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ON THE SUBJECT OF AUTISM: LACAN, FIRST-PERSON WRITING,
AND RESEARCH

A Thesis Presented

by

Adam Poulin

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Thesis Examination Committee:

Todd McGowan, Ph.D., Advisor
Judith Aiken, Ph.D., Chairperson
Hyon-Joo Yoo, Ph.D.
Lance Smith, Ph.D.

Cynthia J. Forehand, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

ABSTRACT

In his essay, *Don't Mourn for Us*, Jim Sinclair describes autism as a “way of being.” He maintains there is “no normal child hidden behind the autism” and that “it colors every experience, every sensation, perception, thought, emotion, and encounter, every aspect of existence.” In an attempt to appreciate the depth of Sinclair’s statements, this thesis approaches autism as a “way of being” through the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan. By applying Lacan’s conceptual framework to first-person writing and scientific research, I lay an interdisciplinary foundation for the case I make. Although this project requires significant conceptual scaffolding across different epistemological systems, I consider how Lacanian theory possesses a unique capacity to conceive of autism as a *way of being* and to open new ways of approaching the source material.

Implicitly, Sinclair asks that we consider the question of what it means “to be” – autistic, neurotypical, or otherwise. I approach this from the premise that an individual exists as a *thinking* being, or a “subject.” Because psychoanalysis is concerned with the constitutive role of the unconscious in structuring consciousness, this thesis invests substantial space in consideration of how the Lacanian subject is oriented around a fundamental *lack*. To this end, I return frequently to Lacan’s concept of *objet a*, understood as a representative of the subject’s lack in the perceptual realm that is itself *lacking*. Further, Lacan’s unique interpretation of Freud consists in placing *language* as the ultimate mediating structure of subjectivity; it both generates lack and establishes a system for mitigating it. One’s way of being is always a *way of being in language*.¹ Given the predominant roles of language and social communication impairments in the DSM-V diagnostic criteria for autism, a main goal of this project is to consider how an autistic *way of being* entails a unique structuration of lack.²

Autism and psychoanalysis share a history that extends back to the origins of the diagnosis. I explore this history with a focus on how different psychoanalytic theories conceptualize the autistic subject and to what extent they honor or undermine Sinclair’s position. Contemporary Lacanian thinkers of autism do both. Unique to Lacan’s structural approach, the concept of the Other is inclusive of a radical alterity, yet also the system of language, the body, and certain aspects of the maternal and paternal functions. The subject is unthinkable apart from the Other. I suggest an autistic way of being is discernible in the autistic subject’s relation to each aspect of the Other. I find support for this claim in recent sensorimotor research. Referred to loosely as the *movement perspective*, this research suggests that differences in how autistic individuals move and perceive others is a “unifying characteristic” of autism.³ Importantly, the movement perspective is proactively inclusive of first-person knowledge. Read through Lacan’s conceptual framework, movement differences address the underlying mechanism of the autistic subject’s relation to the Other, and thus its *way of being*.

Most fundamentally, this thesis is a work of theory that attempts to articulate something universal about *being* a subject, without simultaneously eliding what is unique about being an *autistic* subject

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Autism is typically defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder affecting multiple aspects of an individual's life. Current DSM-V diagnostic criteria include impairments in verbal and non-verbal communication, deficits in social interactions, and restricted and repetitive behaviors or interests.⁴ Frequently associated with these criteria are a pronounced preference for sameness and an aversion to breaks in routine, as well as hyper- or hypo-sensitivity to certain sensory stimuli.⁵ Autism is conceived of as existing along a spectrum, conjoining individuals in need of intensive daily supports at one end, with those who go largely unnoticed among their non-autistic peers at the other end. Although rates of occurrence have risen steadily over the last three decades, accompanied by an increase in research,⁶ societal awareness, and cultural representation, there is still no definitive etiology of autism beyond a collection of risk factors.⁷

In my view, each inconclusive attempt to determine a cause corresponds to a speculative theory about what autism *is*. These range from the psychogenic and the environmental, to the neurobiological and the genetic. Regardless of the varying degrees of evidence to support these theories, what they often share is an *etic* approach to understanding autism, grounded in clinical observation or some sort of empirical research. In recent years, however, autistic self-advocates are producing *emic* accounts in growing numbers, often as participants in the autism rights and neurodiversity movements. For a condition surrounded by so many questions, how the simplest are posed is perhaps as important as to how they are answered. This is a shift from asking

how? to asking *what?* It is a move away from discourse focused on prevention and cure, to one grounded in a radical acceptance that autism *is*.

Neurodiversity activist, Jim Sinclair, raises the stakes of such a shift in his essay, *Don't Mourn For Us*. Here he asserts: "Autism is a way of being. It is not possible to separate the person from the autism."⁸ To conceive of autism at the level of one's existence, as a *way of being*, is to seek an alternative framework from one grounded in a gradation of clinical severity. It highlights the importance of first-person, qualitative, *emic* descriptions. Further, this shift poses the question of what it means *to be* in general. In my view, these questions must traverse an epistemological antagonism located at the intersection of *etic* and *emic* discourses as they relate to the *what* of autism. Put simply, how does knowledge produced through one discourse relate to knowledge produced through the other? How does one reconcile the truth values of *etic* and *emic* accounts of autism without subsuming one within the other? Issuing out of these admittedly abstract concerns are the very concrete policies and practices that guide the development of the systems of support available to actual autistic subjects. Given that any such system is founded on an implicit definition⁹ of what constitutes individual agency, defining autism as a "way of being" instead of as a disorder or a condition initiates a cascade of ethical, political, and philosophical ramifications.

In order to appreciate the scope of Sinclair's words, this thesis applies the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan to autism as a metapsychology of the subject. Because psychoanalysis, as a critical method, can be applied across *emic* and *etic* discourses, I believe it to be uniquely suited for addressing the questions raised above.

My application of this theory will unfold along two related but distinct paths, owing to the influence of Lacan on clinicians and philosophers alike. In both cases, there is an equivalence between what can be said (or known) of human *being* most profoundly, and the inescapable horizon of language in enabling those claims. For Lacan, language both enacts and mitigates a fundamentally unthinkable trauma at the root of human psychical existence, access to which blurs the distinction between speculative inquiry and a leap of faith.¹⁰ Taken to its most radical conclusion, this means that considering autism as a “way of being” requires we approach it as a “way of being” *in language*.¹¹

In Chapter 1, I elaborate on certain aspects of Lacanian theory to develop an understanding of what it means “to be” a subject most broadly, as well as how a subject might evince a specific “way of being” in particular. As I work to show “the subject” stands in contrast to the self-aware, thinking-being of consciousness, which is often taken as the individual unit of human being. Instead, the Lacanian subject is the subject of the unconscious. It is defined by its relation to the Other and is, by nature, irreducible to the appearance of mind (or “ego”) to itself. To approach the autistic subject, I pursue a reading of Lacan that allows one to speculate about unconscious structures by extrapolating from first-person accounts. This involves discerning the conditions of possibility for consciousness as such, without simultaneously or inadvertently making these conditions conscious. Given the interdisciplinary origins of this project, substantial time is invested towards introducing and orienting psychoanalytic concepts; those familiar with Freud and Lacan will consider this well-trodden terrain. Rather than attempt

a novel reading of the primary sources, my goal in Chapter 1 is to engineer the conceptual machinery I utilize in what follows.

In the Interlude, I review historical and contemporary psychoanalytic theories of autism. One goal for this portion is to identify what is unique in a Lacanian approach compared to other theories. Another is to gauge the potential for these theories to engage with Sinclair's statement that "autism is a way of being," as well as other first-person accounts more generally. As we will find, the question of a psychogenic etiology lingers in a psychoanalytic conceptualization of autism. Similarly, we are forced to consider a distinction between approaches that treat *autism*, compared to those that treat the *autistic subject*. Examples of the former present as incompatible with Sinclair's thinking. Ultimately, I argue that a Lacanian approach offers a way to move past the limitations of other psychoanalytic theories of autism, owing both to Lacan's unique innovation of Freudian theory and a persistent resistance to an orthodox reading of his work.¹²

In Chapter 2, I apply Lacanian theory to scientific research and the writing of autistic subjects. Here the overarching goal of engaging with emic and etic knowledge through a psychoanalytic metapsychology is pursued most directly. Building from the definition of *being* developed in Chapter 1, along with the Lacanian conceptualization of autism described in the Interlude, I find support for Sinclair's claim in multiple sources. Scientific research that examines sensorimotor differences is reviewed with a focus on how what these differences mean for the emergence of the autistic subject. Likewise, first-person writing is analyzed for signs that indicate the writers' "way of being" according to the criteria established in Chapter 1. By and large, I support Sinclair's claim,

owing to the resonance that emerges between *emic* and *etic* sources when they are situated within a Lacanian psychoanalytic metapsychology. I conclude by considering the implications of an autistic *way of being* on treatment and support approaches, suggesting areas for additional research, and reflecting on the limitations this project.

Meet and Greet

The potential for deepening one's understanding of autism based on autobiographical accounts far surpasses the scope of this project. Further, as the saying goes, "If you've met one person with autism, you've met *one* person with autism...*once*."¹³ There is a risk inherent to making general claims based on individual reporting. With this in mind, a fundamental wager of this thesis is that Lacan addresses a universal dimension of the subject that does not, through its universality, preclude conceiving of autism as a distinct "way of being."

Finally, to set the stage before moving forward, a brief introduction to the writers who inspired this project is warranted. It is worth noting that the majority of the first-person sources were authored by individuals considered severely autistic. That is, while they are accomplished writers and self-advocates in their own rights, DSM-based diagnostic criteria views them as markedly impaired, requiring substantial support. They are predominantly non-verbal and engage in various modes of ritualized, repetitive, "self-stimulating" behaviors. And yet:

Amanda Baggs is a writer of blogs and essays. In 2007, she created and uploaded a video to YouTube called *In My Language*.¹⁴ Baggs' video asserts the basic value of her unique experience of the world, shown through a series of shots of her interacting with

objects in her apartment: a stream of running water, a piece of string, sunlight shining through a window, the corrugated surface of a piece of cardboard. Her movements are rhythmic and repetitive; throughout the piece she hums a series of sustained tones. About halfway through there is a pause and a title card reads “A Translation.” A voiceover generated by an augmentative speech device begins, accompanied by subtitles. In her typed monologue, Baggs challenges the social paradigm/perception that fails to see her as a “thinking being,” in light of her inability to speak verbal language. She implores the viewer to consider that her movements constitute their own form of language independent of “visual symbols for people to interpret.” She laments that “failure to learn your language is seen as a deficit but failure to learn my language is seen as so natural.” At the time of this writing, *In My Language* has amassed almost 1.5 million views.

In her essays and blog posts, Baggs critiques the discourse of “ableism,” which she views as underlying all social oppression,¹⁵ as well as the implicit privileging of neuro-typicality at play in certain diagnostic approaches¹⁶ to autism. She works to expand the definition of what constitutes a meaningful human existence, in the face of her own profound, daily struggle to meet the basic criteria for that definition: autonomy, mobility, expressive language. In Baggs’ descriptions of her subjective experience, she touches upon the themes of distance from spoken language; a predilection for a-symbolic communicative-interacting with her environment; the predominance of patterns and inter-object connections in her visual field, and the eschewal of a “shell” conceptualization of autism, in favor of one defined by there being less “filtering” of the world than neurotypical individuals experience.¹⁷

Naoki Higashida, now in his mid-20s, has published poems, novels, and essays in his native Japan. In *The Reason I Jump* (2007), Naoki answers a series of questions often asked of autistic individuals. Across his responses, Naoki returns frequently to language. He describes the need to “anchor” his words through the use of an alphabet grid, lest he “drown in a flood of words.”¹⁸ To communicate, he has to “speak in an unknown foreign language, every minute of every day,” which is complicated by the “verbal junk” he spews involuntarily.¹⁹ Naoki considers how autistic kids “never use enough words, and it’s these missing words that can cause all the trouble.”²⁰ He longs for a planet with “autistic gravity”²¹ and a return to a primordial state, where humankind is immersed in water and “at one with the pulse of time.”²² Naoki suggests “people with autism were born outside the regime of civilization”²³ and never feel “our bodies are our own.”²⁴ He maintains that autism is fundamentally a matter of “emotions that trigger abnormal reactions,” as opposed to something grounded in a “malfunctioning” nervous system.²⁵

Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay, now in his late-20s, wrote *How Can I Talk If My Lips Don’t Move* (2008) as a teenager. Through a series of short chapters, Tito describes his experiences growing up in India before moving to the US with his mother. His writing builds a narrative structured around the progressive changes in how he relates to his world. From seeing stories unfold in a mirror,²⁶ to the existential guarantee of his shadow,²⁷ to a desperate need to climb staircases,²⁸ Tito sought refuge from his chaotic senses in idiosyncratic ways that changed over time, due in large part to his mother’s deep faith in his ability to learn, despite less hopeful prognoses from doctors and specialists.

Tito describes, in vivid detail, how his “boundary between imagining and experiencing something was a very delicate one.”²⁹ His sensory perceptions veer wildly and involuntarily.³⁰ In his words, “I either over-see or under-see the components of the environment.” He struggles with “overassociation”³¹ and adds “extra components to existing components,”³² including synesthetic bursts of color to auditory objects. When asked by a doctor to name an object presented to him, he struggled to “untangle the web”³³ of all the “names that were associated with that object.” Whereas looking at real faces threaten him by demanding “the identification of a name,”³⁴ pictures in magazines are innocuous, because they are “frozen,”³⁵ and “do not change their angles.” Further, the repetitive nature of designs “calmed” his eyes and never commanded him to “tell me what I am.”³⁶ Tito states: “My autism is the dynamic experience of my relationship to the world, with its many aspects of place, people, climate, and their own interactions.”³⁷

These brief introductions highlight a range of experiences, touching upon each writer’s relationship to language, rich sensory perceptions, and sense of embodiment. Although in Naoki Higashida’s case, he seeks to raise awareness by writing in the first-person plural voice, there is little indication he intends to be exhaustive in his account of autistic subjectivity; a writer like Baggs outright denounces any attempts to generalize about autism from her writing.

Psychoanalysis and Being

In many ways, Lacan and autism make for a strange pairing. Autism is defined in large part by impairments in an individual’s ability to communicate, verbally and nonverbally.³⁸ The spectrum is inclusive of individuals prone towards a highly literal

usage of language, absent implicit meaning and sub-textual elements, to the complete absence of the spoken word. “Autism” derives from *autos* – Greek for *self* – suggestive of an inward-facing disregard for others, reflected in another hallmark characteristic of autistic individuals: a lack of eye-contact. From this view, autistic individuals are either uninterested in others or incapable of engaging in pro-social behaviors. Conversely, Lacanian theory commences from the premise that the subject of the unconscious emerges on the very condition of existing as a speaking being. Psychoanalysis is, after all, the “talking cure,” even if it holds that speech functions only partially to communicate conscious intentions, and wholly to promulgate unconscious desires.

As Lacan states time and again, unconscious desire is *the desire of the Other*.³⁹ The ulterior, unconscious agenda at play in speech is predicated on an encounter with the Other, which, as a concept, is taken to include: another person, the otherness of the body, and something inhabiting the entire system of Language as the big Other. For Lacan, language is the very mediating substance of thought. There is no “outside” of language and its absence might be suggestive of the absence of the subject.⁴⁰ The stakes of a Lacanian reading of autistic texts become sharper when we consider how Amanda Baggs implores us to consider “her language” as an embodied conversation with her environment, while Lacan maintains “the effect of language goes beyond, because it precedes it, any subjective apprehension which may authorize itself as being a conscious apprehension.”⁴¹ Yet, as will be argued in Chapter 2, non-verbal autistic writers are in the unique position to highlight — and problematize — any simple conflation of agency with the ability to speak.

With this in mind, it would seem that approaching autism through Lacan is skewed from the start. Indeed, although a psychoanalytic clinic of autism was prevalent in the early days of the diagnosis, its decline parallels the overall decline of psychoanalysis in the contemporary (Anglo-American) mental health field, amidst the ascendancy of empirical, evidence-based practice.⁴² This landscape has changed dramatically since the days of psychogenic etiologies, such as the “refrigerator mother”⁴³ theory, which suggested that autism commenced from the influence of an emotionally distant caregiver. Now, organizations like the Association for Science in Autism Treatment (ASAT) seek to dispel “the ongoing parade of ‘miracle cures’ and ‘magical breakthroughs’” in favor of “science-based treatments.”⁴⁴ When one considers the ill effect of unduly blaming parents or of creating an anti-vaccination craze, the shift towards an empirical epistemology is sound. But a different question must be asked as well: what is science’s role when it comes to the *way of being* of a subject? Can “science-based treatments” be applied to such a condition of existence without inherently doing violence to it?

It is of no small significance that the research bedrock for Applied Behavioral Analysis — perhaps the gold standard evidence-based practice *du jour* — originated from the same group of researchers who developed the Feminine Boy Project at UCLA in the 1970’s, a project aimed at modifying gender non-conforming behavior in young boys.⁴⁵ This shared history highlights the extent to which the discourse on autism prevalent in the contemporary Anglo-American world is grounded in the empirical, cognitive-behavioral, and neuroscientific. By contrast, in her documentary, *The Wall* (2011), Sophie Roberts

maligns a contemporary psychoanalytic course of treatment for autism in France, comparing it unfavorably to the aforementioned ABA modality delivered in the US. Her footage depicts analysts explaining their interventions with an air of absurdity, exemplified in a scene where the interviewee holds a small toy crocodile, its jaws agape.⁴⁶ The analyst instructs, “this is the mother,” and proceeds to prop the crocodile’s jaws open with a small wooden rod. She suggests her work with autistic kids is symbolically analogous to preventing the child from being subsumed by the desire of the mOther. *The Wall* amounts to a scathing condemnation of psychoanalysis as applied to autism, presenting the participating analysts as dogmatically unscientific and downright regressive in their sway over the French mental health system. Roberts was subsequently sued by three of the analysts interviewed in the documentary and it was banned for a short time. In one sense, a task for the current project is to reconfigure the coordinates available for understanding the crocodile metaphor along with scientific research and first-person writing.

Another intent here is to raise questions about the epistemological stakes implicit in the favoring of *etic* knowledge-production over *emic* sourcing, while suggesting that Lacan offers a metapsychological forum for actively listening to both. By keeping clinical and philosophical interpretations of Lacanian theory near to one another, I hope to show how these initial points of divergence can be taken as opportunities for deepening one’s regard for autistic subjects on their own terms, without jettisoning the findings of empirical science or clinical case studies. An important step in this process is to demonstrate how Lacanian theory can be applied to non-speaking subjects, by

suggesting that there is something unavoidable and universal in the underlying structure of language, regardless of whether one is autistic or neurotypical. The task of the current section is to introduce certain key theoretical concepts and to orient them in alignment with my overarching goals, and the methodology I will employ to reach them. Among these concepts are: the divided subject, metapsychology, *lack*, structure, and the Other. But first, any initial encounter with Lacan cannot help but take pause at the deceptively simple theoretical edifice he develops to map the terrain of human psychical existence. Understanding the Lacanian subject requires that one locate it in this field.

Lacan's Subject

Lacan's theoretical edifice can be divided across a tripartite structure, inclusive of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary. These domains relate to one another along a topological model. We can conceive of this structure in terms of how a knot suggests the existence of an enclosed inner space, a hidden chamber in its depths, where instead there is only the folding of a continuous surface onto itself. Lacan's three registers are equally inseparable-from and irreducible-to one another. The imaginary is what is given to consciousness; it is the realm of stable appearances, meanings, and phenomena. Linguistically, the Imaginary functions to preserve a degree of predictable correspondence between signifiers and the things they ostensibly signify. Yet crucially, there can be no imaginary appearance without prior symbolic mediation.

Loosely, the Symbolic embodies the shifting, dynamic matrix of signifiers that constitute Language. It is the contextual opening within which imaginary appearances emerge, without ever appearing itself. At the level of the symbolic, language is structured

as a differential field through which the subject emerges as a speaking being. Because Lacan further intends for the symbolic to denote the system of social codes, he installs the big Other as a steward of the symbolic and the originator of signifiers. Finally, the real is an unthinkable, yet necessary, structural impasse that cannot be ascribed to the contextual field of the symbolic, and exceeds capture in imaginary appearances.

As psychoanalyst and philosopher Mari Ruti observes, there is a tentative correspondence between Lacan's real-symbolic-imaginary and Freud's second topography, especially to the degree the focus is on the "tensions and antagonisms" between the elements in each structure.⁴⁷ After moving from his first topographical model, focused as it was on the relationship between the unconscious, the preconscious, and consciousness, Freud's formulation of the Id, the Super Ego, and the Ego came to redefine his thinking, and ultimately to pose the theoretical conundrums he would work to answer until his death. In this second model, the Ego is that aspect of an individual's mental existence with which it most readily identifies. The Super Ego is an internalization of parental (and cultural) authority, whose prohibitions and injunctions provide the ego with the basic coordinates of social conduct. The Id, then, is an untamed source of libido, constantly in transgression of the Law established by the Super Ego, and disruptive of the Ego's attempts to abide by it.

Turning to Lacan's structure requires that one avoid reading Freud according to a depth paradigm. In this interpretation, popularized within post-Freudian strands of ego psychology, the Ego's plight lies in how it deals with the Id's attempts to drag it down into the abyss of unconscious libidinal satisfaction. Instead, Lacan maintains the notion of

a pure surface topology. In this sense, the Imaginary corresponds to the Ego to the extent that the Ego appears to itself as a self-image. The Symbolic and the Super Ego share the role of establishing the coordinates within which the Imaginary Ego will adjudge itself to be in keeping with this self-image. Finally, the disruptive effects of the Id invoke the Real, to the degree that Symbolic Law has no jurisdiction over the Real, nor can the Imaginary Ego identify with what is extra-legal in the Id. In this way, the tension evinced in the individual between Super Egoic/Symbolic restriction and Real/Id-generated pressure fundamentally conditions any act of consciousness, leaving the Imaginary Ego little more than an illusory effect of the collision between the two.

As Lacan details in his essay on *The Mirror Stage*, the ego is a fundamentally narcissistic and defensive investment. It emerges when the developing child identifies with a “gestalt” mirror image, or perhaps more broadly, with the mimicked actions of a mirroring parent. This reflected image of wholeness pulls together the “fragmented” motor-functioning of the immature body and sows the seeds for the development of the ego as a coherent and stable entity.⁴⁸ A tentative, but crucial, correspondence is thus forged. However, Lacan’s point with *The Mirror Stage* essay is to highlight the fundamental *misrecognition* involved in this investment. An important nuance is the inescapable alienation that results, meaning the “initial synthesis of the *ego* is essentially an *alter ego*.”⁴⁹ By identifying with an external image, the child’s internalized sense of self is defined by something outside of it. For however much the child attempts to coincide with its own image, no one-to-one correspondence can be fully obtained, nor does the stability of the image account for the entirety of subjective experience – there is

always a remainder.⁵⁰ Further, as Lacan goes on to state in Seminar X, for as much “jubilation” as the child feels at the sight the image that “renders him transparent to himself,”⁵¹ the child’s investment in the image is only made possible when the parent is called on to “ratify the value of this image.”⁵² A Symbolic dimension is – paradoxically, unconsciously – required to register even the most self-evident content of consciousness. The Other sets the initial coordinates for child’s the identity, even as the child comes to take itself as the primary agent behind its subjective existence, “jubilant” in its Imaginary self-knowledge. Although the Imaginary ego appears to cover over a fundamental division, its every manifestation simultaneously conspires with the Other of the Symbolic to maintain an irresolvable instability owing to the shifting coordinates by which it registers itself as such.

In Lacanian theory, the Other is figured as both a parental/caregiving other who responds to a child’s basic needs, and more broadly as Language, in the figure of the big Other of the Symbolic. Here it is important to bear in mind the inevitable limitations and fallibility of these still formative support structures in a human’s early life. The impossibility of a parent ever perfectly (and permanently) addressing a child’s every need is analogous to the incapacity of language to ever fully articulate one’s subjective experience.⁵³ Taken further, the child’s needs are effectively sculpted into existence by the Other, informed by the caregiver’s attempts to quell hunger, thirst, and discomfort. At this level, one’s internal sensations come to be distinguished by virtue of an external response. Nonetheless, over time, the child synchronizes the words and actions of a caregiver with its own nascent body-organization, and, according to a typical

developmental trajectory, to employ such words and actions to its own ends. But as Lacan describes, something is left out in this progression from chaotic infantile need to conscious intentionality. Owing to how both the parental Other and language fall short – owing to what they *lack* – the subject of the unconscious emerges as a desiring being. Desire is a leftover, generated by the unavoidable imperfection of the whole arrangement. Further, this condition cuts both ways, making *lack* itself a pre-condition for the subject. For as much as a well-attuned caretaking Other might adequately support a child's development, it cannot help but also bring the child into a confrontation with an unknowable dimension of itself: the desire of the Other, which remains as a lacuna in the symbolic.⁵⁴ For Lacan, unconscious desire is both “of” and “for” the Other, manifest in the connotative range of *de*.⁵⁵ Desire seeks an answer to the nebulous *Che vuoi?* of the Other's desire, suggestive of the notion that what desires seeks is, in fact, desire itself.

An important caveat with all of this is to resist seeing the actions and signifiers of the Other as orienting a pre-existing, if inchoate, subject to the ways of the world. Such a pre-lingual dimension is imbued with meaning retroactively as an effect of the signifier, in defiance of a commonsensical developmental chronology. Lacan builds this non-linear temporality out of Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (“deferral” or “afterwardsness”), initially made in reference to the effect of a past trauma felt in the present.⁵⁶ In this sense, the meaning of an event is not something internal to it that unfolds from past, to the present, into the future. Rather, the meaning of the past is retro-determined in light of how the event is coded in the present by the remembering agent. To speak of a pre-verbal subject is untenable in Lacanian theory. Because there is no apprehension of an event

without some base-level mediation of it, there can be no proto-lingual subject lying in wait for the descriptive power of language to come along and provide the tools for signifying its pre-historic experiences.

If the ego is an illusory misrecognition, desire is of/for the Other, and the subject is conditioned by a non-linear temporality, what sense does psychoanalysis make of the subject's being? For starters, Lacan draws a sharp distinction between the being of the subject of the unconscious and any meaning one might derive from such being. In a rather hyperbolic example, he likens this mutual exclusivity to the choice faced by the would-be victim of a mugging: *Your money or your life!* Naturally, "If I choose the money, I lose both."⁵⁷ In the choice between meaning and being, "meaning survives only deprived of that part of non-meaning that is, strictly speaking, that which constitutes in the realization of the subject, the unconscious."⁵⁸ To this extent, the subject stands in mutual exclusivity to its being; it is separate/divided from its being. Over the course of his annual Seminars, Lacan sets out from the classical definition of the Cartesian *cogito* – the "I" that knows itself in its thinking – to distinguish his subject as the subject of the unconscious. Whereas the Cartesian subject finds its being the moment it says "I am," this proclamation is the exact opposite for the Lacanian subject. The meaning of such a statement eclipses the unconscious being of the subject.

The key to understanding Lacan's shift relies on the primacy of Language in his thinking, grounded in his interpretation of the structural linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson. Structural linguistics is concerned with an analysis of "the sign" as it is constituted through the pairing of "the signifier" and "the signified."

Yet Lacan radically severs this pairing, establishing an ever-receding horizon of the signifier that never dips into the signified. By maintaining that the subject is the subject of the signifier, he insists the signifier “stands prior” to the subject.⁵⁹ In ‘standing prior’ the question of ‘being’ relative to the subject takes on its own retroactive layering:

The signifier, producing itself in the field of the Other, makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject.⁶⁰

Lacan’s topography entails that the Symbolic facilitates the movement from one Imaginary appearance to another, without ever “getting behind” the appearance as such. Lacan maintains that the subject is not consciousness, but nonetheless he locates it in speech. Where exactly? The subject is present on the underside of the manifest semantic content of language. The truth of the unconscious emerges at the interstices of representation. One could venture further and say that the Lacanian subject literally *is* this interstitial space.⁶¹ Whereas the Imaginary Ego speaks under the illusion of transparent intentions and self-directed agency, the subject of the unconscious is what is more truly *spoken* in language. In Seminar XI, Lacan distinguishes between the “subject of the statement” and the “subject of enunciation.” In one example, at the level of the statement, the phrase “I am lying,” is a logical paradox.⁶² But at the level of the *enunciation* – the contribution of the unconscious – the phrase serves to show the inherent double-speak at play in any attempt to represent oneself. “I am lying” thus functions in spite of its

paradoxical structure. The subject always says more than it intends at the level of consciousness, through what Lacan deems a “truthful lie.”⁶³

In Seminar XIII, Lacan again invokes Descartes, this time recalling that “doubt” is the definitive step towards establishing the certainty of being. The subject is thus “the being which finds its certainty by manifesting itself as being at the heart of this questioning, ‘I think’: thinking that I am, but I am what thinks and to think: I am, is not the same thing as being what thinks.”⁶⁴ In plainer, more straightforward terms: the subject is retroactively posited as the originator of the signifiers that come to stand for it, even though psychoanalysis holds that these signifiers really come from the Other. Lacan simplifies his phrasing somewhat when he says that “the one who is that which thinks, thinks in a way that the one who thinks: ‘I am’, is not aware of.”⁶⁵ The first part of the sentence, “The one who is that which thinks,” can be restated simply as “the unconscious.” The second part can become the “I” who appears to itself as thinking. Put back together in this way, Lacan’s formulation becomes: The unconscious thinks in a such a way that the “I” misrecognizes itself to be the source of its thinking (“...is not aware of”). Thus, the unconscious is the very condition of possibility for the “I” to appear as such, even as it precludes the “I” from ever properly articulating or knowing itself. The “way of being” for any subject is to derive no meaning from its being as such.

In conceptualizations of autism that focus on deficits in Theory of Mind (ToM), the question of the “I” relative to the unconscious evinces an important contrast. Theory of Mind describes the ability to ascribe internal mental states and intentions to another human being. The autistic individual is considered, in varying degrees, to *lack* a proper

Theory of Mind. That is, they fail to perceive the other human being as an agent with the potential to act intentionally in the world out of conscious motivations. The intent here is not to refute the broad research base underlying this approach, nor to, conversely, endorse its descriptive potential for first-person narratives. What is at stake in psychoanalysis are the ways the unconscious dimension of an individual renders its own intentions as opaque to itself, let alone to others. Our line of inquiry is less concerned with whether the autistic individual views the other human being as possessing its own beliefs and intentions, but whether the other human being is itself a subject of the unconscious.⁶⁶ An encounter between desiring beings is different than an encounter between conscious beings. The former requires there to be a space for what is unknown of the Other *to the other*. In *The Reason I Jump*, Naoki Higashida questions: “Isn’t there a belief out there that if a person is using verbal language, it follows that the person is saying what they want to say? It’s thanks to this belief that those of us with autism get even more locked up inside ourselves.”⁶⁷ A psychoanalytic understanding of how desire undermines the expression of one’s conscious intentions in language simultaneously undermines the “belief” Naoki cites. Instead, not “saying what they want to say” is something oddly universal.

Why a Metapsychology?

To function as a metapsychology, psychoanalytic theory must attempt to account for all that can be known by the psyche in addressing itself to something that is unthinkable within it: the unconscious. In the way that metaphysics theorizes the

preconditions for the existence of time and space, metapsychology seeks to describe the [ultimately] unknowable conditions of possibility for a thinking, self-aware being to exist in relation to the subject of the unconscious. Metapsychology is, in effect, a psychoanalytic epistemology that locates the being of the subject beyond the limit of knowability. What is knowable, then, is structured by this limit, even as the structure itself cannot be observed as such. Building from Freud and Lacan, I deploy psychoanalysis for the purpose of making universal claims about subjectivity, without dissolving the very real differences between individual subjects, autistic or otherwise, based on examples in the emic literature that signal the presence of this limit.

This project is not an attempt at “closing up” or “tying off” an exhaustive account of autistic subjectivity, nor does it approach the question of universality by invoking concepts such as human nature or biological determinism/materialism. In psychoanalysis, the idea of a totalized system of knowledge is radically undermined at the outset. Whereas in a positivist/scientific worldview, the goal is to fill in gaps in knowledge, Lacan considers psychoanalysis to be “an experience that includes within it the taking into account of lack as such.”⁶⁸ In effect, the precondition for universality held by psychoanalysis is not “despite our differences, we’re all the same because we’re human,” so much as it is the universalization of the decentering effect of the unconscious, marking an internal non-identity of the human subject with itself. If anything, what humans have the potential to share in is a mutual lack of self-sameness.⁶⁹ Put differently: what is universal is the particular condition of one’s individual alienation.

This starting point sets psychoanalysis on a divergent course from any theory, be it scientific, philosophical, or spiritual, that maintains an [epistemological] teleology of omniscience. Rather, psychoanalysis entails a radical epistemological humility at odds with the desire to master reality, based first and foremost in Freud's discovery of the unconscious as what is fundamentally determinative of the psyche. Freud believed psychoanalytic inquiry to be a "wounding blow" against "human megalomania," subverting the ego so that "it is not even master in its own house" (Freud Intro 353). In this way, I view psychoanalysis as a uniquely privileged interdisciplinary tool, capable of maintaining a space for the unconscious through a profound questioning of the very desire to know in itself (Lacan X 55). Instead, an essential maneuver for this project is to install a space for what *lacks* in both the structure of the subject and within any knowledge-producing discourse it may inhabit. This is an effort to account for the effects of something that exceeds and escapes representation, but which conditions it all the same. The precise task at hand, as I see it, is to define how *lack* structures — and is structured — within autism.

Lacan's name for what occupies this point of structural lack is *objet a*; he conceives of it as a primordially missing object, whose loss is an outcome of the subject's constitution by the signifier. In the field of the Other, *objet a* comes to stand for the subject as *lack*.⁷⁰ It is a leftover produced by the subject's coming-to-be in language. Similarly, it is an "un-imaged residue of the body"⁷¹ that is "non-specular"⁷² and exceeds the mirror image. Paradoxically, *objet a* is "precisely an object that is external to any possible definition of objectivity."⁷³ It is only an object to the extent that it is lost, a

means for naming something that is radically absent. Lacan refined the concept of *objet a* across his writing, while consistently maintaining its structural importance as something determinative of the subject. In the development of the individual, its earliest manifestations are as “yieldable” objects that assist in the distinction of inner and outer relative to the body (e.g., the breast, the feces, etc).⁷⁴ Yet in itself, *objet a* eschews such a neat distinction of inner and outer; it is a “notion of an outside that stands prior to a certain internalization”⁷⁵ because it “stands in” for the body of the subject in a temporal relation pre-existing the subject’s constitutive lack.⁷⁶

In reference to Freud’s framework of the oral stage, Lacan describes how the breast functions as *objet a* at the moment it is yielded by the child in the process of weaning. Contrary to an experience of separation from a prior state of wholeness, Lacan is clear when he states that in ceding the breast, the subject weans itself into being. This distancing is the “lack that turns him into desire.” He is not weaned, nor is individuation forced upon him. Recalling Lacan’s non-linear temporality there never was a subject in possession of his wholeness prior to such an act of giving up, regardless of the logical tendency to retroactively posit such a state of plenitude. The breast functions as *objet a* by virtue of its inevitable absence, setting the stage for the mobilization of lack in support of unconscious desire.

Relative to subjective structure, I focus on how *objet a* is developed in Seminars X and XI, where it is presented as the object of anxiety and as the *gaze* respectively. In the first case, topographical proximity to *objet a* is signaled by anxiety,⁷⁷ meaning an encounter with the ostensible cause of desire will reveal the essentially groundless, alien

nature of this desire. Lacan holds that anxiety is a breakdown of the “support that lack provides.”⁷⁸ In this sense, *objet a* qua lack acts as a sort of buttress, holding open a space for the subject to function as the subject of unconscious desire in the field of the Other. Anxiety is the sole effect and it is the closest the subject comes to an experience of the Real, breaching the limits of symbolic mediation. As noted, the desire of the Other is encountered by the subject as a question: *Che Vuoi?* Now we can see how this question must remain unanswered;⁷⁹ to wager a response threatens to stifle the subject at the level of unconscious desire. In serving as *objet a*, the breast provokes anxiety not at its loss, but insofar as its “imminence”⁸⁰ threatens to eclipse the space into which the subject emerged as separate in the first place. An actual object may *function* as an *objet a* when it is missing, but it can never *be* the object in its materiality. The distinction is crucial. Anxiety is not the anticipatory fear of losing an object; it is a disruption issuing from the compression of the space reserved for a lack. *Objet a*, insofar as it is lacking, preserves this space.

In the visual realm, *objet a* is defined by Lacan as “the gaze.” The gaze is a disruption or stain that indicates the inclusion of the subject at the level of desire, allowing the neurotic fantasy to invest in the image. As *objet a*, the stain of the gaze serves to stimulate desire, suggestive of something hidden behind it.⁸¹ This formulation appears in Seminar X in reference to a beauty mark,⁸² but Lacan’s most well-known theorization of the gaze comes with his commentary on the phenomena of *anamorphosis* in Seminar XI, concerning a 16th century painting, *The Ambassadors*. Included in the foreground of this painting is the slanted shape of a skull. To behold the anamorphic

skull, the viewer must approach the painting from an angle that in turn distorts the rest of the scene. The skull is not *objet a* because the object cannot be perceived as such. Instead, it is the very liminal position suggested to exist at the pivot point of realignment between skull and the broader scene, where both are maintained simultaneously. One can see how *objet a* orients the subject towards desire as “that which always escapes from the grasp of that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness.”⁸³

Understanding *objet a* through metaphorical approximations is instructive to a point and we will proceed with describing it in relation to all three of Lacan’s registers in. But as an object of *lack*, its effects are felt as that which inheres to the fissures within all modes of representation and perception, signaling the point of the subject’s inclusion within these modes, at the level of unconscious functioning, in subversion of the apparent self-sameness of the ego. Lacan refers to *objet a* as “purely topological” meaning that it is neither fully Imaginary, nor Symbolic by nature. He likens it to a “wooden darning egg”⁸⁴ that contours the subject’s psychical landscape. Taken for a Real object, emergent as something yielded by the subject, *objet a* is not “out there” affecting the scene, so much as it is the very division of the subject extended into any act of apprehending and representing the world. It is not, physiologically speaking, that eyesight is impaired in beholding the gaze. It is that the minimal, but necessary, separation of the subject from the Real of itself, lends a distorting gravity to what is seen.

The topological orientation the subject takes towards this point of constitutive lack determines its particular subjective structure. Traditional Lacanian theory – if there

can be said to be such a thing – would contend that there are limited possible structural variations available to the subject to this end. Neurotic, psychotic, and perverse structures are distinguished respectively by the repression, foreclosure, or disavowal of this unavoidable lack. Consider, by comparison, the standard responses one might have towards a perceived danger: fight, flight, freeze (and flock). While the particular details of either response are limitless, the underlying templates are not – and the initial trauma exists all the same. Subjective structure takes shape by virtue of how the subject responds to the irremediable condition of its non-coincidence with itself. But for Lacan, the game is ultimately rigged and all possible responses are doomed to miss their mark. No structural orientation to lack resolves the fundamental dilemma because *objet a* is unobtainable by nature; there is no such thing as a “normal structure” that is not in some way determined by lack, although Lacan seems to formulate neurotic structure as typical.⁸⁵ Neurotic structure is defined by an attempt at reversing the essentially apocryphal loss of *objet a*, supported by the fantasy that the Other has it. Relative to autism, I draw an analogy between neurotic structure and the idea of being “neurotypical” to de-normalize the predominant lens through which autism is pathologized.

Across his work, Paul Verhaeghe elaborates a clinical approach to metapsychology grounded in Lacan’s structural variations of the divided subject. His role as a psychoanalyst operative within academic psychology at the University of Ghent is invaluable for the project at hand. While remaining firmly grounded in Freudian/Lacanian theory, Verhaeghe’s writing engages with the DSM-paradigm of Anglo-American (psychological) empiricism, effectively providing a translation of one

into the other, without dissolving the crucial, theoretical impasses separating them. We will return to Verhaeghe's work regularly as an embodiment of Lacanian theory in the contemporary clinical setting.

In *On Being Normal and Other Disorders* (2004), Verhaeghe calls for a metapsychology that investigates the structural relation of subject and Other, rather than focusing on "categorizing personalities."⁸⁶ He insists that "each subjective structure possesses a certain way of being-in-language."⁸⁷ Further, his clinical psychodiagnostics leaves off from the question of "guilt,"⁸⁸ given what he considers to be the implicitly juridical nature of any psychopathological investigation. Verhaeghe's critique of western psychology in part assesses the various ways it is preoccupied with locating etiology/cause definitively to side one or the other of typical nature vs nurture rhetoric. The "guilt" in question is a matter of pinpointing the proper "culprit whose two extremities are the exoneration of the subject by way of an external causality, and the blaming of the subject through an internal causality."⁸⁹ In the first case, something is enacted on the passive subject by its environment (exoneration through de-subjectification), and in the second, something arises out of the subject itself (the subject is retained, but blamed). But in neither case is the subject's fundamental lack given its constitutive due. Verhaeghe goes on to equate guilt directly with lack,⁹⁰ whereby "the one who displays *a sense of guilt* is neurotic...the one who doesn't is psychotic; the one who denies guilt is perverse."⁹¹ Going further, neurotic structure places its lack in the Other and is driven by its own culpability in ceding the object; perverse structure carries on as though lack does not exist, characterized by the fetishistic disavowal of this

knowledge; and psychotic structure is *lacking lack* and thus it evinces no structural intuition//awareness of its plight.

Among contemporary Lacanian practitioners, autism is defined according to the structure of psychosis. Assessing the extent to which this application aligns with the self-reporting of autistic subjects is taken up in Chapter 2. In the meantime, the foreclosure characteristic of psychotic structure is essentially a “rejection” of the lack that inheres to the Other, preventing the cross-wiring of desire found in neurotic structure.⁹² Foreclosure of lack hinders the aspect of language that works retroactively to anchor the discourse of the subject.⁹³ Lacan calls this anchorage *le point de capiton* – the “quilting point”⁹⁴ – and its rejection collapses the dialectical tension of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, leaving the semantic coordinates of language unmoored for the psychotic subject. Given that the relationship between signifiers and the signified “always appears fluid, always ready to come undone,”⁹⁵ the function of the quilting point is to prevent the total unraveling of intersubjective meaning. However, recalling that for Lacan, the signified only ever functions as another signifier,⁹⁶ *le point de capiton* is itself subject to the rules of absence governing linguistic structure, making for an essentially negative locus. Thus, the question of foreclosure in psychotic structure is one of a rejection of a particularly important, if fundamentally missing, link in the signifying chain, called the *master signifier*, or S1.

The notion of an originary signifier is mythical by design. In Lacan’s “return to Freud,” no aspect of the master’s theory was spared reinterpretation, least of all the myth of the Primal Father first described in *Totem and Taboo*. Whereas for Freud, a mythical

patricide served as the founding, sacrificial act of civilization, Lacan invokes the “Name-of-the-Father” to meet the structural condition of *le point du capiton* and secure the position of S1. Given the precarious status of the signifier, predisposed as it is towards its own absence, the Name-of-the-Father manifests as an empty linguistic structure, a framework for mobilizing a primary process into a secondary elaboration. It is not the presence of an actual father, so much as it marks the enactment of the “paternal function.” This shift from biology to structure is emblematic of Lacan’s reinterpretation of Freud, and to that extent, the “paternal function” is included within his reworking of the Oedipus complex. Instead of murderous, jealous indignation at the father who severs the mother-child dyad, Lacan supplants this account [of romantic love for one’s mother], with the structural procedure of language acquisition.

In a colloquial reading of the Oedipus complex, the father limits the child’s access to the mother, asking that it relinquish the mother in exchange for something offered in return: a soothing replacement item, a small measure of independence, or new and enticing privileges. A structural reading shifts this perspective significantly and allows one to sidestep the limitations of the historically – and culturally – situated gender essentialism present in such a pop-psychological account. Instead, ascension to the signifier opens space for the desiring being to emerge as divided, owing to a different sort of relinquishment. In this sense, the theme of sacrifice⁹⁷ is useful for understanding Lacan’s Oedipal structure. The move from Freud to Lacan translates “castration anxiety” into “symbolic castration,” with a sense of loss as the common factor. The castrating “cut” in question for Lacan is a change in the Symbolic coordinates within which the

child is positioned relative to the desire of the Other. With its recourse to the signifiers of the Other, the subject gives up – and gives in – to Symbolic Law, allowing *objet a* to initiate its stoking of desire across the metonymic exchange of signifiers. When the Name-of-the-Father is operative, the subject emerges in the gap between [division-from] S1 to S2. *Objet a* is the sacrificed bit of the subject that secures its position relative to the Other, lodged in the liminal space between signifiers. It is what the subject cedes – despite never having had in the first place – to exist as a speaking being. S1 functions as *objet a* relative to the origin of the subject, emerging as lack in the field of the Other. The paternal function procures space for the subject to displace its own division. It serves to signify this division as the missing signifier, S1. As *le point du capiton*, the paternal function stabilizes the differential structure of language equally as a protective measure and as a restrictive containment. It is no less than the [Real] knotting of the Symbolic and the Imaginary.

Verhaeghe offers a framework for understanding these concepts within an intersubjective dynamic, defined by the subject's movement from the *first* to the *second* Other.⁹⁸ In brief, the child is born into something dyadic that opens laterally into a triangular affair, upon the establishment of *le nom-du-pere*. The potency of this theorization lies with its applicability beyond the presence of a traditional family structure populated by “concrete” parents, in favor of a shift in the relationship between the subject and the Other.⁹⁹ With the first Other, mirroring is founded when an attuned caregiver addresses the infant's disorganized bodily needs. The second Other corresponds to a traversal of the first Other's inevitable limitations in this capacity. Invariably the first

Other responds to the stirring of the infant through the unconscious coordinates informing its own desire, and so the child encounters something unknown of (and to) the first Other, something lacking.¹⁰⁰ The second Other emerges as if it possesses whatever it is the first Other lacks, as if *it* is the answer to the first Other's desire. For speaking beings, this is the *phallus*, something Lacan denaturalizes¹⁰¹ from the corpus of Freudian concepts (penis envy, castration anxiety, Oedipal aggression) whose biological literality do psychoanalysis few favors in the present. As a missing element, the Lacanian phallus is a marker of difference; it affords a two-fold displacement of what the child cannot obtain out of the dyadic relation to the first Other by shifting to the second Other.¹⁰² Practically, it helps to establish a correspondence between words and subjective experiences, making the private language of subject and first Other "public" in the audience of the second Other. By functioning as a signifier, it ensures desire is sustained through metonymic deferral and displacement, simultaneously guarding against the real anxiety induced by the desire of the Other and proximity to *objet a*.

The paternal function positions the first Other within a multi-dimensional schema, roughly similar to how a "y" axis is needed to transform an "x" axis beyond the infinitely narrow series of points that constitutes a line. The second Other corresponds to this "y" axis; there can be no solitary and originary "x" axis in this account. With the opening of a two-dimensional terrain the subject may withdraw along the third "z" axis to garner a degree of separation. Roughly, the "x" axis is imaginary and the "y" axis is symbolic. The "z" axis, then, is real to the extent that it is irresolvable to x or y, but is necessary all the same. The establishment of the paternal function and a "third, mediatory point" opens

“the dimension of difference between the child, the first Other and the second Other...”¹⁰³ For Verhaeghe, at stake here are the very possibilities of agency and choice relative to one’s desire, even if this choice is forever entangled with the fundamental enigma of the Other’s desire.¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵ This is why the subject can only position its own coordinates through recourse to *objet a*, regardless of whether *l’objet* is read as some portion of the body the subject gives up, the object-cause of desire in the possession of the Other, or something unspoken and excessive at play in language.

Verhaeghe points out that Lacan’s Other encompasses, at base, the body.¹⁰⁶ However, the bodily Other does not exist in a pre-historic, pre-lingual vacuum, nor in an harmonious, immediate state. The body is first experienced through the shaping of the caregiving Other. The basic embodiment of the subject is mediated through the Other, who “names and tames” the infant’s somatic states, so to speak. Because the infant encounters its most intimate bodily sensations through the tending, attunement, and mirroring of the first Other, even they must be inscribed within a subject-Other dialectic. With the first Other, the child is “invited to interpret its own arousal...in order to get an answer to its own lack, the subject has to model itself according to the Other’s desire; it must identify with it.”¹⁰⁷ In terms of the body, psychoanalytic theory gives primacy to a certain status whereby the body exists as a disruptive catalyst. It is not those aspects of bodily processes we grow to systematize, to codify, to recognize through conscious, mindful awareness – the psychoanalytic body is Real insofar as it resists symbolization and at a certain level bodily arousal is coded as lack. The Other is so necessary a

condition that the individual does not even form an understanding of its own embodiment without the structuring of this relation.

In neurotic structure, *objet a* is put into dialectical exchange with the Other. Put otherwise, lack is volleyed between the subject and the Other. In perverse structure, the subject is the “perfect answer to the phallic desire of the first Other” meaning that the lack in the Other can, in effect, be ignored.¹⁰⁸ Foreclosure of the *Nom-du-Pere* determines the relation of subject and Other by precluding the dialectic exchange of lack, framing the encounter within a psychotic structure. The result is a “monolithic” Other.¹⁰⁹ Just as the subject springs from its own constitutive divide, the Other, too, must hold a space for its generative lack. “Normal” neurotic structure is predicated on the guarantee S1 provides when it is located, as a missing signifier, in the field of the Other. This allows subjects to partake in the social conventions of language, even though this structure is an essentially groundless system oriented around – and perforated by – absence.¹¹⁰ If psychosis is typically characterized by delusion(s), then Lacan forces us to consider how “normal” neurotics engage in the zero-level delusion against which *delusions* are judged to be delusory. In a homophonic play on *Nom-du-Pere*, Lacan suggests instead *les non-dupes-errent*. And so, in a reversal, the psychotic who presents as convinced by his delusion, is in fact the supreme skeptic who cannot “believe” in the Other’s capacity to mitigate lack (i.e., to circulate *objet a*, to manage bodily arousal, or match affective states to words). The psychotic can gain no purchase in the field of the Other and must confront something inescapable of the body without the support lack provides.

It is clear why some Lacanians conceptualize autism through framework of psychotic structure: the neurotic subject's relation to the Other establishes a shared, intersubjective, social landscape that is symptomatically difficult for autistic individuals to navigate.¹¹¹ Between 25-50% of individuals diagnosed on the spectrum are considered non-verbal.¹¹² As Verhaeghe points out, a structural account of language acquisition is tied inexorably to subject development.¹¹³ The circumstances at play in the establishment of the *nom-du-pere* set the conditions for a certain kind of subject to emerge. They are operative through a primary process that determines the way of being for that subject. This is a matter of how – or if – the first Other of the body is inscribed-into and written-over by the signifiers of the second Other through the triangulation of lack.¹¹⁴

To give Jim Sinclair's assertion that "autism is a way of being" a thoroughly Lacanian review, we have so far considered the various ways the divided subject is structurally dependent on and inseparable from the Other, as well as the manifold, far-reaching scope of the Lacanian Other in general. Verhaeghe sets as his goal the establishment of a "metapsychology that gives the relationship between subject and other a central place." He outlines this dynamic in terms of "the subject's relation to the structural lack in the Symbolic (the Other) with respect to the Real of the drive."¹¹⁵ Going forward and owing to the nature of the first-person content to be analyzed in Chapter 2, we will ask the questions: what are we to look for in terms of how these unconscious conditions manifest? How do they shape conscious and how are they to be decoded from *emic* texts? First, however, we cannot proceed further without incorporating the Freudian concept of drive into the theoretical edifice constructed thus far.

Metapsychology from Freud to Lacan with Richard Boothby

My implementation of psychoanalysis as a metapsychology is heavily indebted to the work of Richard Boothby. In *Freud as Philosopher*, Boothby champions the unresolved metapsychological scope of Freudian theory by reading it alongside the philosophies of several formidable continental thinkers. This approach allows him to demonstrate how Lacan's structural concepts open up the untapped philosophical potential of Freud's basic discoveries.¹¹⁶ In particular, the function of *objet a* is transposed into a dynamic system defined by the mobility such as a missing element. As Boothby starts by noting, Freud relies on the flow and investment of "psychical energy" to encompass his array of concepts in a metapsychology.¹¹⁷ This primordial and libidinous energy, originating with the *id*, is formulated in Freud's theory of the "drive," as what impels the subject of the unconscious, *unconsciously*, (into so-called "object cathexis.") While unconscious desire can be interpreted to tell us something about our most basic fantasies and predilections, the drive faces us with an uninterpretable lacuna at the core of our condition as subjects. It is the "heterogeneous pulsionality of the organism, the very ground of its being."¹¹⁸ The search for *objet a* is ultimately the search for an answer to the drive. Importantly, and despite its lamentable translation as "instinct" in the Standard Edition translation of his works, Freud conceived of the drive as a "concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic," irreducible to biology and culture alike, located at the border where one is incommensurable with the other.¹¹⁹ This places the drive uniquely at the point of departure of human from animal. While a biological need can be satiated and an instinct can be followed, the drive is satisfied with

its own continuation. It is the singular, alien presence within the subject that fuels both love attachments and primal aggression alike. Its unrepresentability is an irremediable condition of – and for – one’s existence *qua* subject.

The persistence of the drive transcends the logic of pleasure and pain, cross-wiring one into the other. Although Freud defines pleasure as the minimization of drive tension, his work in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* recognizes the way in which the subject is ultimately complicit in the steady accumulation of this tension.¹²⁰ While understanding human nature to be grounded in an innate desire for pleasure allows one to interpret all behavior as ultimately oriented around the obtainment/procurement of pleasure, psychoanalysis suggests the satisfaction of the subject is secondary to the insistence of the drive.¹²¹ And although it is simple enough to consider that the human organism is ultimately spurred by the proclivity for a state of lesser arousal, it is undeniably more radical to consider that the subject incurs and enjoys a state of constant disruption through its very existence, that survival is hardly the most basic desire of one’s unconscious functioning.

Lacan highlights this problematic dualism and deploys the term *jouissance* to refer to the peculiar sort of enjoyment felt (in an encounter with) at the impossibility of drive resolution, especially to the extent that the drive is properly unsymbolizable.¹²² *Jouissance* is the leftover portion of enjoyment that cannot be expressed through the signifier.¹²³ It is what requires an ultimately imperfect equivalence through metaphorical (analogical) explanation. Put crudely, if “having one’s cake and eating it too” is impossible, then *jouissance* is the terrible enjoyment one derives by compulsively trying

to do so all the same. The subject strives towards *jouissance* as “what is furthest from him” and instead encounters the “intimate fracture” at its core, suggestive of the impossible, internal limit of representation that *jouissance* threatens to transgress.¹²⁴ As such, the experience of *jouissance* is the breakdown of coherent experience itself. It is an excessive enjoyment because it explodes the dyad of pressure and release, in defiance of the logic of self-preservation and pleasurable satisfaction. *Jouissance* is the *beyond* of the pleasure principle that the drive leaves in its wake as it disrupts the smooth functioning of language and the stability of the perceptual field, (indicative of how a core element of the subject is always included in any experience of so-called “external reality”). *Jouissance* is a non-categorical, extra-consensual enjoyment the subject works to temper through an exchange of lack with the Other.

A main function of Verhaeghe’s first and second Others is to shuttle *jouissance* away from the subject, first through mirroring attunement, and subsequently through the signifier. In this sense, *jouissance* is an aspect of bodily arousal that masquerades as something total and encompassing. It teases its own obtainment from beyond the limit it instantiates. In *New Studies of Old Villains: A Radical Reconsideration of the Oedipus Complex*, Verhaeghe ties *jouissance* to the paternal function and the establishment of Symbolic Law. He suggests that “reframing impossibility in terms of prohibition leaves us with the illusion that we might surpass this prohibition and attain a supreme form of enjoyment.”¹²⁵ Because the paternal function is prohibitive, it leaves an excessive remainder the subject cannot shake. Such is the insistent, unresolvability of the drive.

However, given that no such drive energy has been shown to exist as a quantifiable, observable substance, Freud's metapsychological aspirations progressively stalled out against the burgeoning, empirically oriented fields of clinical psychology and neuroscience. While many of his concepts circulate/are operative today, Freud's broader theoretical corpus has been sustained piecemeal, as metaphor and myth.¹²⁶ His drive theory in particular exists by virtue of the proliferation of discrete "drives" more or less conflated with biological instincts. Fortunately, the thoroughgoing argument Boothby undertakes is to show how Freudian energetics is a fundamentally "*structural* concept" determined by a purely differential element that is impossible to represent within the system it governs: *objet a*.¹²⁷ Shifting away from a metapsychology theorized exclusively in terms of psychical energy requires that the structural dimension of the subject be determined by something that eludes it at every turn, lacking a satisfying inscription within the representational modalities available to it. Just as the drive functions vis a vis object cathexis, *objet a* keeps psychical energy moving; it "triangulates" the subject relative to the drive, by posing as an always-out-of-reach something that might serve to resolve the drive.¹²⁸ This is why Lacan refers to *objet a* as the object cause of desire: the real impossibility of having one's cake and eating it too is not just that once we eat it the cake is gone, but that retroactively it never was the actual cake we lusted after in the first place. This sort of perfection can only exist in anticipation, because the structural function of *objet a* is displaced by any actual object obtained by the subject. It is only when the piece of cake is kept at a distance that it can serve to motivate us so deeply. *Objet a*, insofar as it is perpetually lacking, safeguards this distance.

Throughout *Freud as Philosopher*, Boothby drives at the structural kinship of the imaginary and the symbolic, culminating in the role played by *objet a* as the shared point of lack that conjoins them. Given that psychoanalysis addresses the discourse of the unconscious, my implementation of psychoanalytic theory towards first person, subjective writing builds off Boothby's approach to understanding unconscious structures through conscious, phenomenological experience. His work provides an interpretive schema for mediating between Lacan and autistic discourse, especially to the extent the latter addresses issues of sensory-perception, embodiment, language, and subjective experience. In essence, Boothby's project involves detailing how the imaginary dimension of the symbolic maintains a dialectic with the symbolic elements of the imaginary – with *objet a* as the point of negative tension binding the image to the word. The immediate conclusion to be drawn is that unconscious processes prevent any neat empirical experience of the world. The more metapsychological point to be developed concerns articulating how autism emerges as a “way of being” precisely at the point of the subject's encounter with something that should otherwise be missing/lacking. Boothby's writing paves the way for analyzing this encounter.

Earlier we described the symbolic as a “shifting matrix of signifiers” and the imaginary as a “realm of stable appearances.” While this over-simplification serves its introductory purposes, it gives the impression that one is conceivable as easily separate from the other. Instead, Boothby shows how the seeming immediacy of an imaginary coalescence is always-already evocative of symbolic framing. However, because these registers are irresolvable to one another, their structural proximity is best accounted for

by understanding how *objet a* is positioned at an intersection of lack. *Objet a* is *real* in the properly Lacanian sense of the word, emerging in the liminal, unsignified spaces that separate – and connect – signifiers, just as it lurks behind the image, inexhaustible through perceptual means. To the extent that it is a “cedable object,” *objet a* can be said to represent the way the subject must subtract itself from the external world, in a sacrificial trade-off made in order to achieve any experience thereof.

Boothby’s reading of Freud and Lacan sees him survey the rich theoretical terrains of early-mid 20th century phenomenology and gestalt psychology. The shared point of departure here is that both modes of inquiry are concerned with the appearance of ideas and perceptual objects out of their respective contexts – just as psychoanalysis seeks the “unthought ground of thought” – with the important caveat that the subject is the agent driving this emergence, rather than a passive spectator on external happenings.¹²⁹ Boothby maintains the dialectical theme of “positionality” and “dispositionality” to develop on the structural dynamic [underlying relationship] of the imaginary and the symbolic. Initially, an object’s positionality is perceived against the supposed backdrop of its dispositionality. Crucially though, the latter is always at play in the former as an object moves from “positional adumbration” (distinguishing *that* an object exists) to “positional articulation” (determining *what* that object means for the subject, per the unconscious logic of the pleasure principle), requiring the apparent immediacy (givenness?) of the object to be suspended in favor of some underlying intentional orientation.¹³⁰ Dispositionality erases the positionality of an appearance in order for the appearance’s positionality to present with any relevance whatsoever. Once

again, there is no “objective” appearance of an object apart from a more fundamentally – and unconscious – determinative field.

Boothby reviews the figure/ground distinction described by gestalt psychology as an example of the way the subject participates in the creation of such observable entities, sustained as distinct from their environments and separate from other objects.¹³¹ Included among his examples is reference to the classic gestalt image that can be viewed either as the outlining contours of a vase, or as the face-to-face profiles of two individuals gazing upon one another – but not both at the same time.¹³² This “not both” is essential because it represents something fundamental in the relationship of the subject to observable phenomena, something akin to a trade-off implicit in all experience. In short, whenever *something* emerges as an imaginary object, other objects, including their enveloping contexts, are necessarily cast away pending a shift in attention and focus.¹³³ The primacy of the unconscious over consciousness determines the nature of conscious attention and focus ascribed to a given scene, prior to one’s awareness that the decision has, in effect, already been made. The same dynamic should be extended to those experiences we consider as originating in the body, including even what is most internal to the body. Recalling the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Boothby suggests moreover that “the perceiving body absents itself in order to make things present.”¹³⁴ The dissolution of one’s awareness of the body is a founding act of “every registration of perceptual figure and ground.”¹³⁵ It is simply not the case that one can access an unmediated experience of bodily arousal; even those sensations emanating out of our internal viscera are subject to the positional-dispositional dialectic. What cannot become

a positional object of consciousness is the ultimate dispositional field conditioning all awareness, just as the drive is the inaccessible core of the subject, simultaneously most internal and yet radically alien. What is crucial is the element of *something more* implicit behind any perceptual object, something in excess of the perceived that remains necessarily unperceivable, which can only be said to present itself as absent.

Boothby links these ideas to the structure of language, drawing an equivalence between the conditions of appearance underlying one's registration of a linguistic signifier with that of a perceptual gestalt.¹³⁶ Most important here is the function of dissipation that necessarily accompanies such an imaginary formation, drawing the positionality of the signifier into dialectic tension with its dispositional field. Boothby applies this dynamic equally to structure as much as to content and observes that "linguistic unity is pervaded by otherness."¹³⁷ Linguistic meaning and perceptual unity emerge within a differential system in which the salient, seemingly positive characteristics of a thing are attributed by virtue of how that thing (or word, image, object, etc.) differs from its associated surroundings, rather than according to a set of essential qualities it possesses unto itself. Further, because the underlying action of signification is to signal away from itself, the signifier "is bound up with a constant oscillation of appearance and disappearance, a continuous formation and breakdown."¹³⁸ Boothby locates this dialectic as much at the macro-level of language embodied in the matrix of signifiers, as at the micro-level, manifested within the *phoneme*.

In structural linguistic theory, the phoneme is the smallest audibly discernible component of language. It is isolatable from other phonemes but exists without its own

“logico-semantic content,” and is always-already lost in a larger context upon positional registration. The phoneme exists at the intersection of positionality and dispositionality.¹³⁹ It is a marker of “pure difference” that serves as the “hinge” between sound and meaning, blurring the boundary between the acoustic/perceptual dimension of language and the semantic one.¹⁴⁰ The phoneme works to establish the phonetic variations within a word that distinguish it as such, in addition to aiding in the distinction of one word from another. At the first level, the phoneme functions as a differential marker grounded in the embodied production of sound – a feature Boothby notes to be centered on the binary determination of inner and outer proximity to the body; at the second level, the phoneme engages in the “open horizon of semantic content.”¹⁴¹ Because it reaches across two distinct structural layers of language, the phoneme earns the paradoxical status of “both/and” *and* “neither/nor.”¹⁴² With this, Boothby conjures a sort of dynamic stasis wherein every apparent unity is engaged in a dialectic with its own absence: at the micro-linguistic structure in the phoneme, up to the appearance and fading of perceptual gestalts. An imperceptible and unknowable element is caught-by and created-in any act of consciousness.

The basic indeterminacy of the phoneme begs that one consider the extent to which the subject must be able to, in effect, determine it, through some preliminary availability to a structure wherein identity is both defined – and perpetually undermined – by difference. These are the metapsychological conditions for subjectivity evinced by the symbolic dimension of the imaginary register, which comes to “overwrite” what is paradoxically yet to-be-written.¹⁴³ They indicate the primacy of the symbolic over the

imaginary, the dispositional over the positional – *the Other over the imaginary ego* – meaning that the unknowable framing of a thing prefigures what can be known of it.¹⁴⁴ Such a structural predisposition should recall my earlier remarks on the fundamental division of the subject instantiated by its constitutive lack.

While Boothby establishes the positional – dispositional dialectic as one step among many within his larger project of orienting the imaginary and the symbolic to a Freudian metapsychology, a valuable offshoot of this approach lies in the connotative potential smuggled along within the word “disposition.” In addition to naming the imperceptible, unconscious field within which an object’s positionality can emerge, “dispositionality” should be taken equally in its more colloquial form, to refer to the basic nature or temperament of a subject. It is an essential condition of its existence that frames the entirety of its dealings with the world, to the point of constituting the world qua reality.

All of this takes on additional import when Boothby refers to *objet a* as a “dispositional object” that “must be located in the dispositional field” without ever presenting as a readily perceptible phenomenon therein.¹⁴⁵ One could say that it sets the scene without ever making an appearance on stage.¹⁴⁶ Recalling an earlier formulation, *objet a* “triangulates” the subject towards the paradoxically “both/and and either/or” aspects of the phoneme, enabling the dispositional “fore-grasp” necessary to overcome the indeterminacy.¹⁴⁷ The phoneme qua *objet a* is the persistence of context lingering around a discrete gestalt, and equally the uncanny recognition of isolated parts from their surrounding wholes. As we have noted, *objet a* as the gaze is the “stain” to which “desire

is truly tethered” in the scopic domain.¹⁴⁸ Within language, *objet a* absents itself along the signifying chain while initiating the slippage from S1 → S2, S3, and so on, similarly ensnaring desire. In both cases, we can discern a de-centering of the subject whereby *objet a* is the unconscious element of the subject whose polyvalent circulation lends the imaginary sufficient phenomenological depth, and the symbolic a fluid openness to novel semantic configurations and metonymical exchanges. *Objet a* pivots from the imaginary to the symbolic in the way that the phoneme hinges sound and meaning, in effect bridging the real structural gap that binds, just as it separates, the two registers.¹⁴⁹

In highlighting the fundamentally paradoxical and indeterminant character of the phoneme, Boothby opens up a pathway for connecting it, via *objet a*, to the unknowable core of the subject, a space we have framed in terms of the Freudian death drive. The phoneme is, in effect, a conduit for *objet a*, enabling the conjunction of positionality and dispositionality, owing to the structurally missing element at their intersection.¹⁵⁰ *Objet a* is the manifestation of what is unsymbolizable of the subject that emerges retroactively as a leftover of the subject’s coming-to-be in the Other. With the phoneme representing the microunit of the signifier, and with the signifier’s origin in the Other, we see once again how the drive emerges out of a paradoxical space imbedded in the field of the Other, forever undermining the imaginary integrity of one’s identity. When *objet a* coincides with lack in the field of the Other, a neurotic/neurotypical structure is erected around the dialectic of desire.

Being: The Final Approach

To provide a Lacanian interpretation of the assertion that autism is a “way of being,” we will approach the very source of the drive, referred to by Lacan as *das Ding*, and situate it in relation to the broader array of concepts reviewed thus far. Up until now *objet a* has been something of a stand-in for *das Ding*. If *objet a* is “a” lost object, *das Ding* is “the” lost object. Recourse to *objet a*, defined as the impossible activity of trying to obtain what can only function as lost, is the endless deferral of an encounter with the Real of *das Ding*.¹⁵¹ To grasp the most fundamental conditions of a subject’s being is to position the subject in relation to *das Ding*. Consistent across Lacan’s separate clinical structures, it is a structurally universal and necessary condition.

In his *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, Freud names the “thing” as that which fills in the gap between one’s present perception and prior memory of an object.¹⁵² This substance creates a rudimentary stability of appearances for the developing child. In an early example, Freud cites the bridging that occurs when an infant beholds the maternal breast from a new angle, and yet can nonetheless merge this unfamiliar perspective with one previously registered. The “thing” – *das Ding* in German – is the unknowable wholeness of the breast posited as its/the material totality held in reserve behind the patchwork of different viewpoints the infant might amass.

Boothby aligns the phoneme with the Thing, in terms of how the subject’s “fore-grasp” transcends their mutual indeterminacy, granting tentative positionality out of unconscious dispositionality. Freud goes on to outline the process of “cognizing” in which the human being locates *das Ding* beyond the limit of its ability to identify with the bodily movements and actions of a “fellow-creature” based on its own experience of

embodiment.¹⁵³ The “thing” is the portion of the *nebenmensch* absent from this identification, creating a structure similar to that of one’s “fore-grasp” of the signifier. It is interesting to note that these passages are pulled from a section of the *Project* concerning “Remembering and Judging,” further asserting the primacy of unconscious processes over conscious ones: any act of remembering is prejudged by the unconscious dispositional framing in which it occurs. What is “uncognizable” is necessary for any act of cognition, just as *objet a* frames any act of perception from the imperceptible fringes of consciousness.¹⁵⁴ In the *nebenmensch* of the “fellow-creature,” Freud locates a similarly unknowable, necessary condition.

In Seminar VII, Lacan takes up and builds upon the intersubjective aspect of *das Ding*, isolating it in what he calls the “alien” nature of the *nebenmensch*.¹⁵⁵ For Lacan, *das Ding* stands beyond one’s relation to the actual other, and by extension, it is in excess of the parental Other, and Language as a whole. It is the “beyond-of-the-signified,”¹⁵⁶ non-existent “at the level of *Vorstellungen*”¹⁵⁷ as an imaginary appearance. Further, the “impassable...site of the Thing” is the “unfathomable spot” of the death drive.¹⁵⁸¹⁵⁹ Here we see again the alignment of subject – drive – Other, reminiscent of earlier descriptions of how the Other provides a tentative answer to the subject’s *jouissance* [qua bodily arousal qua real drive.]

As noted in Seminar X, Lacan draws a connection between anxiety and the opacity of the desire of the Other, which confronts the subject as an unanswerable question and threatens it with unbearable *jouissance*. By focusing on the negative presence of *das Ding* within the *nebenmensch*, Lacan short-circuits anxiety with the

Thing. Insofar as *objet a* signals anxiety, it functions as a stand-in for the most “profound object, the ultimate object, the Thing.”¹⁶⁰ Key here, once again, is the function of the “support that lack provides” relative to anxiety and, ipso facto, to *das Ding*, the desire of the Other, and *jouissance*. In this sense, *objet a*, mobilized as lack in the field of the Other, promotes a repetitive deferral of these unanswerable questions, preventative of an encounter with the Real of *das Ding*.¹⁶¹ Conversely, proximity to *objet a*, in addition to collapsing the space that sustains desire as desire, is essentially a journey to the frayed fringes of meaningful, signifiable experience. In approaching this limit, the subject finds only *jouissance* in place of *das Ding*.

Naoki Higashida provides several elucidating examples of this type of encounter in *The Reason I Jump*. In response to the titular proposition, he notes how, “People with autism react physically to feelings of happiness and sadness. So when something happens that affects me emotionally, my body seizes up as if struck by lightning.”¹⁶² When Naoki jumps, “It’s as if my feelings are going upward to the sky.” With this skyward discharge, “I can feel my body parts really well...free to move the way I want.” Throughout the book, Naoki expands upon these conditions with inverse examples as well. As he puts it, “kids with autism, we never use enough words,” and “we can never make ourselves understood.”¹⁶³ If a person with autism is “going through a hard time...the despair we’re feeling has nowhere to go and fills up our entire bodies, making our senses more and more confused.”¹⁶⁴ Of autistic people, he says, “We never really feel that our bodies are our own. They’re always acting up and going outside our control.”¹⁶⁵ Naoki evokes a direct correlation between the body and the word.

Naoki's descriptions of lightning strikes, confused senses, and out-of-control bodies are forms of an enjoyment-beyond-signification associated with *jouissance* as we have defined it above. They represent instances of how *jouissance* is "impossible" (i.e., Real), in the sense that it is mutually exclusive with neurotypical/stable consciousness. That Naoki characterizes autism, most broadly, as the inter-relation of "missing words" and intense emotional states, hints at the scope of the connection to be made between the signifier, *objet a* and *jouissance* – and ultimately *das Ding*.¹⁶⁶ "Missing words" can be reversed to entail the *presence* of what words typically cancel out. *Jouissance* has "nowhere to go."

To carry this analysis further we must turn to *objet a* in its manifestation as "the voice."¹⁶⁷ As Lacan defines it, *objet a* emerges when "our voice appears to us with a foreign sound."¹⁶⁸ It is the "otherness of what is said."¹⁶⁹ Just as *the gaze* "cannot be grasped in the image," *the voice* is irreducible to the semantic content of an utterance. In *The Voice and Nothing More*, Mladen Dolar defines this aspect of the voice as a "material element" that is "recalcitrant to meaning."¹⁷⁰ Based on these claims, Dolar asserts a "dichotomy of the voice and the signifier."¹⁷¹ As a dispositional object, *the voice* frames the manifest content of a statement, in lieu of its own representation therein.

Naoki touches upon an intriguingly similar phenomenon when he writes about his "weird voice...the voice I can't control..." He says: "When my weird voice gets triggered, it's almost impossible to hold it back – and if I try, it actually hurts, almost as if I'm strangling my own throat." This voice "blurts out, not because I want it to; it's more like a reflex." It spews "verbal junk that hasn't got anything to do with anything."¹⁷² Here

the “foreign sound” of *the voice* is accompanied by the involuntary mandate of *jouissance*. Crucially, Naoki’s weird voice represents only those unfamiliar elements that constitute *the voice qua objet a*. (In *How Can I Jump If My Lips Don’t Move?*, Tito Mukhopadhyay describes similar experiences, in one case recalling how “many times, in the midst of other sounds, I could hear my own voice, laughing or screaming.”)¹⁷³

These encounters extend along the inverse trajectory as well. As the listener, Naoki writes about “drowning in a flood of words” when he loses his ability to comprehend what is said to him.¹⁷⁴ For his part, Tito describes the “horror” of being “surrounded by real voices.”¹⁷⁵ Auditory processing deficits are well-documented relative to autism, often describing how the sound of a word is registered independent of its meaning, rendering the phonetic dimension non-sensical, “recalcitrant to meaning.”¹⁷⁶

Lacan suggests the distance between the subject and *das Ding* is “precisely the condition of speech.”¹⁷⁷ He makes this assertion in relation to the Ten Commandments, drawing together the mythological establishment of Symbolic Law with the space necessary for the subject to exist as a speaking being, suggesting there is a fundamental prohibition at play in each.¹⁷⁸ Here we return to the Oedipal terrain surveyed earlier, where it is important to recall how Lacan’s structural reworking shifts the focus away from the taboo of actual incest towards the process of language acquisition, based on the machinations of the paternal function and symbolic castration. Lacan goes on to identify *das Ding* with the object of incest, located as they both are, impossibly, beyond this limit.¹⁷⁹ In each case, the subject seeks a reprieve from the anxiety incurred in an encounter with the traumatic real, through a mediating condition that grants simultaneous

access-to and distance-from the Thing. Once again, language is key to establishing this distance.

In response to the question, “Why don’t you make eye contact when you’re talking?” Naoki offers: “What we’re actually look at is the other person’s voice. Voices may not be visible things, but we’re trying to listen to the other person with all our sense organs.”¹⁸⁰ This structural disjunction will be discussed at more length in Chapter 2. In the present context, however, we could venture that an encounter with only this portion of the voice renders bare *objet a* as a source of anxiety and *jouissance*. Instead of some irreducible trace of *the voice* accompanying the signifier, Naoki (and Tito) experience the opposite: the predominance of *objet a qua voice*, with only a hint of the signifier. With the inability to speak, the *objet a* dimension of the voice – the “otherness of what is said” – is retained, and the constitutive distance from *das Ding* via the signifier is collapsed.

In his essay, *The No-Thing of God: Psychoanalysis of Religion after Lacan*, Richard Boothby explores the borderline metaphysical dimension of the Thing. Building on the ideas advanced in *Freud as Philosopher*, in particular his theory for how the signifier opens space for *objet a* and *das Ding*, Boothby compares the religious appeal to an almighty God with a plea to the big Other of language.¹⁸¹ Operative in both is a need to maintain a degree of separation from the *jouissance* of the neighbor-Thing.¹⁸² An encounter with the neighbor-Thing is, ipso-facto, a confrontation with *das Ding* within the indeterminant, buffering zone of the signifier. Similarly, the subject is able to invest in language only to the extent that it can successfully set out space for *das Ding* along the signifying chain. Language, anchored by the paternal function, opens access-to and

safeguards a distance-from, what is essentially an anxiety-causing lacuna where lack does not exist. In Boothby's analysis, Language bridges the gap to one's neighbor in the same move by which it first establishes the gap.

The Thing helps us appreciate the breadth of Lacan's concept of the Other and the extent to which the subject is inconceivable apart from it.¹⁸³ The scope of this concept is well-suited for maintaining the clinical aspects of Lacanian theory alongside the philosophical ones. So far, we have reviewed how the Other encompasses both the parental Other and the linguistic big Other of the Symbolic. In the first case, the nascent subject turns to the parental Other to address the tension of the drive, resulting in the acculturation of what might erroneously be considered bio-material, thereby subjecting the innermost element of the subject to Symbolic law and Imaginary investment. The attunement and mirroring of the caregiving Other simultaneously structures and calibrates the bodily arousal of the infant, while radically de-centering the perceived cause of such arousal. In the second sense, the big Other is the guaranteeing authority of meaning whose governance over the Symbolic order lends credibility to the (operationally) self-referential web of signifiers available to the subject. Verhaeghe's first and second Others were deployed as a model for linking these concepts to the Oedipal structure. And now, in the presence of *das Ding*, we can consider more fully how the Other qua *Nebensmench* is the privileged site of access to something originating with the subject itself.

It is perhaps most accurate to consider Boothby's approach to the Thing as meta-theological, but even so, *das Ding* represents – *sine qua non* – the metapsychological keystone of Lacan's return to Freud. For Boothby, rather than represent a function of

belief, the Thing is the very pre-condition for religious belief, catalyzing the “ineluctable disposition to believe”¹⁸⁴ rendered in/by the unknowability of the subject to itself. By encountering *das Ding* in the neighbor-Thing, the (neurotic) subject contributes to the predominance of the Symbolic order as an intersubjective refuge from the *jouissance* of the subject’s own drive. This is something Verhaeghe, following Lacan, refers to as the “shared solution for the Real.”¹⁸⁵ Boothby further reminds us that *objet a*, Lacan’s “cedable object,” is a crucial part of this trade-off when it is successfully put into play in an economy of exchange with the Other. From the phoneme, to *objet a*, to *das Ding*, we can see how language, animated through the signifiers issuing from the Other, mediates the trauma of the subject’s relation to its very own topological “blind spot.”¹⁸⁶ As Verhaeghe notes, Lacan’s continuous nuancing of the Other – the *jouissance* of the Other in particular – comes to account for the body, which is the “most fundamental Other...the most intimate stranger.”¹⁸⁷ And so, an important question going forward is what results when the Other, in appreciation of the full scope the concept affords, does not provide the privileged opening to *das Ding* qua neighbor-Thing? What if one dimension of the Other, that of the neighbor-Thing, fails? What if the ever-so-crucial encounter with the first Other is missed or is structured differently to the point of being unrecognizable through the neurotic paradigm?

To determine a subject’s way of being is to locate it in relation to *das Ding*, because it lies at the intersection of the drive and the lack in the Other. Neurotic structure means the subject is properly “duped,” allowing for the fantasy of a “shared solution” to something ultimately singular and irresolvable. Neurotic *doubt* – the ever-present

question of “what does the Other want from me?” – is predicated on the twofold, underlying belief that a) there is, in fact, an answer and b) that the Other possesses the answer.¹⁸⁸ Conversely, psychotic structure entails a “monolithic” Other who leaves the subject to confront *jouissance* without the support of a fundamental fiction wherein the Other has *a*, because the triangulation from first to second Other does not occur. As a result, psychotic structure is defined by *certainty*, not doubt.¹⁸⁹¹⁹⁰ The subject’s base-level drive tension does not circulate through the Other in a dialectic of exchange, represented by *objet a*; the solution the psychotic subject erects does not stand in comparison to *an* other’s, let alone *the* Other’s; its delusion is its own, of which it is certain.

In relation to these coordinates, it is tempting to conceive of autism as an *agnostic* or noncommittal “way of being” in language. Instead of doubt founded upon belief, or certitude covering over the inability to believe, when the positioning of *das Ding* itself is called into question, the stultification of belief may well result. With autism, the very emergence of the Other must be reconsidered, without jettisoning its essential mediating function, lest the autistic/divided subject be jettisoned in kind. If, as Boothby suggests, the signifier can hold a place for the Thing in the indeterminant space of *objet a*, then the absence of – or ambivalence towards – certain aspects of language would leave the subject to emerge through a confrontation with *das Ding* according to some other mediating structure – and, consequently, forever in a questioning stance towards language – especially in comparison to neurotic structure. A structurally different relation to the (first) Other will cascade profoundly, affecting one’s fundamental embodiment and

language acquisition alike. If the body itself serves as this mediating structure, then the hinging action of *objet a* should affect a distinctive dialectic of positionality and dispositionality, unique to autistic structure, and evidenced in autistic subjectivity.

The pertinent questions going forward can be stated as follows: what is the status of the Other for the autistic subject? And what does this status entail for *objet a*? Does the autistic subject have “faith” in language to a degree that positions the blind spot of *das Ding* within the neighbor-Thing of the Other, initiating a symbolic mediation of the drive? If the autistic subject does not access *das Ding* through the neighbor-Thing of the Other, what recourse might it attempt to signify that which is the “beyond-the-signified” and stave an overflow of *jouissance*?

Interlude – Psychoanalysis and Autism

Whereas Chapter 1 questioned what it is “to be” a subject in the Lacanian sense, this interlude detours through historic and contemporary psychoanalytic conceptualizations of autism. This is an interim step before we apply a Lacanian hermeneutics to first-person writing and scientific research. While psychoanalysis was a major theoretical orientation used in the initial diagnostic articulation of autism, its legacy as a therapeutic intervention is mixed, and its conceptual contributions find little audience in the context of the data-oriented, evidence-based approaches prevalent today. At its most anachronistic, a psychoanalytic approach to autism is inseparable from the historical insistence on a psychogenic etiology, exemplified in the notion of “toxic parenting,” which lays the blame for “autistic psychopathology” on parents.

In the sprawling *NeuroTribes*, Steven Silberman investigates the history of autism with a focus on the lasting consequences of the divergent research practices of Hans Aspergers and Leo Kanner.¹⁹¹ Silberman contrasts how Asperger, working as a pediatrician in Austria, “saw threads of genius and disability inextricably intertwined in his patients’ family histories – testifying to the complex genetic roots of their condition,”¹⁹² while Kanner, a child psychiatrist trained in the era of psychoanalysis’ dominance, “saw the shadow of the sinister figure that would become infamous in popular culture as the ‘refrigerator mother.’”¹⁹³ Although Bruno Bettelheim is widely associated with this figure today, Silberman notes how Bettelheim “had been virtually parroting Kanner” in his writing on this topic.¹⁹⁴ The psychoanalytic theory that guided Bettelheim’s clinical work aimed towards assisting his patients to “restart the process of ego development” that had been, ostensibly, stifled by cold, emotionally withdrawn parents.

Silberman further highlights the implications of the etiological contrast [between early conceptualizations of autism] by observing: “Where Asperger and his colleagues recognized a specialized form of intelligence systematically acquiring data in a confusing world, Kanner saw a desperate bid for parental affection.”¹⁹⁵ In this view, some of Kanner’s most basic observations – autistic self-isolation and the obsessive desire for sameness, for example – were understood as defensive reactions to a prior psychological wound.¹⁹⁶ Silberman is cutting in his final assessment: “By blaming parents for inadvertently causing their children’s autism, Kanner made his syndrome a source of

shame and stigma for families worldwide while sending autism research off in the wrong direction for decades.”¹⁹⁷

We see echoes of this general framework in the theory of Frances Tustin, albeit in a more nuanced and developed form. Tustin’s clinical work with autistic patients spanned several decades and was widely influential in the psychoanalytic community.¹⁹⁸ In her view, autism is a “massive ‘not-knowing’ and ‘not-hearing’ provoked by traumatic awareness of bodily separateness.”¹⁹⁹ While she granted “*organic autism* can be a reaction to brain damage or sensory defect,” she held psychogenic autism to be a “survival mechanism” akin to a post-traumatic stress disorder.²⁰⁰ She posits a traumatic wound stemming from an “abnormal state” of undifferentiated infantile fusion in which “both mother and child had colluded,” possibly due to a combination of mutual “genetic susceptibility” and “environmental pressures.”²⁰¹ Autism, then, is an “impenetrable protection.”²⁰² Autistic children “are not fully born – they still feel part of the mother’s body; to exist, to ‘be’, seems fraught with danger.”²⁰³

Tustin suggests the “undue closeness” between child and mother “hampers the development of ‘object relations,’ and makes the reality of bodily separateness “agonizingly intense.”²⁰⁴ Autistic children react with an “erogenous auto-sensuousness,” and seek objects and shapes that “swathe such children in a sensual protective shell.”²⁰⁵ Tustin theorized the role of “autistic objects” that are “peculiar to each individual child.”²⁰⁶ Through her clinical work, she observed that “autistic objects seem to staunch the ‘bleeding’ by blocking the wound. They also seem to plug the gap between the couple so that awareness of bodily separateness is occluded.”²⁰⁷

Although Tustin worked mostly within a psychoanalytic model developed by Melanie Klein, she is considered “post-Kleinian”²⁰⁸ and is recognized for her innovations on Kleinian theory.²⁰⁹ Here we can begin to situate Lacan’s thinking in relation to Tustin’s through a more direct comparison with Klein. Both are known for their unique interpretations of Freud, and Lacan made repeated reference to Klein over the course of his seminars.²¹⁰ However, in addition to Lacan’s incorporation of structural linguistics there are clear points of departure in their interpretations of Freud.

For Klein, the organization of an integrated ego is the “first psychic task of the infant.”²¹¹ This ego is a dynamic formation constituted through the dual activity of introjection and projection.²¹² Yet as we reviewed in Chapter 1, the ego, for Lacan, is a site of faulty self-knowledge grounded in a misrecognition – *meconnaissance*. Analysis must instead address *the subject*, posited by Lacan to emerge as an effect of the signifier and the structural flaws in language. The subject speaks from a retroactively determined, unknowable position; it enunciates its unconscious desire along the signifying chain, not in the manifest content of what is said. However, because Klein’s ego results largely from unconscious processes, it occupies a similar position in her theory as the subject does for Lacan, and there is some resonance with the *subject* based in a shared auto-opaqueness/unknowability-to-themselves.²¹³

Klein’s thinking includes elements of both Freud’s drive theory and object-relations theory.²¹⁴ In her model, the ego forms in relation to the id, based on how the drive (originating from the id) is deflected outwards – i.e., projected – onto external objects whose status depends on satisfying the drive. The resulting “good” or “bad”

object is subsequently introjected, creating an internal object.²¹⁵ The ego is shaped by an assemblage of internal objects, and there is no ego perception that is “psychologically neutral” from the prior libidinous investment of the id through projection.²¹⁶ The building blocks of the Kleinian ego/psyche are forged by a mode of relation predetermined by the drive, similar to Boothby’s suggestion (see Chapter 1) that any positional object is always-already framed in a dispositional field, (in)substantiated by the impossible object, *objet a*.

A likeness can be found between Kleinian projection and introjection, and Lacan’s explanation of imaginary and symbolic identification.²¹⁷ We will return to Verhaeghe’s framework of the first and second Others to approach this similarity in a manner that highlights an important distinction between Klein and Lacan. By deflecting the drive to an external object, the child engages, roughly, in imaginary identification. Given Klein’s observation that the projected object is a parental stand-in, we can understand this in terms of how the first Other mitigates the drive through mirroring attunement, ushering it away from the infant and displacing its origin outward.²¹⁸

Conversely, introjection indicates the incorporation, or *taking in*, of something external. In Lacanian theory, symbolic identification takes hold as the subject identifies with the symbolic coordinates laid out for it in the form of the ego-ideal, “ratified” by the signifiers of the Other.²¹⁹ If an introjected object “binds” the drive, symbolic identification functions according to an inverse course by circuiting the drive along the signifying chain.²²⁰ This secondary elaboration of the drive highlights the similarity further: what was previously displaced outwards is taken back in a new form. For Lacan,

the Real element of the drive carried in the signifier doubles with the lack in/desire of the Other, making it is resistant to identification. However, it is important to note that imaginary and symbolic identification both remain firmly on the terrain of the ego for Lacan. They are, in effect, different modes of alienation between subject and ego. Projection is the displacement of the drive onto the first Other; introjection establishes one's position relative to the paternal function of Symbolic Law (i.e., the second Other).

Clearly this comparison holds only to a point. There are key differences between Lacan and Klein in how they conceive of the earliest relationship between mother and child.²²¹ While both consider this relationship to be of central importance, their modes of articulating and weighting its effects are reflective of their distinctive conceptual motifs. Lacan insists on the primacy of the Symbolic over unconscious phantasies emerging from the infantile body.²²² In his schema, the state of fused plenitude that marks the start of mental life for Klein, is only posited retroactively as an effect of the signifier.²²³ A purely somatic, yet still psychically-relevant [mother-infant] relationship is unthinkable, and it undermines the logic of *nachträglichkeit* in favor of a linear temporality. Lacan's inability to "image the earliest mother-infant" is noted as a key difference with Klein.²²⁴ By way of a possible reconciliation, however, it has also been suggested that recent research into a child's prenatal encounter with the maternal voice indicates how the Symbolic "starts to frame the world" even before birth.²²⁵

In Seminar VII, Lacan writes that "Kleinian theory depends on its having situated the mythic body of the mother at the central place of *das Ding*."²²⁶ By approaching this relationship in terms of *presence*, Kleinian theory installs *something* where Lacan insists

there should be *something missing*.²²⁷ Similarly, Lacan was noted to have claimed that Klein “imagarizes” the symbolic order by insufficiently theorizing its radical negation of all object-relations.²²⁸ Using Boothby’s framework, we could say Klein’s model operates predominantly through the positionality of objects at the expense of their dispositionality. Here we can see how *objet a* – the “dispositional object” – is unrecognizable in a Kleinian model. Although projection and introjection are partially analogous to *objet a* in how they make “an exteriority interior,” Klein’s internal object is not properly *lost*.²²⁹ Finally, because *objet a* “designates the ultimate object, the Thing,” the conflation/overlapping of the imaginary maternal body with *das Ding* occludes the place of lack so fundamental for Lacan’s metapsychology.²³⁰

How this distinction plays out in a psychoanalytic examination of autism *as a way of being* depends, in part, on whether one considers the aim of analysis to be a matter of repairing a wound and integrating the ego’s object-relations, or to safeguard a space for lack, and by extension, desire. This is an important difference that frames the way we will approach first-person writing and scientific research going forward. Focusing on lack establishes a unique set of criteria for interpreting the source material by shifting attention towards instances of dialectically opposed, seemingly irresolvable terms, and recasting them as markers of the subject’s structural contours and the movement of *objet a*. Here we pivot to a review of Lacanian theorists of autism, while keeping an eye towards Tustin’s model, and its Kleinian roots.

The prevalence of language impairments that accompany autism, understood within the frame of the autistic subject’s relation to the Other, are of central concern for

analytic theorists who elaborate Lacan's concepts into this realm. From the intersection of language and the Other, questions of structure, topology, *jouissance*, and *objet a*, are posed. Many contemporary theorizations can be traced to Rosine and Robert Lefort. We will dedicate significant space in review of their work here.

In the early 1950s, Rosine Lefort practiced psychoanalytic treatment at *la Fondation Parent-de-Rosan*, an asylum for children near Paris; Robert worked there as a pediatrician. The daily session notes Rosine maintained for two children are collected in *Birth of the Other*, where she provides a detailed account of how she applied Lacanian theory to her treatment of pre- and non-verbal children. Her praxis and subsequent analyses laid an important foundation for a Lacanian approach to the autistic subject.

Birth of the Other examines the cases of "Nadia" and "Marie-Francoise." At the time of their treatment at *la Fondation*, they were thirteen and a half months and two years of age, respectively. Early separation from their parents and hospitalism were concerns for both, and Lefort's technique commenced similarly in each case. By striking a passive, intersubjective presence in an attempt to situate herself in the position of the Other, she sought to introduce *lack* through constructing "limits at the level of her response to the subject's demand."²³¹ In "refusing to satisfy needs, she facilitates the creation of the lack in the Other where the subject will come to locate her own lack." Lefort's clinical observations make repeated note of how her patients related-to and interacted-with the holes in her own bodily surface, especially the eyes and mouth, as well as with apertures in the environment (doorways, windows, etc.).²³² She interpreted

the former as instantiations of *lack* and her patients' actions to be symptomatic manifestations of their respective orientations to the imaginary and symbolic orders.

Lefort's comparison of Nadia and Marie-Francoise examines both the emergence of the Other and the status of the Other as a *lacking* entity. Over the course of their treatment, Nadia's progression through the mirror stage into a transferential relationship with Lefort is contrasted with Marie-Francoise's persistent ambivalence and diagnoses of childhood schizophrenia and autism.²³³ While Lefort occupied the "locus of the Other,"²³⁴ for Nadia, whose desire was structured by her "relation with the lack of the object,"²³⁵ for Marie-Francoise the Other was "nonexistent as such."²³⁶ Noting how Marie-Francoise "did not assign any special significance to the Real of my body in relation to the other objects,"²³⁷ Lefort suggests her corporeal presence was experienced, instead, as part of an "undifferentiated"²³⁸ plane.

In addition to there being no "imaginary existence" of the other for Marie-Francoise, a "nonexistent Other" resulted in the absence of the Other's lack.²³⁹ In this model, the Other's lack is understood as "a hole of reception, the only place where the subject may become, a place that is not in the Real."²⁴⁰ Lefort wagered that this was "an essential aspect of the *infans* subject's psychosis,"²⁴¹ meaning that "if the hole was not in the Other, then it was (Marie-Francoise's) body that was radically holed."²⁴² But whereas Tustin theorized autism to be a defensive gesture in response to the unbearable "wound" left by the child's separation from the mother, in Lefort's analysis, a non-lacking Other offers no "hole of reception," resulting in the inverse, such that a traumatic absence is substituted by the intolerable presence of the Real and the lack of absence.

As Theodore Mitrani has observed, “For Lacan, the hole (lack) stimulates the formation of the signifier, whereas for Tustin, the dread of the hole or wound prevents the creation of signs and symbols and the development of a sense of inside and outside.”²⁴³ The nuancing here is subtle, but one consequence pertains to the therapeutic potential of Tustin’s “autistic object,” which she felt to “handicap mental development.” In a Lacanian framework, as noted by Jean-Claude Maleval, an autistic object “possesses a remarkable dynamic capacity,” which can assist the autistic subject to “open themselves to the world.”²⁴⁴ Along these lines, Lefort considered a revision to Klein’s notion of good and bad objects, such that regardless of whether a “good object exists in itself, bearing real witness to the love of the Other,” what is more fundamental is the “signifying dialectic” that hinges on the Other’s lack.²⁴⁵ We will consider the downstream consequences of this theoretical divergence in Chapter 2.

Beyond the structural necessity of lack, Lefort speculated as to how the Other factors in to the dialectical constitution of physical and psychical space. She observed that the first instances of *objet a* (the voice and the breast) are “stuck to the body of the Other.”²⁴⁶ It follows, then, that with a child’s natural separation from the parent, “a distance appears between the subject and the object of its quest.” The loss of the voice and the breast “introduce the notion of distance” that facilitates the “signifying inscription” of the subject onto the holed body of the Other.²⁴⁷

With Nadia, the presence of a holed Other opened a dynamic, lacking dimension of the object and facilitated the transference in the resulting signifying space. Through the particulars of Nadia’s play, Lefort noted that a “veil”²⁴⁸ was frequently operative and a

“beyond of the image” was established, which “actualized at once the other and the Other, the ‘a + A.’”²⁴⁹ By aligning the beyond of the specular other with the structural fissures of the symbolic Other, the subject’s lack was knotted with the Other’s. For Nadia, this enabled “the articulation of the Real with the signifier.”²⁵⁰ Yet for Marie-Francoise the Other offered no “hole of reception” wherein the “mutation of real objects into signifiers could be done.”²⁵¹ Instead, Lefort “found the Real – plenty of it.”²⁵² The signifier was present, but “could not get inscribed in the Other,” and Marie-Francoise was “cut off...from all loss.”²⁵³ The “double absence of the Other and the other” led Lefort to question “the very notion of structure” itself.²⁵⁴

Psychotic structure, wherein the subject rejects, through foreclosure, the “hole” in the Other, entails that the elaboration from first to second Other does not occur. *Objet a* cannot then defer the drive via the signifier and *jouissance* issues from a “monolithic,” purely imaginary Other.²⁵⁵ The misstep from first to second Other is key for psychotic structure and with Marie-Francoise, Lefort observed no “trace of the image of the other *in its relation* with the Other.”²⁵⁶ But beyond the structural ramifications of this non-relation, the “double absence” forced Lefort to consider whether the imaginary other could foreclose the structural lack of the symbolic Other at all – because neither appeared as such. Although she approached Marie-Francoise through the framework of childhood psychosis, the resulting “failure of structure” provoked a turn towards topology.²⁵⁷

Lacan developed topological conceptualizations throughout his writings, and in Seminar XX, he suggested an “equivalence” between structure and topology.²⁵⁸ Following this course, Lefort noted how the “body’s surface is the locus of structure from

the very beginning of life.”²⁵⁹ Based on her observations of Nadia and Marie-Francoise, she felt compelled to “redefine the corporeal relations between the small subject and the Other in terms of surfaces and, correlatively, of holes.”²⁶⁰ If the correlation between surface and hole is determined by the subject’s relation to the Other, it must be added that this correlation, in turn, determines how – and if – the lost object comes into play. *Objet a*’s role in constituting a space for desire is predicated on the “distance” it marks between the subject and the body of Other, as well as the dialectical folding of this external distance internally to the subject.

To develop her differential analysis of Nadia and Marie-Francoise, Lefort makes reference to two of Lacan’s topological models: the Mobius strip and the torus. The former spans a continuous, two-dimensional surface, twisted in on itself such that the inner and outer are the same. The Mobius is “nonorientable” to the Other in three-dimensional space.²⁶¹ Conversely, the torus is a “three-dimensional structure that divides the space of the body into an exterior and an interior,” creating an “orientable surface structure” shaped around a hole.²⁶² Lefort sought to give “a topological account of this passage from a nonorientable surface to an orientable surface.” Importantly, both the subject and the Other are subject to these morphological shifts.

The ultimate aim of such a topological passage is the “articulation of the Real with the signifier,” and so for every step Nadia took along this sequence, Marie-Francoise was the “counterproof.”²⁶³ As Lefort explains: “She showed us what happens when the questioning of bodies is not pursued with the help of a possible articulation between the Real and the signifier in the field of the Other, but remains in the Real alone.”²⁶⁴

Throughout their sessions, Nadia's interactions with Lefort's body showed her concern for the signifying objects of the Other, while Marie-Francoise "remained with the real object," because there was no symbolic dimension to the holes of the body of the Other.²⁶⁵ In the first case, this signaled Lefort's body was shaped as a torus oriented around a hole, capable of relinquishing its objects to Nadia, whose body, by virtue of the extracted objects, was "filled."²⁶⁶ In this way, Nadia maintained the structure of a Mobius strip, at least initially. As such, "the dialectic between Mobius and torus was able to continue," instantiated in the repeated "sticking and unsticking" of Nadia's body to Lefort's, one surface to another.²⁶⁷

When the activity of sticking and unsticking occurred in the presence of a mirror, changes in how Nadia oriented herself to Lefort's body were noted and interpreted as "changes in her perception of the structure of bodies."²⁶⁸ As Lacan explained in the *Mirror Stage* essay, a mirror supports the perception of a (specular) whole, in contrast to the "fragmented" bodily experience of the child.²⁶⁹ Lefort theorized that in this domain of plenitude, Nadia could view herself in relation to the body of the Other from different positions, variously conjoined and separated – "stuck" and "unstuck." In this way, Nadia established a "topological identification" with Lefort: "she made me a 'surface' in her own image, before going to confront us in the mirror."²⁷⁰

For Nadia, the mirror was a "surface which separated two spaces, by doubling real space in a virtual space," where the Real of the body of the Other was "articulated" with the signifying image of the subject-Other dyad.²⁷¹ In this doubled space, the surface boundary of their Mobius dyad was "pitched" and "immersed," instigating a "succession

of transformations” that possessed the “mark of the signifier.”²⁷² The “distance” between *objet a* and the holed body of the Other was likewise inscribed in the signifying image, “conjugating” the signifier with the Real in the virtual space.²⁷³ With the doubling of space in the mirror, Nadia “took on a toric shape” and “discovered the notions of inside, outside, and hole.”²⁷⁴

In Lefort’s observation, none of this progression occurred for Marie-Francoise. The absence of a holed Other meant that she was not able to extract signifying objects to “stop the holes in her own body.”²⁷⁵ Instead, “Marie-Francoise remained with the real object, and this had the effect of closing off the division of the subject.”²⁷⁶ The seeming contradiction between being simultaneously “closed off” and “radically holed” highlights a fundamental predicate of the Lacanian subject.²⁷⁷ Although Marie-Francoise was faced with “a real hole that was to be really filled,” this refers to a dimension of the body that is typically negated through the articulation of the Real with the signifier. Lefort is describing the process of how signifiers “mark” the body. These holes, marked by “rims,” are zones of extreme sensation, vulnerability (i.e. the mouth, the eyes, the anus), and, in the absence of a holed Other who can proffer signifiers for metonymic exchange, *jouissance*.²⁷⁸ Based on their sessions, Lefort theorized that Marie-Francoise was left to “stop” her corporeal perforation with “real” objects. Conversely, the *division* of the subject is a signifying division, typically emerging through the signifier insofar as it is articulated with the Real. As a divided subject, “real holes” are ameliorated in a dialectic exchange of lack with the Other.

Because the Real and the signifier “each remained in their own domain,” the mirror did not facilitate the “doubling” of real space with virtual space.²⁷⁹ Instead, Lefort recounts an instance wherein Marie-Francoise was presented with a cosmetic mirror by a nurse, and “all it reflected back to her was Real, which she tried to find by clawing at the back of the mirror.”²⁸⁰ Unlike Nadia, who became “oriented” to the Other through the mirror, the real holes that characterized Marie-Francoise were “non-orientable.” Nor did she engage in a topological progression from Mobius to torus [in relation to the Other.]

Marie-Francoise’s treatment was brought to a premature end when the Leforts moved abroad. Yet in their final few sessions, Lefort noted the “emergence of a call to the Other,” leading her to consider that “Marie-Francoise’s structure was not frozen.” The insistence on a topological account, driven by Lefort’s observation that structure fails when the signifier and the Real are unrelated, suggests that autism emerges with the most elemental shaping of the young subject. This can be interpreted as pointing towards a topological theorization of autism irreducible to psychotic structure. If we take psychosis to entail the covering-over of the Other’s lack issuing from a failure of the Name-of-the-Father, Lefort seems to suggest autism is a mode of relating to the subject’s own lack in total isolation from Other. Marie-Francoise was left with a hole that she could not signify via the Other, a “real hole,” because what cannot be signified is Real – and in Lefort’s observation, there was “plenty of it.”²⁸¹ The immediate question to ask becomes: through what medium does the autistic subject relate to lack?

Lefort wrote *Birth of the Other* almost thirty years after her work with Nadia and Marie-Francoise. At the time of their treatment, Lefort was undergoing analysis herself,

prior to any theoretical training, which she felt to be inextricably linked with the treatment of her patients at *la Fondation*.²⁸² Without “knowing what to do,” she was guided by “an unconscious knowledge,” allowing the analysand to occupy the “place of teacher.”²⁸³ Taking into account her nascence as an analyst, it seems reasonable to assign a degree of heterodoxy to her approach with her patients, and possibly to the conclusions she and Robert later drew as well. Throughout the treatment period, Lefort’s practice of writing detailed session notes was an important ritual that enabled her to carry on through challenging times:

The writing was a way for me to blot out the Real of bodies that had been of use to them in the sessions but whose transformation into signifiers remained my responsibility, so that these small analysands could carry on along their own paths.²⁸⁴

While Lefort’s writing practice supported her capacity to engage in sessions, the ability to “blot out the Real of bodies” was also, in essence, the main aim and ultimate difference between the treatments of Marie-Francoise and Nadia. When we consider this from the perspective advanced in Chapter 1, the inability to “blot out the Real of bodies” is another way to conceive of an encounter with *das Ding*, defined as the subject’s “blind spot.” By locating *das Ding* in the unknowable dimension of the Other, one’s entrance into language doubles as access-to and distance-from the Thing, a process described by Lefort as the “conjugation” of the signifier and the Real. Further, in Chapter 1, it was in relation to *das Ding* that we wagered a definition of one’s “way of being,” based in how the

subject's capacity to "believe" in the Other as a protective buffer from *jouissance* determines its fundamental structure.

Through a set of tentative axioms, we can trace the basic parameters/conditions of a Lacanian theory of autism more directly to the notion of autism as a way of being. First, the topological implications of the autistic subject's relation to the Other entail a surfeit of the Real. Second, the signifier exists, but its relation to the Real is not facilitated by the Other. Finally, because *objet a* cannot lack from, nor be relinquished to, an unholed Other, its origin and role in structuring the autistic subject must be examined. Underlying these axioms is the ongoing question of how to relate/distinguish autism and psychosis. Those influenced by the Leforts have taken up these ideas in the context of their own writing and clinical practice, often incorporating first-person sources in their analyses. I will review examples from three such analysts before situating their thinking into a larger discursive context.

Eric Laurent is a French analyst who was well-acquainted with the Leforts. He recalls discussing the question of autism and psychosis with them often: "Should they be separated through a particular mode of foreclosure that provoked the rejection of all signifiers or through a particular mode of the return of *jouissance* to the body?"²⁸⁵ Regarding the former, Danielle Bergeron has suggested that while the psychotic "identifies a defect in the structure of language and devotes his life to trying to restore it," the autistic subject "does not enter into the complex and alienating relation to the desire of the Other" because "he runs afoul of this alienation." The fundamental point of distinction lies in how the psychotic individual "takes a step into language and confronts

the Other of language,” while the autistic subject “has evacuated the other from his system” *tout court*.

In Jacques-Alain Miller’s reconsideration of Lacan’s model of psychosis, differences in the return of *jouissance* are used to distinguish between sub-categories.²⁸⁶ When *jouissance* manifests in the body as [destabilizing, involuntary] enjoyment in the Real, schizophrenia is posited; when it issues from the desire of the Other, paranoia is considered.²⁸⁷ Laurent’s idea, echoed and supported by Maleval, is that autism bears witness to a return of *jouissance* along a “rim,” or “edge.”²⁸⁸ Here we should be quick to recall Lefort’s observation of how the site of a rim functioned for Marie-Francoise, compared to Nadia, who could “fill” her holes with the signifying objects of the Other, Marie-Francoise could only “delimit” them as Real along the outline of a rim.²⁸⁹ But in Laurent and Maleval’s account, the autistic rim is not situated along the [privileged “erogenous zones” of the body that factor in the ceding of *objet a*,] because the Other does not facilitate this exchange of lack for the autistic subject.²⁹⁰ Instead, a “synthetic Other,”²⁹¹ seen by Laurent and Maleval in the “islets of competence” or areas of obsessive interest that many autistic individuals possess, assists in the “localization of *jouissance*” outside the body. In this way the space of the rim “acquires a distance in relation to the body” and “constitutes a frontier in relation to the external world” that substitutes for the nonexistent or unholed Other.²⁹² Laurent views treatment to be a matter of “finding something capable of displacing the limit of the autistic rim” and initiating metonymic exchange within the new coordinates that emerge.²⁹³

In the absence of the signifier's articulation with the Real, Laurent notes how there is no "pathway of the drive that could otherwise link the body of the subject to the Other." The autistic subject is "glued to the drive in a non-metric fashion" because the phallic signifier – the "yardstick" of metric space – only emerges in the elaboration of lack from the first to the second Other.²⁹⁴ Instead, through his obsessive, repetitive acts, the autistic subject "tries to empty himself of a presence in which absence has not been symbolized."²⁹⁵ This child "wears himself out eliminating an excess of presence that encumbers him."²⁹⁶ The "non-metric space" of the autistic subject is "not constituted in terms of distance," causing a conflation of "infinity and proximity,"²⁹⁷ which Laurent observes in the heightened reactivity of autistic individuals to certain sensory stimuli. When the (neuro)typical pathway of the drive to the Other does not exist, the capacity of the "synthetic Other" to establish and regulate a "distance" from (and within) the Real requires that it mobilize *objet a* through some other means.

We have noted how Tustin's concept of the autistic object changes in a Lacanian framework from a static, hindering object, to one with a "dynamic capacity" to "capture" the autistic subject's *jouissance*.²⁹⁸ This owes mainly to Lacan's insistence on the object as a *lost* object and the space for metonymic exchange this loss opens. However, instead of objects "stuck" to the body of the Other that inscribe their distance from the subject as loss *within the subject*, autistic objects are not determined by a prior relation to the holed Other. Yet, as Laurent and Maleval maintain, when the autistic object is pulled into the orbit of the synthetic Other – or area of interest – it may assist in "complexifying" the autistic rim in support of the distance inscribed along this rim.

In his clinical work, Laurent has observed “different modes of attachment to an object that is supplementary, particularized and electively erotized,” which “constitutes an integral part of (the autistic subject’s) rim.”²⁹⁹ Through the “constant re-adhesion” of the subject’s body to such an object of *jouissance*, it may function as an *objet a*. When these objects are “extracted” or put into exchange – with the analyst, a peer, a family member – an effect “can be produced in the real.”³⁰⁰ To facilitate this exchange, Laurent attempts to foster what he calls “an autism a deux,” which is “a matter of making oneself the new partner of this subject, beyond all imaginary reciprocity and symbolic interlocution.” This partnership sidesteps the imaginary ego as a false totem and acknowledges the futility of the signifier to structure autistic *jouissance*. By way of technique, this approach seeks to foster the obsessive interests – or “passions” – of the autistic analysand that constitute the regulating boundary/frontier of the “rim,” rather than incentivize or instrumentalize them to promote non-autistic behavior.

In recent years, Laurent and Maleval have presented “affinity therapy” – colloquially known as “Disney therapy” in the case of Owen Suskind – as an example of a treatment modality that engages the affective life of the autistic individual. By shifting the therapeutic impetus from the teacher to the subject and focusing activity along the autistic rim, this approach moves beyond conscious motivations and “opens a disturbing psychic dimension where the subject is not entirely master of him or herself.”³⁰¹ This suggests a liminal space of therapeutic potentiality within the otherwise comforting zone of the autistic subject’s affinities, an activity Laurent has called “displacing the limit of the autistic rim,” or, per Maleval, “complexifying” it. The underlying mechanism at work

are the affinities' "common ability to create a space that simultaneously creates a need to be filled," or, *lack*.

Maleval's support for affinity therapy doubles as a critique of other approaches. Across *Listen to the Autists!* and *Affinity Therapy: The Return of a Psychodynamic Approach to the Treatment of Autism*, he traces a history of autism treatments grounded in behavioral theory (ABA) and cognitive science (Denver Model, TEACCH, etc.). Maleval suggests different methods "lean on fundamentally different conceptions of what it means to be human." He acknowledges successes and failures across the board and grants that certain approaches yield quantifiable results, especially when "measured with favorable instruments."³⁰²

Ultimately, though, Maleval questions whether knowledge acquired through learning methods that strictly modify behavior can be internalized in a meaningful way. He is skeptical towards practices that "deconstruct emotional life into cognitive elements" because they miss the point that "emotion is not taught."³⁰³ ABA, in particular, is not "a mode of knowledge about autism" and builds off "the implicit hypothesis that all human beings share the same functioning."³⁰⁴ In the context of a behavioral theory predicated on the efficacy of positive/negative reinforcement, this sameness appears to originate in an understanding of human nature that fails to move beyond the pleasure principle.³⁰⁵ This implies an ignorance of autistic difference in its most fundamental dimension, that of the drive. Instead, Maleval suggests that "if autistic subjects think and function differently it is because they derive enjoyment in a very specific way."³⁰⁶ This

observation highlights how *jouissance* is key to both meaningful treatment, as well as an approach to the singularity of the subject that does not elide autistic difference.

Maleval's critique tacitly suggests we consider a distinction between treating *autism* and treating the *autistic subject*. The former posits the underlying existence of a non-autistic subject suffering an autistic psychopathology, with the potential to attain relief *from* autism through the proper interventions at their recommended levels.³⁰⁷ The latter embarks from an understanding of autism as a "different mode of subjective functioning,"³⁰⁸ that emerges with the fundamental structure of the subject. In this model, relief occurs *within* the horizon of autistic being. We can add that relief *from* autism is determined according to a set of etic criteria, while the coordinates of relief set *within* autism can be emic in origin, voiced by autistic subjects themselves. For these reasons, Maleval (and Laurent) urge against the manualization of treatment in favor of knowledge inherent to the subject, and he sees an important ethical distinction in where different approaches locate the "source of change:" with the teacher or with the subject. In his view, although learning and behavioral methods promote autonomy, independence is only achieved through "highly original methods" developed when the autistic individual is free to build on their affinities.³⁰⁹ The difference here is between doing something on one's own (autonomy) and doing something of one's own choosing (independence), albeit with the caveat that the unconscious subverts the full coincidence of agency and conscious thought.

Unsurprisingly, Maleval argues in favor of psychoanalysis as "the only approach that isolates, behind the diversity of different types of behavior, what is constant in

autism.” He considers it uniquely capable of “listening to the other person” and “promoting respect for the singular and its non-absorption into the universal.” This sort of listening attempts to engage with the heterogeneity³¹⁰ of autism at the level of the individual, where $n=1$, in order to “accompany the subject in his original inventions.”³¹¹ Maleval summarily disavows parent-blaming psychogenic etiology, stating “not a single serious psychoanalyst would support such a thesis,” and sees a trend among contemporary analysts towards the separation of autism from psychosis.

Yet along with this support for individualized treatment and subjective knowledge, there are two areas of notable dissonance within the theoretical position we have worked to articulate. The first raises questions of culpability; the second suggests a limit to psychoanalysis’ ability to conceive of autism as a way of being.

Frequently in their writing, Maleval and Bergeron seem to ascribe an element of intentionality to the autistic subject. As Maleval puts it: “At its root, autism is constituted by the refusal to give up drive objects to the Other.” It is a “more or less conscious choice made by the subject to protect themselves against anxiety” by “retaining the object of vocal *jouissance*.” Similarly, at the expense of a “shared perceptible universe,” Bergeron states the autistic subject “chooses to remain within the hallucinatory universe of his own mental representation.”³¹² He refuses to give up unmediated access to “the mental object,” precluding its conversion into a signifier of the Other.

Both Maleval and Bergeron trace this subjective choice to an originary traumatic encounter with the desire of the Other. To this end, Bergeron identifies the “audible” dimension of the maternal voice with the “foreign Thing” that threatens the being of the

autistic subject by mobilizing the drive. Following a “precocious” and “ravaging” encounter with the audible, the autistic subject creates “a universe of objects where he lives from instant to instant,” withdrawn from the desire of the Other. If we apply Lefort’s template to this dynamic, *objet a* does not cancel the audible of the voice because the Real, signaled in the opacity of the Other’s desire, is not articulated with the signifier. In Chapter 1, we offered an interpretation of Naoki Higashida’s “weird voice” and “missing words” in similar terms. At times Naoki’s own voice confronts him with *jouissance* in the nonsensical “verbal junk” he blurts uncontrollably.³¹³ Here the “dichotomy of the voice and the signifier” is analogous to the articulation of the Real with the signifier. Except for Naoki, and perhaps the autistic subject more generally, this dichotomy remains unconjugated by *objet a*, and dichotomy falls apart. As a result, *jouissance* is not channeled away by the signifier so much as it is condensed within it.

For his part, Maleval interprets the autistic subject’s difficulty parsing implicit meaning and subsequent predisposition towards the literal meaning of words to be reflective of an aversion to “vocal *jouissance*.”³¹⁴ Citing Temple Grandin’s account of her thought process in *Thinking in Pictures*, he theorizes that the autistic subject relies on the sign over the signifier.³¹⁵ While the signifier “breaks the link with what it signifies,” signs “do not efface the thing represented,” leaving no mechanism for metonymic exchange.³¹⁶ In a schema like Grandin’s the “referent of signs can be found in the world of things.” As Grandin puts it: “The easiest words for an autistic child to learn are nouns, because they directly relate to pictures.”³¹⁷ Through their “absolute signification” signs are stripped of the indeterminacy of the Other’s desire, and, by extension, of lack.³¹⁸

From this perspective, Maleval defines autism as “an intense form of castration anxiety,” absent the “support that lack provides.”³¹⁹

The notions of “conscious choice” and “refusal” beg consideration in any discourse on autism, and in my view, especially a psychoanalytic one that claims to “accompany the subject in his original inventions” in appreciation of “what is constant in autism.” It would seem the ethical stance that grants agency to the subject in its radical singularity is also prone towards holding the subject accountable for its earliest encounter with (and reaction to) the desire of the Other. If, as Bergeron suggests, this encounter was “ravaging” and “traumatizing,” it is as though psychoanalysis implicates the autistic subject for its instinctive “fight, flight, or freeze” response.³²⁰ This position locates the underlying mechanism of autism somewhere between a deliberate action and an unconscious recoil. Bracketing off the idea that autism is a conscious choice, with Bergeron’s motif of “refusal,” we find ourselves back in Tustin’s conceptual terrain.

Even though Maleval and Laurent radicalize the autistic object by asserting its potential for dynamic exchange along the “rim,” they commence from Tustin’s basic formulation that sees the autistic object as protective in nature.³²¹ What Maleval describes as “retaining the object of vocal *jouissance*” is analogous to how Tustin’s object functions to “staunch the ‘bleeding’ by blocking the wound” of traumatic bodily separateness.³²² And so, while the “rim” may be constituted by the subject’s “islet of competence,” formative of a “synthetic Other” that assists in the “localization of *jouissance*,” the underlying premise remains that it is foremost a barrier, or shell, behind which the autistic subject retreats.³²³ Jim Sinclair would clearly take issue with this,

based in their claim that: “Autism isn’t something a person *has*, or a “shell” that a person is trapped inside.”

Given Tustin’s catastrophizing of autistic being as “fraught with danger,” a Lacanian perspective that sees autism as profound castration anxiety, resulting from a “ravaging” encounter with the Other’s desire, risks losing what distinguishes its approach.³²⁴ However, taking into account the full conceptual scope of the Lacanian Other, an alternate analysis becomes possible. In Chapter 2, following Verhaeghe, we noted the body as the “most fundamental Other.”³²⁵ Beyond the big Other of language and the parental first Other, the bodily Other is “the most intimate stranger.”³²⁶ This highlights the conceptual instability of the basic division between the subject and the Other; they are unthinkable in isolation. Now, the autistic rim, formed at the edge of the autistic “shell” and constitutive of a “synthetic Other,” is no longer a separate possession so much as it is the topological plane of autistic being in its most porous immanence. The challenge becomes a matter of thinking the autistic subject’s efforts at self-stabilization as simultaneously a unique mode of relating to the world that retains all the richness afforded to neurotypical individuals.

For psychoanalysis, all subjectivity is defensive. We find this anchored in one of Freud’s observations in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where he states: “Protection against stimuli is an almost more important function for the living organism than reception of stimuli.”³²⁷ The theoretical progression Freud undergoes by placing the drive at the “frontier” between the body and the mind, as a disruptive stimuli originating from within, means the subject’s defense against itself is an *ex-nihilo* condition of its being.³²⁸

Although this limits how psychoanalysis can conceive of the autistic subject, it is simultaneously an egalitarian maneuver. By pathologizing all subjects, psychoanalysis thereby refuses to situate any mode of being a subject, neurotypical or otherwise, in the privileged position of a non-pathological norm.

In Lacanian theory, the Other is the subject's ultimate mediator; it is both the origin of stimuli *and* the protective buffer against too much stimuli. For the neurotic/neurotypical subject, the Other facilitates the dialectical displacement of the drive with the desire of the Other. Based on the clinical observations put forth by Maleval, Bergeron, and Laurent, this displacement does not occur in the same fashion for the autistic subject, who "runs afoul" of the desire of the Other.³²⁹

Maleval et al. regularly cite first-person sources in their writing. This approach has the effect of substantiating the lived experiences of autistic individuals with poignant examples of threatening and intrusive encounters with the Other. *Nobody Nowhere* (1992), in which Donna Williams describes her many methods for keeping other people at bay, is a prime example referenced by both Bergeron and Maleval. However, we have also seen how this approach leads to a characterization of the autistic subject oriented around a fundamental refusal towards the Other. The immediate question that arises is a simple, "why?" Why is this encounter so fundamentally altering for the autistic subject? Does autism entail that the invasive foreign element of the drive cannot be mapped to an actual Other, leaving it to confront the subject solely through the corporeal guise of the Other as "the most intimate stranger" of the body?

In her final analysis of Marie-Francoise and Nadia, Lefort poses an intriguing question as to whether her analysands, Nadia in particular, possessed a certain topological “anticipation” of the Other.³³⁰ Based on Nadia’s activity in sessions, Lefort was certain the Other, for her, was “holed.”³³¹ Beyond this, she speculated as to whether the Other was “toric from the start” as well. The implication pertains to the ease with which Nadia could make Lefort “in her image” as a support in the “virtual space” of the mirror. In my view, Lefort is questioning whether something innate to the subject determines its capacity to relate to the Other at a topological level. For Marie-Francoise, forever the “counterproof,” the absence of this anticipation might explain why she could not find the symbolic hole in Lefort’s body, leaving it to reappear in the “real of her own body.”³³²

We have set as our goal the development of a psychoanalytic metapsychology compatible with Sinclair’s pronouncement that “Autism is a way of being.” In reviewing clinical literature, we have co-located autism with the most basic emergence of the subject. Now, in order to see beyond a horizon of the autistic subject defined by a traumatic encounter with the desire of the Other, we must consider how to reorient the drive to an Other whose lack does not manifest as such. If we suggest autism to be a mode of relating to one’s own lack, in isolation from the signifying matrix of the Other, then it is not a matter of “resisting” the alienation of language, as Maleval puts it, so far as it is alienation *from* this alienation. Perhaps autistic being is a mode of defense wherein the Other and the neighbor-Thing are not aligned. We will continue to wrestle with these questions in Chapter 2 by engaging with first-person writing and scientific research.

Chapter 2: Introduction

Chapter 2 ventures a series of speculative encounters between emic, first-person writing and quantitative, etic research, facilitated by the psychoanalytic framework outlined in Chapter 1 and the Interlude. Although these encounters are neither standalone pieces nor fully integrated, their central purpose remains consistent: to consider autism as a *way of being* through Lacanian theory. To this end, certain themes and concepts make repeated appearances, applied as analytic tools for a critical engagement with the source material. The remainder of this introduction reviews Chapter 1 and the Interlude before picking up from the end of Chapter 1 to describe, broadly, how these themes and concepts will be incorporated going forward.

In Chapter 1, we defined “the subject” in contrast to the ego or “self.” Instead of an agent possessing transparent self-knowledge, the subject operates unconsciously to frame the bounds of conscious thought. In this way it is a radically *lacking* entity. We considered how Lacan’s application of structural linguistics to psychoanalysis opened new dimensions to Freud’s theoretical edifice, memorialized in his formula “the unconscious is structured like a language.” The subject of the unconscious is thus the subject of the signifier; it only exists in relation to an/the Other. Moreover, a subject’s way of being is a way of being *in language*.

Utilizing Paul Verhaeghe’s psychodiagnostic formalization of Freud-Lacanian theory, we traced the subject’s structural formation in relation to the first and second Others. Whereas the first Other mitigates drive tension through dyadic, mirroring attunement, the second Other elaborates this dyad along the cross-axis of the signifying

chain. A “triangular structuration” is thereby opened allowing the subject to mobilize something unresolved and unsymbolizable in the dyadic relation to the first Other, a remnant of the subject’s drive that emerges as a lacking element in the field of the Other.³³³ Lacan names this *objet a*.

In order to grasp how *objet a* exerts an influence on perceptual awareness, we utilized Richard Boothby’s phenomenological motif of positionality and dispositionality. This approach describes a dialectic relation between positional objects that are readily given to consciousness as discrete and separate from their surroundings, and the imperceptible dispositional field in which such objects emerge. Following Lacan’s analysis of *objet a* as “the gaze” in the visual realm, Boothby names it as a “dispositional object” that is “active in the invisible framing that produces all positional awareness.”³³⁴ In the auditory domain, Boothby applies this framework to the phoneme, taken “solely as a marker of difference,” whose positionality is “immediately swallowed up by its role in establishing a field of dispositionality.”³³⁵ The phoneme, like *objet a*, is a “unique intersection of positionality and dispositionality.”³³⁶

One goal here is to demonstrate how an examination of positionality and dispositionality offers an analytic method for extrapolating about unconscious structures based on conscious subjectivity. Essentially, for something to present itself to consciousness, something else must go unseen, unheard, or unregistered, meaning that what *lacks* from consciousness is as fundamental as what appears. The most basic parsing-out and breaking-up of conscious experience relies on this dialectic, which is regulated by *objet a* as it “focuses” the dispositional field.³³⁷ I apply this methodology

heartily in my analyses of first-person texts. The writing of autistic individuals often describes uniquely distinctive visual and auditory experiences that implicate *objet a* as a dispositional object, and subsequently as a fundamental marker of their subjective structure.

A more profound aim is to show how *objet a* relates to the metapsychological dimension of signifying structure. As a dispositional object “strangely suspended between the subject and other,” *objet a* interweaves the subject’s lack with the desire of the Other in the indeterminate space of the signifier.³³⁸ Here we return to the central place of language in determining the being of the subject. In Verhaeghe’s view, Lacan’s separate clinical structures (neurosis, psychosis, perversion) each “imply a different way of being-in-language”³³⁹ based on how they evince a particular “relation to the structural lack in the Symbolic (the Other) with respect to the Real of the drive.”³⁴⁰ Because *objet a* can be mapped to both the drive and the Other, this led us to double-down on the question of how *objet a* manifests in the subjective experience of autistic subjects as evidence of a uniquely autistic structure.

We left off from Chapter 1 in the shadow that is *das Ding*, presented by Richard Boothby in its most metapsychological dimension as “the site of a fundamental blind spot, the subject’s primitive acknowledgement of a zone of something unknown.”³⁴¹ Located beyond the limit of the subject’s capacity to identify with the other, The Thing provokes the “ineluctable disposition to believe” by confronting the subject with something “abyssal” at its core.³⁴² Boothby’s essay, *The No-Thing of God: Psychoanalysis of Religion After Lacan*, sketches a psychoanalytic theory of religion that

collapses the antagonism between faith and rationality based in how Lacan locates “the motive sources of belief rooted in the elemental architecture of subjectivity.” Because the belief in question pertains to the subject’s capacity for symbolic mediation of anxiety and *jouissance* through the big Other -- by way of fantasy, foreclosure, or disavowal -- the centrality of language impairments and social communication deficits in defining autism tethers us firmly to the ontological dimension of the autistic subject. The subject’s dual-relation to language and other people directly invokes the question of that subject’s way of being.

To this end, the scope of the conceptual terrain occupied by the Other is crucial. In addition to the big Other of the Symbolic domain, we must consider it simultaneously as the caretaking first Other and the body. As Verhaeghe puts it: “On the one hand we have the Other as the body from which the *jouissance* arises; on the other there is the Other as the (m)Other who provides access to this *jouissance* via signifiers.”³⁴³ In the first case there is the body as the “most intimate stranger,” a manifestation of the internal Other “that enjoys, if possible together with us, if need be without us.”³⁴⁴ Yet it is equally the caregiving Other whose signifiers “mark” the body, setting external coordinates for one’s inner sense of corporeality.³⁴⁵ The division of the subject is established by the division between subject and Other. Verhaeghe goes on to note that even as Lacan’s usage of “the Other” changed over the course of his writing, it is possible to maintain the earlier meanings alongside later ones. A Lacanian engagement with the autistic subject must leverage this semantic polyvalence to its full extent.

Review, cont.

In the Interlude, we largely deferred the question of “being” to consider how historical and contemporary psychoanalytic theories conceive of autism. One goal was to identify what is unique in a Lacanian approach to autism compared to other psychoanalytic orientations. Another was to assess the compatibility of this approach with the specifics of Jim Sinclair’s assertion that autism is inseparable from the underlying existence of an autistic person. As he put it: “There’s no normal child hidden behind the autism.” After problematizing the historical relationship between psychoanalysis and a psychogenic etiology of autism rooted in “toxic parenting,” we reviewed Frances Tustin’s work as an example of a theory that pathologizes autistic existence. We traced Tustin’s theoretical underpinnings to the work of Melanie Klein before comparing and contrasting Klein with Lacan.

Although there are clear parallels between the two, a main point of departure pertains to the status of the infant’s earliest relationship with the maternal body. The negation of the signifier and the primacy of the Symbolic, for Lacan, refocuses this relationship away from a dynamic of *presence* to one of *absence*. It is a subtle, but crucial, difference. Tustin, for example, conceives of autism as a maladaptive response to the child’s bodily separation from the mother. A prior “undue closeness” in which “both mother and child had colluded” leaves the child ill-prepared for this otherwise normative separation, leading it to erect a protective barrier around itself. Tustin sees the “autistic shell,” manifest in the ritualized behaviors and obsessive interests of the autistic child, as a tactic for protecting against threatening stimuli. Similarly, she theorized the role of

autistic objects and shapes that protect the child by “blocking the wound,” but “handicap mental development.”³⁴⁶

We then pivoted to the clinical work of Rosine and Robert Lefort as an example of proto-Lacanian autism theorists. In Rosine’s detailed case studies of Nadia and Marie-Francoise, the extent to which she was installed in the role of the Other for each child contrasted their respective courses of treatment. Moreover, the status of her body as lacking, or “holed,” was a necessary condition for initiating a dialectic exchange of signifying objects and establishing a transferential relationship wherein Nadia could signify her lack, but Marie-Francoise could not. For Lefort, autism emerges in the double absence of an Imaginary other and a “holed,” Symbolic Other, resulting in an abundance of the Real. Finally, her turn towards topological models expanded the structural thematic we relied on previously.

A fundamental question for Lacanian theorists of the autistic subject is how to separate autism from the framework of psychosis, based on language’s limited capacity to mitigate *jouissance* in each case.³⁴⁷ Eric Laurent, Jean-Claude Maleval, and Danielle Bergeron are Lacanian analysts active today who build from the work of the Leforts in order to articulate this separation. While for Tustin, autism is a defensive response to the traumatic loss of the maternal body, in a Lacanian model, autism emerges in an encounter with the desire of the mOther. It is not a matter of the mOther’s absence, but of her lack, manifest in the cut of the signifier. Yet whereas the psychotic subject attempts to restore the structural flaw in the Symbolic that bears the desire of the Other, the *autist* turns away from this lack more profoundly.³⁴⁸

Although these analysts see the autistic object as a “precious invention” with the “dynamic capacity” to function as *objet a*, Maleval and Bergeron consider the autistic subject to be prone towards retaining this object of the drive. They use rhetoric that suggests the autistic subject is active in this “refusal” to cede the “vocal object” (Maleval) or “mental representation – the mental object” (Bergeron) to the Other. Doing so supports the supposed homeostasis of autistic withdrawal. Further, Laurent theorizes that for the autistic subject *jouissance* is borne along a “rim” or “edge” that constitutes the site of a “synthetic Other” capable of localizing *jouissance* outside the body. Although this model operates within the paradigm of the autistic shell, Laurent sees the rim as a site of therapeutic potential, where the analyst can join in an “autism à deux” to facilitate the exchange of autistic *objets a* on the terms set out by the subject. Similarly, Maleval argues in favor of psychoanalytic therapies that “listen to the autist” and engage with the subject’s “islets of competence” or *affinities* that constitute the synthetic Other.

Consistent across psychoanalytic conceptualizations of autism is the idea of defense. Because psychoanalysis defines all subjective structures as imperfect solutions to the “structural lack in the Symbolic (the Other) with respect to the Real of the drive,” autism is conceivably just one mode of defense amongst other viable recourses.³⁴⁹ Yet in order for Lacanian theory to engage with autism as a way of being according to the terms set out by Sinclair, the autistic object and the “edge” it supports must be understood as constitutive-of and inseparable-from the autistic subject at the most fundamental level. Rather than represent a barrier behind which the autistic subject retreats, they must be

understood to establish a mediating zone between the subject and the world – and within the subject itself.

In my view, greater distance should be established between a Lacanian conceptualization of the autistic subject and that theorized by Tustin. Contrary to Maleval and Bergeron, who suggest the autist retains the object in defense against the desire of the Other, invoking Tustin's object as that which "plugs the gap," I speculate as to how – and whether -- this subject encounters the Other's lack most basically. This entails leaning towards an understanding of the Lacanian Other in its bodily dimension, suggestive of a uniquely non-intersubjective autistic *objet a*, that is "strangely suspended" between the subject and the "most intimate stranger."³⁵⁰

The Interlude concludes with my speculation that autistic being is characterized by the non-alignment of the Other with the Thing. This is based on Lefort's question as to whether Nadia possessed an "anticipation" of the Symbolic structure of the Other while Marie-Francoise did not. Such an anticipation would explain Nadia's capacity to ally with the Other to process *jouissance*. As Lefort described, Nadia "made me a 'surface' in her own image, before going to confront us in the mirror."³⁵¹ The anticipation of a Symbolic Other opened "space for a more leisurely return to a surface structure" that was "orientable." This was necessary for "articulating" the Real and the signifier in the virtual space of the mirror.

A final step to take here is to consider the process by which *das Ding* is co-located with the desire of the Other. As Boothby puts it: "It is essentially a question of "like me or unlike me" that leads to the positing of the Thing in the case of a failure to

establish identity.”³⁵² The desire of the Other presents a limit to this identification, creating a “zone of something unknown,” that opens a space for the Thing. However, for the neurotypical subject, this failure ostensibly occurs after some measure of success. Autism asks that we consider the ontological ramifications of subject formation in the absence of any such success.

In Chapter 2 we return to Freud’s conceptualization of the Thing from the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*. Recent scientific autism research has observed fundamental differences in how autistic subjects move and perceive other subjects early in life, leading me to hypothesize the “like me” dimension of the fellow-creature is not operative for autistic individuals in a way that opens the virtual space of the mirror necessary for the negation of the Real by the signifier. It is my wager that very little conceptual translation is required to justify extrapolating about *das Ding* from these sources. From there we will analyze the writing of Tito Mukhopadhyay for manifestations of the autistic *objet a*, with special attention to the dispositionality of this object. My ultimate conclusion is that Lacanian theory, while not without limitations, nonetheless presents a potent critical tool for appreciating Sinclair’s claim that autism is a way of being.

Das Ding and Autism Research

For all of the importance we have placed on *das Ding* as a necessary and constitutively absent condition of the subject’s being, the examples Freud used to describe it in the *Project* are rather simple. They involve the everyday activities of looking, moving, and remembering. When the “fellow human-being” recalls the “subject’s first satisfying object (and also his first hostile object) as well as his sole

assisting force,” Freud theorized that certain “perceptual complexes arising from this fellow-creature” will be immediately recognizable against the backdrop of the subject’s own embodied experiences.³⁵³ Specifically, he describes visual perceptions of other people that “will coincide in the subject with his own memory of quite similar visual impressions of his own body – a memory with which will be associated memories of movements experienced by himself.” Although the Thing is assigned to the “portion” of the *nebensmensch* that does not “coincide” with the subject’s memories, corporeal or visual, the whole subjective edifice/structure erected adjacent to it depends equally on memories that “can be traced back to information about the subject’s own body.”³⁵⁴

With this in mind, there are two bodies of scientific research that offer uniquely pertinent findings, suggestive of something distinctive in how autistic subjects look, move, and relate to memories of those movements. First, studies that use eye tracking technology examine how infants and toddlers perceive fellow human beings compared to other visual stimuli.³⁵⁵ Some findings suggest autism is detectable as early as 2-6 months of age based on longitudinally discernible differences in eye fixation when compared with typically-developing (TD) subjects.³⁵⁶ Second, the “movement perspective” covers an interdisciplinary array of research initiatives oriented around scientifically observable and quantifiable metrics of sensorimotor functioning.³⁵⁷ This approach to autism considers how “different ways of perceiving and moving” underlie the secondary (and tertiary) symptomology typically bundled in a classification of autism as a neurodevelopmental disorder affecting social communication.³⁵⁸

The point here is to raise the metapsychological stakes of the body at a point in the history of the subject when the terrain of the body itself is not easily demarcated from the Other. Sensorimotor research and eye tracking studies do not posit a cause of autism, so much as they suggest how its earliest manifestations intervene to shape all subsequent development. For our purposes, at issue in both cases is the capacity for identification and dyadic mirroring at the level of Verhaeghe's dually-defined first Other, whereby the subject exists within a "double dialectic" of the subject—body (or drive), and the subject—Other.³⁵⁹ Before the desire of/lack in the Other is encountered and before the signifier opens a space for the Thing, a relation defined by dyadic mirroring provides a tentative, binary determination of tension/release, inner/outer, "like me or unlike me." We will review the methodologies and findings of these research bodies with a focus on the implications for how *das Ding* emerges. The basic proposition is that "different ways of perceiving and moving" must be considered as affecting the determination of "like me or unlike me."

Eye Tracking and the Limit of the Imaginary

Eye tracking studies consider many aspects of how test subjects perceive their environment. Often utilizing a technique that observes light reflected off the cornea, conclusions are drawn based on what subjects look at, for how long, and at the expense of which other items in the visual realm.³⁶⁰ These findings are typically contextualized in a developmental perspective. One article notes that "from the first hours and weeks of life, preferential attention to familiar voices, faces, face-like stimuli, and biological motion guide typical infants."³⁶¹ The underlying question with eye tracking research is whether

an autistic developmental trajectory is observable in the some of the earliest interactions between a child and its environment in general, and with *other people* more specifically.

Falck-Ytter *et al.* (2013) review an array of studies in a meta-analysis to “critically assess the use of eye tracking in research focused on autism early in life.”³⁶² Although they note a range of findings and differences in specific research designs, their summary discussions support certain broad conclusions. The most striking of these pertain to how autistic children demonstrate: “reduced looking time at people and faces” and “an absence of preference for biological motion,” compared to typically-developing peers.³⁶³ Other research designs that monitor eye movements across images placed side-by-side, called “preferential looking studies,” suggest autistic subjects tend to be drawn towards dynamic geometric images and patterns and “non-social contingencies” more so than towards social scenes or representations of the human form.^{364, 365} In studies where faces are the sole images presented, autistic participants tend to focus more on the mouth and less on the eyes than typically-developing children. Related findings indicate “a tendency to orient towards spatial locations with much audiovisual synchrony (AVS), such as synchrony produced by clapping hands,” or in the case of facial looking patterns, the mouth.³⁶⁶

Even a cautious/conservative interpretation of these findings opens a direct line to Freud’s theorization in the *Project*. To establish the “like me” dimension of the human Other, the subject’s “visual perceptions” must be supported by a bare minimum of looking. A tendency for “reduced looking time” opens a more basic question of “how much looking is sufficient?” While we will leave this question open, it takes no great leap

to suggest the mechanism at work in Freud's thinking is affected by this tendency in autistic subjects.

Eye tracking research appears to substantiate some of Rosine Lefort's clinical observations. Lefort noted how Marie-Francoise "did not assign any special significance to the Real of my body in relation to the other objects."³⁶⁷ She was "always ready to turn towards an object other than me, as if all the objects, including myself, were undifferentiated."³⁶⁸ Decades later, Falck-Ytter *et al.* noted "limited orienting to biological motion" in their young autistic subjects.³⁶⁹ Phenomenologically speaking, a perceptual landscape where other human beings do not emerge as privileged entities supports the broad claim that the autistic subject's relation to the Other is, at some level, not reducible to that of the neurotypical subject. But for as much as these observations support the conclusion that the autistic subject isn't "captured" by the specular other, this leaves us isolated in the imaginary register. Lefort was quick to observe the "double absence of the Other and the other" for Marie-Francoise, who "could not find the hole symbolically in my body."³⁷⁰ Further, Boothby points out that Freud's theorizing in the *Project* specifies the Thing be co-located with "what is unknown in the human Other," as opposed to within other perceptual objects. Eye tracking research addresses only part of equation, remaining within the dyadic relation to the first Other.

An interesting historical footnote illustrates this distinction further. Simon Baron-Cohen, the well-known autism researcher specializing in Theory of Mind (ToM) studies and originator of the "extreme male brain" hypothesis, made a brief reference to Lacan's *Mirror Stage* essay in his PhD thesis at the University of London (1985).³⁷¹ In his

research, Baron-Cohen demonstrated that autistic children have the ability for “mirror self-recognition” and concludes that ToM deficits originate elsewhere. He then goes on to refute what he believes to be Lacan’s theorization that such self-recognition “causes the onset of social awareness,” as a “necessary and sufficient condition.”³⁷² While Baron-Cohen considers that “Lacan did not intend a literal interpretation of his use of the term ‘mirror,’” and notes the “philosophical framework within which he writes is not directly translatable into the experimental psychological one,” this fleeting encounter reinforces an important distinction between the ego and the subject.

In Baron-Cohen’s dismissal of Lacan, the focus on *self*-recognition reveals the implicit determination of “the self” as the fundamental unit of personhood/subjectivity. From a psychoanalytic perspective, a Theory of Mind paradigm posits egos interacting with other egos as the underlying model for social being/existence, based in one’s ability to ascribe intentionality to the neighbor.³⁷³ Autistic individuals exhibit “mind blindness” when they fail to report accurately on ego intentionality. Conversely, Lacan theorizes how the desiring subject encounters the desire of the Other at the point of its own lack, giving rise to *objet a* as the elusive representative of this lack within the socio-symbolic field of the Other. Whereas attributing ‘something more’ to the Other is a shared feature (intentionality and desire, respectively), the former case assumes this ‘something’ is knowable with a working Theory of Mind, while the latter bases itself on the constitutive unknowability of this excessive component.

The point of the *Mirror Stage* essay is to articulate how the ego arises out of a fundamental *misrecognition*, forever subverting the truth of self-recognition.³⁷⁴ As Lacan

puts it, the ego is “irreducible” to and will only ever “asymptotically approach the subject’s becoming.”³⁷⁵ If anything, Lacan’s formulation of the mirror stage is defined by the *failure* of the image to encompass the entirety of the subject’s being. How the subject attempts to repair this failure portends its structure. To define autism via egoic or cognitive criteria is to occlude the autistic subject and the unconscious constitution/condition of its *way of being*.

In a psychoanalytic view, “social awareness,” as it is used to define autism, is a function of a shared, structural failure amongst neurotypical subjects, emerging at the *limit* of one’s mirror self-recognition. This requires we understand the importance of recognition in its negative dimension, rather than as a positive characteristic. In other words, beyond establishing a correspondence between oneself and one’s mirror image, the question becomes: is the image imbued with *something more*, with an unknowable – and thereby lacking – excessive dimension? It is the libidinous investment of the drive that instantiates this dimension. Moreover, is this *something more* granted its symbolic dimension, ratified by a lacking Other? As Boothby might put it: the gestalt positionality of the image is relevant only as far as it registers within an imperceptible dispositional field. And so, just as the reduced looking time observed by eye tracking research only engages with the visual perceptions in Freud’s schema, the question here should be less “can the autistic subject recognize its mirror image?” and instead, “what is the status of the Other relative to this image?” Or, does the Other open a dispositional dimension to the positionality of the image?

Key to Freud's theorization in the *Project* is that "visual perceptions" of the other's movements ("for instance, the movements of its hands") will be related back to the subject's "memories of movements experienced by himself." *Das Ding* inheres to the unseen core of the other that "gives the impression of being a constant structure and remains as a coherent 'thing.'"³⁷⁶ Beholding a two-dimensional, static image does not evoke the dispositional because it does not require that the subject demonstrate a "fore-grasp" of the unseen inner space that is posited moment to moment. Boothby contrasts "positional adumbration" with "positional articulation" to make this distinction, noting how with the latter "changes in the (adumbrated) figure are collated in relation to a virtual unity, analogous to the locus of the Freudian Thing."³⁷⁷

Lefort's topographical analysis of how Nadia approached the mirror allows us to bring "the virtual" into alignment with the Thing, movement, and the autistic subject. As she noted, Nadia was able to establish a "topological identification" with her own image, such that they formed a mobius dyad in the mirror.³⁷⁸ As this dyad was "pitched" in the image, contorting and deforming the perception of their surface boundaries, the Real of their bodies was inscribed into the "virtual space" of the mirror. Unlike Marie-Francoise, Nadia had extracted "signifying objects" from the holed body of the Other, interpreted by Lefort as *objets a*.³⁷⁹ As these anchoring points were cast into the virtual space of the mirror, they engaged the Real of Nadia's body, establishing the signifying coordinates of lack through which she could temper *jouissance*.

Crucially, it was through the embodied dynamism of this scene, the movement of bodies with a common topography, linked by *objet a*, that "something more" was granted

to the image in the mirror. When Lefort questioned whether, for Nadia, her body was “toric from the start” based on some innate structural “anticipation,” she equally implied the question of whether Marie-Francoise was precluded from forming a mobius dyad, and the dynamic “like me” dimension of the human Other necessary for the limit of identification it implies.³⁸⁰ Here we turn to sensorimotor research to understand how movement differences support the idea of autism as a way of being.

Movement Differences and the Thing about Autism

The “movement perspective” makes explicit its intentions to rethink the “socially defined focus” of other autism theories and incorporate the perspectives of individuals with autism.³⁸¹ One particular cluster of this research observes measurable differences in “micro-movements.”³⁸² As the authors define them, “micro-movements are the non-stationary stochastic patterns of minute fluctuations inherent in natural actions.”³⁸³ For the typically-developing (TD) individual, micro-movements “increase in predictability over time, based on ‘re-entrant sensory feedback.’” Micro-movements are not readily perceptible “as they take place at timescales and frequencies that fall largely beneath our conscious awareness.”³⁸⁴ Put differently, micro-movements describe variations in the body’s trial-and-error process for acquiring mastery over its actions, by learning from and readjusting to the outcomes of previous, unsuccessful attempts.

A hypothetical example might proceed as follows: if one were to record all the subtle movements an individual demonstrates when reaching for a glass of water, including all the minute variations in the route the body traverses, time after time, towards a consistent endpoint, the variability of the autistic individuals’ movements

would far surpass that of the non-autistic individual. For TD individuals, what starts as disorganized and chaotic becomes refined and predictable. Importantly, this process usually occurs automatically along with physical maturation.³⁸⁵

Micro-movement research methodologies engage in scientific observation and the application of statistical analysis in interpreting results. The primary research design cited by Torres *et al.* uses a motion capture system to monitor a basic pointing task, involving both “goal-directed” (pointing upon request to a particular shape) and “goal-less” (the subsequent return to baseline posture).³⁸⁶ Findings show how the typically-developing individual’s movements smooth out over time, becoming more predictable, accompanied by a flattening of chaotic, superfluous movements. The researchers note how “intentional motions have been documented in neonates as early as 10 days old,” and how “innate reflexes may initially play a role in the identification of systematic patterns during spontaneous exploratory behaviors by providing reliable referencing anchors.” The TD subject’s development is based on the accumulation of these muscle-memory (kinesthetic) “priors,” suggestive that the body has the potential to register and record micro-movements within a stochastic field of likely/possible outcomes, so that future instances build upon previous attempts.³⁸⁷

By comparison, autistic individuals show a persistence of chaotic, unpredictable micro-movements. As such, the autistic body is “memoryless.”³⁸⁸ At the level of cognitive functioning, the failure to build up a probabilistic inventory of stable cause-and-effect motor expectations leads to “noise,” defined as “any kind of sensed phenomenon or change that cannot be interpreted as a signal.”³⁸⁹ In other words, the

autistic subject's body movements and sensations are not easily factored into consciousness as meaningful events, let alone as "volitional" actions.³⁹⁰ A memoryless and noisy body must "rely on the concrete 'here and now' of perceived body position and environment."³⁹¹ Whereas TD sensorimotor functioning leads to a continuous embodied narrative, the autistic subject is tasked with constructing her own means for establishing new spatial reference points, moment to moment.

Some movement perspective researchers consider certain aspects of their findings "to be a unifying characteristic —or endo-phenotype— for the entire autism spectrum irrespective of the heterogeneity of overall clinical presentation."³⁹² In this view, surface-level behavioral symptoms of autism can be oriented within a sensorimotor framework grounded by the lack of kinesthetic priors. The reliance on the "here and now" is interpreted to account for the stereotypical lack of social flexibility and breaks in routine associated with autistic individuals, based on the recurrent need to find one's bearings. A higher noise-to-signal ratio of micro-movements prevents smooth bi-modal sensory-integration and processing, "because there is no internalized sensory-motor frame of reference," given the preponderance of non-sensical sensory input.³⁹³ A preference for sameness and repetitive motions are construed as "attempts to limit uncertainty (noise)" and as "part of a search for current verification of body position in space," respectively.³⁹⁴ Anticipating, perceiving, and interpreting the "actions and emotional facial micro-expressions of others during real time social interactions," are compromised by the individual's own lack of a "congruent map between physical and visual perception."³⁹⁵

Along these lines, Gizzonio *et al.* note how autistic subjects demonstrate impairments in the ability to perform pantomime gestures. This includes both when the subject is tasked with imitating a visually perceived action, as well as when the action is described through verbal directives. These researchers suggest such differences emerge with the inability to “encode the spatiotemporal dynamics of the observed gestures.”³⁹⁶ They speculate further that gestures described by verbal command when “there is no external model to imitate,” require the described action to be “extracted’ from an *internal* model,” leading to the hypothesis that “children with autism build their own peculiar dyspraxic internal motor models.” Pantomime deficits, then, are “mostly due to the presence of an internal stereotyped model of action” that is not derived through successful mimesis.³⁹⁷

In a study that applied a “rocking chair paradigm” to examine a “low-level of motoric behavior that does not depend on intentional, goal-directed action,” Marsh *et al.* contrast how typically developing children “exhibit spontaneous social rocking with their caregivers,” while autistic children do not share the same “tendency to rock in a symmetrical state.”³⁹⁸ They go on to speculate as to how “deficiencies in perceiving and responding to the rhythms of the world may have serious consequences for the ability to become adequately embedded in a social context.” Treatment interventions grounded in this research approach build from the rationale that “by focusing the child’s attention on the adult’s movements, and facilitating simple motoric movement synchrony, individuals can be pulled into the orbit of another, becoming a social unity of perceiving and acting.”³⁹⁹

There are parallels between certain aspects of sensorimotor research and Freud's theorization of the Thing that raise questions about the formation of the autistic subject. For instance, how might a subject with a "memoryless" and "noisy" body relate visual perceptions of the other's movements back to "memories of movements experienced by himself" – when those movements were not registered as such in the first place? This process is further complicated by the research that shows autistic subjects often do not experience their physical actions to be "volitional" in the way neurotypical individuals do. Pantomime and interpersonal rocking studies suggest fundamental differences in how autistic individuals relate to the movements of others, both intentionally (pantomime) and involuntarily (interpersonal rocking).

In the *Project*, Freud describes a process wherein certain perceptions "can be traced back to information about the subject's own body." Through this constant relating-back of present experiences to past memories, *das Ding* is positioned in the virtual space that gives an object or person "the impression of being a constant structure," despite changes in the subject's perspective or transformations in the object itself. Brincker and Torres (2013) raise an intersecting question in their movement difference research: "How can we, with a body in constant motion, get to a coherent and stable perception of anything?"⁴⁰⁰ In response, they describe how the accumulation of kinesthetic priors support the "predictive anticipation not only of body position and motion in time, but also the contents of what is perceived."⁴⁰¹ However, the autistic body does not accrue such an inventory and must "rely on the concrete 'here and now' of perceived body position and environment." Consistency across space and time is not guaranteed for this subject's own

corporeality, and so Freud's "perceptual complexes" that are judged against this background must be likewise unstable. Given the centrality of the subject's perceptual relation to the other in Freud's theorization of *das Ding*, one must question the extent to which, for the autistic subject, the fellow human being maintains "the impression of being a constant structure."

Sensorimotor research suggests profound implications for how autistic individuals relate-to and experience-of the "like me" dimension of the fellow human. By extension, the "non-comparable" or "unlike me" aspect, constitutive of the Symbolic Other, is equally suspect. While eye tracking studies show quantitative differences in how autistic subjects perceive the other ("reduced looking time" and "limited orientation to biological movement" being prime examples), movement disorder research suggests qualitative differences in how what is perceived is registered by consciousness and understood within the context of the autistic subject's own embodied experiences. This leads to the conclusion that the dialectical co-emergence of the familiar and the foreign, crucial for the alignment of the Thing with the other, occurs along a different topology.

The Object of the Autistic Other

When we extrapolate these findings into a Lacanian schema, we find new opportunities to engage with the work of Lefort, Maleval, and Bergeron reviewed in the Interlude. In that context, we considered whether neurotypical subjects possess an innate "anticipation" of a topologically toric Other that assists in the opening of a virtual space, necessary for the articulation of the Real with the signifier (Lefort). We also questioned the premise that an encounter with the desire of the Other is somehow uniquely

traumatizing for – and perhaps constitutive of – the autistic subject (Maleval and Bergeron). To conclude this portion, we will reconsider these questions in conjunction with sensorimotor research findings and the related implications for *das Ding* raised above.

In her observations of Marie-Francoise, Lefort “found the Real – plenty of it.”⁴⁰² Because Marie-Francoise could not locate the Symbolic “hole of reception” on Lefort’s body, the Other did not lack, nor were signifying objects extracted and pressed into dialectic exchange. Because symbolization opens a space for lack, where lack cannot be established, the Real resides. This resonates with the suggestion by Torres *et al.* that the autistic body is “noisy.”⁴⁰³ Here we can see how uninterpretable signal “noise,” generated by bodily movements that cannot be sequenced into fluid actions and do not register meaningfully for consciousness, create similar conditions for the Real to emerge. As Brincker and Torres point out, the autistic body’s failure to accumulate “kinesthetic priors” means “every variation and contextual influence intensifies the noise already inherent in the movement.”⁴⁰⁴ In other words, the autistic body accumulates the Real through its very existence *qua* body.

We previously noted how “limited orientation to biological motion” supports Lefort’s claim that Marie-Francoise did not differentiate her body from other objects. As such, Lefort’s body remained a mobius strip, a “non-holed structure.”⁴⁰⁵ If we have adequately demonstrated how sensorimotor research supports the idea of a radical difference between autistic and neurotypical subjects in terms of their corporeal relation

to the Other, as well as the connection between these findings and the emergence of *das Ding*, we can circle back to the matter of Nadia's "anticipation" of a toric Other.

As Lefort put it, a torus shape supports "the notions of inside, outside, and hole."⁴⁰⁶ Whereas the continuous surface of the mobius is "nonorientable," a toric Other possesses Symbolic holes that promote the extraction and exchange of signifying objects. Notably in Seminar VII, Lacan described *das Ding* as "an intimate exteriority," that is "at the center only in the sense that it is excluded," so we should add that the virtual "inside" space of the torus is, precisely, that of *das Ding*.⁴⁰⁷ If the autistic subject's movement differences point towards the conclusion that the like me/unlike me dialectic is not operative, and the lack of "predictive anticipation" hinders the emergence of *das Ding* in the Other, then it is logical to conjoin this assessment with Lefort's, and confirm her suspicion that Nadia approached the Other with an innate anticipation of a torus shape, poised with Symbolic holes, calibrated by shared spatiotemporal coordinates. Inversely, Marie-Francoise did not.

The movement perspective asks that we reconsider certain aspects of Bergeron, Laurent, and Maleval's thinking as well. Together these analysts share the underlying paradigm of autism as characterized by the defensive retention of *objet a* in a protective, stabilizing maneuver against anxiety and *jouissance*. Maleval and Bergeron, in particular, see a refusal to cede the "vocal object" and "mental object" to the Other. In my view, we should modify this conceptualization to take into account the way movement differences complicate the mechanism by which this ceding (neuro)typically occurs, that is, in a dialectic exchange with a lacking or "holed" Other.

We have noted, given the nature of the movement differences observed, that the autistic body is a purveyor of *jouissance* through its accumulation of the Real. Relatedly, Laurent suggests there is no “pathway of the drive that could otherwise link the body of the subject to the Other,” and that the autistic subject is “glued to the drive,” causing an “excess of presence.” The non-relation to the Other – or more specifically, the non-alignment of *das Ding*, the “very source of the drive,” with the *nebensmensch* – leaves the autistic subject to mitigate lack on its own. We should be quick to link Laurent’s missing “pathway” with the movement perspective in general, exemplified in the findings of pantomime and interpersonal rocking research. From here we can see how the absence of shared spatiotemporal coordinates equally prevents the establishment of a “social unity of perceiving and acting,” as well as a corporeal “pathway” to the Other. If we grant this missing linkage its full range of downstream effects, we can open space for an alternate interpretation whereby the autistic subject does not retain the object through a defensive refusal or choice, but instead that in the absence of a viable partner for embodied interlocution – without being “in the orbit of another” – the object has nowhere to go. More precisely, the object cannot emerge as missing, because the Other has nowhere to put it.

Maleval and Bergeron trace the impetus for this retention to the autistic subject’s initial encounter with the desire of the Other. In (neuro)typical subject formation, this encounter initiates the alienating, sacrificial tradeoff inherent to language acquisition. Maleval maintains autistic subjects “resist the alienation of their being in language by retaining the object of vocal *jouissance*.”⁴⁰⁸ The alternative, he suggests, is “an intense

form of castration anxiety” that manifests in the behavioral phenomena typically associated with autism. Similarly, in Bergeron’s view, a “precocious encounter” with the Other’s desire is “ravaging,” “unbearable and traumatizing.” The autistic subject has “run afoul” of the alienation that accompanies the Other’s desire and refuses to cede naming rights to its mental representations.

In the Interlude we posed the basic question as to “why” the desire of the Other is so traumatizing for these subjects. Maleval points towards the need to empty the signifier of *jouissance* that arises from the indeterminant element of the Other’s desire residing in the cut between S1 and S2. Bergeron goes further and suggests that “an exteriority within the maternal voice, a ‘foreign Thing’ within the uterine environment” sets autistic formation in motion, leaving this subject to reject “the time and space conditioned by the desire of the Other.”⁴⁰⁹ Bergeron sees this space as constitutive of “a perceptible field” that the autistic subject refuses to enter. By invoking the zero point of *das Ding* as the “foreign Thing,” Bergeron acknowledges the ontological dimension of autism. Although she leaves open the question of *why* autistic individuals are so susceptible to this “exteriority,” elsewhere she describes how the Voice “mobilizes the subject’s drive.” Considered in the absence of a “pathway” of the drive to the Other, one conclusion to draw here is that autistic individuals are left to deal with the mobilized drive without the mediating and structuring support of the Other.

The movement perspective describes a radical spatiotemporal disjunction between autistic individuals and neurotypical individuals. In my view, this disjunction supports shifting the emphasis away from the autistic subject’s *refusal* to cede the object, towards

a conceptualization that acknowledges how fundamental movement differences preclude this exchange from the outset of subject formation. We can maintain that the desire of the Other confronts the subject with something radically unknowable, a kernel of the Real lurking beyond what is recognizable in other people. However, we must add that for the autistic subject this kernel is less salient, diluted perhaps, because the corporeal coordinates used in a determination of “like me and unlike me” are irreducible to those of neurotypical subjects. In an embodied system described as “noisy,” the Real of the Other’s desire simply adds to the noise. Further, the negation inherent to signifying structure, brought about by the slippage of the signifier, is lacking the most basic moorings by which neurotypical subjects orient to this fundamental uncertainty. It is not that autistic individuals do not “want to enter the time or the space conditioned by the desire of the Other,” but rather that they cannot enter this space because they are calibrated to a different intersubjective rhythm altogether.

The Shape of the Other and the Shape of the Object

If *das Ding* is not located with the *nebensmensch*, it may seem that we have reinforced the etymological root of the term autism: *autos*. Lacking a pathway to the Other, these subjects are locked into themselves, too occupied by the chaos of their world to attempt an affective engagement with others. This would be a misstep in direct conflict with Sinclair’s writing in *Don’t Mourn for Us*. In that setting, Sinclair’s sharpest criticism is aimed at parents who lament the inability to connect with their autistic child and assume this precludes any chance for a meaningful relationship. As Sinclair points out, this perception is grounded in the parent’s “own experiences and intuitions about

relationships” rather than the child’s innate incapacity. Instead, what they lack is a “shared system” of “signals and meanings.” Sinclair recommends these parents “back up to levels more basic than you’ve probably thought about before.” With this in mind, we will examine the basic components of a “shared system” and consider how a Lacanian framework might define Sinclair’s “levels more basic.”

We have noted that *objet a* is key to understanding how lacking subjects constitute their world. Given how the object links the body, the signifier, and the Other, I propose it is equally crucial for grasping its role in a “shared system” as well. For interpersonal conduct to register in a meaningful sequence, discrete acts must be perceived positionally within a dispositional field. In Boothby’s account, *objet a* is the “dispositional object” that frames the dispositional field.⁴¹⁰ Because of the way it operates outside awareness to constitute awareness, the object quite literally “disposes” the subject towards certain ways of perceiving, acting, and desiring. Boothby makes two related observations that are especially pertinent here. First, he describes the “perceiving body” as a dispositional field when it “absents itself to make things present.” Second, he observes the body as “the original matrix of signification, the ground upon which the synchrony of the most elemental signifying system will be oriented.”

Taken together, we can see how the neurotypical body is structured – or predisposed – towards an intersubjective, “shared system.” The exchange of signifiers with the Other is a supremely embodied activity that sustains the space for lack *directly on the body*. A shared system is shared across a mutually held embodied lack. With *objet a* “strangely suspended between the subject and the other,” a “shared understanding of

signals and meanings” exists within a dispositional field structured to readily include the *nebensmensch*, to whom neurotypically lacking subjects trace their lost object.⁴¹¹

However, as we have worked to show, the autistic subject does not encounter the Other in such a way as to open the dialectical exchange of *objet a*. A “noisy” body does not recede from awareness to establish a dispositional field, so much as it clouds the positional emergence of what might be perceived or cognized. A memoryless body that must constantly establish new spatiotemporal coordinates provides an ever-shifting “ground” that disrupts the “synchrony” of a signifying system. Yet as we move away from a psychoanalytic model of autism oriented around the willful refusal to cede the object, in order to propose an alternate schema based in movement differences, we must examine it in this context more closely.

This is a unique challenge given how the movement perspective favors observable phenomena and psychoanalysis aims towards the imperceptible conditions of possibility within which observable phenomena emerge. However, there are at least two areas where such a leap seems feasible. Previously we noted how Brincker and Torres (2013) describe the importance of “motor priors” for triangulating between dynamic changes in one’s body and similarly dynamic objects in the perceptual realm. As they put it: “When predictable and reliable, these [motor priors] serve as malleable anchors to adaptively help separate internal from external influences and enable the system to discriminate intended from spontaneous variations.”⁴¹²

I propose we consider the role of these “malleable anchors” as structurally analogous to that of *objet a*. Both function to affix the subject to something, while

retaining a dynamic fluidity relative to the systems they support. *Objet a* tethers the subject to the desire of the Other at a point of lack, *qua* lack. It is a floating anchor whose binding strength is operative in the absence of any fixed positional manifestation. Motor priors constitute the body's frame of reference for registering dynamic changes in position, even as the environmental context in which these movements occur is itself subject to change. They are "malleable" to the extent that they demonstrate no discrete positionality in the present. Instead, motor priors establish a dispositional field within which positional movements are articulated. By anchoring perceptual phenomena, they evoke the stability and "constant structure" of *das Ding*. Motor priors and *objet a* function to orient the subject to the horizon of knowability within their perceptual field. In both cases, something not given to consciousness constitutes the conditions for conscious awareness.

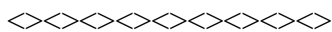
To further assist with this conceptual scaffolding from *objet a* to kinesthetic motor priors, we must revisit Boothby's analysis of the phoneme from *Freud as Philosopher*. In linguistic theory, the phoneme is the smallest discernible unit of sound contained in a word, that supports distinguishing between otherwise phonetically similar terms. As Boothby explains, the phoneme "functions solely as a marker of difference" whose positionality is "immediately swallowed up by its role in establishing a field of dispositionality."⁴¹³ It is a "hinge between sound and meaning," that "functions to link a system of oppositions modeled on a logic of embodiment with a domain of meaning that transcends all reference to the body."⁴¹⁴ As such, the phoneme is a "unique intersection of positionality and dispositionality," that assists in the subject's semantic "fore-grasp" of

an utterance even before the utterance can be said to have been heard.⁴¹⁵ Paradoxically, this logic entails that one can only hear what one is predisposed to understand. Boothby theorizes that the phoneme sustains a structural opening for lack in the auditory realm. *Objet a* marks a similar “locus of indeterminacy,” that “is linked to bodily structures, but is also crucially distinct from all embodiment.”⁴¹⁶ Like the phoneme, *objet a* disposes the subject towards a certain way of desiring based in how it holds a space for what is unknowable.

By this logic, in the context of “predictable and reliable” motor priors, I suggest neurotypical subjects possess a “fore-grasp” of certain movements that precede their registration as such. Brincker and Torres describe a “predictive anticipation” that helps track the dual vectors of one’s “own body position and motion in time, but also the contents of what is perceived.”⁴¹⁷ To account for the inherent variability of such movements, they theorize that neurotypical bodies accumulate a “*probabilistic expectation about the variability itself*,” meaning what can be registered about a movement is dependent upon an embodied “fore-grasp” of the stochastic field within which it occurs.⁴¹⁸ Just as *objet a* frames the perceptual field, motor priors enumerate the range of possibility wherein movements can be defined as such. As “malleable anchors,” they assist in the binary determination of intended/spontaneous and internal/external. They convert noise into “actively sampled and sharpened informative ‘signals.’”⁴¹⁹ On one level, they “hinge” between changes in the body and changes in the environment. On another, they hinge between sensed phenomena and the meaningfulness of this phenomena.

If motor priors and *objet a* function similarly as “malleable anchors,” the absence of motor priors for the autistic subject substantiates the suspicion that *objet a* is not active between this subject and the Other. Regardless of whether this originates from a refusal to cede the object or the absence of a viable partner for exchange, such a structural comparison relies on an alignment of what is constitutively indeterminant in the subject’s spatiotemporal embodiment, with the opening of a similar space in the signifier, exemplified in Boothby’s analysis of the phoneme as an anchoring “hinge.”

Returning to Sinclair’s essay, we must go further to link *objet a* with the “shared understanding of signals and meanings” that constitutes the system in question, and ultimately back to the subject’s way of being as it relates to *das Ding*. To this end, we can turn to another strand of the movement perspective that examines how sensorimotor differences affect an individual’s ability to participate in social interactions, as well as the more fundamental question of what constitutes a social interaction as such. We will conclude by using the idea of “enjoyment” to tie together *objet a*, Sinclair’s “shared system,” movement differences, and *das Ding*.



In *Embodiment and sense-making in autism* (2013), Hanne De Jaegher argues for an “enactive account” of autism that understands social functioning to be inseparable from embodiment and movement. Enactive cognitive science “uses the notion of *sense-making* to define cognition as the meaningful way in which an agent connects with her

world.”⁴²⁰ Sense-making is a “thoroughly embodied activity,” emerging through a purposeful, yet mutually informative exchange between the embodied subject and its environment. De Jaegher cites a “deep continuity between the processes of living and those of cognition.” In this way, she evokes a sort of corporeal social constructivism, wherein the individual “casts a web of significance on its world” from a “non-neutral perspective,” in support of the “constitutive and interactive *autonomy* of living systems.”⁴²¹

Because sense-making is interactive, encounters between certain subjects may yield *participatory sense-making*. De Jaegher suggests that when “patterns of interpersonal coordination” are present across different modalities (e.g. the timing and rhythm of bodily movements and the cadence of verbal exchanges), neurotypical subjects “literally *participate in each other’s sense-making*.”⁴²² De Jaegher cites research that describes how “interactors’ perception-action loops are coupled and interlaced with each other.” As interactors, neurotypical subjects are “highly plastic” and susceptible to the “double influence” of the dialectical exchange inherent to a social interaction. By contrast, “difficulties with coordinating and interacting in autism will lead to hampered participatory sense-making.”⁴²³ This distinction encapsulates Sinclair’s notion that the lack of a “shared system” is at the root of social disjunction between autistic and neurotypical individuals.

An interesting aspect of De Jaegher’s analysis pertains to how, for neurotypical subjects, the interaction process itself becomes a third term in this formula. As she puts it, “interactions self-organize and self-maintain through processes of coordination, including

its breakdowns and repairs.” She uses the example of encountering someone in a narrow hallway: “sometimes...in order to avoid bumping into each other, you both step in front of each other a few times, each moving to the same side at the same time – when all you both wanted was to continue on your way.” The interaction process *as such*, becomes “autonomous” and “modulates the sense-making that takes place.” De Jaegher’s analysis of this phenomena even takes on a vaguely psychoanalytic feel. The interaction process “sometimes continues in a way that none of its participants intends,” making it “impossible to say who is the ‘author’ of the intentions.” This implies that the “shared system” of neurotypical individuals functions, in part, at the expense of their autonomy as agents and invokes the influence of something exterior to all participants, an “extra-individual dimension.”⁴²⁴

A psychoanalytic interpretation of participatory sense-making requires that we understand social interactions as occurring between desiring beings. In this way, the interaction *as such* is constituted by what is radically absent for the interactors themselves. To speak of the interaction process in this way is to invoke *objet a* as the dispositional object that, as Boothby puts it, is “strangely suspended between the subject and the other, belonging to both and neither.”⁴²⁵ Both the participatory interaction and *objet a* “modulate” sense-making from a third position, exterior to the semantic, corporeal, or perceptual content of the interaction itself. In the participatory sense-making of neurotypical subjects, we find a schema reminiscent of the sacrificial ceding of the object to the Symbolic Other. Present in both cases is an unconscious activity that serves to moderate the subject’s encounters with actual others. Movement differences entail that

autistic subjects cannot give themselves over to the “self-organizing” autonomy of social interactions, not because they refuse to cede the object, but because they do not synchronize with neurotypical subjects in the necessary way.

De Jaegher contrasts the enactive approach with three prevalent theories of autistic cognition: Theory of Mind, Weak Central Coherence, and Executive Functioning.⁴²⁶ In her view, these theories are limited by their “piecemeal functionalism” and overall reductionism. They fail to take into account how embodiment and movement are intimately linked with and constitutive of social functioning. Instead, by foregrounding the “role of the body in subjectivity and cognition,” De Jaegher argues that an enactive approach can be integrative of “autistic embodiment and autistic psychology.” From this premise, she undertakes a project that promotes the universality of sense-making across all subjects, while also considering what is unique in *autistic* sense-making. De Jaegher attempts to de-stigmatize “autistic” behaviors by speculating as to how they *makes sense* given differences in *autistic* sense-making. As she puts it:

If autistic embodiment is intrinsically linked with autistic sense-making, we can hypothesize that many autistic people will find joy or significance in behaviors and embodied styles of sense-making that are considered “autistic.”⁴²⁷

In the Interlude, we noted Jean-Claude Maleval’s idea that “if autistic subjects think and function differently it is because they derive enjoyment in a very specific way.”⁴²⁸ The thematic resonance with De Jaegher’s thinking, although grounded in a different definition of the subject, is clear. However, by linking sense-making with

enjoyment, and enjoyment with *das Ding*, we can proceed with a more direct analysis of how sense-making evokes *das Ding* – and ultimately, the subject’s way of being.

In a psychoanalytic model, the subject enjoys by satisfying the drive. Importantly, this does not occur through achieving a definitive end, but in the action of continually reaching for it. For neurotypical subjects, the lacking Other offers a signifying matrix to facilitate this mode of enjoyment: the signifier never reaches the signified, one word begets another, and so on. When Lacan suggests that “distance” from *das Ding* is “precisely the condition of speech,” he grants that the signifier, regulated by Symbolic Law, establishes a limit to *jouissance* as an excessive form of enjoyment.⁴²⁹ The signifier, afforded its properly dispositional function of negation, distances the subject from the Real. Because the Real is antithetical to meaning and sense-making, distance from *das Ding* (as the site of the drive and the source of *jouissance*), is a condition for meaning and sense-making. Too much enjoyment threatens the subject *qua* thinking-being.

In De Jaegher’s enactive account, “cognizers” (note the similar phrasing to Freud’s in the *Project*) engage in a mutually informing, push-pull dialectic with their environment, in the constantly unfolding *enaction* of their being: “The significant world of the cognizer is therefore not pre-given but largely *enacted*, shaped as part of its autonomous activity.”⁴³⁰ Sense-making relies on “a cognizer’s adaptive regulation of its states and interactions with the world, with respect to the implications for the continuation of its own autonomous identity.” Enactive cognitive science asks: “why do cognizers care about their world” and “why does anything mean something to someone?” De Jaegher considers that one’s capacity to enjoy is intertwined with sense-making as a

“relational and affect-laden process.” *Affect-laden* suggests a libidinal investment, which necessitates a limit to said investment in the form of the signifier.⁴³¹ The “cognizer’s adaptive regulation,” in support of sense-making and autonomy, implies a method for negating the Real.

Yet we should be quick to recall how the autonomy of the cognizer is radically undercut by the logic of participatory sense-making. Herein lies the most promising inroad for a psychoanalytic interpretation of De Jaegher’s approach. By ceding full autonomy to the “extra-individual dimension” of the interaction *as such*, based in a corporeal predisposition towards intersubjective synchrony, neurotypical subjects participate in the establishment of the dispositional field necessary for the signifier’s negation of the Real. To boot, De Jaegher states that “sense-making is a narrowing down of the complexity of the world.”⁴³² In support of sense-making, the notion of “narrowing down” invokes *negation* as a form of removal or withdrawal from something excessive.

From the Lacanian perspective, neurotypical subjects narrow down the world in unconscious *participation* with one another, according to the Symbolic Law of the signifier that establishes a distance from *das Ding*. In this way, neurotypical sense-making is a “shared solution to the Real” embodied in the structural predisposition to displace the drive into the *fremde* portion of the neighbor-Thing.⁴³³ As Lefort speculated and the movement perspective seemingly confirms, this is supported by an “anticipation” of a toric Other possessing symbolic “holes of reception,” primed for the dialectic exchange of signifying objects, giving rise to *objet a* as the dialectical hinge of perceptual awareness.⁴³⁴ All of this comes together to reveal the neurotypical subject’s way of

being, determined by its “relation to the structural lack in the Symbolic (the Other) with respect to the Real of the drive.”⁴³⁵

Conversely, the “non-metric space” of the autistic subject, for whom the status of the Other has been radically called into question, is not regulated in the same way.⁴³⁶ Yet the absence of a *shared* system animated by the intersubjective exchange of *objet a* does not imply the absence of *any* system whatsoever. Sinclair has challenged us to “back up to levels more basic” to find common ground between neurotypical and autistic subjects. The question of how autistic “narrowing down” is revealed through enjoyment is key to moving forward. In the absence of the necessary conditions for participatory sense-making in the neurotypical sense, De Jaegher points towards the autistic subject’s areas of restricted interest and patterns of repetitive behavior as indications of autistic sense-making.⁴³⁷ Here we can draw together first-person accounts, scientific research, and certain aspects of the Lacanian theory of autism we reviewed in the Interlude.

In consideration of the way many autistic individuals are drawn towards certain sensory phenomena, De Jaegher considers that the purely “aesthetic element” of perception might hold inherent value for autistic sense-making.⁴³⁸ For example, she cites the enjoyment of patterns, including: “patterns in space, in ideas, in numbers, in size, in time.” This is supported in eye tracking studies that use a preferential looking methodology and indicate a partiality for dynamic geometric images and patterns over social scenes or depictions of the human form.⁴³⁹ More importantly, there are myriad similar examples across first-person accounts.

In *Up in the Clouds and Down in the Valley: My Richness and Yours*, Amanda Baggs considers that the neurotypical world is “more filtered” than her own, possibly at the expense of “the much more direct relationships, connections, and patterns formed between one thing and another.”⁴⁴⁰ She explains how patterns, as opposed to the categories established by language, are the “basis for how I understand things.” As she describes patterns: “I mean things fitting together in certain ways, outside of me. I mean perceiving connections without force-fitting a set of thoughts on top of them. This is how I handle not only sensory impressions but language itself.” Although De Jaegher makes no reference to Baggs’ writing, they appear to be kindred spirits in support of the value inherent to autistic being, with embodiment a common theme. Baggs continues:

Everything I perceive – from the movements of my body to the smells in the air – goes into my mind and sifts itself into similar kinds of patterns...I consider these patterns and connections to be more my language than the words that appear on the screen when I let my fingers use the keyboard. And far more my language than the words that have popped out of my mouth throughout my life. They are how the world makes sense to me. Anything else is just the artifact of a shoddy translation.⁴⁴¹

Baggs’ description of how patterns structure her subjectivity begs the question of whether the signifier is the only entity capable of negating the Real. Elsewhere in her essay, Baggs explains how she must “scale the cliffs of language” to use words. She laments how “language was built mostly by non-autistic people” and the limitations this

places on her ability to express “the most important things about the way I perceive and interact with the world.”

In *The Reason I Jump*, Naoki Higashida describes a similar alienation from the signifying structure of neurotypical language, as well as an embodied enjoyment of linguistic material.⁴⁴² In response to the question “Why do you ask the same questions over and over?” Naoki offers that “it lets us play with words.” The repetition of certain questions is “great fun...it’s playing with sound and rhythm.”⁴⁴³ Recalling that the drive is satisfied in the repetition of its failure to obtain a lost object, the affective engagement Naoki describes serves as a prime example of autistic enjoyment, reminiscent of Laurent’s notion that this subject is “glued to the drive.”⁴⁴⁴

Naoki’s writing provides other examples of embodied, aesthetic enjoyment as well. He notes how “when a color is vivid or a shape is eye-catching, then our hearts kind of drown in it.”⁴⁴⁵ The rotational symmetry of “spinning things fills us with a sort of everlasting bliss.”⁴⁴⁶ Answering the question “Why do you line up your toy cars and blocks?” he states: “What I care about...is the order things come in, and different ways of lining them up. It’s actually the lines and the surfaces of things like jigsaw puzzles that we love, and things like that. When we’re playing in this way, our brains feel refreshed and clear.”⁴⁴⁷ In autistic sense-making, the activities that constitute a “narrowing down” of complexity take the form of repetitious movements and patterns. Tito Mukhopadhyay, whose writing will be discussed more so in the next section, echoes Naoki’s sentiments: “Designs always calmed my eyes, perhaps because of their repetitive nature or perhaps because they never questioned my eyes, ‘Tell me what I am.’”⁴⁴⁸

In the Lacanian conceptualization of autism advanced by Eric Laurent and Jean-Claude Maleval, the technique of “autism à deux” seeks out the psychological and physical manifestations of autistic enjoyment in acceptance of this subject’s unique way of being. These might include certain topics of intellectual interest or patterns of stereotyped movement. In the absence of Symbolic lack embodied in the Other, Laurent and Maleval consider the autistic individual’s “islets of competence” (or areas of restricted interest, passions, affinities, etc.) as formative of a “synthetic Other,” that assists in the “localization of *jouissance*” outside the body. The synthetic Other establishes a “rim” or “edge” that “constitutes a frontier in relation to the external world, a channel towards it and a dynamising [sic] sensor of *jouissance*,”⁴⁴⁹ It assists in autistic sense-making by establishing a semantic field. When an object from this semantic field is brought into play by the autistic subject, Laurent and Maleval see an opportunity to “complexify” the membrane of the autistic rim and establish channels for the dialectical exchange of lack. This entails elevating the object to an autistic *objet a*. Contrary to Tustin’s theorization of the “autistic object” as a hinderance to mental development, Laurent and Maleval see in it the “dynamic capacity” to “capture” the autistic subject’s *jouissance*.⁴⁵⁰ In combination with the synthetic Other, the autistic *objet a* can be mobilized to open a properly dispositional field wherein autistic sense-making can occur.

Although De Jaegher seems to favor subject-oriented research that suggests “people with autism derive pleasure from their specialized activities or thinking styles,” she considers an alternate hypothesis whereby the autistic subject’s restricted interests and patterns of behavior are sources of suffering.⁴⁵¹ Ultimately, she seeks a middle-

ground and concludes that regardless of any such definitive assessment, these characteristics should be approached as “relevant, salient, or significant for the person with autism” – be they socially disruptive, personally painful, or uniquely sense-making.⁴⁵²

In search of the “levels more basic” as a common ground for linking autistic being with *being* a subject more generally, *enjoyment* presents itself as at once singular to each subject, yet structurally universal, grounded in the ontological dimension of the drive. However, when we observe how enjoyment emerges out of different structural conditions, as in a comparison of autistic and neurotypical subjects, we see its universality in sharper relief. If we can enjoy up *to the point of a limit* there is sense-making, and where there is sense-making there is a solution to the Real. Yet first-person accounts, autism research, and clinical observations suggest an autistic affective engagement with the world walks the line between overwhelming *jouissance* and circumscribed enjoyment.

Review, Reset, and Discussion

Our ultimate aim has been to consider Jim Sinclair's statement that "autism is a way of being" from the perspective of Lacanian theory. So far in Chapter 2, we have applied the psychoanalytic conceptualization of "being," developed in Chapter 1, to eye tracking and sensorimotor autism research. The definition of "being" we advanced is grounded in the details of the subject's relation to the Freudian Thing. Because the underlying mechanism at work in Freud's sketch of *das Ding* in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* relies on the basic activities of looking, moving, and remembering, the significant differences autistic individuals demonstrate in these activities lends substantial support to the notion of autism as a unique way of being.

In the Interlude we considered autism from the perspective of psychoanalysis more generally, including alongside several Lacanian analysts. We noted the problematic history of a psychogenic etiology, as well as the conceptualization developed by Frances Tustin, whereby autistic being is inherently traumatic. While contemporary Lacanian theorists offer a method for approaching the autistic subject that honors her singularity and recognizes autism as a "different mode of subjective functioning," we raised concerns about an element of culpability ascribed to autistic individuals and noted its dissonance with Sinclair's notion of autistic being.⁴⁵³ Although psychoanalysis views all subjectivity as fundamentally defensive, Jean-Claude Maleval and Danielle Bergeron deploy the rhetoric of "choice" and "refusal" to account a particular defensive gesture underlying autistic subject formation, the intentional withholding of *objet a*.

Based on the implications of the movement perspective, taken in the context of Freud's locating of *das Ding* in the "non-comparable portion" of the Other, we suggested an alternate interpretation. In this approach, autistic subjects do not "refuse" or "choose not" to cede the object of the drive to the Other, so much as the Other does not emerge within the spatiotemporal (nor semantic) coordinates necessary for such a dialectic exchange. Further, we picked up from a question posed by Rosine and Robert Lefort in their extended case studies of "Nadia" and "Marie-Francoise," to consider whether neurotypical individuals maintain an innate "anticipation" of the Other in such a way as to steer that subject towards a non-autistic structural formation. The absence of such an anticipation, grounded in movement differences, was offered to counter the notion of refusal. Simply, with the very emergence of the autistic subject, the signifying matrix for facilitating an exchange of *objet a* is not active in a way recognizable according to neurotypical criteria.

By reading the movement perspective through a Lacanian framework, we grounded autism as a *way of being* based in how the universal activities of looking, moving, and remembering affect the establishment of the "like me/unlike me" division of the Other for autistic subjects. Freud specifically names these activities as necessary components for positioning the Thing in the "unlike me" dimension of the Other, after similarities in externally perceived movements are related back to one's embodied memories of similar actions. Sensorimotor research shows how the autistic body is "noisy" and "memoryless," meaning certain movements are not smoothly registered in consciousness and the lack of accrued "kinesthetic motor priors" do not assist in an

embodiment that unfolds in a linear sense across space and time. By understanding sensorimotor differences as essential to the autistic subject's experience of the world (see: Robledo *et al.* 2012), the movement perspective links the physical with the social in a way that resonates with Freud's idea that "it is on his fellow-creatures that a human being first learns to cognize."

We have attempted to walk a line between articulating a structural/psychoanalytic account of autistic being, while keeping an eye towards the necessary conditions for the emergence of the subject more universally. From a Lacanian perspective, these include: lack, the signifier, and the Other. Sinclair's essay challenges us to conceive of autism as inseparable from the being of autistic subjects, but by focusing on the profound differences that demonstrate this inseparability, we have risked undermining the status of autistic individuals as subjects. If *das Ding* is not aligned with the Symbolic Other, what mediating substance establishes distance from and access to *jouissance*? If, as Amanda Baggs suggests, neurotypical language does not adequately speak for her experience of the world, how might autistic desire be embodied in the absence of the signifier? If the Other does not emerge as a viable partner for the exchange of signifying objects, regardless of whether we can absolve the autistic subject from a charge of refusing to cede the object, how and where does *objet a* arise?

The Lacanian answer for these questions lies with the Real: a lack of mediating substance to establish distance from the drive leaves the subject to confront the Real; proximity to *objet a*, one possible result of the non-existent lacking Other, is likewise an encounter with the Real signaled by anxiety. Yet as we have noted, the Real emerges at

an impasse of signification; it is resistant to thought, whether we define it as the exchange of signifiers with the Other in articulation of one's desire, or in terms of sense-making and the "narrowing down of the complexity of the world."

In an attempt to move towards an affirmative definition of autistic being and locate the common ground of Sinclair's "levels more basic," we followed the enactive approach and considered how differences in autistic sense-making suggest a unique mode of autistic enjoyment. We connected enjoyment to *das Ding* and subsequently to the subject's way of being. It is from this position that we will move into the final segments of this project. First, we will take up a psychoanalytically modified question of autistic sense-making in the context of Tito Mukhopadhyay's writing.

The Object of Autistic Sense-Making

Across the writing of Amanda Baggs, Naoki Higashida, and Tito Mukhopadhyay, there is a recurring theme that hints at the unique structure underlying autistic sense-making. In my view, this can be described, roughly, as a "dialectical disjunction" between certain elements of cognition and sensory-perception that neurotypical individuals experience in a gestalt whole, or with the otherwise smooth transition between modalities. Examples include differences in shifting from remembering to experiencing, from one sensory modality to another, and from perceptual experiencing to semantic construction. I propose to categorize these phenomena as perceptual, temporal, and semantic modes of *hinging*, based in the role *objet a* typically assumes in hinging between dialectically opposed registers, enabling the positional awareness of discrete elements within a dispositional field.

Given the differences we have identified in the autistic subject's relation to the Other, as well as the implications for how movement differences might affect an autistic person's way of establishing a dispositional field, we can extrapolate further to suggest *objet a* is not active as a dispositional object according to the same parameters as for a neurotypical subject. In other words, the impact of the autistic subject's drive on the perceptual realm is not structured by the signifier of the Other. We touched upon this disjunction in Chapter 1 when we reviewed Naoki's encounter with the voice *qua objet a*. As the determiner/regulator of what is cast out of awareness to allow *any awareness whatsoever*, *objet a* typically operates according to Symbolic Law, by remaining constitutively imperceptible in the establishment of a limit awareness. The dialectic disjunction described by autistic subjects suggest the intrusion of the drive on those aspects of perceptual awareness usually accounted for by the Other. Here we can recall Danielle Bergeron's suggestion that the autistic subject "does not want to enter into the time or the space conditioned by the desire of the Other," with the caveat that avolition is not the driving impetus here.

In *The Reason I Jump*, Naoki Higashida explains how "inside my head there really isn't such a big difference between what I was told just now, and what I heard a long, long time ago."⁴⁵⁴ In response to the question *Why are you too sensitive or insensitive to pain?* Naoki eschews a biological explanation of hyper- and hypo-sensitivity, saying "I don't think this is all to do with nerves and nerve endings. It's more a matter of 'inner pain' expressing itself via the body. When memories suddenly come to people, we experience a flashback – but in the case of people with autism, memories are

not stored in a clear order.” He goes on to say, “it’s not necessarily physical pain that’s making us cry at all – quite possibly, it’s memory.”⁴⁵⁵ Tito Mukhopadhyay endorses a similar phenomenon, although the disjunction is in part temporal and perceptual: “My boundary between imagining and experiencing something was a very delicate one.”⁴⁵⁶

Naoki describes an aspect of his perception similarly to De Jaegher’s suggestion that “people with autism can be properly described as having a different conception of wholeness, one that has to do with order, patterns, exceptions, and perceptual richness.”⁴⁵⁷ Answering the question *When you look at something, what do you see first?* Naoki explains: “When you see an object, it seems that you see it as an entire thing first, and only afterward do its details follow on. But for people with autism, the details jump straight out at us first of all, and then only gradually, detail by detail, does the whole image sort of float up into focus.”⁴⁵⁸

In De Jaegher’s enactive account, differences in which aspects of an object become salient are ascribed to the particulars of how autistic sense-making “narrows down” the perceptual field. Underlying this activity are sensorimotor differences, which determine the criteria for establishing the relative significance of certain activities and objects over others. In De Jaegher’s schema, value judgements like this are made in support of the autonomy of the embodied system, but the psychoanalytic reframing we offered earlier, based on *enjoyment*, places the drive at the heart of this equation. Naoki’s description of an object’s constituent parts preceding the whole gives the impression that the links of the signifying chain, distilled from linguistic components down to the smallest discernible/separable elements of thought, are not “conditioned by the desire of

the Other.” We might venture further that in the absence of the alignment of *das Ding* with the *nebensmensch*, the perceptual stability and wholeness neurotypical individuals derive from the displacement of the drive into the field of the Other is at the root of Naoki’s subjective account.

Other examples of dialectical disjunction highlight a similar lack of affective engagement in the field of the Other, as indications that *objet a* does not regulate the hinging of opposing registers. Amanda Baggs describes how her “first memories of speech involve not only no understanding of the meaning of words but no understanding that words could even have meaning.” She continues by noting: “On the occasions where I do understand the words, I can’t juggle the tone at the same time.” In a blog entry titled “What I mean by ‘beneath’ words,” she remarks on experiencing different aspects of words, depending on which “layer” of consciousness she is inhabiting.⁴⁵⁹ Words may manifest as anything from auditory phenomena with no discernible meaning, as “symbols” with the implication of a meaning that is ungraspable to her, to words in the conventional sense.

In *How Can I Talk if My Lips Don’t Move?* Tito Mukhopadhyay describes challenges with bi-modal sensory processing.⁴⁶⁰ Additionally, he notes, “There are components in the environment that I can miss due to the overindulgence of one sense or an overindulgence towards one component to which my perception chooses to attend.”⁴⁶¹ He will either “over-see” or “under-see the components of the environment.”⁴⁶² The involuntary occlusion of different elements from Tito’s sensory field. The similarities

with Naoki's account are clear, and he opens further common ground with both Naoki and Baggs when he describes hearing someone's voice more than their words.⁴⁶³

Beyond his overindulgent senses, Tito relates a "difficulty of overassociation" between terms as well.⁴⁶⁴ In one example, keeping in mind his limited verbal abilities, Tito is tasked with demonstrating his receptive language comprehension by writing out something that was said to him. Due to the impact of synesthesia on his senses, what he wrote described the poetic associations he drew from the vivid coloration of the speaker's voice. As a child, Tito would form "wrong associations between words and objects," such that whatever held his visual attention was named according to the words being spoken around him at the time.⁴⁶⁵ From the perspective of the signifier, in Tito's case the movement from one to another occurs in the "non-metric fashion" of the autistic subject, so-named by Eric Laurent as an outcome of the absent phallic signifier that elaborates lack from the first to the second Other.⁴⁶⁶ If we take "metric" in a different sense, as the "metering" out of a rhythmic pattern in a piece of music, then for Tito, the dual signifying functions of metonymy and metaphor, or displacement and condensation, would seem to march to the beat of a different drum.

Tito's Autistic Objects and the Space of the Question

These examples show instances of dialectical disjunction occurring within the seemingly natural vicissitudes of subjectivity: from remembering – experiencing – imagining; to sensing (hearing/seeing/feeling) – understanding – associating; and perceiving parts – wholes – details. As we have worked to illustrate, following Boothby's phenomenological analysis in Chapter 1, cross-modal hinging between semantic and

perceptual fields is analogous to the basic orientation of consciousness to the unconscious. In his account, the “perception of any object always occurs within what might be called a “dispositional field,” the bulk of which “remains unconscious.”⁴⁶⁷ Something must give way, constitutively speaking, for *anything* to emerge.⁴⁶⁸ And so, in cases of dialectical disjunction, the status of the *hinge* between the positional/conscious and the dispositional/unconscious – i.e., that which regulates the basic activity of subjective experience – must be considered directly.

We have routinely applied Boothby’s notion of *objet a* as a dispositional object. In *Freud as Philosopher*, he considers how the object “functions as a particular enhancement, we might even say a ‘focusing,’ of the dispositional field.”⁴⁶⁹ While it “cannot occupy the positional focus of attention,” *objet a* “remains active in the invisible framing that produces all positional awareness.”⁴⁷⁰ *Objet a* is “less an object than the function by which objects will be established.”⁴⁷¹ In its most metapsychological role, “*objet a* functions to ‘dispose’ the subject in the direction of the ungraspable horizon of the Thing.”⁴⁷² Inversely, it can be said that *das Ding* is the condition of possibility for the dispositional, meaning the sensorimotor evidence we reviewed to suggest that autistic subjects do not position the Thing in the *nebensmensch* in a “neurotypical way,” has implications for the basic establishment of a dispositional field and “all positional awareness.”⁴⁷³

Further, in the case of “sense-making,” described by De Jaegher as a “narrowing down of the complexity of the world” in support of stable, positional awareness of what remains, *das Ding* likewise establishes a horizon of possibility. In Boothby’s view, “The

Thing marks the space of an open question. As Freud said of it, the establishment of such a space of the question is what allows the human being to learn to cognize.”⁴⁷⁴ By reading this together with De Jaegher’s enactive account, sense-making is not only a “whittling down” of reality from a greater “whole;” it is the introduction of lack into the Real, which only retroactively posits the plenitude of the world.

Earlier we supplemented De Jaegher’s account to include *objet a*, hinted at in her analysis of *participatory sense-making* as the autonomy of the intersubjective “interaction *as such*,” because of how it subverts the conscious intentionality of the participants involved. Due to movement differences, autistic individuals do not engage in sense-making in the same way. Moreover, as we see in the examples of dialectical disjunction described by Baggs, Higashida, and Mukhopadhyay, the relation between a positional object and the dispositional field in which it exists does not appear to be regulated by *objet a* in the neurotypical sense either. To consider autistic being and autistic sense-making in the affirmative sense means, ironically, to consider how autistic subjects introduce lack/absence into their world. If it is not in dialectical concert with the Symbolic Other, then how?

From here we will focus on a succession of phenomena Tito Mukhopadhyay describes in *How Can I Talk if My Lips Don’t Move?* These include specific objects of interest and sensory assemblages that engage the body and assist in Tito’s sense-making. I propose we interpret them as autistic *objets a* and consider how they mark “the space of the question” that supports sense-making. In the thinking of Maleval and Laurent, the autistic object is manifest in whatever physical, sensorial, or subject-matter object the

subject is drawn towards out of its inherent “affinities” or “passions.” Importantly, these need not only represent the hyperlexic intellectual investments of savants. As Maleval theorizes, the autistic object initially supports the autistic “edge” or “rim” that “constitutes a frontier in relation to the external world” and assists in the “localization of *jouissance*.” In its “developed forms,” as in, when autistic individuals are supported to foster their predilections, not earn them through performing adaptive “prosocial behavior,” the autistic object “possesses a remarkable dynamic capacity” to “complexify” the rim, opening an intersubjective dispositional field, and subsequently the “space of the question.”

In Tito’s writing, he describes how certain objects and sensorial assemblages assist him to “secure” his “scattered senses,” and allow his thoughts to “flow.”⁴⁷⁵ He writes about mirrors, his shadow, staircases, flapping his hands and rotating his body. Common to these phenomena is their ability to open up a narrative dimension in his cognition, creating “stories.” In an early example, he recounts obsessing over a particular mirror in his family’s home, because “standing in front of a mirror helps secure my scattered senses.”⁴⁷⁶ The scattering and shattering of senses “can stop all through processes, making it impossible to continue doing an activity that involves reasoning or using the voluntary muscles of the body.”⁴⁷⁷ Eventually, he would “finally reach the mirror in the hope of seeing a story and in the hope of some silence.”⁴⁷⁸ In the absence of “those stories, recognizing and recalling a person or a situation is very difficult.”⁴⁷⁹

Tito’s stories open an associative web, or signifying matrix, that helps orient him to the world. The structural displacement inherent to the narrative flow of a story evokes

the opening of lack necessary for “sense-making.” In the field of the mirror, Tito observes: “More than the reflections, I was interested in the essence of the reflected objects and the possible stories about them.”⁴⁸⁰ Interpreted through Boothby’s framework, stories are constitutive of a dispositional field that, in the case of the mirror, frames the positionality of a reflected object and allows his thoughts to “flow” more generally. By securing his “shattered senses” and facilitating cognition, the mirror qua autistic *objet a* can be said to “capture *jouissance*” and “localize it” outside of him.

Tito goes on to write about how his shadow was his “greatest companion.”⁴⁸¹ There is a shift in these passages that is quite revealing of the way an autistic *objet a* relates to the Synthetic Other. Tito’s shadow was “an extension of my body,” and the “feeling of losing my shadow was like losing a part of my body.”⁴⁸² Approached in this way, as his de-facto body double, Tito’s shadow was alienating and rivalrous. Although it engaged his body, its shape and dimensions were contingent on the variations of light in a given space, contorting Tito’s body-double into new, unfelt and untraceable forms. But “even if I could not control its size, I could at least control its actions.” Occasionally, Tito felt the need to “teach it some discipline” by jumping endlessly.⁴⁸³

Tito’s shadow never told him any stories. Instead, it “followed [him] around, blocking stories as it always did with its greater story of nothingness.”⁴⁸⁴ The progression of Tito’s autistic *objets a* shows how he remedied his obsessive rivalry with his shadow by opening a dynamic, indeterminate space within it. In one example, Tito’s hands “made a connection” with his shadow and “would flap excitedly at the sight of [it].”⁴⁸⁵ His flapping hands would become “transparent as they moved faster and faster, ready to

become so transparent as if to challenge their shadows, ‘How would you shape me now?’” Tito “needed to continue flapping and maintain their transparency with [his] speed.”⁴⁸⁶ In this dispositional space, stretched across a dynamic, transparent field, “stories passed in and out,” negating the narrative blockage of his shadow.⁴⁸⁷

In another example, Tito describes learning how to use chalk to trace the outline of his shadow on the floor. “As I did so, I started seeing shadows in a new light. I could now trap their shapes within the boundaries of my chalk tracing. Those traced shapes remained there on the floor long after I had moved my hands away from those spots, like pieces of my own history.”⁴⁸⁸ He goes on to reflect that he could “seek out new stories in those shapes on the floor.”⁴⁸⁹ In the example of his flapping hands, Tito opened an indeterminate space within his shadow that allowed stories to pass in and out. With the chalk tracing, Tito *cancelled* his shadow by inscribing it, and then exchanged the empty husk for new stories.

In a final example, Tito remarks on how “staircases filled me with wonder because I saw my shadow splitting up into different vertical and horizontal planes as I climbed up and down them.”⁴⁹⁰ He then internalized the wonder of staircases, which he would “mentally climb” with his “shadow in front of [him], broken by alternate vertical and horizontal planes.”⁴⁹¹ Similar to the negation of his chalk tracings, staircases did similar violence to the inertia of his shadow that blocked his stories. Perhaps we can appropriately observe that the word is indeed *the murder of the Thing*.⁴⁹²

As an “extension” of his body that blocked stories, Tito’s shadow emerges as the rivalrous double that is the specular *imago*. Yet in the absence of a dispositional field

guaranteed by the stable coordinates of neurotypical embodiment, Tito's *imago* was not "ratified" by the big Other of the Symbolic, and the element of the drive engaged by the *imago* was initially granted no signifying matrix for its deferral.⁴⁹³ This was at the expense of sense-making, leaving only "stories of nothingness." We might speculate further that in this permutation, Tito's shadow was a literal embodiment of *the gaze*. It was resistant to narrative displacement; it occluded stories as a *stain* signifying "nothingness."

By pulling his shadow into the orbit of other, newly-fostered activities and interests (i.e., hand-flapping and climbing staircases), Tito negated its nothingness. Although the Symbolic dimension he established was not embodied by the linguistic signifier, the dynamic "transparency" of his flapping hands, the "splitting up" of the staircase, and the "trapping" of the chalk tracings all disrupted his shadow's inertia by introducing lack. Is this not still the basic trajectory of the mirror phase, only played out in a uniquely autistic way? The signifying objects Tito deployed were plenty capable of cancelling the Real, even if they did not originate with the Other. from his Synthetic Other

To conclude, we will double back to consider Tito's mirror as an *objet a par excellence*. In conjunction with Eric Laurent, Jean-Claude Maleval, and Richard Boothby, we have theorized the autistic *objet a* as uniquely selected by each subject and capable of assisting in sense-making by "capturing" *jouissance*. In this way, it may offer the autistic subject a "solution to the Real" that is irreducible to the neurotypical elaboration of lack along the linguistic signifying chain. By taking *objet a* as the

“dispositional object” that orients the subject to the “ungraspable horizon of the Thing,” we considered how it functions through opening an indeterminate “space of the question,” or *lack*.⁴⁹⁴

In Tito’s case, we interpreted his description of the conditions necessary for his thoughts and stories to “flow” as revealing the intervention of *objet a*, manifest in the structural displacement inherent to a narrative. Tito opens *How Can I Talk* by explaining his relationship to a mirror in his family’s home from early childhood. He and the mirror had a mutual desire to tell one another stories. As he peered into the mirror, the world behind him “became transparent.”⁴⁹⁵ The mirror could “absorb” the perceptual elements of the room. Tito explains how “stories waited for me behind the mirror. So I was needed on its other side. There was no great trouble to go through the mirror to the other side. All I needed to do was to stare intensely at any shadow on the corner of the wall as it was reflected in my eyes.”⁴⁹⁶ By engaging with the “nothingness” of a shadow as it was mediated by the mirror, Tito was able to traverse a boundary to access the stories he craved.

In an interview with Ralph James Savarese, Tito is asked about mirrors in the context of how he balances between different aspects of his cognition. The entire exchange proceeds as follows:

R.S. I'm wondering how you reconcile your imaginative visions with your scientific knowledge, your reason with your "fantastic abilities"? At the end of *How Can I Talk...*, you proclaim, "Now, as I stand in front of a mirror, trying to find some inspiration for my next story, I can clearly separate the physical laws

of reflection with the planes of incidence and reflection from my enchanting sensory experiences, leading my mind to differentiate between my alive and interactive world and the reality about what the mirror is, a mere object with a plane surface" (213). The customary narrative of maturity, both for the individual and for the nation, is from primitive animism to rational disenchantment. What's so interesting to me is that your education, while allowing you to distinguish between fancy and fact, has in no way quelled your deeply animistic sense.

T.M. It's like this. This is full and that is full. Take the full away from the full and what you are left with is full again. And this "full" I am talking about is Zero. $0 - 0 = 0$. It is this Zero that is the center of all numbers, balancing the positive and negative on either side. So it is easy to imagine the Big Bang and Creation from Zero. The other side of Zero is not perceivable or conceivable to us. What is understood by us is the plane surface of the mirror and the laws on this side.

Who knows what laws rule the other side if the plane surface of the mirror is understood as Zero?⁴⁹⁷

Tito's response is delightfully oblique. The most direct interpretation places the "plane surface of the mirror" at the intersection between his "imaginative visions" and "deeply animistic sense" on one side, with his "scientific knowledge" and "rational disenchantment" on the other. Because both sides are "full," we can consider Tito to be balancing the epistemological scales between intuition/rationalism and empiricism.

Although we might question the validity of the antagonism Savarese establishes between such modes of knowing, suffice to say that Tito identifies the mirror, broadly speaking, as a “hinge” between them.

We have already named Tito’s mirror as an autistic *objet a* based on how it captures his *jouissance* and secures his senses to facilitate the flow of his thoughts. Here we can consider how it opens the “space of the question” and orients him to a “zone of something unknown” as well.⁴⁹⁸ Tito places the mirror surface at the Zero point between the known and the unknowable, “balancing the positive and the negative.” All that can be known is the mirror’s “plane surface.” If we take the mirror as the dialectical hinge between consciousness and the unconscious, factored here as “the other side of Zero,” which is “not perceivable or conceivable to us,” then the Zero point of the mirror surface is precisely the locus of lack that is *objet a*. Tito suggests thought is bound by an epistemological horizon manifest in this reflective plane. If this is the case, then all that is known consciously owes its knowability to the unconscious knowledge on the other side of the mirror, and Tito’s mirror truly orients him to the “ungraspable horizon of the Thing” at the core of his being.

We set out to consider autism as a *way of being*. As Jim Sinclair explains it, this entails an acceptance of the innateness of autism to the autistic individual; of its constitutive inseparability from the all aspects of an individual’s being; and the totality of its effects on how that individual experiences the world. Sinclair lays bare what is at stake: to mourn for an individual because she is autistic is to mourn that she exists.

In part, this exercise was driven by a concern that as the prevalence of diagnoses increases and more individuals are interpellated as being “on the spectrum,” the underlying uncertainty about what autism *is* will be hastily covered over in favor of approaches that seek to ameliorate suffering (and, cynically, to reduce costs and increase assimilation) without considering the extent to which this suffering results more from the pervasive ignorance of autistic being, as opposed to the pathology of autism itself. To this end, there is an element of substantiation inherent to this project, foremost in terms of the viability of Lacanian theory to conceive of autism as a *way of being*, but also more broadly as a matter of the critical and investigative potential of psychoanalysis itself. On the latter point we will have to defer, but as a method for approaching autism as a *way of being*, taking into account both first-person/emic accounts and scientific/etic research findings, Lacan offers a fertile system, at once highly developed and yet still open to unique applications.

The overlying architecture of this project is as follows: Chapter 1 established what it means *to be* from a psychoanalytic perspective, as well as what might be understood as one’s particular *way of being*. The Interlude put our task into the context of the psychoanalytic discourse of autism, and Chapter 2 engaged with first-person accounts and scientific research.

To start, we took a structural approach, following Lacan’s general reliance on distinct clinical structures. In the first case, we considered how the subject of the unconscious exists in relation to *das Ding*, defined alternately as the source of the drive, the “prehistoric Other,” and the “site of a fundamental blind spot.”⁴⁹⁹ In the case of

neurotic structure, which I consider to be analogous to neurotypical being, the subject locates *das Ding* in the unknowable core of the Other and thereby establishes the “ineluctable disposition to believe” in the Symbolic as a “shared solution to the Real.” One’s particular *way of being* is thus a question of the structural configuration underlying of the subject’s relation to the “lack in the Symbolic (the Other) with respect to the Real of the drive.”⁵⁰⁰ Further, we put forth *objet a* as a reference point of *lack*, useful for tracing conscious phenomena back to the unconscious structures from which they emerge, based on how *objet a* holds Imaginary and Symbolic elements in dialectic tension with one another.

The Interlude detoured through a historical and contemporary examination of different psychoanalytic theories to grasp how they conceptualize autism. We highlighted the problematic history of a psychoanalysis and autism, exemplified in a psychogenic etiology and the associated the notion of “toxic parenting.” We briefly compared and contrasted Lacan with basic aspects of Melanie Klein’s theory. This was a necessary step to understand Frances Tustin’s theory of autism, as well as to distinguish what is unique in a Lacanian approach. We reviewed the case studies of “Nadia” and “Marie-Francoise,” described by Rosine and Robert Lefort as examples of Lacanian praxis; based on their observations, we opened a topological front towards our overarching aims. From there we reviewed three contemporary Lacanian theorists alongside Tustin and suggested the Lacanian innovation of *objet a* and the overall primacy of lack as important components for a psychoanalytic approach to autistic being to maintain resonance with Sinclair’s criteria.

A salient example of this takes the form of the “autistic object.” Theorized by Tustin to account for the restricted interests and sensory profiles of autistic individuals, in her account the autistic object supports autistic withdrawal and the “massive ‘not-knowing’ and ‘not-hearing’” she views as resulting from the fundamental trauma at the root of autism.⁵⁰¹ Instead, by interpreting the autistic object as an *objet a*, Lacanians such as Jean-Claude Maleval and Eric Laurent consider how it possesses the potential for opening a dialectic of exchange, especially when this occurs in the dispositional field established by the “Synthetic Other,” embodied in the autistic subject’s affinities, or passions.

We concluded the Interlude by considering the limitations to a psychoanalytic approach, Lacanian and in general. Psychoanalysis sees all subjectivity as fundamentally defensive, which on one hand levels the playing field between autistic and neurotypical being. However, we also noted that Maleval and Danielle Bergeron attribute an element of intentionality to the autistic subject’s particular mode of defense, theorized as the willful retention of *objet a* due to a “ravaging encounter” with the desire of the Other. This “refusal” prevents the circulation of *objet a* in the Symbolic field of the Other. We returned to the Lefort’s to open an alternative interpretation whereby autistic subjects do not relate to the Other in such a way that promotes the exchange of the object, grounded in a topological feature of the Other’s emergence.

In Chapter 2 we applied the conceptual machinery erected in Chapter 1 and the theoretical contextualization conducted in the Interlude to approach autism as a way of being most directly. This included an interpretation of sensorimotor research findings,

gathered under the umbrella of the “movement perspective,” as they pertain to Freud’s initial sketch of the Thing from *Project for a Scientific Psychology*. The movement perspective considers how autistic individuals move and perceive their environment, based on quantitative research and first-person accounts.

Specific movement differences include the lack of accrued “kinesthetic motor priors” that assist in determining the body’s location in space, requiring the constant redetermination of the “here and now” on the part of autistic individuals. In other words, muscle memory is not built up in such a way as to promote the smooth performance of otherwise mundane physical tasks, let alone those subject to variables in the environment or the dynamic unpredictability of another person in a social setting, leading to the characterization of the autistic body as “memoryless.” Studies observe “reduced looking time” at people and a preference for dynamic geometric images in autistic children. Others note the inability to engage in pantomime activities and the spontaneous synchronization of interpersonal rocking. The autistic body is considered “noisy” based in how certain sensory feedback cannot be interpreted as a signal and remains as undecipherable “noise.” Self-reports supplement these findings and note challenges with volitional action, regulating multi-modal sensory perceptions, and entire multifaceted apparatus of social-communication.⁵⁰² Taken together, sensorimotor differences affect all aspects of embodiment for autistic individuals.

Freud relies on the activities of moving, looking, and remembering as essential to the subject’s isolation of an unknowable dimension of the “fellow-creature.” It is in this “non-comparable portion” that the subject co-locates the unknowable core of its own

being in order to emerge *qua* subject. The movement differences expressed by and observed in autistic individuals support the idea that this isolation occurs according to a different set of coordinates. I take this as compelling evidence that autism entails a distinct way of being a subject that is irreducible to neurotypical structure formation.

From this position, we continued by reconsidering certain questions raised in the Interlude. Instead of taking autism as the “refusal” to cede the object of the drive to the Other, following a “ravaging” encounter with the desire of the Other, we offered that movement differences preclude the establishment of a topologically “toric” Other and the “symbolic holes” of reception where the object can be held in the dialectical tension of “mine-not mine.” To wager a somewhat hasty analogy, we might liken the autistic subject to a pilot who cannot see the airfield through dense fog and strong winds. This pilot does not *refuse* to land, so much as she cannot safely and securely do so in the absence of any necessary coordinates to determine her destination.

In search of *objet a*, we returned to Sinclair’s writing to consider how autistic and neurotypical subjects lack a “shared system” capable of mediating their contact in the way the object functions between subjects of a similar structural configuration. The enactive approach to autism described by Hanne De Jaegher was reviewed in this context, due to a conceptual resonance between the mechanism at play in *participatory sense-making* as she describes it and Sinclair’s shared system. I included Boothby’s interpretation of *objet a* as a “dispositional object” to further mediate between Sinclair and De Jaegher. As a dispositional object, *objet a* is a condition of possibility of conscious thought. When it is active between neurotypical subjects, it collectively

disposes them towards locating *das Ding* in the Other, erecting a “shared system” and promoting *participatory sense-making*. Inversely, I suggested that the autistic *objet a* must be active in autistic sense-making, defined as the “narrowing down of the complexity of the world.”

We continued to trace *objet a* through the writing of Naoki Higashida, Amanda Baggs, and Tito Mukhopadhyay. Under the *ad hoc* heading of “dialectical disjunction” I cited examples from their writing that suggest *objet a* is not active in a neurotypical way as the “hinge” between Imaginary and Symbolic elements. Examples included the unique manifestation of parts over wholes, the sensory perception of an object or a word barred from its semantic context, and the conflation of past memories with present experiences stoked by an out-of-control drive towards hyper-association of discrete elements.

To offer an affirmative account of autistic sense-making, we concluded by pulling examples from Mukhopadhyay’s *How Can I Talk if my Lips Don’t Move?* that show how he engaged in sense-making in concert with different objects and sensory assemblages in his environment. The main effect at issue is the lessening of *jouissance* and the negation of the Real, owing to how both are antithetical to conscious awareness and sense-making. Key among Tito’s objects was the mirror. By orienting him within a full range of what is perceivable/conceivable and imperceptible/inconceivable – or conscious and unconscious – the mirror’s “plane surface,” named by Tito as the “Zero point,” was posited as *objet a*.

So What? And What Now?

If, by any margin, I have succeeded in applying Lacanian theory in examination and support of Sinclair’s notion of autistic being, then it is fair to ask: so what? and what

now? In response I will offer a few brief remarks, before suggesting areas and topics for further study.

To start, there is the potential for significant theoretical dissonance within the position that places a psychoanalytic theory of the subject alongside a statistical analysis of empirical differences in body movements. As such, I have attempted to take every opportunity to formulate a psychoanalytic interpretation of these research methodologies, before utilizing their findings in a Freudo-Lacanian context. Instead, the quantitative observations it makes are immediately subject to interpretation within a conceptual field. It is at this juncture that we applied a psychoanalytic metapsychology, exemplified in the co-mingling analysis of Sinclair's "shared system" with De Jaegher's "participatory sense-making." In a psychoanalytic interpretation of movement differences, the foremost question must pertain to how the Other engages the body and inscribes it into thought.

The movement perspective does not presume to identify a cause of autism. However, as a result, we can equally consider that movement differences precede what we understand as autism, and simultaneously that they are manifest in already-autistic subjects. A similar chicken-and-the-egg deadlock emerges in the context of Lacan's writing on the Thing in Seminar VII, where he suggests the distance between the subject and *das Ding* is "precisely the condition of speech."⁵⁰³ Can the inverse be true, such that the absence of speech – and if not the full absence, then at least the limitations of the sort of speech dependent on the Peircean sign described by Maleval – entails a *proximity* to the Thing?⁵⁰⁴ Maleval suggests as much by claiming autistic speech "does not represent the drive."⁵⁰⁵ Laurent invokes a similar notion of proximity when he offers the autistic

subject is “glued to the drive.”⁵⁰⁶ Here emerges the problem of autistic being and the Real. To characterize the former by the abundance of the latter, as we have done many times, is to collapse the space for thought. In the absence of the signifier’s articulation with the Real, the negation of speech does not occur; but if this can only entail a proliferation of the Real, we risk *desubjectifying* the autistic subject. In my view, this reinforces the importance of examining how autistic objects assist in uniquely *autistic* sense-making, by opening lack in ways that only vaguely resemble the usual mechanisms for neurotypical subjects.

As we noted in the introduction to Chapter 1, the lack of a definitive cause of autism persists in spite of many attempts to offer one. Some of these, such as the debunked theory that autism is caused by exposure to the heavy metals in vaccinations, even promise a means for preventing further occurrences by avoiding the guilty agent (mercury, MMR vaccines, etc.). In the most egregious cases, not only is there false hope for prevention, but worse yet, the suggestion of a cure. I maintain that accepting autism as a way of being is mutually exclusive with any approach that seeks to treat autism as such. “Defeat Autism Now!” – since morphed into the Autism Research Institute – is a good (or bad) example of this position.⁵⁰⁷ A medical approach to autism, regardless of whether it promises a cure or merely a lessening of one’s autistic symptoms, attempts to intervene in the core dimension of personhood we have worked to articulate throughout this piece.

However, this is not to suggest there is nothing further to consider here. On one hand, the work of Catherine Malabou, who applies Hegelian and Freudian theory to contemporary neuroscience research, comes to mind. In *The New Wounded: From*

Neurosis to Brain Damage (2012), Malabou examines how certain brain traumas, including the mental decomposition of dementia, intervene in the essential coordinates we use to define an individual agent. Rather than proffer a purely biological grounding for the subject, Malabou's position is highly-nuanced. She develops a dialectic analysis of how the activity of *neural plasticity* "appears as an accurate balance between the ability to change and the resistance to change."⁵⁰⁸ In other words, while neural plasticity allows for the integration of new experiences into the narrative unfolding of the self, sufficient injury "consists in the transformation of the patient's previous personality and in the emergence of a new individual proceeding from the explosion of the former identity."⁵⁰⁹ Malabou points out the importance of affect and emotional life in gauging the permanence of an identity over time.⁵¹⁰

This takes on a new significance in the context of *Switched On: A Memoir of Brain Change and Emotional Awakening* (2016). In *Switched On*, John Elder Robison, a well-known autistic writer and advocate, describes his experiences with the experimental treatment, *transcranial magnetic stimulation* (TMS). Although Robison has a long record of asserting the inherent value of autistic being, in accepting the TMS trial offer, "I wanted to 'make myself better' in some ill-defined but powerfully felt way."⁵¹¹ His telling how TMS profoundly altered his affective engagement with the world – and with other people more specifically – dovetails with Malabou's writing. Although the effects of TMS wore off over time (often to the added peril of Robison), the susceptibility of one's emotional state to material intervention and the implications for reconfiguring the

which aspects of the perceptual field gain significance over others, bears further research, theorization, and consideration than will occur here.

The most concrete “so what” I can offer builds from Maleval’s support for affinity therapy and Laurent’s (still quite ill-defined) notion of *autism a deux*. In both cases, the areas of restricted interest and preferred objects of autistic individuals are considered rather sacred. Given the important role we have assigned to autistic *objets a* in supporting autistic sense-making, any approach or intervention that leverages access to such an object risks doing violence to the subject. Similarly, to incentivize neurotypical or “pro-social” behavior by withholding the object runs a similar risks. Instead, accepting autism as a *way of being* asks that we remain open to the radical unrecognizability of its various manifestations. Without sweeping aside the material realities of being autistic or raising an autistic child, *being* autistic, as loudly and proudly as it were, means no less than interrogating the “shared system” neurotypical individuals take for granted for “levels more basic” and universal.

In the introduction to Chapter 1, I made reference to Sophie Roberts’ documentary *the Wall*. Roberts is sharply critical of psychoanalytic approaches to autism as they continue to exist in France. In the particular scene under consideration, an analyst likens the jaws of a toy crocodile to the desire of the mOther; by propping the jaws of the crocodile with a small wooden peg, the analyst attempts to demonstrate the intervention of psychoanalysis relative to autism: because the desire of the Other threatens unbearable *jouissance*, the analyst must assist the subject to secure a space for its own desire via the phallic signifier, cast there as the wooden peg, lest it be devoured by the mOther’s desire.

In *New Studies of Old Villains*, Paul Verhaeghe offers a reworking of the Oedipus Complex and references Lacan's "crocodile mother" in contrast to Freud's "primal father."⁵¹² Verhaeghe notes that general shift in Lacan's thinking away from the mother as a source of *jouissance*, towards a model wherein the subject's turn to the Symbolic supports a defense against "the real of the *jouissance* as it arises from one's own organism." He criticizes Freud and Lacan for hastily extracting a "generalized theory"⁵¹³ from their clinical practice. Verhaeghe's point, essentially, is that while the mother – or the gender-neutral caregiving first Other – is "mixed up" in the subject's drive owing to how it emerges *extimately*, psychoanalysis must attempt to support the subject to remain open to other ways of dealing with the drive, rather than propping up older, "mythical" methods and the fantasies of maternal *jouissance* or paternal punishment that sustain them.

There is a progressive impetus in amongst contemporary Lacanians that remains open to a critical engagement with different discourses. I hope for the continued cross-pollination of ideas. For autistic subjects, who must seek relief from *jouissance* without the assistance of the Symbolic Other, following their lead in support of uniquely embodying activities and sensory-driven sense-making inventions is to accept their *way of being* at "levels more basic."

Further Study

Based on what I see as the under-tapped potential of Lacanian theory to assist in a conceptualization of autism, there are several themes, concepts, and topics ripe for further study. I will list them with little elaboration here:

- **Autistic Structure:** Although I have presented Lacan’s clinical structures as mutually exclusive, different readers focus on how Lacan moved away from this arrangement later in his career. This raises questions of whether to invest more theoretical effort into a head-on engagement with autistic structure and how it is distinct from psychotic structure.
- **The Sinthome:** Lacan’s concept of *le sinthome* presents as a framework for further consideration of how autistic subjects establish idiosyncratic solutions to the problems of sense-making that arise from a “noisy” and “memoryless” body. *Le sinthome* is a sort of private solution. As Verhaeghe describes it, “the aim of the creation of a sinthome is to be able to function without a guaranteeing Other.”⁵¹⁴
- **Lalangue:** Lacan defines *lalangue* as the material, or “acoustic level” of language that engages *jouissance* but does not contribute a semantic quality.⁵¹⁵ *Lalangue* remains interwoven with mature speech in the unconscious. Recalling Naoki’s enjoyment at “playing with sound and rhythm,” *lalangue* presents as another framework for understanding autistic self-reporting.

- **Neurodiversity:** This movement sees autism as occurring within the natural range of human variation.⁵¹⁶ While it normalizes and sees value inherent to autistic individuals, it does so based on biological differences. A direct Lacanian engagement with the underlying assumptions of neurodiversity might open new ways of approaching difference.
- **Facilitated Communication (FC):** As I have argued, autistic being may present within a semantic field that is not immediately recognizable – or verifiable – to neurotypical observers. One example is the controversial practice of *facilitated communication*, that gained popularity in the 1980s and 90s, but has since undergone sharp critiques from evidence-based approaches. In the context of movement differences, a Lacanian analysis of FC can include the mediating function of the Other to speculate as to the mechanism at play in an approach that raises questions of authorship, while simultaneously offering a means for stabilizing *the word*.

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¹² I owe this observation to Richard Boothby, who considers Lacan a "big tent" thinker. We can also take Lacan's "excommunication" from the psychoanalytic establishment as an example of an ingrained resistance to orthodoxy.

¹³Although the saying “If you’ve met one person with autism...” is a variation on a broader trope, Michael Berube added the final *twist* during a talk I attended at SUNY Buffalo on Psychoanalysis and Neurocognitive Disability in March 2015.

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“...If there’s one thing I’ve put in question time and time again, then it’s the scientific point of view, inasmuch as its aim is always to consider lack as something that can be filled, in stark contrast to the problematic of an experience that includes within it the taking into account of lack as such.”
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- ⁹⁶ Lacan, Jacques. *Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Psychoses, 1955-1956*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. United States: W W NORTON & CO (NY), 1997. 119
- ⁹⁷ Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 183-189
- ⁹⁸ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 354-355 “The first Other is that of the body, the second Other is that of law and knowledge. Neither is forced to be localized in a single concrete figure: the concrete mother will make statements about both the body and the law; the same goes for the father. Nor does the first Other by definition have to be biologically female and the second Other male. What is crucial is that there is a transition from a dual relationship between and subject and one Other to a triangular structuration, enabling the subject to shift the dialectics of (a) from the first to a second Other.”
- ⁹⁹ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 354
- ¹⁰⁰ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 355
- ¹⁰¹ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004.
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- ¹⁰⁴ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 221
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- ¹⁰⁶ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 354

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¹⁰⁸ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 410

¹⁰⁹ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 435

¹¹⁰ Basically, neurotics buy-in to language, individually and singularly, but in such a way that allows for the displacement and deferral of the onus to establish (and guarantee) what it is that words correspond to in “reality,” onto someone/anyone else (i.e. the big Other) – Everybody’s lost something in the same field.

¹¹¹ Maleval, Jean-Claude. *Why the hypothesis of an autistic structure?* In *Psychoanalytic Notebooks, Autism*. Edited by Natalie Wülfing. Issue 25, September 2012. London: London Society of the NLS, 2012. 34

“...the symptomology of autism presents disorders of language, of identity and of jouissance belonging to the clinic of the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father. It is this that allows one to consider autism as a form of psychosis; however it is so different from all the others that it leads one to question the strictness of the link between the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father and psychosis.”

¹¹² "Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. April 26, 2018. Accessed October 11, 2018. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>.

¹¹³ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 429

¹¹⁴ Verhaeghe, Paul. *New Studies of Old Villains: A Radical Reconsideration of the Oedipus Complex*. New York: Other Press, 2009.

¹¹⁵ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 129

¹¹⁶ Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 3

¹¹⁷ Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 4

¹¹⁸ Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 145

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- ¹²⁹ Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 17
- ¹³⁰ Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 218, 222
- ¹³¹ Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 39
- ¹³² Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 40
- ¹³³ Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 25-26, 50

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- ²⁶⁰ Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 324
- ²⁶¹ Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 343
- ²⁶² Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 342-343
- ²⁶³ Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 324

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- ²⁶⁵ Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 227
- ²⁶⁶ Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 342
- ²⁶⁷ Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 342, 345
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- ²⁷³ Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 330
- ²⁷⁴ Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 331 - 332
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³⁰⁰ Laurent, Eric. *Spectres of autism*. In *Psychoanalytic Notebooks, Autism*. Edited by Natalie Wülfing. Issue 25, September 2012. London: London Society of the NLS, 2012. 55

³⁰¹ Maleval, Jean-Claude. "Affinity Therapy: The Return of a Psychodynamic Approach to the Treatment of Autism." *Autistes Et Cliniciens*. March 3, 2015. Accessed October 09, 2018. <http://www.autistes-et-cliniciens.org/Affinity-Therapy-The-Return-of-a-Psychodynamic-Approach-to-the-Treatment-of>.

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³⁰³ Maleval, Jean-Claude. "Affinity Therapy: The Return of a Psychodynamic Approach to the Treatment of Autism." *Autistes Et Cliniciens*. March 3, 2015. Accessed October 09, 2018. <http://www.autistes-et-cliniciens.org/Affinity-Therapy-The-Return-of-a-Psychodynamic-Approach-to-the-Treatment-of>.

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³⁰⁵ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 115

³⁰⁶ Maleval, Jean-Claude. *Why the hypothesis of an autistic structure?* In *Psychoanalytic Notebooks, Autism*. Edited by Natalie Wülfing. Issue 25, September 2012. London: London Society of the NLS, 2012. 48

³⁰⁷ Maleval, Jean-Claude. "Affinity Therapy: The Return of a Psychodynamic Approach to the Treatment of Autism." *Autistes Et Cliniciens*. March 3, 2015. Accessed October 09, 2018. <http://www.autistes-et-cliniciens.org/Affinity-Therapy-The-Return-of-a-Psychodynamic-Approach-to-the-Treatment-of>.

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- ³¹⁰ Masi, Anne, Marilena M. DeMayo, Nicholas Glozier, and Adam J. Guastella. *Neuroscience Bulletin*. April 2017. Accessed October 15, 2018. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5360849/>.
- ³¹¹ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 144
- ³¹² Bergeron, Danielle. "The Borders Between Autism and Psychosis." *Konturen*. Accessed October 14, 2018. <http://journals.oregondigital.org/konturen/article/view/1396/1541>.
- ³¹³ Higashida, Naoki, Ka Yoshida, and David Mitchell. *The Reason I Jump the Inner Voice of a Thirteen-year-old Boy with Autism*. New York: Random House, 2013.
- ³¹⁴ Maleval, Jean-Claude. *Why the hypothesis of an autistic structure?* In *Psychoanalytic Notebooks, Autism*. Edited by Natalie Wülfing. Issue 25, September 2012. London: London Society of the NLS, 2012. 40
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- ³¹⁶ Maleval, Jean-Claude. *Why the hypothesis of an autistic structure?* In *Psychoanalytic Notebooks, Autism*. Edited by Natalie Wülfing. Issue 25, September 2012. London: London Society of the NLS, 2012. 40-42
- ³¹⁷ Grandin, Temple. *Thinking in Pictures*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014. 14
- ³¹⁸ Maleval, Jean-Claude. *Why the hypothesis of an autistic structure?* In *Psychoanalytic Notebooks, Autism*. Edited by Natalie Wülfing. Issue 25, September 2012. London: London Society of the NLS, 2012. 37-39
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³²⁰ Bergeron, Danielle. "The Borders Between Autism and Psychosis." *Konturen*. Accessed October 14, 2018. <http://journals.oregondigital.org/konturen/article/view/1396/1541>.

“the position of the autistic child with respect to the people around him can be summarized in three exhortations: “Do not touch me! Do not speak to me! Do not look at me!” it is as if he said to the other: your drive causes me to panic, the object of your desire and the uncontrollability of *jouissance* will annihilate me. Therefore, I will barricade myself within my ultimate refuge, making the letter of my body into a rampart against the hole of my subjectivity.”

³²¹ Maleval, Jean-Claude. *Why the hypothesis of an autistic structure?* In *Psychoanalytic Notebooks, Autism*. Edited by Natalie Wülfing. Issue 25, September 2012. London: London Society of the NLS, 2012. 47

³²² Tustin, Frances. *Autistic States in Children*. London: Routledge, 1992. 117

³²³ Tustin, Frances. *Autistic States in Children*. London: Routledge, 1992. 18, 22

Maleval, Jean-Claude. *Why the hypothesis of an autistic structure?* In *Psychoanalytic Notebooks, Autism*. Edited by Natalie Wülfing. Issue 25, September 2012. London: London Society of the NLS, 2012. 44

³²⁴ Tustin, Frances. *Autistic States in Children*. London: Routledge, 1992. 10-12

³²⁵ Verhaeghe, Paul. *New Studies of Old Villains: A Radical Reconsideration of the Oedipus Complex*. New York: Other Press, 2009. 57

³²⁶ Verhaeghe, Paul. *New Studies of Old Villains: A Radical Reconsideration of the Oedipus Complex*. New York: Other Press, 2009. 57

³²⁷ Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Edited by James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1989. 26-30

³²⁸ Freud, Sigmund. *Instincts and their vicissitudes*, 122

³²⁹ Bergeron, Danielle. "The Borders Between Autism and Psychosis." *Konturen*. Accessed October 14, 2018. <http://journals.oregondigital.org/konturen/article/view/1396/1541>.

³³⁰ Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 348

“That it was holed for Nadia is certain, as we have seen; but that it was also toric from the start is an open question, unless we recognize there too, a certain anticipation, an anticipation that leaves space for a more leisurely return to a surface structure. Yet this could happen only, as Nadia had shown, if the relational impact was displaced from the

signifying object sought on the body of the Other to an identificatory image, which...dominated the entry into the mirror: she made me a “surface” in her own image, before going to confront us in the mirror.”

³³¹ Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 348

³³² Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 216, 259

³³³ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 354-355

“The first Other is that of the body, the second Other is that of law and knowledge. Neither is forced to be localized in a single concrete figure: the concrete mother will make statements about both the body and the law; the same goes for the father. Nor does the first Other by definition have to be biologically female and the second Other male. What is crucial is that there is a transition from a dual relationship between and subject and one Other to a triangular structuration, enabling the subject to shift the dialectics of (a) from the first to a second Other.”

³³⁴ Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 258

³³⁵ Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 238

³³⁶ Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 238

³³⁷ Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 276

³³⁸ Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 243

³³⁹ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 143

³⁴⁰ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 129

³⁴¹ Boothby, Richard. *The No-Thing of God: Psychoanalysis of Religion After Lacan*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, edited by Michael Lacewing and Richard Gipps. Oxford University Press, 2018.

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- ³⁴² Boothby, Richard. *The No-Thing of God: Psychoanalysis of Religion After Lacan*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, edited by Michael Lacewing and Richard Gipps. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- ³⁴³ Verhaeghe, Paul. *New Studies of Old Villains: A Radical Reconsideration of the Oedipus Complex*. New York: Other Press, 2009. 58
- ³⁴⁴ Verhaeghe, Paul. *New Studies of Old Villains: A Radical Reconsideration of the Oedipus Complex*. New York: Other Press, 2009. 57
- ³⁴⁵ Verhaeghe, Paul. *New Studies of Old Villains: A Radical Reconsideration of the Oedipus Complex*. New York: Other Press, 2009. 58
- ³⁴⁶ Tustin, Frances. *Autistic States in Children*. London: Routledge, 1992. 117, 111
- ³⁴⁷ Maleval, Jean-Claude. *Why the hypothesis of an autistic structure?* In *Psychoanalytic Notebooks, Autism*. Edited by Natalie Wülfing. Issue 25, September 2012. London: London Society of the NLS, 2012. 34
- ³⁴⁸ Bergeron, Danielle. "The Borders Between Autism and Psychosis." Konturen. Accessed October 14, 2018. <http://journals.oregondigital.org/konturen/article/view/1396/1541>.
- ³⁴⁹ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*. New York: Other Press, 2004. 129
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- ³⁵² Boothby, Richard. *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 232
- ³⁵³ Freud, Sigmund. *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Edited by James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1958. 393
- ³⁵⁴ Freud, Sigmund. *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Edited by James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1958. 393-394
- ³⁵⁵ Boraston, Zillah, and Sarah-Jayne Blakemore. "The Application of Eye-tracking Technology in the Study of Autism." *The Journal of Physiology* 581, no. 3 (2007): 893-98. doi:10.1113/jphysiol.2007.133587.

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³⁵⁶ Jones, Warren, and Ami Klin. "Attention to Eyes Is Present But in Decline in 2–6 Month-Olds Later Diagnosed with Autism." *Nature*. December 19, 2013. Accessed November 02, 2018. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4035120/>.

³⁵⁷ "Autism: The Movement Perspective." *Frontiers Research Topics*, 2015. doi:10.3389/978-2-88919-509-1.

³⁵⁸ De Jaegher, Hanne. "Embodiment and Sense-making in Autism." *Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience* 7 (2013): 156-74. doi:10.3389/fnint.2013.00015. 164

³⁵⁹ Verhaeghe, Paul. *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnosics*. New York: Other Press, 2004.

141 "...from a clinical point of view, we are always dealing with the divided subject, and therefore with a relation between two divisions. Furthermore, the first relation is internal to the subject (the relation to the other in oneself, that is, to the drive). In addition, there is also an external relation (that between the divided subject and also the divided Other). IN view of the fact that the external dialogue experiences the effects of the internal relation and vice versa, a completely different perception of inside and outside, both of self and Other, needs to be developed."

181 "...both speech and behavior take place inside a double dialectic: between the subject and the body and between the subject and the Other."

³⁶⁰ Jones, Warren, and Ami Klin. "Attention to Eyes Is Present But in Decline in 2–6 Month-Olds Later Diagnosed with Autism." *Nature*. December 19, 2013. Accessed November 02, 2018. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4035120/>.

³⁶¹ Jones, Warren, and Ami Klin. "Attention to Eyes Is Present But in Decline in 2–6 Month-Olds Later Diagnosed with Autism." *Nature*. December 19, 2013. Accessed November 02, 2018. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4035120/>.

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- ³⁶² Falck-Ytter, Terje, Sven Bölte, and Gustaf Gredebäck. "Eye Tracking in Early Autism Research." *Journal of Neurodevelopmental Disorders*. 2013. Accessed November 02, 2018. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3849191/>.
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- ³⁶⁵ Klin, Ami, David J. Lin, Phillip Gorrindo, Gordon Ramsay, and Warren Jones. *Nature*. May 14, 2009. Accessed November 03, 2018. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2758571/>.
- ³⁶⁶ Falck-Ytter, Terje, Erik Rehnberg, and Sven Bölte. "Lack of Visual Orienting to Biological Motion and Audiovisual Synchrony in 3-Year-Olds with Autism." *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 7 (2013). doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0068816.
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- ³⁶⁷ Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 277
- ³⁶⁸ Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 242
- ³⁶⁹ Falck-Ytter, Terje, Sven Bölte, and Gustaf Gredebäck. "Eye Tracking in Early Autism Research." *Journal of Neurodevelopmental Disorders*. 2013. Accessed November 02, 2018. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3849191/>.
- ³⁷⁰ Lefort, Rosine, Robert Lefort, and Leonardo Rodriguez. *Birth of the Other*. Translated by Marc Du Ry and Lindsay Watson. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. 241
- 251 "Marie-Francoise showed in it that her whole problem with the body was the filling in of the hole, a real hole that was to be really filled...It was only in relation to her own body that the hole of the body was in question: her mouth or her eye. It was not at all a question of the hole of my body."

259 “It is necessary to assume that there is a symbolic dimension to the requirement that the body of the Other be holed: as Marie-Francoise could not find the hole symbolically in my body, that hole reappeared in the real of her own body.”

³⁷¹ Baron-Cohen, Simon. “Social Cognition and Pretend Play in Autism.” <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ded2/098d1b188ec8fcc6040c71b703371830f901.pdf>. October 1985. Accessed November 3, 2018.

372 Ibid. Baron-Cohen cites this passage “This moment in which the mirror-stage comes to an end inaugurates...the dialectic that will henceforth link the ‘I’ to socially elaborated situations.”

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251 “Marie-Francoise showed in it that her whole problem with the body was the filling in of the hole, a real hole that was to be really filled...It was only in relation to her own body that the hole of the body was in question: her mouth or her eye. It was not at all a question of the hole of my body.”

259 “It is necessary to assume that there is a symbolic dimension to the requirement that the body of the Other be holed: as Marie-Francoise could not find the hole symbolically in my body, that hole reappeared in the real of her own body.”

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