

Retrieved from:

The European Journal of Psychoanalysis

Aug 18, 2022

[https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/autistic\\_rims\\_and\\_their\\_vicissitudes/](https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/autistic_rims_and_their_vicissitudes/)

Leon Brenner

# Autistic Rims and Their Vicissitudes

## Summary:

According to Lacan, the rim of the drive is involved in the initiation and preservation of the relationship between the body and language. In the study of autism, a major hypothesis states that the rim of the drive is foreclosed for the autistic subject. This foreclosure causes the drive circuit to short-circuit, thus jeopardizing the preservation of the relationship between the body and language. This paper puts forward the idea that autistic subjects supplement this privation through the construction of secondary rims that enable the “delimitation” of jouissance, giving rise to a unique psychic dynamism. The notion of the rim is developed, and its vicissitudes are presented and divided into three versatile types: protective rims, systemizing rims, and incorporating rims. Each of these represents a particular dynamism in the autistic subject’s engagement with the body, knowledge, and the social bond. Each one dictates a different mode of operation for the subject and, in this sense, necessitates a distinct psychoanalytic position in the treatment and facilitation of autism. In the clinical and theoretical elaboration of the vicissitudes of the rim, several significant notions pertaining to autism are discussed such as: aloneness, sameness, autistic objects, stimming, special interests, camouflaging, and nonbinary gender identities.

## The Rim of the Drive

The “drive” is more a psychoanalytic concept than an “instinct”. Accordingly, Freud went to great lengths to differentiate the two terms from one another. Be that as it may, the German word for “drive” (*Trieb*) ended up being mistranslated as “instinct” in James Strachey’s canonical English translation (e.g. Freud, 1914a, p. 148). This error resulted in a conflation of drive (*Trieb*) and instinct (*Instinkt*) in Freud’s writings and their subsequent misinterpretations by English-speaking psychoanalysts.

In direct reference to this mistranslation, Lacan (2001) clearly states that “*Trieb* and instinct have nothing in common” (p. 49). Freud conceives of the instinct as a hardwired biological program that compels the organism to fight for its survival. It acts to fulfill the organism’s instinctual needs by raising tension levels when the organism’s needs arise and lowering them when they are satisfied (Miller & Laurent, 1998, pp. 15-35). This dynamic equilibrium can be associated with a sine function demonstrating the homeostatic rhythm of organismic systems (see figure 1).



Fig 1. A sine function demonstrating the instinct's dynamic equilibrium.

The drive is something completely different. According to Freud (1911), the drive imprints the psyche on a level that exceeds the organism's instinctual need but also precedes the tangible idea; in other words, it is "a concept on the frontier between the somatic and the mental" (p. 74). To this, Lacan (2006) adds that the drive originates exactly in a rupture in the instinctual organization of the human organism. This rupture stems from the "organic inadequacy" of the newborn baby (Lacan, 2006, p. 77). Unlike other animals, which are commonly born with biological faculties sufficient for their survival, human newborns are born "immature" and are characterized by their motor impotence and complete dependence on their caregivers (p. 76). In other words, animal instincts are sufficient in maintaining the relationship between their *Innenwelt*—namely, the basic feelings related to the subject such as hunger, thirst and the need for sleep [1]—and their *Umwelt*—namely, their respective environment. For animals, Lacan (1988) argues, the instinct is sufficient in establishing an "identity of the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*" (p. 137). On the other hand, Lacan (2006) states that, due to its specific quality of a 'premature birth', the human organism is born with an innate dehiscence—a rupture between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt* (p. 78). By taking on itself the sway of language, the human organism attempts to patch-up this rupture. The drive is the unique byproduct of this encounter between the organism and language: it embodies the mutual effect they have on each other. In stricter Lacanian terms one might say that the drive emerges as an *excess* produced by the *cut* that the *signifier* introduces into the *real* (Lacan, 2001, p. 162). In terms of Freud, one might add that this cut circumvents the orifices of the body's erogenous zones: the oral, anal, and the phallic and, for Lacan, the scopic and invocatory as well. These are the names of the drives in Lacan's teaching (minus the phallic): the oral with the breast as its object, the anal with the excrement as its object, the scopic with the gaze as its object, and the invocatory with the voice as its object.

In *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (2001), Lacan presents his "deconstruction of the drive" (pp. 161-173). Relying on Freud's "*Trieblehre*" (1905a, 1915b, 1914b, 1914c, 1920), he develops his "theory of drives" using the four Freudian components of the drive: *Drang* (thrust), *Ziel* (aim), *Objekt* (object) and *Quelle* (source). Let us quickly contrast these components to what we have so far described as the instinct.

Contrasting to the instinctual raising and lowering of tension levels, the thrust (*Drang*) of the drive is characterized by a constant tendency to discharge internal stimuli. Lacan (2001) emphasizes that "the characteristic of the drive is to be a *konstante Kraft*, a constant force... [having] no day or night, no spring or autumn, no rise and fall (pp. 164-165). Therefore, contrary to a sine function that exemplifies the instinctual rhythm, the drive can be exemplified by a constant function—a straight line. Moreover, unlike the bodily tensions that characterize instinctual dynamics, the thrust of the drive does not engage the organism as a whole (p. 164). It is distributed to the localized erogenous zones of the body. Thus, while bodily tension associated with hunger for instance would affect the whole body, the thrust of the drive is distinct in its oral, anal, scopic, and invocatory instantiations.

The aim (*Ziel*) of the drive is the thing that gives its thrust a trajectory that allows it to produce satisfaction. The aim of the drive is also distinct from that of the instinct, which always aims toward a particular object. For example, if the organism is hungry, raised tension levels will compel it to consume food. With the drive, one could say that 'it's not the destination, it's the journey'. That is, the satisfaction of the drive is not achieved by aiming at its object (*Objekt*). To that Lacan (2001) adds that there is no distinct natural object designated as the aim of the drive—any object can be adopted as a drive object (p. 168). For example, in order to satisfy the oral drive, one does not necessarily have to consume food, one can give a lecture to a crowded classroom (p. 165-166). As will be explained shortly, the drive aims *around* its object, gaining satisfaction in the demarcation of its contours, thus reaching its goal without attaining its object.

The source (*Quelle*) of the drive is the "rim-like structure" of the orifices of the erogenous zones on the body (p. 169). The thrust of the drive originates from the holes demarcated by the rim of the orifice.

Armed with the four components of the drive, Lacan develops the schema of the drive circuit (see figure 2). This schema adds an explanatory layer to Lacan's deconstruction of the drive by illustrating the interrelations between the four components of the drive.

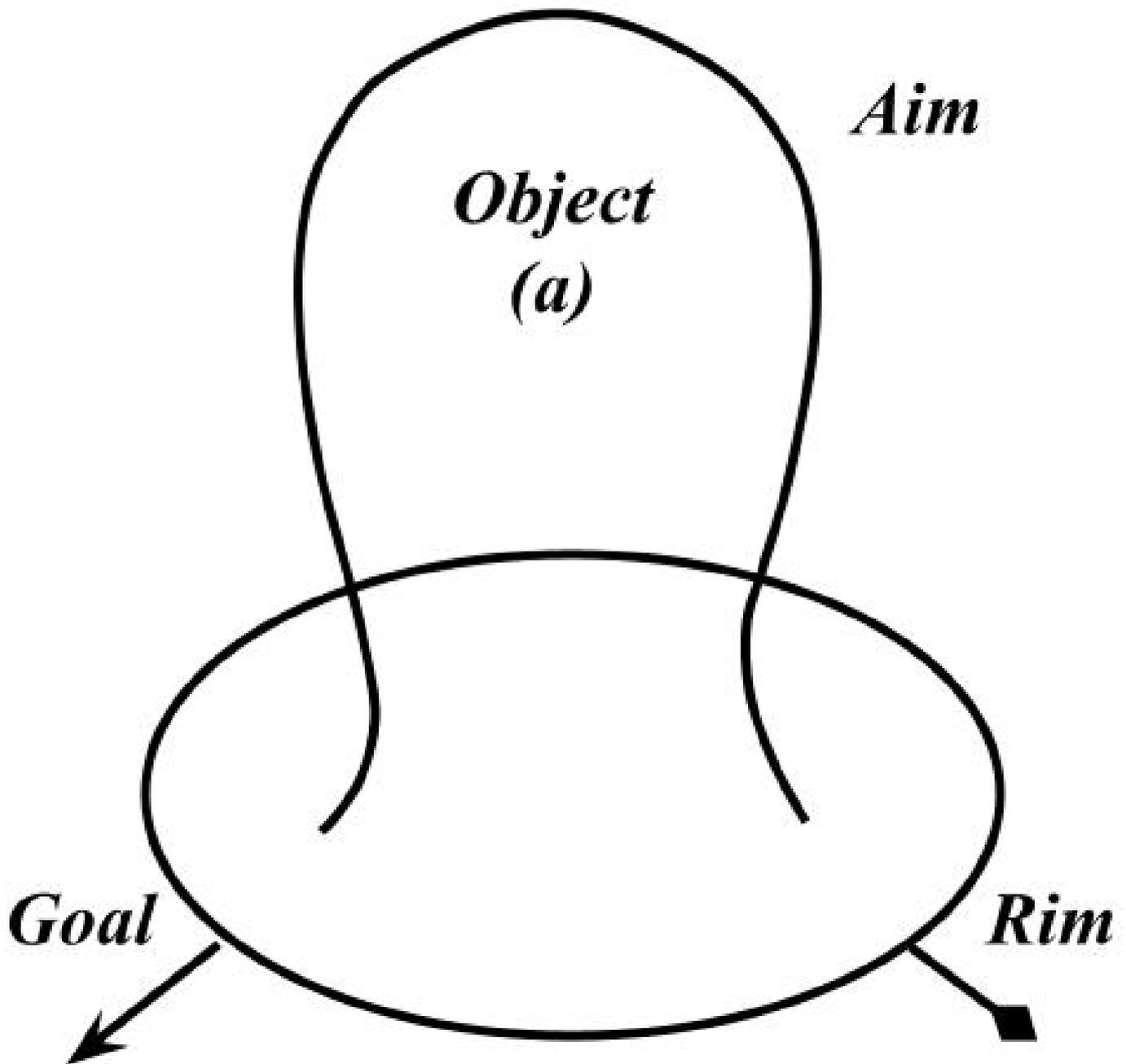


Fig 2. Lacan's schema of the drive circuit. (Based on: Lacan 2001, p. 178)

The schema illustrates the movement of the drive in general, namely, it clarifies what is common to the dynamics of the drive in all of its modalities. In the center of the schema we identify the drive object, hereby presented as *objet petit a*. Lacan (2014) uses the algebraic notation “*a*” to strip the particular function each drive object plays for each of the drives (p. 86). For example, the object of the oral drive, the breast, carries with it several additional meanings that are not generalizable to all other objects. On the right, the source of the drive is replaced by the figure of the rim. The thrust of the drive is represented by the arrow, moving in a circular trajectory. It originates from within the rim, aims its trajectory around the object, finally returning to its source—represented in the schema by the goal. The schema thus accentuates the dissociation between the drive's aim and its object, this time clearly demonstrating that the drive's goal is not the attainment of the object but the return to the source.

According to Freud (1911), the movement of the drive is fixated at an early stage in the child's life. He argues that this fixation is instated when a psychic inscription of the drive fails to accompany the others in an anticipated path of development. This leads to an inhibition in its development, which causes it to persist in an unaltered state. For Lacan, the schema of the drive circuit represents the movement of the drive after it has been fixated in a particular trajectory. As the schema illustrates, the drive circuit consolidates in a circular and continuous movement; a movement that originates from the erogenous zone and continues to circumvent the object of the drive by returning to the erogenous zone, from where it sets out on its path yet again. This is why, for instance, when one is hungry, they might go and eat a sandwich to fulfill their instinctual need. However, it could also happen that, as one is getting full, they will keep on eating a cake for dessert... and maybe an ice cream as well... etc. As Lacan (2001) argues, "the *objet petit a* ... is introduced from the fact that no food will ever satisfy the oral drive, except by circumventing the eternally lacking object" (p. 180). From this we can see that the satisfaction of the drive is not related to the object of the instinctual need but rather to the perpetuation of the drive's movement *ad infinitum*. Correspondingly, we can imagine Lacan's schema of the drive circuit branching out from the instinctual rhythm represented by the sine function (see figure 3).

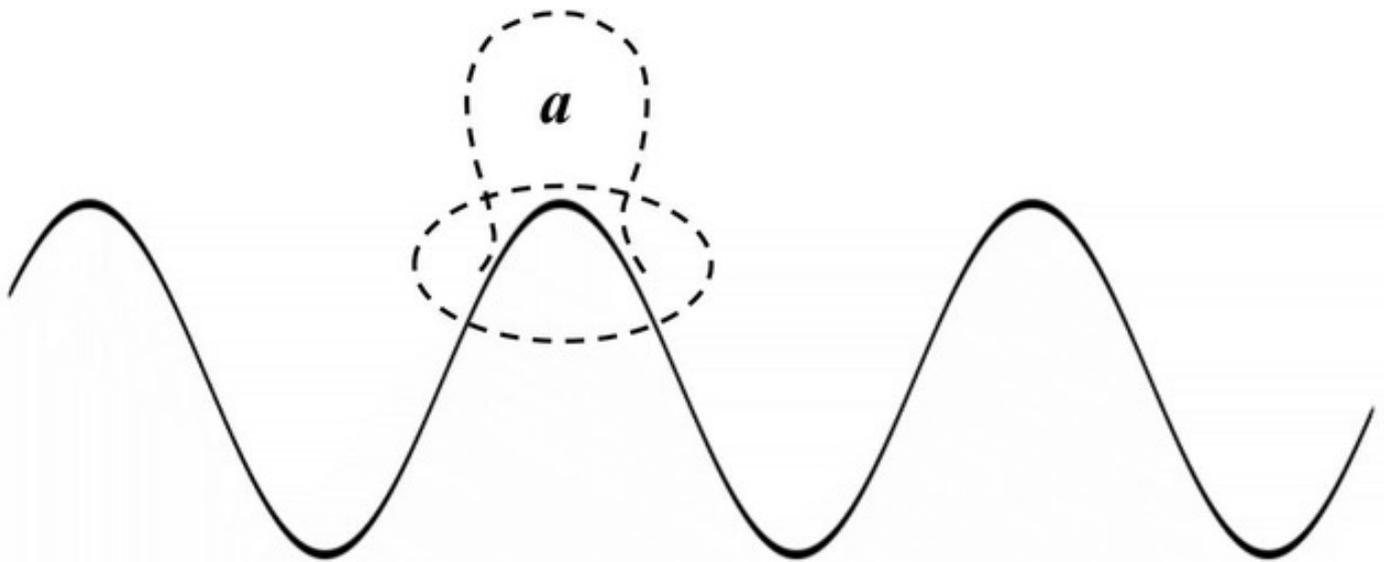


Fig 3. The drive circuit branching out from the instinctual rhythm represented by the sine function.

Because the drive object cannot be reduced to any object of exchange it cannot be consumed and rendered ineffective. Accordingly, its perpetual effectiveness ensures the consistency of the functioning of the drive circuit: "nothing else ensures the consistency [of the drive circuit] except the object, as something that must be circumvented" (Lacan, 2001, p. 181; brackets added). Particularly, Lacan argues that the drive object conditions the relationship between the rim in its manifestation as source and goal. The source and the goal of the drive are, in a sense, both holes that are demarcated by the rim. The source might be associated with the orifices of the body that are the sources of somatic excitation. The goal of the drive can be associated with the erogenous zones: the sites where this excitation is signified. The object of the drive is then situated between these two orders of the rim, which is now conceived of as a two-edged rim, marking the confines of the holes that are on the body and mediated in language. This is why I argue that the rim is involved in the initiation and preservation of the relationship between the body and language (Brenner, 2020, p. 187).

One of my major hypotheses is that, in autism, the inscription of the rim of the drive is foreclosed. This form of foreclosure is not the one we see in psychosis, namely the foreclosure of the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father (Lacan, 1997, pp. 96, 306). It is a form of foreclosure that is singular to autism, an "autistic foreclosure" that takes the inscription of the rim of the drive as its object (Brenner, 2020, pp. 197-199).

The foreclosure of the rim of the drive alters the drive circuit in such a way that neither affects the thrust of the drive nor the object of the drive; the drive is still experienced by the autistic subject as a constant force

and the object of the drive reappears in the foreground of an intolerable real. Rather, the foreclosure of the rim of the drive causes the drive circuit to “short-circuit”. It aimlessly emerges from a rimless source, unable to circumvent the object and return to its goal, thus jeopardizing the preservation of the relationship between the body and language (See figure 4).

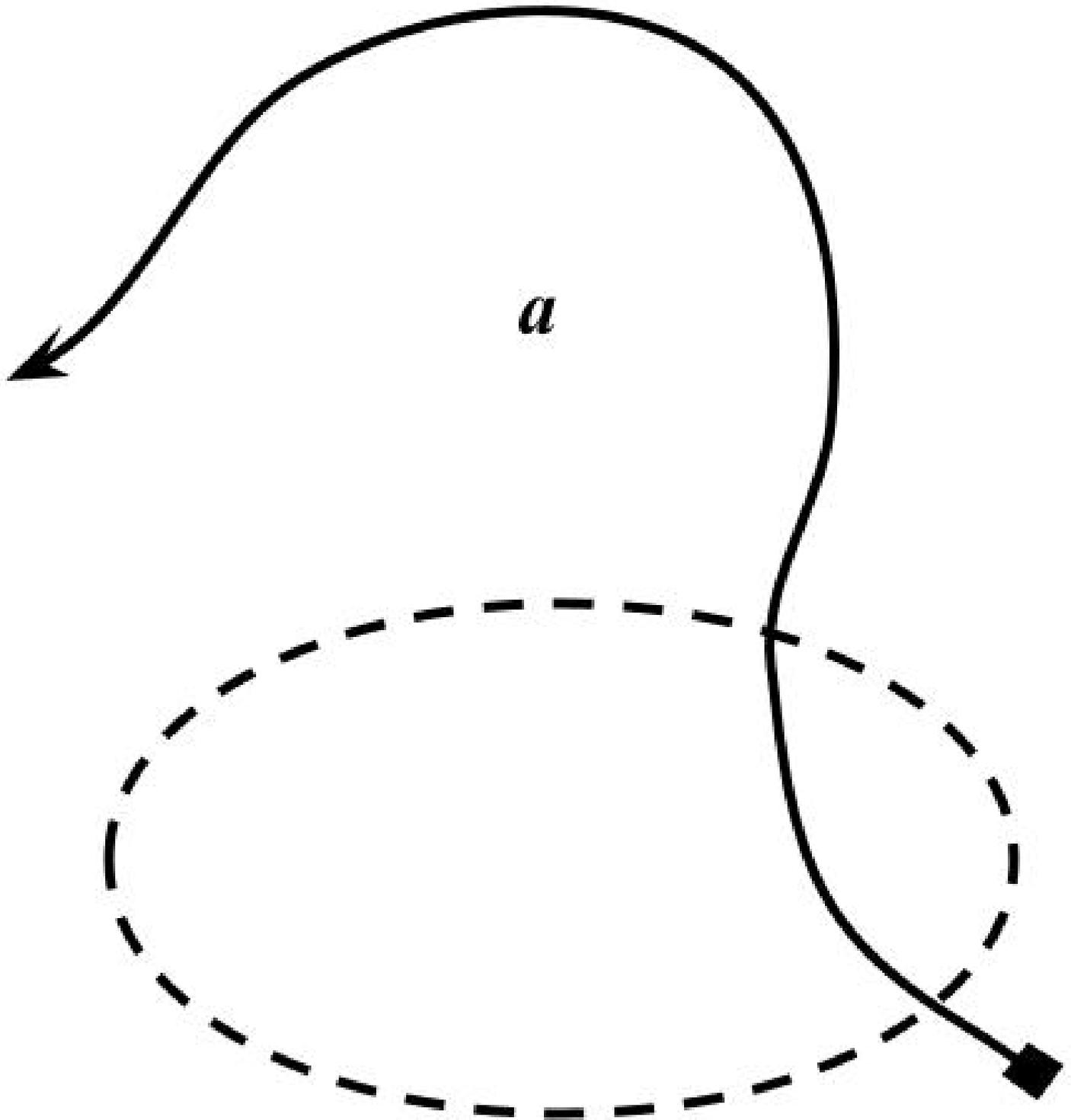


Fig. 4 The drive circuit is short-circuited and thrust into an aimless movement, unable to circumvent the drive object and return to its goal.

Many autistic subjects attest to having difficulty relating to their bodies, experiencing them as a fragmented, unorganized, and indiscernible mass of stimuli and sensations (Schauder et al., 2015). These difficulties could be said to be rooted in the working of autistic foreclosure. Particularly, I suggest designating the effects of the foreclosure of the rim on the level of the drive and, in this sense, on the level of the distribution

of stimuli and sensation in the body. In other words, I argue that the foreclosure of the rim interferes with the role language plays in the organization and distribution of libido. In Lacanian terms, the autistic body would be distinguished in its modes of organization and regulation of jouissance. In another publication, I have described the autistic body as a body “without holes,” in the sense that all the erogenous organs are “plugged” (Brenner, 2021a, p. 48). The plugging of the erogenous organs provokes in the subject an unbearable anxiety, through which most manifestations of jouissance are experienced as intolerable intrusions (Lefort, 2003, p. 16). Accordingly, the autistic body is characterized by a unique topology that has no distinction between an inside and an outside and thus the body’s interior and exterior are continuous (Laurent, 2012, pp. 78-84).

Following Lacan’s (1989) contention that states that autistic subjects are not divorced from language (pp. 19-20), I argue that the foreclosure of the rim does not utterly deprive the autistic subject from establishing a mode of access to jouissance. Without the rim, the autistic subject might forfeit access to the “ciphering” of jouissance, which is established in the circular movement of the drive circuit as it is presented by Lacan in *Seminar XI*. However, I argue that this privation can be supplemented through the construction of a secondary rim that enables the “delimitation” of jouissance. The “ciphering” (*chiffrier*) of jouissance (Lacan, Unpublished, 20.11.73) is dependent on the recourse to the signifier, which provides the means for its “interpretation” and transformation into a consistent affective vocabulary. Elsewhere, I argue, along with Maleval (2009), that the “delimitation” (*cadrer*) of jouissance is enabled by the autistic recourse to the sign (Brenner, 2020, pp. 250-251). Without delving into the theory behind the distinction between these two linguistic units,[2] for the sake of our discussion I will argue that the sign is more like a *rigid linguistic object* than an empty and dynamic signifier. It is with the help of this linguistic object that autistic subjects are able to construct a supplementary rim that can delimit their jouissance. This is not the original rim of the drive circuit but a secondary rim that enables a unique psychic dynamism.

In my work so far I have attempted to identify different modalities in the utilization of the sign in the construction of supplementary rims. These modalities are not conceptual forms forced on the clinical evidence derived from case studies and autobiographies. They are not categories that limit the scope and variations of the inventiveness autistic subjects exhibit in the construction of their supplementary rims. They are functional headings that group the variety of solutions autistic subjects use to treat the alteration in the drive circuit caused by the foreclosure of the rim. These alterations can take place on the level of each and every drive and can be divided into three versatile type: protective rims, systemizing rims, and incorporating rims. Each of these is characteristic of a particular dynamism for the subject in its engagement with the body, knowledge, and the social bond. Each one dictates a different mode of operation for the subject and, in this sense, necessitates a distinct psychoanalytic position in the treatment and facilitation of autism. The following sections will present recent theoretical developments in terms of the vicissitudes of autistic rims.

## **Protective Rims**

The foreclosure of the rim affects the drive circuit in such a way that it causes the jouissance—usually mediated through the body’s orifices—to be experienced as an intolerable intrusion that is out of the subject’s control. In order to surmount the unbearable anxiety originating in this experience, autistic subjects engage in shielded interactions with the objects they contingently stumble upon in their environment. Through these consistent object interactions, autistic subjects are able to harness their dynamic qualities to construct protective rims that guard their body from the intrusion of jouissance.

A canonical example for the construction of protective rims can be found in France (Francis?) Tustin’s work with autistic children (1986, 1992). Tustin provides a variety of case studies that exemplify the unique use autistic subjects make with hard objects that they attach to their bodies. According to Tustin (1986), these “autistic objects” are not used for their intended function but gain an idiosyncratic protective function (p. 103). For example, while a set of keys seems to be essential for a child named Peter, he does not use them to

open cupboards or doors. Tustin argues that their hardness protects Peter from the unbearable invasion of stimuli entering his body.

Tustin stresses that autistic objects are “sensation-dominated” objects (p. 104). This means that they do not take part in fantasy or play but are felt as being part of the child’s body and, thus, losing them causes great distress. Tustin notes that these objects play a part in the intensely repetitive rituals that autistic subjects occupy themselves with. Thomas Ogden (1989) adds that these rituals introduce the subject to a rhythmical mode of experience in which raw sensory data constitutes bounded surfaces and forms pre-symbolic connections between sensory impressions (pp. 127-128). These rhythmic experiences isolate the subject in temporary states of shielded interaction that correspond to what today is commonly called “autistic stimming”. Stimming, short for self-stimulatory behavior, is a term that some autistic subjects have adopted in order to describe repetitive behaviors that give them a sense of control that helps them cope with overwhelming external stimuli and provides a way for them to calm and communicate their moods. These behaviors could include hand-flapping, spinning in circles, body rocking, manipulation of objects, vocalizations such as grunting and muttering, and more.

The regulating power of autistic stimming can be associated with Kanner’s (1943) notion of “autistic sameness”. When observing his autistic patients, Kanner noted how their “behavior is governed by an anxiously obsessive desire for the maintenance of sameness that nobody but the child himself may disrupt on rare occasions” (p. 245). In a later publication, Kanner (1951) provides the following description of this tendency:

The totality of an experience that comes to the child from the outside must be reiterated, often with all its constituent details, in complete photographic and phonographic identity. No one part of this totality may be altered in terms of shape, sequence, or space. The slightest change of arrangement, sometimes so minute that it is hardly perceived by others, may evoke a violent outburst of rage. (p. 106)

It is important to note that both the object involved in autistic stimming and repetitive vocalizations can be described as an autistic object. Based on her observations, Tustin (1986) remarks that autistic children do not clearly differentiate between sensory modalities. Therefore, she notes that autistic children sometimes experience seeing and hearing as if they are being touched by an object (p. 105). For example, Tustin describes how an autistic child named David comes to the conclusion that the words “Tustin” and “Austin” are the same because they *felt* the same when they “touched his ears or eyes” (p. 106). Tustin continues to argue that “words can be autistic objects” (p. 113). Particularly, words and sounds become autistic objects when they take part in echolalic manipulation.[3] The same goes for echolalic utterances that are matched with a sensation. When they take part in repetitive stimulatory behavior they can be described as stimming.

This is where Tustin’s notion of the autistic object also complies with the Lacanian understanding of the way objects are used as a support for linguistic constructions. For example, in the case of an autistic child named Juan, he goes on to touch different objects in the counseling room, one by one, not playing with them but categorizing them by calling them by their names. The names of the objects are repeated in isolation while handling the objects themselves (Berenguer & Roizner, 2012, p. 107). By establishing an order in which the names of the objects can be reiterated, Juan is able to create a boundary that protects him in the counseling room without holding the psychoanalyst’s hand. This process can also be elaborated from a linguistic point of view—one that is focused on the use of signs. Recall that a sign is akin to a rigid linguistic object that has a direct and permanent biunivocal relationship with a referent (Brenner, 2020, p. 226). In this sense, signs can be used as reliable linguistic placeholders for actual objects encountered in the world. When a sign is matched with an autistic object, it can be independently used in stimming in the same way that an actual object is used to establish a protective boundary for the body. Namely, through the mediation of the autistic object, a transitive relationship between the subject’s *jouissance* and a linguistic sign can be achieved. On the basis of this relationship a sign can gain the dynamic function of an object in the construction of a protective rim.

## Jouissance ? Autistic Object ? Sign

The autistic object used for its protective properties in the aforementioned manners functions as a supplementary sensational rim to the drive. As Tustin (1986) clarifies, in their stereotypical behavior, “autistic children often bite their compressed tongue, or the bunched-up pads of their cheeks. Or they wriggle their bottoms to feel the faeces in their anus” (p. 109). As one can see, these have to do with the regulation of the oral and anal drives. The autistic object is a metonymic replacement for these auto-sensuous activities, they take part in the attempt to mark out a limit to the drive *in the body*, enabling its marking *on the rim of the body*.

Tustin (1986) argues that the protective function of the autistic object is strictly pathological and should be discarded in the course of the treatment. She calls its protective function a “pseudo-protection” and emphasizes that it prevents the child from developing any genuine means for protection as are to be found in the relationship with the mother (p. 108). Particularly for Tustin, “The sensation-dominated state of the autistic child means that such children live in a globally apprehended world” (p. 105). She argues that in this diluted world autistic children cannot become aware of needs, wants and desires (p. 106). They solely rely on the autistic objects they select, particularly those that bring them instant sensorial satisfaction. For Tustin, the autistic child that lives in this “bodily way” runs the risk of having its mental life remain raw, stereotyped and massively restricted (pp. 107-110).

The encapsulation in the sensation-dominated world described by Tustin, can be associated with Leo Kanner’s (1943) notion of “aloneness”. Kanner notes that for autistic subjects a “profound aloneness dominates all behavior” (p. 247), that is, “an extreme autistic aloneness that, whenever possible, disregards, ignores, shuts out anything that comes to the child from the outside” (p. 242). I agree with Tustin that the strict dependence on autistic objects can lead to, as Kanner suggests, a state of extreme aloneness. Moreover, it is also true that autistic objects constructing protective rims are commonly inflexible, and rigid in their nature (Tustin, 1986, p. 114). Accordingly, they tend to betray the subject in times of extreme crisis and under dynamic and changing conditions. However, I do not think that protective rims should be considered to be strictly pathological and, in this sense, should not be disposed of in the course of the treatment. Particularly, many autistic subjects report that their protective rims have functioned as a gateway to their further animation and incorporation in the social bond. It is only after establishing a certain level of protection and predictability in their world that they are able to step out of it. Moreover, many autistic people testify to experiencing their parents or therapists taking away their autistic objects as being tormenting and traumatic.

Therefore, it is my view that protective rims are not only to be described as impregnable boundaries but also as openings. They are constructed vis-à-vis the sensorial states that the subject encounters in its environment. They provide ways to transform contingent invasions of jouissance into controlled states of interaction with objects. In this sense, like Freud’s (1914a) description of the libido as an amoeba sending out its pseudopodia into the outer world (p. 75), protective rims provide a sensational opening to the world. They allow the subject a mode of access to a rudimentary level of a delimitation of jouissance and, in this sense, are an important part of the work done with autistic subjects experiencing difficulties with their bodies. Therefore, clinical work with autistic subjects in this way would involve assisting them in identifying effective objects in their environment. Moreover, it would entail making sure to supply a clinical environment that is rich with objects of many shapes, sizes, tactile consistencies, volumes, colors and tastes. Finally, practitioners would be expected to follow the child and observe when it selects and inserts an object (an actual object or a linguistic utterance) into a repetitive ritual; they can then assist them in expanding their ritualistic repertoire by generalizing its protective function. In any case, such inventions are best to be developed in a group setting and handled by a multiplicity of practitioners that provide a plurality of activities such as dancing, playing music, drawing, cooking, etc. (see “practice among several” in: Camós & Acero, 2013).

## Systemizing Rims

The objectal dynamic implemented in the construction of protective rims can exceed its protective-sensational function and be used toward achieving a personal mode of satisfaction. Systemizing rims come into the picture when the subject, through a repetitive process of trial and error, constructs orderly systems of knowledge that enable drive satisfaction on the level of the body and the intellect.

In the field of autism research outside psychoanalysis, “systemizing” is a term referring to the desire to explore, analyze, and construct systems of knowledge (Baron-Cohen et al., 2003). Autistic subjects that lean towards systemizing often are able to find satisfaction in analyzing how systems work as well as predicting, controlling, and building new systems. Systemizing entails an intricate use of language to establish an order to the world, one that makes it more predictable but also provides the subject with access to an intimate and idiosyncratic mode of satisfaction. Some studies suggest that systemizing may provide a way for autistic subjects to find comfort and relief from stressors (Klin et al., 2007) and a way of coping with negative emotional experiences (Turner, 1999; Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 1999; Kim et al., 2000; Attwood, 2003).

In psychoanalytic terms, systemizing could be described as a supplementary strategy for the organization of drive functions. Particularly, systemizing rims are considered to establish restricted modes of fixation that put in place the drive circuit which, in turn, raises the “delimitation” of jouissance from a means of protection to the creation of “islands” of drive satisfaction. When they are skillfully cultivated by the subject, these rims can be used to enrich the subject’s relationship with its environment. In other words, they are used to dynamically suture the *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt*. This suture stretches from the systematic organization of the body as an enjoying apparatus to a world of systemized patterns available for the subject’s collecting pleasure.

In contrast to protective rims that come to locally delimit jouissance with the help of an autistic object, systemizing rims come to establish the efficacy of the body in its interactions with the environment. Basically, when implemented on the level of the body, systemizing rims are constructs that combine and transform the localized protective functions of several autistic objects into a complex apparatus that enables the subject to use its body to achieve satisfaction by handling more intricate goals in more complex circumstances. In comparison to protective rims, which involve the passive adoption of objects contingently encountered in the child’s surroundings, systemizing rims involve an active investment in the election of objects. Moreover, rather than strictly taking the form of rhythmic modes of repetition, systemizing rims are open to change, have characteristics that can develop over time, and can adapt to different contexts and situations. In this sense, systemizing rims provide the subject with access to supplementary levels of drive organization and help establish a consistent body image that establishes the means for developing and shaping joyful interactions with the environment.

A canonical example of the construction of systemizing rims on the level of the body can be found in Bruno Bettelheim’s (1959) published case history of a 9-year-old autistic boy named Joey. In his work with Bettelheim, Joey regains access to his body through the construction of a system of mechanical apparatuses made of autistic objects. Bettelheim recounts how Joey would plug himself into particular fabricated ‘electrical’ outlets that would form a “highly complex piece of machinery” (p. 117). In order to enter the dining room and enjoy food, Joey would connect the table to an “energy source” and attach it to a paper napkin. He would also produce elaborate drawings of the various apparatuses he would engineer in order to animate his body (p. 120). By using the machine as a systemized blueprint for his body image, Joey is able to voluntarily animate it. The therapeutic implementation of machines in a clinical setting is developed today in the field known as “machine therapy” (Jackson, 2002). In this field, practitioners study how the interaction between humans and machines can access and reveal the vital aspects of one’s psychology (Dobson, 2007). Particularly in the treatment of autism, a growing number of studies have investigated diverse applications of technology-based interventions. These include but are not limited to: tactile and auditory devices, video-based feedback, computer-aided instruction, virtual reality, and robotics (Grynszpan et al., 2014; Jaliaawala & Khan, 2020). When these are implemented to form supplementary strategies for

the organization of drive functions, we could say that they concern the construction of systemizing rims.

Systemizing rims are not solely implemented in the organization and animation of the body, they are also used to achieve intellectual satisfaction through the orderly systemization of structures of knowledge. Some studies state that intellectual systemization confers on autistic subjects a sense of organization and predictability, possibly providing a buffer to distress or anxiety (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 1999; Mercier, Mottron & Belleville, 2000; Zandt, Prior & Kyrios, 2007). As a result, the hypothesis of a correspondence between anxiety and the tendency for systemization has already been raised (Attwood, 2003; Klin et al., 2007; Spiker et al., 2012). In this sense, an anxiety provoked by the sound of airplanes can turn into a profound knowledge of airplane types or flight schedules. In psychoanalytic terms, we might say that in these cases an initial attempt to protect against the invasion of jouissance turns into an expertise in a particular field of knowledge that delimits it.

A subjective interest in systemization can sometimes turn into what many autistic subjects call “special interests”. Studies show that the vast majority of autistic subjects (between 75 and 95%) have special interests in particular topic areas (Turner-Brown et al., 2011). Special interests take many forms: cataloging objects; identifying linguistic patterns; gaining a proficiency in a particular field like aircrafts or transportation; creative interests like writing or drawing; fascination with the way machines work; or more esoteric topics like cartoon characters or fantasy world construction.[4] Studies show that autistic children have, on average, eight special interests at a time and that these often intersect with one another (Nowell et al., 2020).

Special interests have been shown to contribute to the development of expertise, rich knowledge and the promotion of learning by motivating children to collect information through books and other sources (Nowell et al., 2020). Other studies show that special interests provide opportunities for social interaction with others with similar interests; generate positive emotions and coping strategies; and induce a sense of pride and general well-being (Mercier et al., 2000; Winter-Messiers et al., 2007; Jordan & Caldwell-Harris, 2012; Koenig & Williams, 2017; Grove et al., 2018). When special interests are implemented in the organization of drive functions and give rise to intellectual satisfaction, we might say that they take form as a systemizing rim.

Taking into account the substantial dynamic value of systemizing rims, practitioners working with autistic subjects are encouraged to support their construction. Particularly, this would entail assisting subjects in finding objects and relevant fields of knowledge from which the organization of drive functions can benefit. Other than harboring their dynamic value, another avenue for developing systemizing rims is an attempt to generalize their use. On the level of the body, this would mean addressing other body related issues by expanding the structure of systemization. This would entail deeply engaging with the dynamic quality of the object used on the body through speech or artistic expression, leading to a point where the object can be neglected while its dynamic function is preserved or expanded. This mode of treatment is clearly traced in Bettelheim’s description of Joey’s case (1959) as well as other publications (Williams, 1992, pp. 64–65; Wallis, 2010). On the level of the intellect, this would entail engaging with others sharing similar interests as well as learning about new interests from others. Also, as will be described in the next section, work with autistic subjects could also entail expanding the use of their systemizing rims beyond the realm of personal satisfaction in the direction of their incorporation in society.

## **Incorporating Rims**

Incorporating rims are homologous to systemizing rims but are distinct in their aim. While systemizing rims aim at a personal form of satisfaction achieved on the level of the body or the intellect, incorporating rims harness their dynamic qualities in order to include the subject as a part of a whole. This inclusion could concern the domain of intersubjective communication, social integration as well as gender, sexuality and

sexual identity. When constructions on these levels have an effect on the level of the drive—an effect that shifts the subject’s position in relation to its environment—they can be determined as incorporating rims. I will briefly comment on the construction of incorporating rims corresponding to these domains in this final section.

## **Understanding and Being Understood**

Sometimes autistic subjects develop special interests that have to do with human behavior and psychology or with social interactions (e.g. Williams, 1992, p. 119; Hendrickx, 2015, p. 17; Jordan, 2017, p. 65). In these cases, subjects invest themselves in systematically learning social cues and body gestures by heart. When these systemization skills are implemented in attempts to understand and be understood by others, they may form incorporating rims. However, this contention has to be nuanced.

Some autistic subjects implement their systematic knowledge on human behavior and psychology in what is called “camouflaging” (Attwood, 2006; Gould & Ashton-Smith, 2011; Kopp & Gillberg, 2011; Lai et al., 2011). Camouflaging is a coping strategy implemented in certain social situations. It may include: hiding behaviors associated with autism; using explicit techniques to appear socially competent; engaging in compensatory non-verbal techniques and body language; and hiding other social difficulties in order to blend in with non-autistic people (Hull et al., 2017). One pragmatic goal of camouflaging is the desire to obtain jobs and qualifications, which are commonly less accessible when one is “visibly autistic”. These extend to job interviews as well as graduating from school or university. Another pragmatic aim of camouflaging is establishing connections and having relationships with other people. Many autistic people attest to having a strong desire to make friends and form romantic attachments. Camouflaging is sometimes used to overcome the initial obstacles in making connections and allow for future relationships to develop. By camouflaging and using systemized behavioral techniques, some autistic subjects are able to reduce their anxiety and uncertainty in these situations and to be more confident in their ability to socialize.

Camouflaging is reported to produce a sense of satisfaction when autistic subjects are able to achieve their social goals. However, one of the most consistent side-effects of camouflaging is mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion (Mandy, 2019). Camouflaging requires constant concentration, monitoring, and self-control, and is usually accompanied by feelings of discomfort. Many autistic subjects report they require a lengthy period of time to recover from it and, usually, they later need to seek solitude; some even experience peak anxiety while camouflaging. Moreover, some autistic subjects report that camouflaging had prevented them from receiving adequate support with other difficulties associated with autism, particularly because they did not seem to comply with the autistic traits that warrant such support. Finally, camouflaging can also have a negative impact on one’s self perception. Some autistic subjects report that forming relationships on the basis of camouflaging accentuates the deceptive nature of human relationships and causes them to feel even more lonely and misunderstood.

In my work with autistic analysands, I have witnessed when an interest in camouflaging provides the subject access to a knowledge that exceeds the dimension of mimicry. These are commonly experienced as moments of personal loss, when a psychological or behavioral model is discovered to be inherently lacking and developed into a heuristic. Particularly, this might be described as a moment when an orderly system of knowledge is unable to encode a recurring aspect in human interaction and the subject is forced to abandon the belief in the completeness of knowledge and invent a unique way to encode it into its vocabulary. In a different publication, I have associated these moments with the “dialectization of the sign” and the creation of “pseudo-concepts” or “pseudo-signifiers” (Brenner, 2022). In other words, we could say that these moments entail a localized inscription of a lack in the order of the sign that is associated with a particular sensation experienced in the context of social interaction.[5]

In her book, *Thinking in Pictures* (2006), Temple Grandin describes moments where she is able to encode the ambiguous nature of some of her life experiences. She says that these inscriptions give rise to a qualitative effect that is meaningful, all-encompassing, and affects her subjective position. Particularly, she says that whenever she revises her knowledge in such a way, it is like “getting a new version of software for the computer” (p. 11). These “software updates” also characterize moments of subjective transition and major changes in her life, such as graduating from high school and enrolling in college (p. 18). These subjective effects distinguish the construction of incorporating rims from the systematic mimicry that characterizes camouflaging. They entail an effect on the level of the drive and the body that impacts that subject’s incorporation in the humanized world—its *Umwelt*.

## **Social Integration**

Regardless of their success in understanding and being understood by others, many autistic subjects report significant challenges in their attempts at social integration in adulthood. Among these, autistic adults report: feelings of intense isolation, difficulties achieving independence, struggling to find employment, and challenges relating to peers and establishing social relationships; all these are accompanied by an intense longing for social connectedness, and an unfulfilled desire to contribute to one’s community in order to develop greater social understanding (Müller et al., 2008; Whitehouse et al., 2009; Levy & Perry, 2011; Koegel et al., 2013).

An extensive body of literature documents the effectiveness of a variety of social skills intervention methods in cases of autism (e.g. Nikopoulos & Keenan, 2004; Koegel & Koegel, 2006). These vary and include, among others, external support groups promoting shared interest activities, structured social activities, opportunities to discuss social behavior, learning communication cues in mixed groups, and external support from a friend or a caregiver in a social context (Howlin, 2000; Müller et al., 2008; Koegel et al., 2013). However, even with the help of these intervention methods, a deep feeling of social integration is only reported by a minority of autistic adults.

Be that as it may, testimonies of autistic adults who achieved substantial levels of social integration exist and can be found in autobiographies and commentaries written by autistic people. Two such cases are presented by Donna Williams (1992) and Temple Grandin (2006). In their autobiographies, both Williams and Grandin report dramatic shifts in their sense of social integration, shifts that affected their self-perception both in terms of their function in society as well as their sense of embodiment and intimate relationships with other people.

In previous publications I suggested that such a deep sense of social integration is not commonly achieved through pedagogical forms of social skills intervention methods, but through a creative investment of the subject’s dynamic inner world in an object that is then situated in a domain that exceeds its control (Brenner, 2021b; 2022). This mode of libidinal investment can be contrasted to the one associated with protective rims. In the case of a protective rim, the dynamic qualities that are originally attributed to an object are creatively cultivated by the subject in its attempts to protect itself from invasions of *jouissance*. This mode of libidinal investment also comes into play when systematizing rims are strictly used for the sake of establishing intimate and idiosyncratic modes of drive satisfaction. Conversely, when incorporating rims are used to establish a deep sense of social integration, the relationship between the subject and the object is reversed. In these cases, it is the dynamic inner world of the subject that is projected onto an originally lifeless object that then finds its place in the social bond.

This mode of libidinal investment involves a supplementary inscription of a loss of *jouissance* in a place outside of the subject. This supplementary inscription functions as a singular solution to the structural refusal to inscribe the drive object in the Other and as part of the treatment for the foreclosure of the rim of the drive circuit (Lefort, 2003, p. 14). The fabrication of and voluntary separation from the object comes to engender a

certain subjective division that is intimately associated with the subject's inner world but is permanently put in an *other* place—or, more precisely, among *others*.<sup>[6]</sup> At this point, it is important to note that, while the autistic supplementary loss mimics something of the functionality of the *objet petit a*, its implementation is not identical to the one accomplished in the symbolic inscription of the latter. It is through a “body event” (*événement de corps*) (Laurent, 2012, p. 69) that the jouissance of the drive is dynamically deposited in an object that can then be replicated and distributed among many people.

For Williams, it was the publication of her two first books: *Nobody Nowhere* (1992) and *Somebody Somewhere* (2015). In them, she was able to find a way to creatively express her subjective outlook in a way that also has value in the social domain. Like the tall grass, vines, and colorful roses Williams draws in her self-portraits, the publication of her books created an imagined ideal that extends and demarcates the empty place of the subject from the outside rather than the inside. For Grandin, it was her fascination with farm animals that surrounded her as a young girl that brought her to pursue an academic career and become a professor of animal sciences in the College of Agricultural Sciences at Colorado State University. In other words, Grandin's special interest in livestock had materialized into her receiving acknowledgment as a renowned scientist and writer by many colleagues and students.

It is important to note that the loss engendered by the extension of one's inner world among others is not enough to bring about the subjective effect discussed above. For instance, developing a special interest and presenting it to one's family or posting it on an internet forum is only a first step, a step that must be taken carefully if one wants to avoid unbearable anxiety. The second step has to do with the vantage point of others, that is, with the wide acknowledgment by many people of the singularity of the subject's creation. In other words, it is only when one's special interest is widely appreciated as being “special” that the dynamic potential associated with incorporating rims can be fully established. For Grandin (2006), one can note a waypoint in this development with the invention of her “squeeze machine” (p. 60). Grandin describes how, as an autistic child, she would wrap herself with blankets and get under sofa cushions because the pressure was relaxing for her (p. 58). As a young adult, she realized that she could treat her anxiety by building an apparatus composed of two soft foam-padded panels that applied pressure along the sides of her body and her neck (p. 59). As an academic, Grandin developed her squeeze machine into an apparatus that comforts cattle handled at slaughterhouses. Therefore, we see that Grandin's special interest in livestock, accompanied by her intimate investment in the squeeze machine, enabled the invention of Grandin's cattle handling apparatus, an apparatus widely acclaimed both within and outside academia.

There is another way to account for autistic subjects' social integration in psychoanalytic terms. It is by associating the unique subjective effect achieved on this level with an identification with a supplement to the ego-ideal (Brenner, 2021b, p. 967). According to Lacan, the ego-ideal is one of the prototypical components of the Freudian ego. More specifically, it is a construct that is determined by the interplay of relations that make up the symbolic law, in accordance to which subjects locate themselves in relation to one another in society (Lacan, 1988, p. 140). In other words, the ego-ideal represents a vantage point from which the subject perceives itself as it is seen by others or the vantage point from where the subject gains its position in society and in the world (Vanheule, 2011, p. 4). When incorporating rims are used to establish a deep sense of social integration, the projection of the subject's inner world into an object that is deployed in the social bond can be said to engender a supplement to the ego-ideal. That is, through a voluntary establishment of a vantage point from which the subject perceives itself as it is seen by others. The identification with this vantage point could be determined as a secondary form of egoic (narcissistic) identification characterizing the construction of incorporating rims.

## **Gender, Sexuality and Sexual Identity**

Lacan argues that the ego consists of two prototypical aspects: the ego-ideal, discussed so far, and the ideal ego. Lacan (2006) describes the ideal ego as the most “primordial form” of ego construction prior to its

functioning in the formation of self-identity and the establishment of intersubjective relations through the identification with the ego-ideal (p. 76). The ideal ego functions as an ideal body-image that masks the fragmented reality of the child's body. The identification with the ideal ego kicks into action the basic organizing psychic faculties that facilitate motor development and situate the subject's body in the world. In Lacan's words, the ideal ego has a primal function in suturing the *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt*, namely, the basic feelings related to the body and its respective environment (p. 78). Lacan insists that, for humans, it is only through the vantage point of the ego-ideal that the ego can be integrated as a whole. This means that the ideal ego is dependent on the former for its proper integration. In Lacan's insistence on the dependence of the ideal ego on the ego-ideal we see that the accommodating power of the body-image is neither determined by the instinct nor by other people, but by the signifier (p. 141). Recall that, the autistic mode of access to language is characterized by a refusal of the effect of the signifier. In this sense, autism can also be characterized by a refusal of the effect of the ego-ideal, bringing about a disturbance in the establishment of the body-image. This is why, the fact that Williams and Grandin have been able to establish their subjective coordinates on the level of the ego-ideal also has an effect on their relationship with their bodies. As Williams reports (1994), after the publication of her books she feels less cut off from her body. She says that she could then perceive her body from a more intimate position: from the inside rather than the outside as though it "was real, it was mine, and it was part of me" (p. 234).

The identification with the ideal ego and its effect on the body brings us to the question of gender, sexuality and sexual identity in autism. Many recent studies have emphasized the large overlap between autism and trans and nonbinary modalities of gender (Williams, Allard & Sears, 1996; Tateno, Tateno & Saito, 2008; Jones et al., 2012; Jacobs et al., 2014; Glidden et al., 2016; van der Miesen et al., 2018; George & Stokes, 2018). Some studies suggest that the higher rates of trans/nonbinary gender identity is a symptom of autism (Coleman-Smith et al., 2020). These studies generally assume that autism and trans/nonbinary gender identity are both non-normative and inherently distorted and therefore must stem from one another (Walsh & Jackson-Perry, 2021).

In his teaching, Lacan (1988) had always emphasized that human sexuality is characterized by an "eminent disorder", that "nothing in it adapts" and, therefore, that there is no "normal" type of sexuality (pp. 138-139). He mentions that, already in Freud's "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905b), one notices an inclination to describe human sexuality as being fundamentally "polymorphously perverse" (p. 191). Therefore, from within the scope of psychoanalysis, trans/nonbinary gender identities are as "abnormal" as normative identities. In this sense, statistical prevalence plays no role in associating them with autism. From a Lacanian perspective, rather than assuming that an interaction between autism and trans/nonbinary gender identities originates in a shared deficit, autistic sexuality and gender identity are both described in terms of the subject's singular relationship with language and the body.

According to Lacan (1988), unlike animals who commonly engage in sexual behavior in accordance to a set of predetermined species specific instinctual cues, humans have to rely on the symbolic in order to engage in sex. In this sense, an animal would have only a limited number of performed sexual bearings, whereas for humans the signifier opens up a "noetic possibility"—a possibility to know something, to say something about one's gender, sexuality and sexual identity regardless of the instinct (p. 125).

Particularly, Lacan argues that the phallus is the signifier that determines the subject's identification in terms of gender: a subject either *has it* or *is it* in their fundamental fantasy. However, Lacan (2006) comments that for some subjects the function of the phallus is diffused, opening up an avenue for more "fluid" gender identifications (p. 471).

In their recourse to the sign, autistic subjects are also able to construct systemized fields of knowledge about gender, sexuality and sexual identity. Systemized fields of knowledge constructed with the help of signs commonly portray consistent, rule-bound relationships between concepts and objects. However, from a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective, human sexuality and gender cannot be consistently systemized or, more precisely, are not properly systematized in the symbolic domain.[7] When encoded into a system made

of signs, human sexuality and gender reveal their inconsistent nature, rendering them to be problematic. Therefore, it could be the case that the fact that autistic subjects are able to clearly perceive that systemized fields of knowledge on sexuality and gender are “imperfect”, makes them more open to identify in contradiction to them (Kristensen and Broome, 2015). Viewing things in this way portrays autistic gender identification as advantageous in being more open to more “fluid” avenues for identification in terms of gender, sexuality and sexual identity (Walsh & Jackson-Perry, 2021, p. 56).

Incorporating rims are systemized fields of knowledge that construct a personalized imagined ideal that, in some cases, extends and demarcates a position from which the subject is able to identify and formulate a unique outlook on sexual relationships and pleasure. Incorporating rims also enable an identification with a supplementary ideal ego in a similar way to the identification with the ego-ideal. When this identification has a deep subjective effect, it can lead the subject from “gender dysphoria”—a state of anxiety, depression, irritability, malaise, and gender performance dissociation (Perrotta, 2020)—to what some call “gender euphoria”; this is “a distinct enjoyment or satisfaction caused by the correspondence between the person’s gender identity and gendered features” (Ashley & Ells, 2018, p. 24) that is “understood in terms of increased subjective well-being associated with gender affirmation” (Bradford et al., 2019, p. 3).

The work with incorporating rims in the clinic of autism revolves around the investment of one’s systemizing skills and linguistic functionality in developing one’s curiosity in relation to other people and the social bond. The work is first of all directed by the subject’s interests. In this sense, it does not rely on a predetermined notion of one’s place in the world. Not all autistic subjects wish to adapt to social standards, e.g. integrate and find a job, or are interested in sex or a sexual partner. If they are, their particular fields of interest are implemented in order to achieve these aims. However, in contrast to the pedagogical approach, the Lacanian psychoanalytic orientation aims at a subjective effect. This effect comes into being through the subject’s identifications that materialize in the construction of a supplementary ideal ego or ego-ideal. This “know-how” (*savoir faire*) is not encyclopedic; it is based on the synthesis of systemized fields of knowledge that engender in the subject’s reality a loss rather than an excess. It is in relation to this loss that the subject’s desire can be incorporated in its relationship with society and with others.

## **The Clinic of Rims**

In his paper, “The Unconscious and the Speaking Body” (2016), Jacques-Alain Miller emphasizes that Lacan, in his later teaching, was determined to replace the term “unconscious” with his neologism the “*parlêtre*”. Compared to the analysis of the symptom, which is a formation of the unconscious structured as a language, the analysis of the *parlêtre* revolves around the “sinthome”—an event of the body. This conceptual adjustment compels Miller to postulate a transition in the psychoanalytic understanding of the *parlêtre*, proposing the notion of the “speaking body” as a substitute.

In autism we identify unique rim constructions that attempt to treat the foreclosure of the rim of the drive circuit. If today we take into account the remarkable ways that the autistic subject’s supplementary rims affect their psychic reality, can we describe a new modality of the speaking body? If there has been a movement from the *parlêtre* to the “speaking body”, would it be beneficial at this point to explore the movement from the notion of the “speaking body” to the notion of the “body made of rims”—where *jouissance* returns on the rim marked by the signifier or the sign. Are the real, symbolic, and imaginary themselves in fact rims? And their intertwining is actually a knotting of rims? This takes us a step further from the autistic “neo-rim” (Laurent, 2012, pp. 69–70), opening the possibility of a discussion of neurotic and ordinary psychotic rims and their knotting. Designating the clinic of autism as revolving around the supplementary construction of the rim might be one way to go. However, I believe that we would be wise to learn further lessons from autistic subjects, lessons that could also be implemented in our psychoanalytic work with neurotic, perverse and psychotic subjects.

## **Bibliography:**

Ashley, F., & Ells, C. (2018). In favor of covering ethically important cosmetic surgeries: facial feminization surgery for transgender people. *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 18(12), 23–25.

Attwood, A. (2006). *The complete guide to Asperger's syndrome*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Attwood, T. (2003). Understanding and managing circumscribed interests. In M. Prior (Ed.), *Learning and behavior problems in Asperger syndrome* (pp. 126–147). Guilford Press.

Baron-Cohen, S., Richler, J., Bisarya, D., Gurunathan, N., & Wheelwright, S. (2003). The systemizing quotient: an investigation of adults with Asperger syndrome or high-functioning autism, and normal sex differences. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B: Biological Sciences*, 358(1430), 361–374.

Baron-Cohen, S., & Wheelwright, S. (1999). ‘Obsessions’ in children with autism or Asperger syndrome: Content analysis in terms of core domains of cognition.’ *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 175(5), 484–490.

Berenguer, E., & Roizner, M. (2012). On route to speaking: speech taking shape in autism. *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, 101–112.

Bettelheim, B. (1959). Joey, a ‘mechanical boy’. *Scientific American*, 200(3), 116–130.

Bradford, N. J., Rider, G. N., Catalpa, J. M., Morrow, Q. J., Berg, D. R., Spencer, K. G., & McGuire, J. K. (2019). Creating gender: A thematic analysis of genderqueer narratives. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 20(2–3), 155–168.

Brenner, L. S. (2020). *The autistic subject: on the threshold of language*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Brenner, L. S. (2021a). Is the autistic body a body without organs? In E. Daffron & B. Mclaughlin (Eds.), *The body in theory: Essays with Lacan and Foucault*. McFarland Press & Company.

Brenner, L. S. (2021b). The autistic mirror in the real: Autism in Lacan's mirror stage. *Theory & Psychology*, 31(6).

Brenner, L. S. (2022). The autistic pseudo-signifier: imaginary dialectization of signs in the clinic of autism. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*. In Press.

Caldwell-Harris, C. L., & Jordan, C. J. (2014). Systemizing and special interests: Characterizing the continuum from neurotypical to autism spectrum disorder. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 29, 98–105.

Camós, N. C., & Acero, I. R. (2013). *No todo sobre el autismo* [Not everything about autism]. Gredos.

Coleman-Smith, R. S., Smith, R., Milne, E., & Thompson, A. R. (2020). 'Conflict versus congruence': A qualitative study exploring the experience of gender dysphoria for adults with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50(8), 2643–2657.

Dobson, K. E. (2007). *Machine therapy*. Doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Freud, S. (1905a). Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie [Three essays on sexuality]. In *Gesammelte Werke* (Vol. 5, 1940–1952), pp. 33–145.

Freud, S. (1905b). Three essays on the theory of sexuality (1905). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, volume VII (1901-1905): A case of hysteria, three essays on sexuality and other works* (pp. 123-246).

Freud, S. (1911). Psycho-Analytic notes on an autobiographical account of a case of paranoia (Dementia Paranoides). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, volume XII (1911–1913): The case of Schreber, papers on technique and other works* (pp. 1–82).

Freud, S. (1914a). On narcissism. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, volume XIV (1914–1916): On the history of the psycho-analytic movement, papers on metapsychology and other works* (pp. 67–102).

Freud, S. (1914b). Zur Einführung des Narzißmus [An introduction to narcissism]. in *Gesammelte Werke* (Vol. 10, 1940–1952), pp. 137–170

Freud, S. (1914c). Zur Geschichte der Psychoanalytischen Bewegung [On the history of the psychoanalytic movement]. In *Gesammelte Werke* (Vol. 10, 1940–1952), pp. 43–113.

Freud, S. (1915). Instincts and their vicissitudes. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, volume XIV (1914–1916): On the history of the psycho-analytic movement, papers on metapsychology and other works* (pp. 109–140).

Freud, S. (1920). Jenseits des Lustprinzips [Beyond the pleasure principle]. In *Gesammelte Werke* (Vol. 13, 1940–1952), pp. 1–69.

George, R., & Stokes, M. A. (2018). Sexual orientation in autism spectrum disorder. *Autism Research, 11* (1), 133–141.

Glidden, D., Bouman, W. P., Jones, B. A., & Arcelus, J. (2016). Gender dysphoria and autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review of the literature. *Sexual Medicine Reviews, 4*(1), 3–14.

Gould, J., & Ashton-Smith, J. (2011). Missed diagnosis or misdiagnosis? Girls and women on the autism spectrum. *Good Autism Practice (GAP), 12*(1), 34–41.

Grandin, T. (2006). *Thinking in pictures: My life with autism*. Vintage.

Grove, R., Hoekstra, R. A., Wierda, M., & Begeer, S. (2018). Special interests and subjective wellbeing in autistic adults. *Autism Research, 11*(5), 766–775.

Grynszpan, O., Weiss, P. L., Perez-Diaz, F., & Gal, E. (2014). Innovative technology-based interventions for autism spectrum disorders: a meta-analysis. *Autism, 18*(4), 346–361.

Hendrickx, S. (2015). *Women and girls with autism spectrum disorder: Understanding life experiences from early childhood to old age*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Howlin, P. (2000). Outcome in adult life for more able individuals with autism or Asperger syndrome. *Autism, 4*(1), 63–83.

- Howlin, P., Goode, S., Hutton, J., & Rutter, M. (2004). Adult outcome for children with autism. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 45(2), 212–229.
- Hull, L., Petrides, K. V., Allison, C., Smith, P., Baron-Cohen, S., Lai, M.-C., & Mandy, W. (2017). “Putting on my best normal”: Social camouflaging in adults with autism spectrum conditions. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 47(8), 2519–2534.
- Jackson, M. (2002). Familiar and foreign bodies: a phenomenological exploration of the human-technology interface. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 8(2), 333–346.
- Jacobs, L. A., Rachlin, K., Erickson-Schroth, L., & Janssen, A. (2014). Gender dysphoria and co-occurring autism spectrum disorders: Review, case examples, and treatment considerations. *LGBT Health*, 1(4), 277–282.
- Jaliaawala, M. S., & Khan, R. A. (2020). Can autism be catered with artificial intelligence-assisted intervention technology? A comprehensive survey. *Artificial Intelligence Review*, 53(2), 1039–1069.
- Jones, R. M., Wheelwright, S., Farrell, K., Martin, E., Green, R., Di Ceglie, D., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2012). Brief report: female-to-male transsexual people and autistic traits. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 42(2), 301–306.
- Jordan, C. J., & Caldwell-Harris, C. L. (2012). Understanding differences in neurotypical and autism spectrum special interests through internet forums. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 50(5), 391–402.
- Jordan, P. (2017). *How to start, carry on and end conversations: Scripts for social situations for people on the autism spectrum*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Kanner, L. (1951). The conception of wholes and parts in early infantile autism. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 108(1), 23–26.
- Kanner, L. (1943). Autistic disturbances of affective contact. *Nervous Child*, 2(3), 217–250.
- Keenan, M., & Nikopoulos, C. (2006). *Video modelling and behaviour analysis: A guide for teaching social skills to children with autism*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

- Kim, J. A., Szatmari, P., Bryson, S. E., Streiner, D. L., & Wilson, F. J. (2000). The prevalence of anxiety and mood problems among children with autism and Asperger syndrome. *Autism, 4*(2), 117–132.
- Klin, A., Danovitch, J. H., Merz, A. B., & Volkmar, F. R. (2007). Circumscribed interests in higher functioning individuals with autism spectrum disorders: An exploratory study. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 32*(2), 89–100.
- Koegel, L. K., Ashbaugh, K., Koegel, R. L., Detar, W. J., & Regester, A. (2013). Increasing socialization in adults with Asperger's syndrome. *Psychology in the Schools, 50*(9), 899–909.
- Koegel, R. L., & Koegel, L. K. (2006). *Pivotal response treatments for autism: Communication, social, & academic development*. Brookes Publishing.
- Koenig, K., & Williams, L. (2017). Characterization and utilization of preferred interests: A survey of adults on the autism spectrum. *Occupational Therapy in Mental Health, 33*(2), 129–140.
- Kopp, S., & Gillberg, C. (2011). The autism spectrum screening questionnaire (ASSQ)-revised extended version (ASSQ-REV): an instrument for better capturing the autism phenotype in girls? A preliminary study involving 191 clinical cases and community controls. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 32*(6), 2875–2888.
- Kristensen, Z. E., & Broome, M. R. (2015). Autistic traits in an internet sample of gender variant UK adults. *International Journal of Transgenderism, 16*(4), 234–245.
- Lacan, J. (1997). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, book III, the psychoses (1955-1956)*. (J.-A. Miller, Ed.). Norton & Company.
- Lacan, J. (1988). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, book I, Freud's papers on technique (1953-1954)*. (J.-A. Miller, Ed.). Norton & Company.
- Lacan, J. (1989). Geneva lecture on the symptom. *Analysis, 1*(1), 7–26.
- Lacan, J. (Unpublished). *The seminar, book XXI, The names-of-the-father (1973-1974)*. Trans. Gallagher, C.

Lacan, J. (2006). *Écrits*. (B. Fink, Ed.). Norton & Company.

Lacan, J. (2001). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, book XI, the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis (1964)*. (J.-A. Miler, Ed.). Norton & Company.

Lacan, J. (1998). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, book XX, Encore: On feminine sexuality, the limits of love and knowledge (1972-1973)*. (J.-A. Miller, Ed.). Norton & Company.

Lacan, J. (2014). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, book X, anxiety (1962-1963)*. (J. Miller, Ed.). Polity.

Lai, M.-C., Lombardo, M. V, Pasco, G., Ruigrok, A. N. V, Wheelwright, S. J., Sadek, S. A., ... Baron-Cohen, S. (2011). A behavioral comparison of male and female adults with high functioning autism spectrum conditions. *PloS One*, 6(6), e20835.

Laurent, É. (2012). *La bataille de l'autisme* [The battle of autism]. Navarin.

Lefort, R., & Lefort, R. (2003). *La distinction de l'autisme* [The distinction of autism]. Seuil.

Levy, A., & Perry, A. (2011). Outcomes in adolescents and adults with autism: A review of the literature. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 5(4), 1271–1282.

Maleval, J.-C. (2009). *L'autiste et sa voix* [The autist and his voice]. Seuil.

Mandy, W. (2019). Social camouflaging in autism: Is it time to lose the mask? *Autism*, 23(8), 1879–1881.

Mercier, C., Mottron, L., & Belleville, S. (2000). A psychosocial study on restricted interests in high functioning persons with pervasive developmental disorders. *Autism*, 4(4), 406–425.

Miller, J.-A., & Laurent, É. (1998). The other which does not exist and its ethical committees. *Almanac of Psychoanalysis*, (1), 15–35.

- Miller, J. (2016). The unconscious and the speaking body. In *10th congress of the World Association of Psychoanalysis* (pp. 1–11).
- Müller, E., Schuler, A., & Yates, G. B. (2008). Social challenges and supports from the perspective of individuals with Asperger syndrome and other autism spectrum disabilities. *Autism, 12*(2), 173–190.
- Nowell, K. P., Bernardin, C. J., Brown, C., & Kanne, S. (2021). Characterization of special interests in autism spectrum disorder: A brief review and pilot study using the special interests survey. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 51*(8), 2711–2724.
- Ogden, T. (1989). On the concept of an autistic-contiguous position. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 70*, 127–140.
- Perrotta, G. (2020). Gender dysphoria: definitions, classifications, neurobiological profiles and clinical treatments. *International Journal of Sexual and Reproductive Health Care, 3*(1), 42–50.
- Schauder, K. B., Mash, L. E., Bryant, L. K., & Cascio, C. J. (2015). Interoceptive ability and body awareness in autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 131*, 193–200.
- Spiker, M. A., Lin, C. E., Van Dyke, M., & Wood, J. J. (2012). Restricted interests and anxiety in children with autism. *Autism, 16*(3), 306–320.
- Tateno, M., Tateno, Y., & Saito, T. (2008). Comorbid childhood gender identity disorder in a boy with Asperger syndrome. *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences, 62*(2), 238.
- Turner-Brown, L. M., Lam, K. S. L., Holtzclaw, T. N., Dichter, G. S., & Bodfish, J. W. (2011). Phenomenology and measurement of circumscribed interests in autism spectrum disorders. *Autism, 15*(4), 437–456.
- Turner, M. (1999). Annotation: Repetitive behaviour in autism: A review of psychological research. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines, 40*(6), 839–849.
- Tustin, F. (1986). *Autistic barriers in neurotic patients*. Karnac Books.

Tustin, F. (1992). *The protective shell in children and adults*. Karnac Books.

van der Miesen, A. I. R., de Vries, A. L. C., Steensma, T. D., & Hartman, C. A. (2018). Autistic symptoms in children and adolescents with gender dysphoria. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 48(5), 1537–1548.

Vanheule, S. (2011). *The subject of psychosis: A Lacanian perspective*. Springer.

Wallis, C. (2010, February). Temple Grandin on Temple Grandin. *Time Magazine*.

Walsh, R., & Jackson-Perry, D. (2021). Autistic cognition and gender identity: Real struggles and imaginary deficits. In *Working with Autistic Transgender and Non-Binary People* (pp. 49–70). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Whitehouse, A. J. O., Watt, H. J., Line, E. A., & Bishop, D. V. M. (2009). Adult psychosocial outcomes of children with specific language impairment, pragmatic language impairment and autism. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 44(4), 511–528.

Williams, D. (1992). *Nobody nowhere: the remarkable autobiography of an autistic girl*. Times Books.

Williams, D. (2015). *Somebody somewhere: Breaking free from the world of autism*. Broadway Books.

Williams, P. G., Allard, A. M., & Sears, L. (1996). Case study: Cross-gender preoccupations in two male children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 26(6), 635–642.

Winter-Messiers, M. A., Herr, C. M., Wood, C. E., Brooks, A. P., Gates, M. A. M., Houston, T. L., & Tingstad, K. I. (2007). How far can Brian ride the Daylight 4449 Express? A strength-based model of Asperger syndrome based on special interest areas. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 22(2), 67–79.

Zandt, F., Prior, M., & Kyrios, M. (2007). Repetitive behaviour in children with high functioning autism and obsessive compulsive disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 37(2), 251–259.

**Notes:**

[1] In his paper “On Narcissism: An Introduction” (1914), Freud discusses his notion of *Selbstgefühl* in this context. See German version, p. 165, English version, p. 98.

[2] See full discussion on the distinction between signifier and sign in: Brenner, 2020, pp. 223-235.

[3] Mechanical repetition and manipulation of words and phrases as if they are tangible physical objects.

[4] Nowel et al., 2020, have divided autistic special interests into the following categories: TV, objects, music, toys, collections, animals, construction, transportation, art, machines, mechanical, things, numbers, reading, math, time, maps, astronomy, geology, computers, people, dates, sports, measurements, plants, religion, schedules, history, physics, politics, and psychology.

[5] In *The Autistic Subject: On the Threshold of Language* (2020) I have described the accumulating knowledge acquired on the basis of the subject’s recourse to the sign “the synthetic Other”. In this sense, one might say that this subjective effect creates a “lack in the synthetic Other”, corresponding with Lacan’s notion of the “lack in the Other”.

[6] A large group of people, one that exceeds the subject’s capacity to count, is put here as a supplement to the Other.

[7] Here one could allude to Lacan’s famous formula: there is no sexual relationship (Lacan, 1998, pp. 35, 44)

## **Bio:**

**Leon S. Brenner** is a psychoanalytic theorist and psychological counselor from Berlin. Brenner’s work draws from the Freudian and Lacanian traditions of psychoanalysis, and his interest lies in the understanding of the relationship between culture and psychopathology. His book *The Autistic Subject: On the Threshold of Language*, is a bestseller in psychology in Palgrave/Springer publishing in 2021. He is a founder of Lacanian Affinities Berlin and Unconscious Berlin and is currently a research fellow at the International Psychoanalytic University Berlin and the Hans Kilian und Lotte Köhler Centrum (KKC) at the Ruhr Universität Bochum.

## **Publication Date:**

May 20, 2022