become stabilised. Previous volumes in this series have examined these questions in relation to physics, epistemology, and institutional structures. The present volume turns to neurodivergence as a particularly revealing domain in which conflicts between different modes of world-relation, world-binding, and social organisation become visible.

In recent years, neurodivergence—particularly in relation to autism and ADHD—has become a central topic across several research fields, including autism studies, clinical psychiatry, neurodiversity research, and the social sciences of disability. Concepts such as *masking*, *camouflaging*, and *autistic burnout* have increasingly been used to describe the tensions experienced by neurodivergent persons within neurotypical social environments. While this growing body of work has produced important empirical insights, the phenomena it describes are still largely interpreted within frameworks that treat neurodivergence primarily as a problem of individual adaptation, psychological burden, or social misalignment. As a result, the structural conditions under which these tensions arise often remain theoretically underdetermined. The present volume proposes a different point of departure: it approaches neurodivergent–neurotypical conflicts not primarily as interactional or psychological problems, but as expressions of deeper differences in the ontological organisation of world-relation, meaning, and responsibility.

This perspective has produced important empirical insights, yet it remains limited in a decisive respect. It assumes that neurodivergent and neurotypical forms of life fundamentally operate within the same ontological structure and that conflicts between them arise primarily from misunderstandings, social norms, or individual deficits. The present volume takes up this point and pursues a different approach. The contributions assembled here proceed from the assumption that many of the observable conflicts cannot be explained solely in social or psychological terms, but are connected to deeper differences in the ways world-relation, meaning, and responsibility are structured.

From this perspective, phenomena such as masking, diagnostic misinterpretations, or the frequent biographical destabilisation of neurodivergent persons no longer appear merely as problems of individual adaptation. Rather, they can be understood as symptoms of structural tensions between different modes of world-relation. Neurodivergent existence is not regarded here as a deviation from a normative model of human subjectivity, but as the expression of other modes of perception, binding, and world-organisation.

The volume develops this perspective in three interconnected steps.

The first contribution focuses on the phenomenon of masking and develops an ontological theory of this process. Masking is not primarily interpreted as a psychological strategy of adaptation, but as a boundary phenomenon between different world architectures. While many social and institutional orders are structured through stabilisation, simplification, and representation, neurodivergent forms of world-relation often operate within more open and

relational experiential fields. Masking emerges where these different structural forms encounter one another and a form of social legibility must be produced.

The second contribution examines the diagnostic consequences of this constellation. It shows that psychiatric and clinical models frequently interpret masking in ways that systematically misrecognise neurodivergent competence. Stability, adaptability, or situational control are not rarely interpreted diagnostically as deception or overcompensation. Autism, by contrast, is often recognised clearly only in moments of visible overload or breakdown. This dynamic leads to a situation in which diagnostic recognition becomes effectively tied to forms of failure.

The third contribution expands this analysis through a temporal and institutional perspective. Using the concept of *Eigenzeit*, it demonstrates that many conflicts in neurodivergent biographies arise from a structural incompatibility between different forms of world-binding. Modern institutions—such as administrative systems, labour markets, or educational structures—operate within temporally and organisationally standardised regimes that strongly proceduralise responsibility, decision-making, and action. For forms of existence characterised by higher densities of world-binding, this creates conditions under which stable life trajectories become increasingly difficult to sustain.

Taken together, the contributions of this volume open a perspective in which neurodivergence appears not only as an object of medical or social-scientific research, but as an analytical entry point into fundamental questions concerning the structure of modern societies. The conflicts that become visible in neurodivergent biographies point toward deeper tensions within institutional, diagnostic, and temporal orders.

The volume does not seek to present a final theory of neurodivergence. Rather, its aim is to provide a conceptual framework within which the phenomena under discussion can be reinterpreted. Neurodivergent existence appears in this context less as a special case of human development than as a site where fundamental presuppositions of modern social organisation become visible.

Seen from this perspective, neurodivergence does not merely designate a variation within a shared human condition. Rather, it reveals structural limits within the dominant ways in which modern societies organise reality, responsibility, and time. The conflicts that become visible in neurodivergent biographies therefore cannot be reduced to questions of individual adjustment or clinical diagnosis. They point toward a deeper problem: the incompatibility between forms of existence that bind world differently and institutional orders that presuppose simplification, proceduralisation, and representational stability. In this sense, neurodivergence appears not only as an object of study but as an analytical vantage point from which the ontological presuppositions of contemporary social organisation can be critically examined.

Masking Between Existence and Understanding Pre-Ontological Liminality and Ontological Field-Fabrication in the Tension Between Neurodivergent and Neurotypical World Architectures

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18140651>

Abstract

This paper develops an ontological theory of masking that understands masking neither as an individual adaptation strategy nor as a primarily psychological or communicative phenomenon, but as a structural effect of ontological asymmetry between neurodivergent and neurotypical existence. The point of departure is the thesis that neurodivergent existence often operates in a pre-ontological, liminal mode oriented toward openness, embodiment, and relational field complexity, whereas neurotypical world architectures are stabilized through ontological fabrication, representation, and simplification. Masking emerges where a more complex, non-closed, open field of existence is compelled to socially land within a simplified, objectified reality.

The paper shows that the so-called “non-understanding” between neurotypical and neurodivergent subjects is not symmetrical, but results from a structural gradient of complexity: a simplified field cannot apprehend a more complex one without distorting it. Against this background, masking is determined as an ambivalent process—at once a creative act of world-making that enables social legibility, and an ontological form of forced labor when such legibility becomes a permanent condition of existence. The well-documented physical and psychological consequences of masking thus appear not as individual pathologies, but as indicators of structural overload that arises when pre-ontological liminality is compelled to operate durably within ontologically consolidated orders.

The paper radicalizes existing approaches such as the Double Empathy Problem by showing that the issue is not primarily one of translation deficits or perspectival differences, but of the impossibility of simultaneously realizing existence and understanding. In this sense, masking marks a boundary zone in which it becomes visible that dominant world orders are not neutral, but are constructed too simply to sustain complex forms of existence. The aim of the paper is to position masking as a key phenomenon of a plural ontology and to expose the structural conditions under which neurodivergent existence can either become creatively effective or be ontologically exhausted.

Method Note

This contribution is based on a long-term, embodied research practice within the framework of an operator-based ontological theory development that has been formally elaborated in prior publications. The theses developed here do not arise from isolated observations or empirical investigations in the narrow sense, but from structural derivation within this research corpus. The paper understands itself as a conceptual–theoretical clarification. Its claim to validity lies in ontological consistency, structural plausibility, and recursive confirmation across different fields of application, rather than in statistical generalizability.

1. Introduction: Masking Beyond Adaptation and Translation

In contemporary autism research, masking is predominantly described as an individual adaptive performance: as a conscious or unconscious strategy to meet neurotypical expectations, avoid social sanctions, or establish communicative legibility. This perspective—whether clinical, social-psychological, or critically neurodiversity-oriented—nevertheless remains confined within a shared ontological framework. It implicitly assumes that neurodivergent and neurotypical subjects move within the same reality, and that misunderstanding primarily results from insufficient translation, perspectival difference, or social normativity.

The present contribution proceeds from a different starting point. It assumes that neurodivergent and neurotypical existence do not merely represent different perceptual styles or communicative logics, but rest on asymmetrical ontological foundations. Neurodivergent existence—particularly autistic existence—often operates in a pre-ontological, liminal mode that is not oriented toward stable object formation, representation, or final fixation of meaning, but toward embodiment, resonance, and relational field complexity. Neurotypical world architectures, by contrast, are characterized by ontological fabrication: the stabilization of reality through objects, roles, categories, and normative references.

Masking emerges in the tension space of this asymmetry. It is not a translation between two equivalent perspectives, but the attempted landing of a more complex, open field of existence within a simplified, ontologically consolidated order. In this sense, masking is neither primarily communicative nor psychological, but an ontological boundary process. It makes visible that neurotypical “understanding” is structurally bound to simplification and can apprehend complex forms of existence only at the cost of distortion.

Against this background, the so-called “non-understanding” between neurotypical and neurodivergent subjects is not symmetrical. While a more complex field can incorporate a simpler one, the inverse relation is structurally limited. This asymmetry explains why neurotypical actors often experience neurodivergent existence as irrational, deficient, or incomprehensible—and why, conversely, the attempt to be understood can entail a loss of existential coherence for neurodivergent subjects. The author’s proposition, developed in this context, that one cannot exist and be understood at the same time is therefore not a rhetorical exaggeration, but an ontological consequence.

The contribution thus develops masking as an ambivalent process: as a creative act of world-making in the mode of liminal intervention, as well as an ontological form of forced labor when such intervention becomes a permanent condition of social existence. The aim is to release masking from individualizing and psychologizing interpretive frameworks and to conceptualize it as a key phenomenon through which the limits of contemporary models of reality and knowledge become exemplary.

The theses developed here do not rest on isolated observations, but on a long-term, embodied research practice as well as a coherent operator-based theoretical framework that has been formally elaborated in several prior publications. Accordingly, the present contribution does not claim empirical verification in the narrow sense, but rather structural plausibility and ontological consistency within this research corpus.

2. State of Research and Theoretical Delimitation

2.1 Masking and Camouflaging in Autism Research

In contemporary autism research, masking is most often discussed under the terms *masking* or *camouflaging*. These refer to behaviors through which autistic individuals imitate, compensate for, or anticipate neurotypical social expectations in order to avoid social sanctions or to establish a sense of belonging. This body of research has made important contributions, particularly with regard to the psychological costs of masking, such as exhaustion, burnout, or depressive symptomatology.

At the same time, this perspective remains limited in several respects. First, masking is predominantly conceptualized as an individual performance—as a skill, strategy, or coping mechanism. Second, it operates implicitly within a shared model of reality in which neurotypical norms function as the reference point, and neurodivergent deviation appears in need of explanation. Third, masking is described primarily as a reaction to social contexts, rather than as an effect of a deeper ontological asymmetry.

As a result, much of the masking literature reproduces precisely the simplification that makes masking necessary in the first place: it treats masking as behavior *within* a world, rather than as a symptom of the encounter between fundamentally different world architectures.

2.2 The Double Empathy Problem – Progress and Its Limits

The so-called Double Empathy Problem represents a decisive advance over deficit-oriented models of social interaction. It demonstrates that misunderstandings between autistic and non-autistic people are not one-sided, but arise from a mutual misalignment of perceptual, meaning-making, and communicative logics. In doing so, responsibility is shifted away from individual deficits toward relational conditions.

The present contribution builds on this insight, but goes beyond it. The Double Empathy Problem remains largely situated at the level of interaction, communication, and perspective.

Despite its critical thrust, it continues to imply a fundamental symmetry between the positions involved: two different, yet equivalent modes of reading the world.

This symmetry, however, becomes theoretically untenable once ontological premises are taken into account. The perspective developed here argues that misunderstanding is not merely relational, but structurally asymmetrical—not because one side is “right,” but because neurotypical world architectures depend on simplification, stabilization, and representation, whereas neurodivergent forms of existence often operate within more complex, open, and not fully objectifiable fields.

2.3 Incommensurability, Complexity, and Ontological Asymmetry

The concept of incommensurability is frequently used in the social and cultural sciences to describe different frameworks of thought or meaning that cannot be seamlessly translated into one another. In most cases, however, this incommensurability remains epistemically framed—as a problem of translation, language, or perspective.

The present contribution understands incommensurability ontologically. What is decisive is not merely that different modes exist, but that they operate on differently complex levels of reality. Neurodivergent existence is often organized in a pre-ontological or liminal manner: it is not primarily oriented toward stable objects, roles, or meanings, but toward embodied resonance, situational dynamics, and relational openness. Neurotypical existence, by contrast, is ontologically fabricated: reality is rendered manageable through reduction, fixation, and symbolic stabilization.

Masking marks the point at which these levels encounter one another. It is the attempt to transfer liminal complexity into a simplified order without that order itself expanding its capacity for complexity. Distortion thus arises necessarily—not because someone fails, but because a simpler field cannot fully sustain a more complex one.

Here, complexity does not refer to heightened cognitive performance or information processing, but to a lesser reduction of the world into ontologically stabilized units. The asymmetry described therefore does not imply epistemic or moral superiority, but designates a structural limitation of reduction-based architectures.

2.4 Consequence: Masking as an Ontological Boundary Process

From this perspective, masking is neither mere adaptation nor simple deception. It is an ontological boundary process in which it becomes visible that dominant models of reality are not neutral, but privilege certain forms of existence while allowing others only in distorted form. Masking is thus simultaneously productive and destructive: productive insofar as it enables temporary legibility and world-making, and destructive insofar as it binds existence durably to simplification.

This double structure fundamentally distinguishes the approach developed here from existing theories of masking. Masking is no longer treated as an individual problem, but as an indicator

that the prevailing ontological conditions of social order are insufficient to accommodate neurodivergent complexity.

3. Pre-Ontological Liminality and Ontological Field-Fabrication

3.1 Pre-Ontological Existence as a Mode of Increased Field Complexity

In the present context, the concept of pre-ontological liminality does not designate a pre-cultural or immature state, but a durable mode of existence in which the world does not primarily appear as a stable set of objects, roles, or meanings, but as an open, relational, and situationally effective field. In this mode, reality is not finished, but in the process of becoming; it is not closed, but tense, ambiguous, and bodily present.

Neurodivergent—particularly autistic—existence often operates within such a pre-ontological field. Here, perception, meaning, and action are not separated, but entangled. The world does not appear as something that must be interpreted, but as something that is directly operative: through resonance, dissonance, overload, rhythmic displacement, or structural attunement. This form of world-relation is more complex, not in the sense of more complicated cognition, but in the sense of higher structural resolution.

Pre-ontological liminality therefore does not imply a lack of structure, but a lower degree of structural reduction. Complexity is not filtered out prematurely, but held. It is precisely in this that both the epistemic potential and the existential risk of this mode lie.

3.2 Ontological Field-Fabrication as the Dominant Form of Reality

Opposed to this are neurotypical world architectures grounded in ontological fabrication. Ontological field-fabrication designates the process through which reality is rendered manageable by being translated into stable units: objects, categories, social roles, institutional functions, and normative expectations. This fabrication is not arbitrary, but functional. It reduces complexity, enables coordination, accelerates communication, and stabilizes social order.

Ontological fabrication, however, is always also simplification. It operates through abstraction, generalization, and representation. That which cannot be translated into these forms appears as disturbance, noise, or deviation. In this sense, ontological fabrication is not a neutral background, but an active field structure that determines what counts as real, meaningful, or intelligible.

It is important to emphasize that this form of reality stabilization is not false. It is, however, not universal. It represents a specific solution to coordination problems that simultaneously and structurally disadvantages other forms of existence.

3.3 The Gradient of Complexity: Why Understanding Is Asymmetrical

The central point of this contribution lies in the gradient of complexity between pre-ontological liminality and ontological field-fabrication. This gradient is not moral, but structural. A more complex field can incorporate a simpler one without relinquishing its own complexity. The inverse is not possible: a simplified field can apprehend a more complex one only by reducing it.

From this follows an asymmetrical structure of understanding. Neurodivergent subjects can, as a rule, recognize, analyze, and anticipate neurotypical order because that order is grounded in reduction. Neurotypical subjects, by contrast, can “understand” pre-ontological, liminal forms of existence only when these simplify themselves. Understanding is here bound to reduction.

This asymmetry explains why the classical narrative of mutual misunderstanding falls short. The problem is not that two perspectives speak past one another, but that a dominant field recognizes only what submits to its logic of simplification.

3.4 Masking as the Landing Attempt of a More Complex Field

Against this background, masking can be precisely defined as the landing attempt of pre-ontological liminality within an ontologically fabricated world. Masking is the process through which a more complex field of existence attempts to become legible within a simplified order without being able to transform that order itself.

This landing attempt is not per se deficient. Initially, it is a creative act: a form of world-making in which autistic existence modulates meanings, rhythms, and resonances in such a way that they can appear within the dominant field. Masking thus functions as an interface mode, a transitional state between field logics.

At the same time, this mode is structurally unstable. The longer pre-ontological existence is compelled to remain within ontologically fabricated structures, the more the process shifts from creative intervention to ontological forced labor. The price of this landing is not misunderstanding, but loss of existence: exhaustion, alienation, collapse.

3.5 To Exist or to Be Understood: A Structural Impossibility

From the gradient of complexity described above follows a consequence that is often misunderstood: within ontologically fabricated fields, pre-ontological existence cannot simultaneously exist and be understood. To be understood here means to be translated into the categories of the dominant field. To exist, however, means to remain within one’s own field logic.

This impossibility does not apply abstractly or universally, but under the conditions of ontological field-fabrication, in which understanding is bound to simplification and representation.

Masking is the attempt to temporarily bridge this impossibility. It is neither deception nor adaptation in a trivial sense, but a boundary phenomenon through which it becomes visible

that the problem does not lie in the subject, but in the limitations of the dominant world architecture.

4. Masking as an Autistic Act of World-Making

4.1 Masking as Active Field Intervention

When masking is described exclusively as a reaction to dominance or as a form of forced adaptation, it remains invisible that in many situations it is initially an active, formative process. Masking is not merely the concealment of one's own existence, but often a deliberate modulation of appearance—an intervention into the shared field through which autistic subjects generate efficacy where immediate presence would otherwise be excluded.

In this sense, masking is not a simple adjustment to a foreign order, but a temporary interface mode that allows pre-ontological liminality to be partially stabilized without being fully relinquished. Autistic world-relation is not suspended, but translated, folded, or rhythmically displaced so that it can appear, at least fragmentarily, within the dominant field.

This form of world-making is not primarily strategic or intentional, but is often bodily-rhythmic, situational, and pre-reflective in its organization.

Masking here functions as a tool of field navigation rather than as a sign of self-loss.

4.2 Masking as a Form of Relational Intelligence

In its productive form, masking presupposes a high degree of relational intelligence. It requires the capacity

- to recognize dominant field logics,
- to anticipate their mechanisms of simplification, and
- to modulate one's own existence such that legibility emerges without fully dissolving into representation.

This performance is generally not recognized as a competence, precisely because it consists in not standing out. It is invisible labor, yet highly complex labor. Masking requires the ability to be present simultaneously in two modes of reality: within one's own pre-ontological field and within the ontologically fabricated social space. That such double presence can be sustained over longer periods does not indicate adaptive weakness, but rather extraordinary field sensitivity.

In this sense, masking is initially not a loss, but a form of world intelligence that enables engagement with insufficient conditions of reality.

4.3 Masking as Creative Transgression of Stable Order

In certain contexts, masking can even generate a productive irritation of dominant field structures. When autistic subjects do not fully reduce their existence but instead modulate it selectively, fissures emerge within ontological fabrication—moments in which dominant orders register their own simplification.

Such effects can be observed, for example, in artistic, theoretical, or institutional contexts in which masking functions not merely as adaptation, but as intervention. Masking becomes a form of indirect critique: not through open confrontation, but through the introduction of other rhythms, logics, and resonances that are not anticipated within the dominant field.

This transformative masking is not a betrayal of autistic existence, but a mode of survival and efficacy under conditions of structural asymmetry.

4.4 The Limit of the World-Making Mode

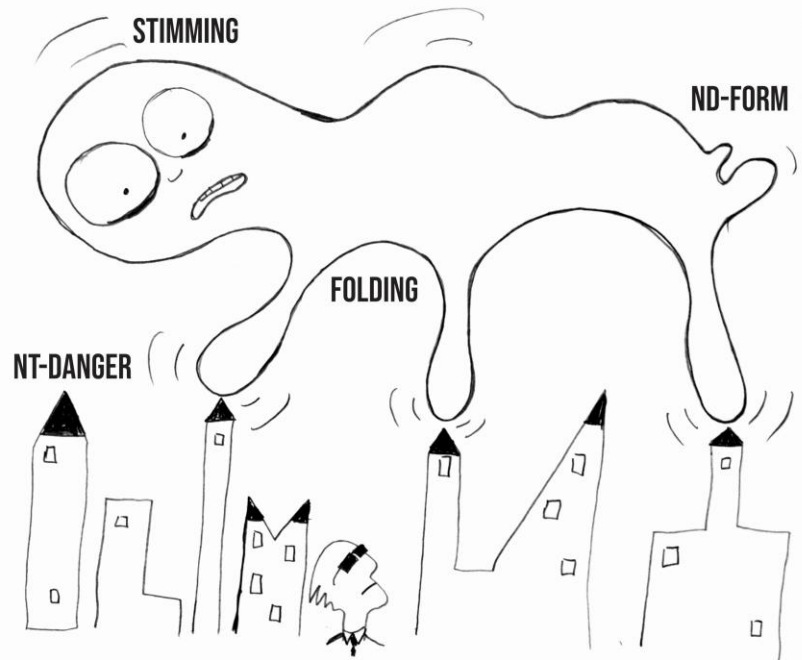
What is decisive, however, is this: in its productive form, masking remains temporal, situational, and reversible. It is a transitional mode, not a sustainable permanent state. Its creative force rests precisely on the fact that pre-ontological liminality is not fully relinquished, but remains operative as a background condition.

Once masking becomes a permanent prerequisite of existence, it loses its world-making character. The interface mode turns into a coercive form that no longer mediates between fields, but stabilizes only one side. The productive ambivalence collapses.

This tipping point is central to the understanding of masking—and will be systematically elaborated in the following section.

Image 1 from: *They Cannot Understand: Why Autism Research Gets It Wrong*, ISBN 3695116013
The figure does not serve to illustrate empirical findings, but to conceptually condense the ontological structure developed in the book.

COMPLEXITY OF ND EXISTENCE



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

5. The Costs of Landing: Masking as Ontological Forced Labor

5.1 From Temporary Intervention to Permanent Stabilization

When masking is no longer situationally chosen but structurally enforced, its function changes fundamentally. What begins as a creative landing attempt becomes a permanent stabilizing performance for a foreign world architecture. Autistic existence is no longer merely modulated, but continuously reduced in order to persist within the dominant field.

This condition is not characterized by isolated conflicts, but by chronic ontological tension. Pre-ontological liminality is no longer permitted to return; openness becomes a threat; resonance a disturbance. Existence is tolerated only in the mode of simplification.

5.2 Bodily and Temporal Costs

The well-known consequences of masking—exhaustion, shutdown, burnout—cannot be adequately explained in psychological terms within this framework. They are bodily markers of ontological instability. The body responds where existence is durably organized against its own field logic.

Particularly significant here is the temporal dimension. Masking costs not only energy, but lifetime. Time is no longer used for unfolding, but for the maintenance of appearance. Autistic existence is placed in a permanent maintenance mode whose aim is not development, but the avoidance of disturbance.

5.3 Masking as Unrecognized Labor

From an ontological perspective, masking constitutes a form of labor: non-marketized, invisible, unrecognized, yet real. It is labor that does not serve one's own existence, but the stabilization of a dominant field. This labor generates no value for the subject; it consumes it.

Here, the connection to structures of labor and violence becomes visible. Masking is an extractive practice in which a more complex field of existence continuously expends energy in order to uphold a simplified order that is itself incapable of sustaining that complexity.

5.4 Collapse as a Structural Consequence – and the Limit of Productive Masking

Collapse—whether in the form of burnout, withdrawal, or social unavailability—is not a failure within this model, but the limit of ontological forced labor. It occurs where masking no longer functions as a temporary interface mode between fields, but becomes a permanent precondition of existence and fully colonizes pre-ontological liminality. In this state, masking stabilizes only a foreign order of reality, without feedback, resonance, or co-creation of the field.

By contrast, productive, montropic masking designates the only mode in which masking does not become exhausting, as long as co-creative field conditions are present. In this mode, masking does not proceed against one's own ontological direction, but along its internal structural and meaning axis. It is not an isolated act of the subject, but a co-creative process in which autistic existence and field modulate one another reciprocally. Energy arises here not through adaptation, but through resonance: through the partial opening of a field to more complex rhythms, meanings, and forms of relation.

Productive masking is therefore always relational. It presupposes a minimal capacity for co-creation on the part of the field—the possibility that difference is not merely tolerated, but can become effective. Where this possibility is absent, masking inevitably tips from world-making into forced labor. In this sense, collapse does not mark the end of creative capacity, but the point at which co-creation becomes structurally impossible and a field reveals its own limitation.

The central question, therefore, is not how masking can be avoided, but which ontological conditions enable co-creation without reducing existence to a permanent work of translation.

6. Conclusion: Masking as a Diagnosis of the World

The present contribution has interpreted masking not as individual behavior or psychological coping, but as an ontological boundary process that becomes visible when pre-ontological, complex forms of existence are compelled to operate within ontologically fabricated, simplified world architectures. Masking thus appears neither as mere adaptation nor as pure suffering, but as an ambivalent practice in which creative world-making and structural forced labor can become indistinguishably intertwined.

Crucially, the well-known costs of masking do not arise from the complexity of neurodivergent existence itself, but from the inability of dominant world orders to carry this complexity in a co-creative manner. In this sense, collapse does not mark the failure of the subject, but the limit of a reality architecture that allows existence only on the condition of its simplification.

Masking thus becomes a diagnosis—not of autistic people, but of the world in which they are expected to appear. The open question that follows from this diagnosis is not addressed to neurodivergent subjects, but to science, institutions, and society itself: What degree of ontological complexity must a dominant world architecture permit so that existence is not forced into a permanent work of translation?

References:

Speed, T. (2025). *They Cannot Understand : Why Autism Research Gets It Wrong*. BoD.

Speed, T. (2025). *They Cannot Understand - Why Autism Research Gets It Wrong (Version 1)* [Computer software]. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17811620>

Speed, T. (2025). *Recursive Knowledge Instead of Additive Knowledge Accumulation - On the Epistemic Structure of Embodied, Neurodivergent Research (Version 1)*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18054997>

Speed, T. (2025). *Veridical Mapping as the Foundation of a Second Science. Rosetta Operator — An Invariance Theory of Consciousness, Work, and World. (2 English)*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17857039>

Speed, T. (2025). *Operatoric Cognition: Pre-theoretical Structural Invariance as the Basis of Autistic Intelligence (3 English)*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17897109>

Speed, T. (2025). *Beyond Intelligence - Emergence, Operator Relativity, and an Autistic Epistemology (Version 1)*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18068128>

Speed, T. (2025). *Savant Phenomena and Non-Representational Cognition An Operatoric Approach (Version 1)*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18069350>

Speed, T. (2025). *Structural Savantism - On the Epistemic Gap Between Savant Research, Autism, and Intelligence Theory (Version 1)*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18069627>

Speed, T. (2025). Veridical Mapping as a Spatial Operation - Neurodivergent Cognition Beyond Representational Models (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18032384>

Speed, T. (2025). The Observer as a Spatial Category - On the Topological Inversion of World and the Ontological Structure of Observation (4 English DOI corrected in PDF). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18018699>

Speed, T. (2025). Seinsverschiebung (Shift of Being) as a Pre-Ontological Category - On the Incompatibility of Existence and Understanding in Modern Regimes of Stabilization (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18007628>

Speed, T. (2025). The Constructed Observer - World-Formation Beyond Representation - Why Perception Is Not Representation, but a Structural Achievement (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18006170>

Speed, T. (2025). Synesthetic Science - Neurodivergent Embodiment as a Method of World-Detection - On the Epistemic Function of Embodied, Non-Representational Perception (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18001074>

Speed, T., & Speed, T. (2024, Dezember 29). Transfer Protocol (Transferprotokoll) – A Neurodivergent (Autistic) FEATURE FILM by Timothy Speed (2 without subtitles + Trailer). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18093110>

Speed, T. (2025). REPRESENTATIONAL VIOLENCE — A Manifesto How normative fields erase non-representational ontologies (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17826435>

Speed, T. (2025). AUTISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY - A Second Knowledge Architecture in the Human Species (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17817017>

External References:

Milton, D. E. M. (2012). On the ontological status of autism: the 'double empathy problem'. *Disability & Society*, 27(6), 883–887. [ResearchGate](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312511110)
→ Klassischer Ausgangspunkt der Double Empathy Perspektive.

Hull L, Petrides KV, Allison C, Smith P, Baron-Cohen S, Lai MC, Mandy W. "Putting on My Best Normal": Social Camouflaging in Adults with Autism Spectrum Conditions. *J Autism Dev Disord*. 2017 Aug;47(8):2519-2534. doi: 10.1007/s10803-017-3166-5. PMID: 28527095; PMCID: PMC5509825.

Masking Is Not an Exhaustion Symptom

How Psychiatric Diagnostics Reduce Autistic Existence to Failure

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18199424>

Abstract

In current psychiatric and diagnostic practice, masking in autistic persons is predominantly interpreted as an exhausting act of adaptation, whose pathological relevance is assumed to manifest above all in visible failure, breakdown, or burnout. This reading has become established not only in everyday clinical contexts, but also in parts of neurodiversity-oriented research. The present paper argues that this interpretation rests on an implicit, normative ontology that treats neurotypical forms of existence as an unquestioned reference and renders autistic existence legible only in relation to deviation, deficit, or exhaustion.

Starting from an ontological perspective on masking, the paper shows that masking is not primarily to be understood as self-denial or an attempt at adaptation, but as a situational act of translation, protection, and interface-work within structurally asymmetrical world architectures. The clinical reduction of masking to an indicator of exhaustion leads to a diagnostic short circuit: autistic competence, stability, and functional simulation are systematically interpreted as deception or compensatory over-adaptation, while autism is acknowledged as “authentic” only at the moment of decompensation.

The paper analyses the resulting dynamic as an iatrogenic structure: diagnostic recognition is bound to visible failure, thereby generating an implicit pressure toward decompensation. In this framework, autistic burnout appears not merely as an individual consequence of masking, but as a structurally produced harm of a system that can read autistic existence only in the mode of dysfunction. The focus thus shifts from individual vulnerability to institutional responsibility.

In conclusion, the paper argues for a fundamental revision of diagnostic concepts of masking. Masking must be understood as an ambivalent, context-dependent competence, not as a pathological condition. Without such a revision, psychiatry reproduces precisely those dynamics of exhaustion and breakdown that it claims to recognise and treat. Autistic burnout thus becomes visible less as a symptom of autistic existence than as a marker of an ontologically inadequate diagnostic practice.

This paper is situated within the context of:

Speed, T. (2026). Masking Between Existence and Understanding - Pre-Ontological Liminality and Ontological Field-Fabrication in the Tension Between Neurodivergent and Neurotypical World Architectures (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18140651>

1. Introduction: Masking as a Clinical Key Problem

In recent years, the concept of masking has assumed a central position in clinical and social-scientific engagements with autism. Originally introduced to make visible adaptive strategies used by autistic persons in dealing with neurotypical social environments, masking has increasingly come to function as a diagnostic marker. In psychiatric practice, it is frequently understood as the expression of an overburdening adaptation effort, whose pathological relevance is assumed to manifest particularly in exhaustion, breakdown, or burnout.

This shift is not trivial. It marks a transition from a descriptive to a normative use of the concept. Masking is no longer primarily regarded as a situational, context-dependent performance, but as a latently pathological condition that must “sooner or later” necessarily become exhausted. Within this logic, autistic burnout appears as the moment in which masking visibly fails—and thus simultaneously as the moment in which autism becomes diagnostically unambiguous.

The present paper argues that this clinical reading of masking rests on an implicit ontological presupposition that takes neurotypical forms of existence as an unquestioned reference frame. Within this frame, masking is read exclusively as deviation, self-denial, or over-adaptation. Autistic competence, stability, or functional simulation thus come under systematic suspicion. They do not appear as expressions of an autonomous mode of existence, but as temporary deception whose dissolution is diagnostically anticipated.

The aim of this paper is to critically analyse this diagnostic logic. This is not a moral critique of individual practitioners, nor a blanket rejection of psychiatric diagnostics. Rather, the paper seeks to show that the prevailing interpretation of masking produces a structural short circuit: it binds diagnostic recognition to visible failure and thereby generates dynamics that themselves contribute to the emergence of autistic burnout. Masking thus shifts from an analytical concept to a clinical trap.

2. The Implicit Norm: Neurotypical Existence as the Reference Frame

Psychiatric diagnostics does not operate in a norm-free space. Even where it understands itself as descriptive and objective, it rests on implicit assumptions about what counts as functional, stable, or desirable. In the case of autism, neurotypical existence functions largely unquestioned as the reference frame. Perception, communication, affect regulation, and social interaction are measured against neurotypical standards, without these standards themselves being reflected as specific, historically and culturally situated forms of existence.

Within this frame, autism appears primarily as deviation. Autistic behaviours are not understood as expressions of an autonomous ontological logic, but as deficient variants of a supposedly universal model of subjectivity and sociality. This assumption usually remains implicit, yet it decisively shapes the interpretation of diagnostic phenomena. Against this

background, masking is inevitably read as an attempt to approximate a normal state assumed to be superior.

The result is an asymmetrical interpretation: neurotypical functioning is regarded as authentic, autistic functioning as secondary or compensatory. When an autistic person succeeds in acting stably, in a controlled manner, or with apparent competence in certain contexts, this is not read as an expression of their own competence, but as an indication that “actual” autistic difficulties are being concealed. Visible dysfunction thus becomes the implicit criterion of truth.

This logic has far-reaching consequences. It narrows the view of autism to those moments in which deviation, overload, or breakdown becomes visible. Autistic existence is not diagnostically recognised as a continuous reality, but only where it can no longer fulfil the neurotypical frame of expectation. In this context, masking does not function as a description of a performance, but as a moment of suspicion: as long as someone functions, they are considered not truly visible.

In this way, the ground is prepared for an interpretation of masking that implies exhaustion not merely as a possible consequence, but as a necessary endpoint. Autistic burnout appears in this perspective less as a contingent risk than as the expected culmination of an “inauthentic” mode of existence.

3. The Problematic Counterfigure: Unmasking as a Supposedly Healthy Solution

Parallel to the pathologisation of masking, the notion has increasingly become established in clinical and activist discourses that unmasking represents the healthy, authentic, or long-term desirable form of autistic existence. Within this opposition, masking appears as a harmful act of adaptation, while unmasking is framed as liberation, self-discovery, or a therapeutic goal. This dichotomy, however, is as reductive as it is problematic.

The assumption that unmasking is healthy per se presupposes that social, institutional, and material environments are capable of sustaining autistic existence in an unmasked state. This is precisely not the case in most societal contexts. Labour markets, educational systems, medical institutions, and bureaucratic procedures are largely structured around neurotypical norms and respond to unmasked autistic existence not with acceptance, but with sanction, exclusion, or pathologisation. Under these conditions, unmasking is not a neutral act of self-care, but is often associated with significant risks.

The clinical idealisation of unmasking ignores this structural reality. It shifts responsibility from the system onto the individual by implicitly suggesting that health emerges through disclosure and self-exposure, rather than through changed conditions. Autistic persons are thereby placed in a double bind: masking is deemed harmful, while unmasking is considered dangerous. The choice between these two options is not a therapeutic one, but an existential one.

In addition, unmasking is frequently misunderstood in diagnostic contexts. When masking is read as deception, unmasking appears as the revelation of an “authentic” self. This implies an essence presumed to be hidden beneath the mask and made visible through its removal. Such an assumption is ontologically problematic. It equates authenticity with immediacy and fails to

recognise that unmasked behaviour, too, is always situational, relational, and context-dependent. There is no presuppositionless, pure self beyond all social mediation.

In practice, this idealisation gives rise to new forms of clinical violence. Autistic persons are encouraged or pressured to abandon masking without the environments in which they live being transformed at the same time. Unmasking thus becomes another demand for adaptation—this time not to neurotypical norms, but to a therapeutic ideal of authenticity. The consequences are frequently social isolation, economic precarity, or renewed pathologisation.

From a diagnostic perspective, a further problem emerges: unmasking is read as proof of authenticity and thus of diagnostic truth. Those who suffer while unmasked are considered “truly” autistic; those who remain stable while masking are seen as not yet visible or not honest. In this way, the previously described requirement of failure once again becomes the condition of recognition—this time not through masking, but through its abandonment. The structural pressure toward dysfunction remains in place; only its form changes.

The present paper therefore argues that both masking and unmasking can only be meaningfully understood diagnostically if they are removed from the logic of health versus pathology. Both are context-dependent modes of navigating existence within structurally asymmetrical environments. Neither masking nor unmasking is healthy or pathological per se. What is pathogenic, rather, is a system that recognises autistic existence only under conditions of visible suffering.

4. The Diagnostic Short Circuit: Masking, Unmasking, and the Logic of Representability

The dynamics described so far—the pathologisation of masking and the simultaneous idealisation of unmasking—converge in diagnostic practice into a shared structural short circuit. Regardless of whether autistic existence appears masked or unmasked, it is recognised as diagnostically relevant only when it becomes visible, legible, and usable in a particular form. This form is not neutral, but bound to the representational logic of psychiatric systems.

Diagnostics necessarily operates through representations: symptom descriptions, categories, scales, and codes. These instruments are functional, but they presuppose that what is to be captured can be translated into standardised signs. Within this framework, masking becomes recognisable only where it can be represented as a symptom—typically in the form of exhaustion, overload, or breakdown. As long as masking functions, it remains diagnostically invisible or is read as deception. Competence, stability, or situational control do not appear as expressions of autistic existence, but as indications that “actual” difficulties are being concealed.

The counterfigure of unmasking is subject to the same logic. Unmasking is evaluated positively where it can likewise be rendered unambiguous: as visible dysfunction, social conspicuousness, or suffering. Here too, representability functions as a silent criterion. Unmasking that does not culminate in diagnostically usable forms—for example because it leads to a different, yet viable mode of navigating existence—remains unnoticed or is again problematised. Recognition is granted not on the basis of existence, but on the basis of displayability.

It thus becomes clear that the decisive distinction does not lie between masking and unmasking, but between representable and non-representable existence. Autistic existence is not read diagnostically as a continuous, autonomous reality, but is mediated through its replaceability by symptomatic formats. What cannot be translated into these formats without loss disappears from the diagnostic field of vision. In its place appears the representation: the symptom profile, the diagnosis, the file.

This mechanism can be described as a form of representational violence. This does not refer to an intentional act of harm, but to a structural effect: systems that can process only what can be represented eliminate those forms of existence that resist such translation. Autistic existence is not misrepresented, but replaced by its representation. Representation functions—and precisely through this functioning, reality is lost.

The diagnostic short circuit thus consists in autism appearing either as masked deviation or as unmasked dysfunction, while a third possibility is systematically excluded: the recognition of autistic existence as a competent, situationally modulated, and not necessarily exhausting reality. Masking and unmasking become opposing poles of a false dichotomy, within which only that which fails, suffers, or collapses is considered “real.”

Within this structure, autistic burnout is not merely recognised, but actively prepared. When diagnostic visibility is bound to representability, and representability to dysfunction, an implicit pressure toward decompensation emerges. Burnout then appears not as a contingent consequence of individual overload, but as a structurally expected point at which existence finally fits into the diagnostic grid. The resulting harm is therefore not only individual, but systemically co-produced.

5. The Pressure Toward Decompensation: When Recognition Is Bound to Dysfunction

From the diagnostic logic described in Section 4 emerges a dynamic that is highly problematic for autistic persons: diagnostic recognition is effectively bound to visible dysfunction. Not explicitly, not intentionally, but structurally. Autistic existence becomes clearly legible only where it fails, becomes overwhelmed, or collapses. Stability, control, or functional adaptation, by contrast, remain suspicious or invisible.

This linkage generates an implicit pressure toward decompensation. Those who remain stably masked over longer periods in everyday life, work, or institutional contexts risk not being taken seriously diagnostically. Symptoms must be amplified, burdens emphasised, and resources downplayed in order to become recognisable at all. The diagnostic process thus actively shapes how autistic persons speak about themselves, present themselves, and relate to their own functioning.

This is not a matter of conscious deception, but of structural adaptation to diagnostic horizons of expectation. Autistic self-descriptions become strategically distorted—not out of dishonesty, but out of necessity. What does not fit expected narratives does not count. What functions too well is regarded as inauthentic. The boundary between self-description and self-erasure becomes dangerously blurred.

Particularly problematic is the fact that this dynamic produces long-term, real effects on how existence is lived. When masking is persistently interpreted as deception and unmasking only as dysfunction, autistic persons are left with little space in which functional but non-normative modes of existence can be lived sustainably. The pressure either to suffer visibly or to negate oneself operates continuously. It does not merely exhaust psychologically, but intervenes in the very structure of self-perception and agency.

In this sense, decompensation is not merely an individual risk, but a systemically induced option. Breakdown becomes the condition of visibility. Autistic burnout then appears not as an unexpected event, but as the logical endpoint of an arrangement that ties recognition to loss. The longer functional masking is maintained, the greater the discrepancy between lived reality and diagnostic legibility—until it can be resolved only through collapse.

This pressure toward decompensation is particularly strong in institutional contexts where access to support, accommodations, or legal recognition is tied to diagnosis. Autistic persons face a paradoxical demand: in order to gain access to support, they must relinquish or call into question precisely the functional capacity that has thus far enabled their survival within these structures. Assistance is granted only once existence has already been damaged.

This dynamic once again shifts responsibility from the system onto the individual. Burnout appears as a personal failure to meet demands, rather than as the result of a diagnostic framework that recognises only dysfunction. The structural involvement of diagnostics in the production of autistic burnout remains invisible—even though it is functionally effective.

6. Autistic Burnout as an Iatrogenic Harm

Against the background of the preceding analysis, autistic burnout can no longer be understood solely as an individual consequence of masking or as the result of personal overload. Rather, it becomes apparent that burnout in many cases has an iatrogenic character: it arises not only despite, but through diagnostic and institutional practices that systematically misread autistic existence.

Iatrogenic here does not mean that burnout is intentionally caused. It denotes a structural co-production through procedures, categories, and horizons of expectation that operate in a way that produces harm while functioning formally correctly. Psychiatric diagnostics contributes to autistic burnout by tying recognition, support, and legitimacy to conditions that destabilise autistic existence over the long term.

The central mechanism at work is the coupling of visibility and dysfunction. As long as autistic persons function while masking, they remain diagnostically marginal or are considered “not severely affected enough.” When they function stably while unmasked, they lose legibility or are once again problematised. Only in states of exhaustion, overload, or collapse do they become unambiguously recognisable. Burnout thus becomes the paradoxical entry ticket into diagnostic reality.

This logic has serious consequences. It produces a situation in which autistic persons are compelled to turn their own existence against itself in order to be recognised. Functional

competences are suppressed or devalued, stability is interpreted as deception, and limits are exceeded in order to signal seriousness. The system does not reward sustainability, but collapse.

Within this context, autistic burnout appears not as an accidental or unavoidable endpoint of autistic adaptation efforts, but as a structurally expected event. Breakdown is the moment at which existence finally passes into diagnostically usable forms. What previously appeared too complex, too contradictory, or too functional now becomes unequivocal: exhausted, dysfunctional, in need of treatment.

Particularly problematic is the retrospective naturalisation of this dynamic. Burnout is subsequently read as evidence that masking was “always” harmful. The system’s involvement in producing burnout remains invisible. Harm appears as a property of the autistic person, rather than as an effect of a framework that does not permit sustainable forms of existence.

In this sense, autistic burnout is less an expression of individual failure than a marker of the ontological inadequacy of diagnostic models. It indicates that a system can recognise autistic existence only under conditions that undermine that existence itself. Burnout is therefore not merely a clinical phenomenon, but a structural symptom—pointing to the fact that the conditions under which autism is diagnostically conceived are not viable.

7. Ontological Inadequacy of Diagnostic Models

The preceding analysis makes clear that the problem does not lie primarily in individual misinterpretations or a lack of sensitivity, but is more deeply rooted. The dominant diagnostic models of psychiatry lack a viable ontology of autistic existence. They operate with logics of deviation rather than logics of existence. Within these models, autism is not understood as an autonomous mode of being-in-the-world, but as a deviation from an implicitly posited normal state.

This ontological presupposition has immediate consequences for the interpretation of masking and unmasking. Masking necessarily appears as self-denial because the model provides no category for situational, context-dependent navigation of existence. Unmasking necessarily appears as the revelation of an “actual” state because authenticity is equated with immediacy. Both readings presuppose the existence of a stable, normatively defined mode of functioning against which health is measured.

What these models lack is the capacity to think complexity without pathologisation. Forms of autistic existence that are neither clearly dysfunctional nor norm-conforming evade diagnostic capture. They are neither sufficiently ill nor healthy in the expected sense. It is within this void that the short circuits arise which distort both masking and unmasking and facilitate burnout.

Ontological inadequacy becomes particularly evident where diagnostics are oriented toward long-term assessment. Models that primarily conceive autism as a disorder or deficit cannot describe a sustainable form of autistic existence. They recognise only two states: compensated deviation or manifest dysfunction. Everything in between remains theoretically underdetermined and practically invisible.

As long as diagnostic systems grasp autism exclusively in relation to neurotypical norms, every form of autistic competence remains precarious. It is always provisional, always suspect, always potentially revocable. Stability is not regarded as an expression of a viable mode of existence, but as a fragile equilibrium that must sooner or later collapse. Burnout is thus not read as a warning signal of systemic misconditions, but as the expected confirmation of a deficit-oriented model.

This contribution does not aim to establish a new ontological norm of autistic existence, but to expose the implicit ontology through which diagnostic recognition is systematically bound to failure.

8. Consequences: Revising Diagnostic Categories Rather Than Optimising Adaptation

From the present analysis, a clear consequence follows: the problem cannot be resolved through better education, increased sensitivity, or individualised therapeutic approaches. Such measures fall short as long as the underlying categories remain unchanged. What is required is a revision of the diagnostic concepts themselves—particularly where masking and unmasking function as markers of health or pathology.

Masking must no longer be diagnostically understood as an exhaustion symptom per se. Nor should unmasking be idealised as a therapeutic goal. Both are context-dependent modes of navigating existence within structurally asymmetrical environments. Their evaluation cannot be separated from the conditions under which they become necessary. Health, in this context, is not a property of behaviour, but a question of the viability of the environment.

Without this categorical shift, autistic burnout remains a systemically produced harm. It continues to be treated as an individual problem, even though it points to structural incompatibilities. Diagnostic frameworks that can recognise autism only in the mode of failure actively contribute to the production of that failure.

A future-oriented diagnostic practice would therefore need to cease understanding autism exclusively as deviation from a norm and instead recognise it as an autonomous mode of existence with its own conditions of stability. Only then can masking be understood for what it is: neither illness nor virtue, but a situational response to conditions that themselves ought to be called into question. Within such a framework, autistic burnout would no longer be the price of recognition, but a signal that recognition comes too late.

Conclusion

The present paper has shown that the prevailing psychiatric interpretation of masking and unmasking is not merely imprecise, but structurally inadequate. Masking is diagnostically read as a symptom of exhaustion, unmasking as a sign of authenticity or therapeutic progress. Both interpretations rest on the same implicit assumption: that autistic existence is real, legitimate, or recognisable only when it can be rendered in dysfunctional or suffering forms.

This logic binds diagnostic visibility to representability, and representability to failure. Autistic competence, situational stability, and functional navigation of existence remain invisible under

these conditions or are treated as deception. Recognition is granted not on the basis of existence, but on the basis of loss. The diagnostic framework thus produces precisely those dynamics of breakdown that it subsequently interprets as clinical findings.

Against this background, autistic burnout no longer appears as a mere consequence of individual adaptive effort, but as an iatrogenic harm produced by a system that lacks a sustainable category for autistic existence. Burnout marks the point at which existence finally fits into diagnostically usable formats. It is less an expression of autistic vulnerability than an indicator of the ontological limitation of diagnostic models.

The central consequence is therefore not a better balance between masking and unmasking, but the necessity of a categorical revision. As long as diagnostics primarily understands autism as deviation from a neurotypical norm, it remains incapable of recognising autistic existence beyond deficit or collapse. Under these conditions, masking and unmasking are not health markers, but responses to structural incompatibility.

A diagnostic practice that does not wish to continue co-producing autistic burnout must therefore cease treating failure as a condition of truth. It would need to recognise autistic existence as an autonomous, competent, and context-dependent reality—not only where it collapses. As long as this does not occur, burnout remains not an individual problem, but a systemic symptom.

The dynamic described here does not apply to all diagnosticians, but to the structure of diagnostic logic itself.

The analysis developed here is categorical in nature. It describes conditions of diagnostic visibility and is not designed as an outcome study. Its empirical testability depends on the existence of diagnostic systems that do not operationalise autism primarily in the mode of dysfunction.

References:

External:

- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press.
- Canguilhem, G. (1991). *The normal and the pathological* (C. R. Fawcett & R. S. Cohen, Trans.). Zone Books.
- Yergeau, R. M. (2018). *Authoring autism: On rhetoric and neurological queerness*. Duke University Press.
- Milton, D. (2012). The double empathy problem. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*.
- Milton, D., Gurbuz, E., & López, B. (2022). The ‘double empathy problem’: Ten years on. *Autism*, 26(6), 1311–1313.)

- Bourdieu, P. (1991). Language and symbolic power (J. B. Thompson, Ed.; G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). Harvard University Press / Polity Press.
- Butler, J. (2006). Frames of war: When is life grievable? Verso.

Internal:

Speed, T. (2026). Masking Between Existence and Understanding - Pre-Ontological Liminality and Ontological Field-Fabrication in the Tension Between Neurodivergent and Neurotypical World Architectures (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18140651>

Speed, T. (2025). They Cannot Understand - Why Autism Research Gets It Wrong (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17811620>

Speed, T. (2025). Recursive Knowledge Instead of Additive Knowledge Accumulation - On the Epistemic Structure of Embodied, Neurodivergent Research (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18054997>

Speed, T. (2025). Veridical Mapping as the Foundation of a Second Science. Rosetta Operator — An Invariance Theory of Consciousness, Work, and World. (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17857039>

Speed, T. (2025). Operatoric Cognition: Pre-theoretical Structural Invariance as the Basis of Autistic Intelligence (3 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17897109>

Speed, T. (2025). Beyond Intelligence - Emergence, Operator Relativity, and an Autistic Epistemology (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18068128>

Speed, T. (2025). Savant Phenomena and Non-Representational Cognition An Operatoric Approach (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18069350>

Speed, T. (2025). Structural Savantism - On the Epistemic Gap Between Savant Research, Autism, and Intelligence Theory (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18069627>

Speed, T. (2025). Veridical Mapping as a Spatial Operation - Neurodivergent Cognition Beyond Representational Models (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18032384>

Speed, T. (2025). The Observer as a Spatial Category - On the Topological Inversion of World and the Ontological Structure of Observation (4 English DOI corrected in PDF). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18018699>

Speed, T. (2025). Seinsverschiebung (Shift of Being) as a Pre-Ontological Category - On the Incompatibility of Existence and Understanding in Modern Regimes of Stabilization (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18007628>

Speed, T. (2025). Synesthetic Science - Neurodivergent Embodiment as a Method of World-Detection - On the Epistemic Function of Embodied, Non-Representational Perception (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18001074>

Speed, T. (2025). REPRESENTATIONAL VIOLENCE — A Manifesto How normative fields erase non-representational ontologies (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17826435>

Speed, T. (2025). AUTISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY - A Second Knowledge Architecture in the Human Species (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17817017>

Speed, T. (2025). Autistic Ontology: Why Autistic Embodiment Reveals an Incommensurability Between Modes of Reality (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17811460>

Speed, T. (2025). Speed's Work: An Autistic Intervention in the Concept of Work In the Age of AI and Robotics. BoD.

Speed, T. (2025). Structural Violence and State Protective Obligations How Work-Centered Social Systems Predictably Make Neurodivergent People Ill - (A structural-theoretical analysis using the example of Citizen's Benefit / Basic Income Support in international comparison) (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17978565>

Eigenzeit and Neurodivergence: Why Autistic and ADHD Biographies Collapse Under Administrative Time

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18498345>

Abstract

This paper develops the concept of Eigenzeit as an analytical instrument for investigating neurodivergent life realities. Eigenzeit is neither a concept generated by nor specific to neurodivergence, but arises from prior boundary work on the ontology of decision, responsibility, and world-binding. Eigenzeit denotes the non-delegable instantiation of world-time in action: that form of time in which world is bound at all, carried, and irreversibly co-enacted. Time is not understood here as an ordering category or a logic of deadlines, but as the temporal dimension of enacted world-binding—as the structural context of world-capability.

On the basis of this general conception, the paper shows why autistic and ADHD biographies in particular are systematically pushed into overload, breakdown, and dependency within modern institutions. Central societal systems—administration, labour markets, education, social law—operate in time- and structure-administrative regimes that presuppose world-binding while simultaneously undermining it: through standardisation, fragmentation, the simulation of responsibility, and the replacement of real binding by procedures. Deadlines, pacing, and file-based formality are not the core problem here, but symptoms of a deeper deficit of world-capability.

Neurodivergence is thus not treated as a deficit, but as a different cost and binding structure of world-relation, in which this structural inoperability becomes visible early and with particular sharpness. Autistic integrity is often characterised by high binding strictness and low capacity for simulation vis-à-vis externally imposed world-regimes; ADHD frequently exhibits a dynamic in which fragmented, externally steered contexts do not allow for stable world-binding. Many phenomena commonly read as “symptoms”—exhaustion, breakdown, avoidance, dysfunctional adaptation—can therefore be reconstructed as Eigenzeit collapse: as the temporal-structural consequence of a prior withdrawal of world-binding.

In continuity with *They Cannot Understand*, Eigenzeit is understood as a specification of the concepts of incommensurability, inoperability, and non-translatibility. The paper shifts the focus away from temporal adaptation and therapeutic normalisation toward the question of under what conditions world remains bindable at all—and why the systematic withdrawal of this capacity destabilises not only neurodivergent existences, but the ontological viability of social reality itself.

This paper makes no claim to define or exhaustively capture autism or neurodivergence as such. The concept of autism is historically, diagnostically, and ontologically heterogeneous and remains unresolved in central respects. What is addressed here is not a comprehensive account of “autism,” but a specific structural aspect: the manner in which certain neurodivergent modes of existence bind world, carry responsibility, and form Eigenzeit.

Not all autistic persons exhibit the same binding density, the same logic of integrity, or the same inoperability with respect to institutional regimes. The analysis developed here does not target individual types, but structural conflicts that become visible where high world-binding encounters binding-poor orders. In this context, autism does not function as a homogeneous category, but as an epistemic amplifier of a more general problem: the systematic withdrawal of world-capability.

Where the following speaks of “autistic integrity” or “neurodivergent modes of existence,” this therefore does not denote a normative attribution, but a conceptual focus. It serves the analysis of Eigenzeit, inoperability, and shift of being (Seinsverschiebung)—not the classification of persons.

1. Eigenzeit as a Concept of Binding – Not as a Temporal Phenomenon

Eigenzeit is not a time problem.

And it is certainly not a “special time” that runs differently for certain people.

The concept of Eigenzeit does not primarily target time, but binding. Time appears here only secondarily—as trace, as inscription, as the irreversible consequence of what has become fixed in the world. Eigenzeit does not designate the passage of time, but the loss of openness that arises through binding action.

The canonical definition reads:

Eigenzeit denotes the non-delegable instantiation of world-time in human action, in which decision, responsibility, and irreversible world-binding are inseparably intertwined.

This definition is not to be read psychologically, metaphorically, or socio-politically. It describes an ontological operation: the point at which action binds world, closes possibility, and responsibility can no longer be outsourced. Eigenzeit is not what passes, but what is no longer reversible.

At the center, therefore, is not time, but world-binding. Eigenzeit is the temporal signature of indimergence: that non-processual setting of facticity through which world becomes bearable at all. Indimergence does not occur *in* time; time emerges where indimergence has already taken effect. Eigenzeit is the inscribed irreversibility of this act.

In this way, Eigenzeit stands in direct continuity with the shift of being (Seinsverschiebung) developed in the work. Seinsverschiebung designates the ontological distortion of a field that begins with the objectifiability of world, in which world is no longer primarily bound resonantly, but treated as an available object. Eigenzeit collapse designates the point at which, under these conditions, no Eigenzeit can any longer be formed: time continues to run, but without world-binding. The present paper does not extend this line, but specifies it.

This is decisive for understanding the context of neurodivergence. Autistic modes of existence are not characterised by “perceiving time differently.” They are characterised by taking bindings more seriously. World is not entered loosely, tentatively, or simulatively, but with higher binding density. Decisions are not options, but settings. Responsibility is not an attribution, but a bearing. Precisely for this reason, simulation—the “as-if”—is here often structurally scarcely possible.

Eigenzeit thus does not describe an individual experience, but a cost structure of world-relation. Where binding is high, Eigenzeit is fragile. Not because time is lacking, but because world cannot be arbitrarily opened and closed. Autistic integrity is not a moral quality, but a structural one: a low tolerance for world-non-commitment.

Modern institutions, however, operate in exactly the opposite way. They presuppose world-binding without bearing it. They fragment responsibility, distribute competences, replace binding with procedures. Time appears there as calendar, deadline, sequence—as a surrogate for world. What is lacking is not time, but world-capability.

Here inoperability arises. Not between “people” and “systems,” but between binding regimes. Time-administrative orders cannot generate Eigenzeit because they systematically avoid indimergence. They think time and existence without the loss that arises through decision and ontology. They live from repeatability, interchangeability, retrievability. Autistic modes of existence do not come under pressure here by accident, but necessarily. They expose a structural rupture that the order itself cannot think.

What is frequently described in this context as *masking* is therefore not a social adaptive behaviour, but destruction of binding: a compulsion to simulation in binding-poor regimes that systematically dissolves Eigenzeit. Masking does not mean showing oneself differently, but detaching oneself from one’s own world-binding in order to remain compatible with procedures. It is not a strategy, but a structural self-unbinding.

In this sense, Eigenzeit in the neurodivergent context is not a special case, but an epistemic amplifier. It makes visible where world is only still administered. And it shows that the collapse is not subjective, but ontological: world becomes unbearable long before “time problems” appear.

What is frequently described here as subjectivity, state of mind, or individual perception misses the point. The phenomena discussed here are not inner states, moods, or psychological dispositions, even though they are regularly interpreted as such. They mark factual limits of world-bearability, which can be described structurally and thus, in principle, also in terms of physical boundary concepts. Where Eigenzeit can no longer be formed, there is no subjective experience, but a violation of real conditions of binding.

Talk of “overload,” “stress,” or “emotional strain” shifts the problem into an inner perspective and thereby obscures its actual locus. It replaces an analysis of world-binding with state attributions to persons. In fact, what is at issue is the impossibility of certain couplings: between decision and consequence, between action and world, between responsibility and bearing. This impossibility is not psychologically contingent, but structurally necessary as soon as world is organised as objectifiable, fragmentable, and simulable.

Eigenzeit functions here as a precise marker of this boundary. It does not show how something feels, but whether world can still be bound at all. Neurodivergent modes of existence do not make this point visible because they are more sensitive, but because they possess fewer buffers against the loss of binding. The collapse is therefore not an inner state, but a real rupture of world-coupling—a fact, not a state of mind.

2. Inoperability Instead of Adaptation: Neurodivergence as a Conflict of Binding Regimes

The conflicts that become visible in the institutional handling of neurodivergence are, as a rule, wrongly addressed. They are described as deficits of adaptation, functional disorders, or a lack of resilience. Such readings presuppose the existence of a shared operational space in which only the degree of fit of individual actors varies. It is precisely this presupposition that is false here.

What becomes visible is not a gradual deviation within a shared system, but an inoperability between different regimes of world-binding. Neurodivergent modes of existence do not introduce “different needs” into existing structures; they operate with different binding logics. Where institutions are based on delegation, interchangeability, and simulation, high binding density is not merely unsupported but rendered structurally unviable.

This inoperability is neither a merely social difficulty nor a misunderstanding between actors. It is the institutionally visible consequence of what has been described in the work as shift of being (*Seinsverschiebung*). *Seinsverschiebung* denotes the ontological distortion of a field that sets in with the objectifiability of world: world is no longer primarily enacted as a bindable nexus, but treated as an available object. Function, administration, and procedure are, in this sense, not the principle of *Seinsverschiebung*, but its secondary modes of operation.

Within such a displaced field, highly bound modes of existence do not simply appear as “different,” but as non-integrable, because their world-binding cannot be translated into object- and process-forms. Inoperability is thus not an interaction problem, but a coupling break: between binding modes that carry world in enactment, and orders that treat world as an object and substitute binding through procedures.

Institutional orders—administration, labour markets, education, social law—are dependent on binding substitutes. Responsibility is distributed, decisions are proceduralised, consequences are temporally and materially decoupled. World appears here as something that can be processed, shifted, or recombined without being carried by anyone. These orders function only as long as binding does not have to be taken fully seriously. Where binding becomes real, they reach their limit.

Neurodivergent ways of life, particularly autistic ones, relate to this not oppositionally but incompatibly. They do not introduce world-binding retrospectively, but in enactment. Decisions are not experienced as reversible steps within a process, but as settings that change world. Responsibility is not a role, but a factual consequence. Precisely for this reason, adaptation is not a neutral operation, but a break in binding.

The demand for adaptation misconstrues this asymmetry. It assumes that binding can be arbitrarily reduced, displaced, or externalised. For highly bound modes of existence, however, this does not mean flexibilisation, but ontological loss. World becomes unreliable, actions lose their bearability, Eigenzeit collapses. What is institutionally regarded as orderly operation appears from this perspective as a continued simulation of world-capability.

Here lies the connection to the analysis of incommensurability developed in *They Cannot Understand*. The problem is not a misunderstanding between actors, but the absence of shared translation spaces. Institutions demand forms of behaviour that are only possible under conditions of low binding density. Autistic integrity does not refuse these conditions out of resistance, but because they are structurally unavailable.

The consequence is a systematic pathologisation. What is consistent within a regime of high world-binding—caution, avoidance, withdrawal, refusal of simulation—appears in the institutional context as a deficit. Not because it would be dysfunctional, but because it is not attachable. Inoperability is thus translated into individual diagnoses: as an attempt to retroactively repair an ontological break by psychologising it.

This conflict cannot be resolved through better communication, more inclusion, or finer adaptation programmes. Such measures continue to operate within the same binding-poor logic that produced the break in the first place. They address symptoms, not the cause. As long as institutions cannot carry Eigenzeit, they will treat binding as a disturbance—and it is precisely there that they will necessarily exclude neurodivergent modes of existence.

3. Simulation Instead of Bearing: Responsibility Without Eigenzeit

Modern institutions do not operate irresponsibly.
They operate through responsibility simulation.

Responsibility appears there as assignment, jurisdiction, documentation, or retrospective evaluation. It is distributed, passed on, limited. What is lacking is not the rhetoric of responsibility, but responsibility-bearing. Responsibility is made legible without being borne. This is precisely where the structural collision with Eigenzeit begins.

Eigenzeit is inseparably bound to responsibility, because it arises from irreversible world-binding. Where responsibility is not delegable, where decisions are not retractable, where consequences cannot be externalised, Eigenzeit comes into being. Institutions, by contrast, depend on systematically avoiding exactly these conditions. They must organise responsibility in such a way that it remains processable, attachable, and low-consequence.

Simulation is the operative solution to this problem.

Simulation here does not mean deception or deliberate misrepresentation, but a formal substitution of world-binding. Decisions are taken without anyone ontologically bearing them. Procedures replace settings. Files replace world. Time replaces binding. Simulation is thus not a deviation, but the necessary operating mode of an order that can no longer bind world.

This structure is stable—as long as Eigenzeit is not demanded.

Neurodivergent modes of existence, particularly autistic ones, come into conflict precisely at this point. They bring with them a non-simulable structure of responsibility. Responsibility is not assumed as a role, but experienced as consequence. Decisions are not “run through,” but set. What counts institutionally as flexibility appears here as non-commitment. What is intended as relief functions as world-withdrawal.

The decisive point is this:

These modes of existence make visible what institutions must conceal in order to function. They expose the fact that responsibility without *Eigenzeit* is empty—that procedures hold only as long as no one demands real world-binding. Where this binding cannot be suspended, the institutional order collapses into simulation.

When adaptation is demanded, this therefore does not mean integration, but an injunction to simulation. Masking, compliance, functional participation are not neutral coping strategies, but forms of self-unbinding. Masking is not a social technique, but destruction of binding: a compulsion to simulation in binding-poor regimes that systematically dissolves *Eigenzeit*. World is no longer borne, but performed.

For this reason, many neurodivergent biographies do not end in a spectacular breakdown, but in administrative erosion. The problem is not the great rupture, but the gradual emptying of world: decisions lose weight, actions lose direction, responsibility becomes unclear. *Eigenzeit* does not collapse suddenly; it runs out.

This collapse is not a subjective suffering, but a structural condition. It arises where world-binding is systematically replaced by simulation while responsibility continues to be demanded. In this constellation, neurodivergent modes of existence are not accidentally overburdened, but logically rendered impossible.

This also makes clear why therapeutic, pedagogical, or coaching interventions regularly miss the point. They intervene where adaptation appears as the solution and thereby reinforce precisely the simulation logic that produced the conflict. What is lacking is not competence, but bearable world.

4. *Eigenzeit* Collapse: When World Is No Longer Bearable

The collapse of neurodivergent biographies is not an individual event. It is not a psychological failure, not insufficient adaptive performance, not a deficit of coping. It is an ontological collapse: the point at which world is no longer bearable.

Eigenzeit does not collapse where people “do too little,” but where binding is systematically withdrawn while responsibility formally remains in place. The person is expected to decide, act, cooperate, respond—yet without any real possibility of binding world. Action is demanded without being allowed to carry world. Responsibility is required without being anchorable. This is precisely where collapse emerges.

This condition is not spectacular.

It is quiet.

It does not primarily manifest as crisis, but as erosion: decisions lose weight, actions lose direction, consequences appear arbitrary. World becomes flat—not chaotic, but administratively smooth. What remains is functioning without binding—a form of activity that consumes time without bringing forth world.

For highly bound modes of existence, this condition is not stable. Autistic integrity depends on world actually counting. When binding is devalued, the effect is not relief, but existential destabilisation. Withdrawal, interruption, avoidance are not symptoms, but protective reactions against world-withdrawal. They do not mark overload from too much world, but the impossibility of binding world meaningfully at all.

Here it becomes visible why Eigenzeit collapse is not repairable.

What collapses is not a state that could be restored, but the condition of world-binding itself. Interventions aimed at return, reactivation, or “re-entry” therefore miss the point. They presuppose that world still bears—precisely what is no longer the case.

The institutional reflex is to pathologise this condition. Burnout, depression, adjustment disorder, avoidance, incapacity for work: all these categories describe effects without addressing their cause. They treat the collapse as an individual occurrence, even though it is structurally produced. Eigenzeit is not recognised in the process, but further consumed—through renewed demands for adaptation, renewed simulation, renewed attribution of responsibility without bearing.

Decisive is this:

Eigenzeit collapse is not reversible through time. More rest, more patience, more protection do not solve the problem as long as the conditions of world-binding are not restored. Time heals nothing here, because time itself is part of the problem—as empty procedural time without world.

For this reason, neurodivergence must necessarily be brought onto an equal footing with neurotypicality, including changes to all structures. The neurotypical cannot make up Eigenzeit for neurodivergent people, cannot live it, cannot shape it. Any attempt to do so is inevitably a violent and failing intervention. The question of habitat, living space, one’s own culture, one’s own formats, one’s own science therefore has to be posed.

This also shifts the question of responsibility. It is not the affected person who has failed, but the order that presupposes binding while simultaneously destroying it. The collapse is not an individual end, but a boundary signal: it indicates that a system has exceeded its ontological capacity to bear.

Neurodivergent existences cannot be managed in the long term without destroying them. If they are not allowed to live in accordance with their Eigenzeit, this results, in effect, in an existential prohibition.

5. Rights, Reasonable Accommodations, and Inclusion: Interventions After the Loss of Eigenzeit

Rights intervene too late.

This is not a polemical claim, but a structural determination. Human rights, fundamental rights, and disability rights take effect where subjects are already identifiable as carriers of states, properties, or impairments. They address persons after world-binding has been damaged or destroyed. Within this framework, Eigenzeit does not appear as a condition to be protected, but as a silently presupposed resource.

Reasonable accommodations, inclusion measures, and protective rights therefore operate consistently within an already collapsed context. They compensate for functional losses, modify demands, and mitigate consequences. What they cannot achieve is the restoration of world-binding. They treat symptoms of an ontological exhaustion, not its cause. In many cases, they thereby destroy affordances that are highly relevant for the Eigenzeit of neurodivergent people.

This is not an implementation problem.
It is a categorical problem.

Rights presuppose decision-making and agency. They address the human being as an accountable subject capable of articulating interests, asserting claims, and passing through procedures. Yet precisely these capacities depend on viable Eigenzeit. Where Eigenzeit has collapsed, rights do not operate emancipatorily, but abstractly. They address a person who structurally no longer exists—at least not in the form presupposed by law.

In the neurodivergent context, this asymmetry becomes particularly evident. Autistic persons are legally protected while remaining institutionally embedded in binding-destroying regimes. Adjustments occur at the level of pace, access, or formality, not at the level of responsibility-bearing. World remains unviable even when it is organised to be more barrier-free.

Inclusion thus becomes integration into simulation.
It enables participation in procedures, not participation in world.

This finding is uncomfortable because it cannot be resolved through better design. More rights, finer accommodations, or more differentiated diagnoses change nothing about the fact that institutions can neither generate nor replace Eigenzeit. At best, they could protect it—and structurally they do not, so long as they continue to substitute binding with procedures.

Here the actual limit of the liberal-legal model becomes visible. It conceives of the human being as an object of states, not as a bearer of world-binding. Responsibility is legally attributed, not ontologically borne. Where this difference is not recognised, a paradoxical situation arises: formally defined rights increase while real agency declines.

For neurodivergent existences, this is not an abstract tension but a lived reality. Protection is granted after binding has been lost. Recognition occurs after Eigenzeit has already been consumed.

This makes clear:
A politics that does not protect Eigenzeit can only retroactively append rights.
And rights that are appended retroactively cannot compensate for the loss.

What is lacking is not another category of protection, but a prior boundary determination: the recognition that Eigenzeit is a pre-legal condition of world- and agency-capacity. Without this

recognition, inclusion remains an administrative project—and neurodivergence a permanent boundary case.

Instead, attention must be directed toward the affordances of Eigenzeit.

6. Why Politics Cannot Produce Eigenzeit – and Where Its Responsibility Nevertheless Lies

Politics cannot produce Eigenzeit.

Not because it fails, but because this lies outside its categorical scope.

Eigenzeit arises where decision irreversibly binds world. This act is not delegable, not aggregable, and not collectively substitutable. Politics, by contrast, necessarily operates through representation: mandates, procedures, majorities, jurisdictions. It can organise decisions, but it cannot assume world-binding. Where politics attempts to produce Eigenzeit, it inevitably resorts to symbolism, programmes, or simulation.

This limit is not a deficit of politics.

It is its condition.

The categorical error begins where politics behaves as if it could nevertheless carry world. Where responsibility is generalised, externalised, or temporally stretched, an appearance of agency emerges—without bearing its ontological costs. Politics extends time where binding would be required. It distributes responsibility where it is not delegable. This is how symbolic politics arises: not as deception, but as a necessary substitute for something that is structurally unavailable.

In this sense, politics itself is already embedded in a Seinsverschiebung. It operates within a field distorted by the objectifiability of world, in which real binding is structurally no longer provided for. Eigenzeit collapse appears here not as political failure in the narrow sense, but as the temporal-structural consequence of this displacement: politics responds within an ontologically distorted framework and thereby reproduces precisely the conditions it seeks to address.

This does not imply irresponsibility, but a different form of responsibility. If politics cannot produce Eigenzeit, then its task consists in not further destroying its conditions. It cannot perform world-binding by proxy, but it can prevent institutions from systematically undermining, consuming, or rendering that binding impossible.

This responsibility is negative, not productive.

It consists not in doing, but in refraining.

Concretely, this means: politics must not stabilise regimes that demand responsibility without bearing it. It must not enforce procedures that simulate world-binding while simultaneously presupposing it. It must not legitimise demands for adaptation that treat high binding density as a disturbance. Where this nevertheless occurs, Eigenzeit is not merely ignored, but actively destroyed.

In the neurodivergent context, this limit becomes particularly sharp. Autistic existences are not a target group of political design, but boundary cases of political competence. They show where politics overreaches its own presuppositions—not because they claim special rights, but because they embody a form of world-binding that cannot be politically substituted. Least of all through neurotypical formats.

For precisely this reason, neurodivergent collapses are politically relevant without being politically solvable. They do not indicate a need for new programmes, but a transgression of existing orders. Politics regularly responds by expanding administration, law, and care—that is, by precisely those means that previously co-produced the collapse.

Here the circle closes:

Politics that fails to recognise its own categorical limit produces dependency, which it then administers. It drives neurodivergent people out of their life contexts—thus into poverty and injury—and then replaces world-binding with jurisdiction and calls this responsibility. For highly bound modes of existence, this displacement is not bearable. They lose not only protection, but world.

The consequence is not withdrawal from politics, but a disciplining of political claims. Politics must cease wanting to act where only binding can operate. And it must begin to intervene where its own instruments destroy that binding.

That is little.

But it is the decisive point.

7. Neurodivergence as an Early Indicator of Societal World-Unbearability

Neurodivergence is not a marginal phenomenon.

It is an early indicator.

Not because neurodivergent people are more sensitive, but because they reach limits earlier at which world is no longer bindable. Highly bound modes of existence make visible what can be compensated, simulated, or externalised for longer within binding-poor forms of life. They expose the points at which world is no longer borne, but only administered.

In this sense, neurodivergence is not a special case of social inclusion, but an epistemic marker for the bearability of societal orders. Where highly bound modes of existence systematically collapse, it is not adaptation that has failed, but world-capability that has been exhausted. The order can no longer carry world; it can only organise it.

The frequent attempt to individualise this finding—as psychological vulnerability, as special needs, as a therapeutic challenge—misses its object. It translates a structural rupture into a personal property. What appears as a “neurodivergent problem” is in truth the boundary line of a system that presupposes binding without enabling it.

This becomes concrete in practice: in the systematic disregard of autistic special interest, which is read not as world-binding but as deviation; and equally in the structural incompatibility that ADHD encounters in fragmented processes, spaces, and temporal regimes. In both cases, what becomes visible is not too much world, but too little bearable world.

Eigenzeit makes this boundary precisely visible. It shows that world is not infinitely fragmentable, delegable, or simulable. Where Eigenzeit collapses, not merely a biography ends, but a form of world. That this collapse becomes visible first where binding density is high is no coincidence. It is a structural necessity.

Neurodivergent existences therefore do not stand outside society.
They often stand at its boundary.

They show what happens when responsibility without bearing, decision without binding, and action without world become the norm. Their failure is not individual, but a prefigured societal failure.

This also shifts the question of the future. It is not about integrating neurodivergent people better, making them more resilient, or adapting them more functionally. It is about whether societal orders are still capable of binding world, rather than merely administering it. Neurodivergence answers this question not normatively, but factually—through the early failure of binding.

This paper therefore offers no solution.

Not because solutions are lacking, but because the claim to solution itself is part of the problem. Where Eigenzeit has been destroyed, nothing can be “repaired.” What can be done is to make visible where world has become uninhabitable.

Neurodivergence is not a deficit, not a model, not an ideal.
It is a boundary signal.

And boundary signals are not meant to be soothed.
They are meant to be taken seriously.

References:

This work operates operatorically rather than discursively; its claims are derived from internal structural invariance rather than from literature synthesis.

Speed, T. (2025). *They Cannot Understand - Why Autism Research Gets It Wrong* ISBN: 3695116013

Speed, T. (2025). *They Cannot Understand - Why Autism Research Gets It Wrong* (AAM Open Version German and English) Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18154332>

Speed, T. (2026). *The End of World-Time: Indimergence, Curved Possibility, Recurrence, and the Limit of World-Capability* (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18455805>

Speed, T. (2026). *Repair Without Eigenzeit - On the Ontological Instability of Simulation-Based Healing in Morphology and Medicine* (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18449885>

Speed, T. (2025). *Labour as Relational Agency: An Autistic Theory of Structural Violence Against Non-Market Work in the Age of AI*. In *Speed's Work: An Autistic Intervention in the*

- Concept of Work - In the Age of AI and Robotics (Version 2). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17816066>
- Speed, T. (2025). The Value Threshold: Why Value Only Comes Into Being When Work Appears — Ontology of the Emergence Economy and Introduction of the Universal Care Income (UCI) (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17840416>
- Speed, T. (2025). The Diversity Threshold – A Threshold Model of Emergent Systems (3 English (small correction)). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17859190>
- Speed, T. (2025). Radical Worker: Autonomous Labour as Reality-Maintaining Practice (Version 2). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17816015>
- Speed, T. (2019). Primary and Secondary Economy - On the Ontological Distinction Between Value Formation, Work, and Systemic Extraction (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17952123>
- Speed, T. (2025). Poverty as Manufactured Vulnerability - Povertism, Classism, and Functional Right-Wing Radicalism in the German Welfare State (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17998234>
- Speed, T. (2026). Correct, but Worldless - Why Theoretical Correctness Does Not Guarantee Ontological Grounding (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18134901>
- Speed, T. (2005). Gesellschaft ohne Vertrauen - Die Grundlagen einer kreativen Gesellschaft (2 Open AAM Version in German). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18145477>
- Speed, T. (2014). Stärke in der Armut - Ein Essay als Entwicklungsprozess. (AAM Open Version in German) [Computer software]. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18145555>
- Speed, T. (2026). Stabilization Without World - On the Self-Distortion of Physics Through Statistical Placeholders (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18267243>
- Speed, T. (2025). SPEED'S WORK - An Autistic Intervention in the Concept of Work In the Age of AI and Robotics (AAM Open Version English with Images in PDF) [Computer software]. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18233080>
- Speed, T. (2019). Radical Worker - The Fight for Self-Determined Work (AAM Open Version in German and English) . Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18145937>

About the Author

Timothy Speed is an independent artist-researcher working on operator-based ontologies, world-formation, and neurodivergent epistemology.

His work connects philosophy of physics, consciousness studies, and social theory through the framework of operatoric research.

Further publications, papers, and archival materials are available at:

<https://timothy-speed.org>

<https://zenodo.org/communities/operatoric-research-corpus>

(The present text constitutes an interface translation into neurotypical academic discourse. This translation functions as an accessibility measure necessitated by dominant linguistic and epistemic conventions. It does not represent the native epistemic form of the research, but a communicative adaptation required for participation in standardized scholarly exchange.)

A more in-depth paper on the methodology can be found here:

Speed, T. (2025). Recursive Knowledge Instead of Additive Knowledge Accumulation - On the Epistemic Structure of Embodied, Neurodivergent Research (Version 1). Zenodo.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18054997>

A paper providing an overview of the work can be found here:

Speed, T. (2026). Introduction to an Operator-Based Research Program - World, Work, Value, Consciousness – Structure and Boundary Questions Beyond Representational Models (Corpus Overview / Survey Paper / Meta Paper) (Version 1). Zenodo.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18303557>

References

Speed, T. (2025). They Cannot Understand : Why Autism Research Gets It Wrong. BoD.

Speed, T. (2025). They Cannot Understand - Why Autism Research Gets It Wrong (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17811620>

Speed, T. (2025). Recursive Knowledge Instead of Additive Knowledge Accumulation - On the Epistemic Structure of Embodied, Neurodivergent Research (Version 1). Zenodo.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18054997>

- Speed, T. (2025). Veridical Mapping as the Foundation of a Second Science. Rosetta Operator — An Invariance Theory of Consciousness, Work, and World. (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17857039>
- Speed, T. (2025). Operatoric Cognition: Pre-theoretical Structural Invariance as the Basis of Autistic Intelligence (3 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17897109>
- Speed, T. (2025). Beyond Intelligence - Emergence, Operator Relativity, and an Autistic Epistemology (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18068128>
- Speed, T. (2025). Savant Phenomena and Non-Representational Cognition An Operatoric Approach (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18069350>
- Speed, T. (2025). Structural Savantism - On the Epistemic Gap Between Savant Research, Autism, and Intelligence Theory (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18069627>
- Speed, T. (2025). Veridical Mapping as a Spatial Operation - Neurodivergent Cognition Beyond Representational Models (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18032384>
- Speed, T. (2025). The Observer as a Spatial Category - On the Topological Inversion of World and the Ontological Structure of Observation (4 English DOI corrected in PDF). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18018699>
- Speed, T. (2025). Seinsverschiebung (Shift of Being) as a Pre-Ontological Category - On the Incompatibility of Existence and Understanding in Modern Regimes of Stabilization (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18007628>
- Speed, T. (2025). The Constructed Observer - World-Formation Beyond Representation - Why Perception Is Not Representation, but a Structural Achievement (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18006170>
- Speed, T. (2025). Synesthetic Science - Neurodivergent Embodiment as a Method of World-Detection - On the Epistemic Function of Embodied, Non-Representational Perception (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18001074>
- Speed, T., & Speed, T. (2024, Dezember 29). Transfer Protocol (Transferprotokoll) – A Neurodivergent (Autistic) FEATURE FILM by Timothy Speed (2 without subtitles + Trailer). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18093110>
- Speed, T. (2025). REPRESENTATIONAL VIOLENCE — A Manifesto How normative fields erase non-representational ontologies (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17826435>
- Speed, T. (2025). AUTISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY - A Second Knowledge Architecture in the Human Species (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17817017>
- Speed, T. (2025). Autistic Ontology: Why Autistic Embodiment Reveals an Incommensurability Between Modes of Reality (Version 1). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17811460>

Speed, T. (2025). *Speed's Work: An Autistic Intervention in the Concept of Work In the Age of AI and Robotics*. BoD.

Speed, T. (2025). *Structural Violence and State Protective Obligations How Work-Centered Social Systems Predictably Make Neurodivergent People Ill - (A structural-theoretical analysis using the example of Citizen's Benefit / Basic Income Support in international comparison) (2 English)*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17978565>