

**In constant encounter with one's environment:
Presenting counter-metaphors in the study of the
discourse of autism and negotiations of space in
literature and visual culture**

MA thesis

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Introduction

My Research Master thesis inquires *the discourse of autism and negotiations of space in literature and visual culture*. I will further expound my study of autism as a discourse rather than a mental disorder and my choice to consider the production and reproduction of meaning rather than the truth on autism itself. I will then highlight my focus on spatiality and my use of the counter-metaphor of *atopos* in my critical approach of my case studies. The counter-metaphor aims to create a new affirmative and empowering language on negotiations of space that are commonly pathologized as autistic behavior that helps to profoundly consider themes on difference and diversity in cultural objects on autism. Finally, I will present my four sub-questions and the case studies that fall within each sub-question.

Autism as a discourse

In terms of just the word and not the assemblage of symptoms that it signifies, autism is a concept that has been used to define deviant behavior as well as identity categories in the Western world for the past 70 years. Currently, it signifies flawed social skills, deficits in communication, and repetitive behavior that is often characterized by stereotypical body movements, a sensitivity to sensory input and a preference for unchanging recurring activities. The word was initially coined by the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler in 1911, who used the term in order to describe severe forms of schizophrenia, of which Bleuler is also its eponym. He described “autism” as a condition in which the schizophrenic lives in their own fantasy world that solely consists of subjective experiences and thus rejects reality as it is, deriving it from the Old Greek *autos*, which means “self” and refers to the preoccupation with one’s own feigned image of reality (Bleuler, 1911; see also Parnas and Bovet, 1991). Bleuler’s discourse was adopted by two Austrian psychoanalysts in the 1940’s, who independently formulated the condition as it is currently understood: whilst Leo Kanner described “infantile autism” as a failure to relate to other people in the outside world and a lone preoccupation with abstract concepts (Kanner, 1943), Hans Asperger used the word ‘autism’ to characterize gifted children who perceived things from a highly individualized and mature perspective (Asperger, 1944). After years of adjustments and expansions of the meaning of autism, the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (2013), the guide that is widely used by clinicians and academics to define autism and diagnose patients, classifies “autism spectrum disorders” as a spectrum of neurodevelopmental disorders that can be traced by a list of criteria, of which “[p]ersistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts” and “restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, of activities” lies at their core (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Even though the concept of autism is grounded in the clinical realm that I have outlined here, words and knowledge on autism are produced, distributed and circulated throughout society as a whole in ways that do not necessarily refer back to clinical practice. Ever since classifications of mental disorders have been broadened in the last 25 years through revisions of the DSM, the presence of people who identify with the label of autism has increased, both with or without official diagnoses. Moreover, the pathologization of human diversity, that is, the description of human particularities as medical conditions, has profoundly influenced contemporary discourse in everyday life. People use the term 'autist' as a slur and prominent figures like world leaders are 'diagnosed' by people outside the clinical world (Locker, 2015). Whilst this use of the concept of autism relies on pathologized discourse, autistic self-advocates who strive for inclusion in society problematize and challenge the formal definition of autism in the DSM and the hegemony of the clinical world in defining and delimiting the concept of autism.

My thesis is specified to the production and reproduction of meaning of autism in the realm of art and culture. Many people have become aware of autism as a classified disorder through the great prevalence of popular depictions of characters who are identified with the label. Even though autism was mentioned in popular culture for the first time in the 1969 Elvis Presley movie *Change of Habit*, the feature film *Rain Man*, starring Dustin Hoffmann as the autistic Raymond Babbitt and Tom Cruise as his younger brother, brought more familiarity with autism to a large public. In recent years, the amount of films, television series, novels, and biographies on people with autism spectrum disorder has greatly increased. Not only have books like *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (2003), documentaries like *Het Beste voor Kees* (2014) and films like *Rain Man* greatly shaped the public perception and the cultural representation of autism, recent cultural expressions like the Swedish *Millennium* novel trilogy (2005-2006) and the American television series *Community* (2009-present) also have major and minor characters that cope with their mild autism, which is a part of their identity that defines their daily lives but that is not necessarily the focal point of the cultural expression. Moreover, pathologized language on autism is used in articles and reviews as attempts to interpret conspicuous characters in sitcoms like *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-) and films like *The Imitation Game* (2014). In short, art and culture has been an important platform on which meaning on autism has actively been produced, reproduced, distributed, and sold to a wider public.

This research aims to disclose the discourse of autism in literature and visual culture and analyzes the occurrence, implementation, and concretization of the autism discourse in cultural artifacts. I do not employ a methodological framework that seeks to describe the behavior of actual people with autism or inquires into the cause and the possible treatment of autism, as I do not aim to acquire knowledge on 'autism' in and of itself or discover the truth of its social or neurobiological nature.

Instead, I focus on the production and circulation of knowledge on autism in cultural objects as a textual reality beyond the intrinsic logic of this knowledge: what is said with regard to the concept of 'autism', how, when, where, and by whom (Foucault, 1972)? I consider texts that employ a certain discourse of autism, that is, a shared way of talking about knowledge (or, more precisely said, calling knowledge into being), and do not consider their mimetic quality and the question to which extent depictions of autism are 'true' to 'reality'.

Within this research, 'autism' is a historically and culturally constructed term that has been employed in society in order to name deviant behavior, and not a disorder that has its core in biological factors like genes and brain activity or in behavioral factors. Following the American communication scientist Majia Holmer Nadesan (2008), I study the social and cultural reality behind the pathologization of human difference, specified to labels concerning the term 'autism', in and outside the clinical world, in interpretations of the word 'autism' and the construction of identifications with the label of autism in and outside fiction and cultural objects (4-5).

This means that my research is not explanatory: it reveals which discourses, images and metaphors on autism have been used, but does not explain the exact nature or causes of autism. In this regard, it offers a decentralized view on the discourse of autism, as it does not assume 'autism' as an autonomous pre-linguistic material entity, like a virus or tumor has a material reality (see Nadesan, 2008). Because I do not claim to 'diagnose' characters and narrators in the cultural objects that I study, I will avoid language that mirrors the practice of classifying mental disorders and diagnosing individual cases, like "displaying autistic traits" and "symptoms of autism". Instead, I will study and name the exact occurrence of references to autism in and outside pathologized language as they appear in my case studies and will quote the exact terminology that is used in the cultural artifacts themselves. I will remain faithful to the things that are actually visible, readable and audible in a represented material world.

Autism and spatial metaphors

My study of the discourse of autism is specialized in depictions of autistic people who perceive and maneuver through space, and addresses debates on autism within and outside of the humanities within the framework of space, as conceptualized within the field of Cultural Studies. In the academic literature of the past six years, discourses on autism have already been linked to space and metaphors surrounding spatiality, and I would like to critically relate to this literature.

In 2008, American educationalist Alicia Broderick and activist Ari Ne'eman published the article "Autism as Metaphor: Narrative and Counternarrative", in which they aim to specify common

metaphors in autism discourse, of which some are spatial metaphors. Applying cultural theorist Susan Sontag's notion of "illness as metaphor", with which she addressed words that are used to describe illnesses (Sontag, 1977), to the assumption shared by the French philosopher Michel Foucault that truth is always "produced and sustained" within power structures, Broderick and Ne'eman consider and demythologize several metaphors as oppressing narratives on autism and subsequently propose "counter-narrative" that empower autistic people themselves (Broderick and Ne'eman, 2008: 459-460). In their history of metaphors that have been used to conceptualize autism, they state that "[s]patial metaphors are a dominant type of metaphor that historically has been consistently drawn upon in conceptualizing autism" (463). Such metaphors assume there is a hermetically sealed world that opposes the 'normal'. First, Broderick and Ne'eman describe the use of the term "alien", which evokes the notion that autistic people originate from another world and have entered the world of non-autistic people (463). This metaphor assumes autistic people are fundamentally different from others and perceive the world as if they are strangers. It can be found in the 1999 book *Through the Eyes of Aliens* by author Jasmine Lee O'Neil and in the name of the largest online community for autistic people, Wrong Planet, that uses a civil rights discourse (464). The second metaphor is that of the shell and refers to the aloofness that is often recognized in an autistic child that refuses to get involved in social and emotional contact (465).

Both spatial metaphors are linked to early theoretical frameworks on the cause of autism in children. According to Broderick and Ne'eman, the metaphor of the shell refers to children's withdrawal from the ignorant parent, in line with the Austrian-American psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim's hypothesis that the criteria of autism in children are results of an upbringing by emotionally frigid mothers. This model of the "refrigerator mother" (466) had been widely adopted until the 1970s and has been rejected as being degrading to families of autistic children ever since. Broderick and Ne'eman state that metaphors have served as justifications of treatments like psychoanalysis for the mother. Within the psychogenic discourse of autism, metaphors that referred to a negotiation of space represented the child as an autonomous entity that entered domestic space as a stranger and withdraws from this alienating space at their own will (reacting to the cold and distant mother), which creates a discourse of distance in space (466). In this way, the spatial metaphors are aimed to create a common discourse of the cause and right treatment of autism and create a binary opposition between "'normalcy' and 'abnormalcy'" (466-467).

Broderick and Ne'eman propose to dismantle the metaphors of the alien and the shell as oppressing narratives of the child that has become autistic because of an aloof mother. The discourse of a conscious transgression of space (entering space as an alien, and withdrawing from space by creating a shell between the self and the world around it) supposedly refers to a psychoanalytic theory on the

origins of autism that has already been rejected by mainstream clinical discourse as a wrongful absence of parental affection. Nevertheless, the outmoded spatial metaphors are still used in contemporary discourse, Broderick and Ne'eman argue. Elaborating on Leo Kanner's hypothesis that autistic children have aloof parents, Bettelheim compared the lives of autistic children with his own experiences in the Dachau concentration camp, concluding that children do not have the opportunities to be emotionally nurtured in a milieu that causes distress. He thus pleaded for a space for autistic children that was devoid of parental influences. This implies an assumption that autism originates within a conscious negotiation between the child and their milieu. Since then, the psychoanalytic discourse of the "refrigerator mother" has been rejected in favor of a neurodevelopmental view of autism, pioneered by the American psychologist Bernard Rimland (Feinstein, 2010). Broderick and Ne'eman also consider autism to be a "neurological condition", but criticize the metaphor of disease that has often been used by American autism lobby group and present the discourse of current self-advocacy movements as a counter-narrative that brings up metaphors of *neurodiversity*, in which diversity in neurobiology is accepted as a difference, just as humans differ in race, sexuality, and ethnicity (Broderick and Ne'eman, 2008: 467-474).

No 'autism' without spaces

Broderick and Ne'eman do not further address the dismissed spatial metaphors, while I would like to argue that an emphasis on space in a study of the discourse of autism in art and culture can help to create new *counter-metaphors* on autism as a reaction to common language on autism and the pathologization of human difference, intended to empower autistic people themselves and to offer a resisting view towards dominant pathologized constructs of autism. Broderick and Ne'eman's account of the spatial metaphors is too limited, because it solely describes the notion of transgressing space on the basis of the "refrigerator mothers" theory; in fact, I would like to argue that they do not address the exact nature of the discussion of space *itself* thoroughly enough. A discussion of space, embodiment and materiality as represented in films, novels, autobiographies and documentaries can offer such an account of space within attempts to call a discourse on autism into being.

The notion of space may seem to be vague and general to some: naturally, one is always surrounded by space, since our conscious perception is focused on entities that can be located anywhere. I think it is exactly these facts that makes my emphasis on space relevant. I consider discourses on autism as constructs that are always shaped within an interaction between bodies and the stimuli that people are confronted with on a regular basis – and these stimuli are always located in a given space. Regardless of the exact cause of autism, which I do not want to consider in my personal research, the

characteristics of autistic behavior, like the communication problems, the failure to sustain social relationships and the strict persistence on routine, can only be detected within a given delimited space. In these spaces, a given person relates themselves to the people and stimuli around him, and they themselves as well as others can determine whether the resulting behavior fits into contemporary notions of autism.

In line with this, it is important to realize that social spaces are not neutral, but political. The arrangement of spaces can determine who can enter, freely move and communicate, and who cannot. For example, the organization of a classroom, with its distinctive arrangement of a blackboard at the front and rows of school desks at the back, creates a hierarchical division between a teacher, who is able to stand (and thus to survey) and to speak without the permission of another person present, and a group of students, who are wished to uninterruptedly sit down, to stay quiet, and to ask permission in order to be able to speak. The classroom therefore constructs and confirms a distribution of power, and thus a possibility for speech and discourse, that is normalized during daily practice, so that one takes for granted the arrangements of spaces and does not question it.

In the case of autism, deviant behavior is detected and classified as pathologized difference by authority figures within the classroom, as well as the family home and the office of the clinician. This means that the labeling of people as being autistic (and thus the attribution of 'autism' as a discourse) occurs within a given distribution of power in space. In this regard, space is the material "historical a priori" that constitutes 'truths' on autism (Foucault, 1972) and the subjective lived experiences of deviance that is pathologized as tokens of autism consists of misfit in this space (Garland-Thomson, 2011). A person that is considered autistic 'derives' their deviance not only from the stimuli that are located in space, but also from notions of knowledge and power that are constructed and confirmed within a given arrangement of space. This is why I think it is of great importance to focus on space in a consideration of autism as a discourse in art and culture, which represent and frames spaces.

From 'autos' to 'atopos'

Spaces are presented and represented in arts and culture by means of specific words or a specific visual vocabulary, and it is my aim to reveal the exact nature of these 'renderings'. The depiction of space in film, documentaries, literature, and biographies influences the way in which people with and without autism move through it and thus construct and maintain a discourse of autism – after all, the way in which space is represented is in fact an arrangement of space, in which people experience the impact of stimuli and are given or denied the ability to speak and move freely, in accordance with prevalent power distributions.

The spatial autism metaphors that are described by Broderick and Ne'eman fail to offer an adequate and comprehensive discourse to name the words and the visual vocabulary that has been used to depict people with autism moving through space in art and culture. The metaphors of the alien and the shell respectively connote a crossing to and a withdrawal from a 'normal' space by an 'abnormal' other, but do not grasp the exact nature of questions that are raised by representations of autistic people in art and culture, such as those concerning the perception of one's own body, the bodies and personalities of other people, the choreography of social interactions, and the stimuli in spaces. It mainly considers the notion of autism as it is rendered as a term to denote deviance as perceived by the common public and is useful to consider the way in which bodies and subject that are labeled as 'autistic' are positioned as objects of the Othering gaze of the implied reader and watcher of literature and visual culture who is fascinated by the deviant (Murray, 2008a) and hopes to 'understand' people with 'autism' better through the consumption of media. Because my research is specified to negotiations of space, I study the representation of subjects who actively enter and maneuver space. Without ignoring potentially oppressive framings of disability and deviance in art and culture, I thus consider 'autistic' characters as entities with embodied agency (Milton, 2012) that negotiate the materiality of space, actively perceived as *stimuli*, a term lend from Simmel (1903).

In order to grasp (pathologized) discourses of deviance as well as the material reality of active agents in literature and visual culture, I would like to introduce a counter-metaphor that will recur many times in this thesis and that more precisely grasps the notion of autism as a discourse as well as depictions of everyday lived experience in art and culture: the Old Greek word *atopos* (ἄτοπος). The choice for a Old Greek word is a reaction to the etymology of the word 'autism', as the word 'self' connotes a preoccupation with the self, in accordance with the spatial metaphor of the shell. In accordance with Broderick and Ne'eman's article, the shell stands for the isolation from the outside world that is supposedly a result of the introspection of the autistic person, as if they are surrounded by a hard material which separates them from the outside world. Within the image of *atopos*, the word choice 'autos' is actively rejected. This is because of my understanding of autism as a discursive-material entity that takes shape within an interaction with the self and the space in which the self is located, instead of a neurobiological disorder that is characterized by introversion and thus a withdrawal from space.

The word *atopos* fits my understanding of autism in a peculiar way: it consists of the parts 'a', which signifies negation, and 'topos', which means 'place', and as a whole means 'strange', 'improper', and 'out of place'. The very fact that the Old Greek language has a word that refers to space to signify a state of otherness and inappropriateness (something that is *out of place*) is of importance here, since this mirrors both my finding that autism as a discourse of otherness is inextricably linked to space

and Broderick and Ne'eman's metaphor of the alien. When one describes autism as a state of being 'out of place', one thus evokes images of a person that exhibits 'strange' behavior because they originate from 'another place', a place that is not ours, just as a foreigner or a Martian comes from another delimited space.

However, the discourse of autism is used regardless of the actual origins of a given person that identifies themselves as having autism: the autistic person is a stranger irrespective of the fact that they come from a foreign world and thus has transgressed an actual geographical border. Whereas this seems logical, as the image of an alien as described by Broderick and Ne'eman is only a *metaphor*, it is very important when it comes to my notion of atopos. Many concepts and words in the English language are derived from the Old Greek word, and strikingly often, they connote a subversion of borders. For example, the term *atopia* as defined by the German geographer Helmut Willke refers to a world or society without territorial borders in relation to globalization (Willke, 2001: 13). Moreover, in 1923 the immunologists Arthur F. Coca and Robert A. Cooke classified the notion of hypersensitivity to substances as *atopy*, which is still in use to name people with allergies who develop eczema or bronchitis when confronted with allergens (Coca and Cooke, 1923). Again, the parallel between the Old Greek word *atopos* and the subversive notions of space is very interesting and relevant when it comes to my aim to unpack and to give words to autism and perceptions of space in terms of spatial metaphors.

Therefore, I will analyze the representation of autistic people in film within a framework of transgressions of space with the notion of atopos. This concept will be addressed in several ways. As I said before, within the image of the 'alien', the autistic person transgresses borders of the familiar and the strange in terms of 'out of place-ness', even if actual geographical borders are not approached and the actual distance between the same and the other is completely virtual. Furthermore, many cultural expressions show the great intensity of stimuli in space, as perceived by autistic persons, which can be described as the hypersensitivity that is experienced in atopy: while the bodies of people with allergies expand space (in cases of eczema or rash on the skin) or swallow up space (in cases of shortness of breath after inhaling an allergen) as a result of contact with allergens as intense stimuli, people with autism transgress borders between the body and the space surrounding them while experiencing sensory stimulation. As 'atopos' gives the opportunity to broaden words and thoughts, I will refer to people and characters who are identified as autistic in case studies in different terms ('people with autism', 'autistic people', 'people who identify with the concept of autism') so that the reader can choose which term they prefer themselves. In order to avoid unnecessary references to gender, singular they will be used to refer to a hypothetical and unspecified person. This accommodates the large LGBTQIA community within the autism community.

Thesis structure

My thoughts will be explained and substantiated by means of an analysis of my corpus of case studies within the framework of sub-questions that will be the basis of the chapters that will follow. Each chapter contains a comparative analysis of two case studies that are chosen because of their relevance to the academic and public debate on representations of autism and disability. My case studies consist of Hollywood productions, novels, and media that feature the voices of actual people who identify with the concept of autism, like YouTube videos, autobiographies, and documentaries. Each chapter clearly identifies a sub-question surrounding culture, representations of space, and my atopus counter-metaphor, and is structured as an elaborate answer on these questions. Besides comparative textual analyzes, the chapters will contain elaborate explanations of the research methods that are used to address both my case studies and the concept of atopus, as my approaches and techniques are very new and form the backbone of my findings; a 'counter-metaphor' is my very own creation after all. Within my analyzes of the discourse of autism in several cultural texts, my findings, and thus my answers, will be presented and will be accompanied by a consideration of my approach to my case studies.

Within this question-based structure, my findings surrounding my case studies and the atopus counter-metaphor will be structured in such a way that both my approach of the discourse of autism and my critical intervention based on the invention of a new concept are introduced and established in a robust way. Even though all chapters will be focused on the discourse of autism and negotiations of space in cultural objects, they each address and represent a different component of my method of working. My first chapter will show how characters identified as autistic and the use of pathologized language (both autism-related diagnoses and language that is explicitly linked to the cultural practice of diagnosing and treating people, like 'symptoms' that are believed to 'express' themselves) can be studied as discourse that is featured in mediated cultural texts. This will form the groundwork of my second chapter, which will give a closer look to my choice to introduce new concepts as 'counter-metaphors' in my study of the discourse of autism, as the case studies that are analyzed in this part cannot be comprehensively addressed by the word 'autism' alone. Again, this will form the groundwork of the subsequent (and last) chapter, in which I explore the opportunity to use a counter-metaphor within a theoretical framework in my study of cinematic and literary space. Overall, this thesis will thus be pyramidal, as each chapter paves the way for a new one and thus build on a solid structure. Because I intend to create a new self-aware research model that can be carried on in the future, each individual chapter will contain at least one suggestion for further research, based on the findings.

Case studies

Chapter one contains a study of the discourse of autism in the 1988 American film *Rain Man* as well as the 2011 film adaptation of Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Specifically, I analyze the use of autism-related language and the depiction of pathologized deviance with the help of the American philosopher of language John Searle's notion of the *speech act* and the American semiotician C. S. Peirce's ideas on *indexicality*. I will also address contemporary debates on the discursive nature of diagnoses in psychiatry and in autism studies, in which the fallacy *reification* and the Marxist notion of *commodification* play a pivotal role. In this chapter, I critically consider existing literature on the cultural representation of autism and develop my own approach of autism in cultural objects on the basis of this criticism.

Chapter two covers mediated cultural objects that are made by people who identify with the concept of autism. It consists of a textual analysis of two YouTube video's that are posted by amateur filmmakers: the videos "What it's like to walk down the street when you have autism or an ASD" by "Craig Thomson" and "In My Language" by "silentmiaow", a YouTube channel that is owned by the American autistic activist and blogger Amelia Baggs. As this chapter will extensively make use of the atopos counter-metaphor, it further unravels the cultural theory behind atopos and my choice to make use of this word. Therefore, it will employ the phenomenology of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the German psychiatrist Thomas Fuchs, as it will give me a useful apparatus to consider the representation of subjective perceptions of body and space in my case studies, in line of my use of the term 'atopos'. It will also address the notion of the *legendary psychastenia* as developed the French intellectual Roger Caillois.

Chapter three will address two (ultimately overlapping) themes concerning filmic and literary space: the representation of Central London as a typically metropolitan space, and the representation of spaces of encounter with animals. First, it gives a reading of the 2003 novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by the British author Mark Haddon, as well as the British autistic savant Daniel Tammet's 2006 memoirs *Born on a Blue Day*. Both books contain a visit to a public transport facility by an autistic protagonist and therefore enable a close comparison. In order to be able to address urban space, I will refer to the American urban planner Kevin Lynch's ideas on *cognitive mapping*. In the section on animals, I analyze sections of the American primatologist Dawn Prince-Hughes' 2004 memoirs *Songs of the Gorilla Nation*, that features descriptions visits to the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle and the special bond with the silverback gorillas who were held captive there. I compare these sections to two television documentaries that feature the American ethologist Temple Grandin: *The Woman who thinks like a Cow* (2006; part of the British BBC 'Horizon' series).

Grandin struggled with her autism at a young age, but has been a pioneer in animal behavior in the last four decades: her autism helped her to empathize with cattle, which made it easier to develop humane practices in cattle farms and slaughterhouses. I will particularly focus on the representation of her livestock handling designs and her *hug machine* as interventions in space that she has created herself. My reading of these case studies will be enriched by a consideration of various insights from the American cultural theorist Donna Haraway's 2008 book *When Species Meet* and will aim to let go anthropocentrism. The first chapter as a whole will be bound together by the American disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thompson's notion of the *misfit* as a central theme and concept that originates from the field of Disability Studies.

Finally, the conclusion will wrap up my findings and will offer further advice and cautions regarding future projects in academia and/or activism that may arise out of my work. This will offer a final reflection on my specific academic analyzes, actions, and interventions.

What is the discourse of autism in *Rain Man* (1988) and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2011)?

This chapter will offer a reading of two specific case studies, each from Hollywood cinema, that feature the discourse of autism and are therefore of importance for my aim to study the manifestation of the discourse of autism in cultural objects. The Barry Levinson-directed 1988 film *Rain Man*, featuring the American actor Dustin Hoffman in the title role of the autistic brother of actor Tom Cruise's character, is of great cultural significance and has been analyzed in several academic publications (see Baker, 2008; Beek, 2011; Draaisma, 2009; Murray, 2008a; Murray, 2008b). It is one of the quintessential popular depictions of the disorder that has created a solid connection between the public awareness of autism and the portrayal of Hoffman's character (Baker, 2008: 229). Stuart Murray, who has extensively written on the cultural representation of autism in film declared *Rain Man* "the foundational text for all the various contemporary representations of autism, the breakthrough story that gave the condition a public profile" (Murray, 2008a: 84). *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, directed by Stephen Daldry and released in 2011, is less well-known for its depiction of autism but nevertheless features the discourse despite the fact that autism-related language cannot be found in the eponymous 2005 Jonathan Safran Foer.

The comparative study between these two specific case studies that is presented in this chapter will disclose differences between the use of autism-related terminology and the cinematic representation of pathologized deviance through time, as the films were released 23 years apart from each other. In line of the main research question that is presented in this thesis, the reading have a special focus on space and will highlight the difference between the road trip through the United States that is undertaken by the two brothers in *Rain Man* and the walks through New York City that Oskar undertakes in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. For the sake of brevity, the latter film will be referred to as *Extremely Loud* from now on. The textual analysis will be complemented by a comprehensive consideration of the study of autism as a discourse, which will offer a template for the approach of the discourse of autism for the upcoming chapters and could be further developed in future research projects into the topic.

A textual analysis of the case studies and a definition of the study of autism in culture as a discourse has resulted in the following findings: whilst *Rain Man* involves an entrance in a new and clearly delimited space where the protagonist is informed about "high-functioning autism" by a clinician, Oskar mentions a possibility of "Asperger's disease", with language based on a remark from his father, in a domestic space that he can enter within the ranges of his free access to New York City.

Rain Man introduced the wider public to the discourse of autism, but *Extremely Loud* and *Incredibly Close* already assumes background knowledge on autism and smoothly integrates the possibility of Asperger's Syndrome ("disease") into the narrative of the traumatic loss of the father. On a visual and textual level, tokens of deviancy in the case studies as a whole are indexes of pathologized human difference as shown on-screen, which mainly comes to the fore in certain negotiations of space by the characters within the cinematic frame of independent shots.

In the presentation of these findings and the words that accompany them, I will start with a short consideration of the study of the discourse of autism as a in the cultural object with a constructionist approach of meaning (Hall, 1997: 25) in cultural texts and pathologized language that forms a component of these texts. I will present a corpus of cultural theory as well as critical stances on the process of diagnosing people as a theoretical groundwork for this choice. I will then explain how my approach of the cultural representation of autism deviates from existing literature on this subject, and will critically consider the works of Stuart Murray, Mark Osteen, Douwe Draaisma, and Jennifer Sarrett. Together, these parts will offer enough information on the approach of cultural objects and autism as a discourse within these objects, and will form a theoretical framework for the textual analyzes of respectively the use of autistic-related words and the portrayal of pathologized difference in *Rain Man* and *Extremely Loud*. The analysis of pathologized difference outside of verbal and textual uses of pathologized language will be accompanied by a discussion of semiotics in order to make clear how a film that features the discourse of autism can convey disability and pathology through cinematic means. As the academic approach to the cultural object is strongly highlighted and in itself constitute the very findings that are presented in this thesis, the I-form will be used in the discussions of specific choices considering this approach.

My approach of the discourse of autism in speech and culture

Both *Rain Man* and *Extremely Loud* employ words and terminology that are linked to autism and feature characters who are identified as having or as potentially having autism. I employ a study of the discourse of autism in culture in its constructive quality, which means that one creates a reality with words, a narrative structure, editing, and a *mise-en-scène*. The latter term here refers to the organization of matter within the frame, either moving or motionless (Gibbs, 2002: 1). I do not consider films as a reflection onto a reality outside of the cultural object itself, no matter how much a certain film seem to mirror reality. In my analysis of cultural objects, I thus attempt to acquire meaning, and in my approach, this meaning is enclosed within the mediated object itself. Within the field of semiotics as the study of signs, the relationship between that what refers and that what is being referred to in a sign has been perceived as arbitrary (Saussure, 2011 [1959]: 67-70); the

relation between the linguistic construct 'tree' refers to an actual tree but could also have been used for another concept or material entity. Nevertheless, just because this arbitrary condition create the exact necessity for language that I try to capture when thinking about the discourse of autism, it is relevant to study signs in relation to themselves; after all, one person cannot suddenly decide to call a tree a 'bree' in the English language, as no-one will understand this person, which will hamper everyday speech. This invites me to think about 'autism' as a signifier in and of itself: how has the sign of autism come into being, how do people uphold the arbitrary relationship between the word and the condition that it refers to?

In my study of 'autism', I solely look at the way the discourse of autism, has been created out of the cinematic means that have been available and the choices that have been made in order to produce the film in the way it appears to the spectator. Without the use of terminology surrounding autism, the case studies would have been different cultural objects. I will elaborate on this by further enunciate my approach by linking it to debates on language and signs in the philosophy of language (Searle, 1969: 4), the philosophy of science, and psychiatry.

This study of the discourse of autism as a certain construct is inspired by the notion of the speech act as developed by the respectively British and American philosophers of language J. L. Austin (1911-1960) and J. R. Searle (1932-). In his work *How to do Things with Words*, J. L. Austin described performatives as utterances that not merely describe or illustrate reality, but actively change it by means of an act. If one pronounces the name of a stillborn child or ship ("I shall call you..."), one is actively engaged in the action of giving something a name, which cannot be true or false, but instead creates a new reality in and of itself (Austin, 1962: 6). This brings up a notion of language as something that is not created to mirror pre-existing everyday experiences, but instead is involved in the creation of this everyday reality. Within speech that is used to declare things (This tree over there...) and not specifically to describe things (This tree is big and has blossoms) in a certain context in which people expect a plant to be declared as such and in which the language is intended to declare something a tree according to taken-for-granted social rules, language is something that is actively performed. In his 1969 book *Speech Acts*, Searle hypothetically states that the use of language is grounded on social rules, which means that speaking language equals being engaged in a speech act. According to Searle, "all linguistic communication involves linguistic acts", as it involves the rising language through the speech act instead of the mere sentence or word itself (16).

What I will adopt from the notion of the speech act and the realization that speech is performative is the fact that one 'does' the discourse of autism and that the notion of a discourse of autism as delineated by me as an object of study is grounded in this understanding of language as a

performative act. This is a way for me as a researcher to consciously and clearly delimit my exact object of study and thus my research question. I only inquire 'autism' and in its quality as pathologized language, which I employ as a neutral name for words and concepts that are developed and/or classified within a clinical context. 'Autism' needs its peculiar employment of language, so that people know how to act and react in everyday social situations and communication in such a way that it feels natural and is taken for granted. It thus exists exactly within this widely shared process, to such an extent that each expression of the word 'autism' contributes to the constitution of the discourse of autism. This implies that each document that features the word 'autism' can (and should) be studied by means of a discourse analysis in order to fully understand the development of the discourse of autism, and that I am specifying in only a part of the available texts on autism, that is, arts and culture. For my reading of *Rain Man* and *Extremely Loud*, I am sensible of freedoms and restrictions within the discourse as enacted by the performativity of 'autism', as one enacts and sustains power by extending and delimiting that what can and what cannot be said on the topic. Because of this, the act of executing a 'discourse analysis' refers to the systematic practice of exactly this sensibility, as I look at the things, words, and images that can and cannot be used in a cultural object from a certain time and place that features terminology surrounding 'autism' (Foucault, 1972).

On the basis of this approach of discourse analysis, I would like to state that the discourse of autism can only be found and studied in cultural objects, as the discourse of autism cannot exist and flourish outside of the agreement and confirmation on its existence. The Canadian philosopher Ian Hacking's notion of *making up people* enriches this choice, as it argues that diseases and disorders are creations of a given moment in time and classifications of people affects the people who are labeled with the help of them as well as the classifications themselves (Hacking, 1986: 161-162, 171). Nevertheless, I would like to stress the importance of studying the way in which pathologized language affects all people, instead of just the persons who are labeled (171), as I am interested in the implications of pathologized language for society and culture as a whole. The person expresses suspicions of autism towards another person and the person who offers formal support to a person who identify with the concept of autism are just as much affected by the discourse of autism as the person who identifies with the discourse of autism themselves.

Additionally, debates within psychiatry on the ethical and epistemological consequences of the act of diagnosis form an enriching source of considerations and opportunities to further define autism as a discourse. The Dutch psychiatrist Edo Nieweg warns against processes of reification in his specialist literature on the topic (Nieweg, 2005: 687). Reification is a rhetorical flaw in which an abstract concept is presented and conceptualized as a concrete material reality (Nieweg, 2005: 688). 'Autism' does also imply a concrete 'disease entity' (689) that exemplifies something universal (transcends

individuality) out of the peculiar and individual. Therefore, it is prone to reifying language: in everyday speech, people are said to be “affected” by autism (Families Affected by Autism, 2013), and in clinically classified language, language that suggest a clear-cut disorder obscure the status of autism-related classifications like PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder *Not Otherwise Specified*, my emphasis) in the DSM-IV as a remainder category (692). Nieweg states that reification increases the occurrence of circular reasoning in the clinical world (as one cannot say “I have traits similar to autism because I have PDD-NOS”, as PDD-NOS already point out exactly these autism-like traits in its very definition, which invalidates the causal relationship that is invoked here), obscures the fact that many classified disorders are defined that way through agreements amongst clinics rather than scientifically proven facts, and naively seeks for ‘true’ autism that can be uncovered by means of research (693). It is fruitful to adopt this criticism from inside the clinical world in a study to the discourse of autism.

The notion of reification is something to avoid in my study and something to be wary of in academic literature on autism. Reified language obscures the fact that the language surrounding disorders depends on discourse and agreements made by clinicians, rather than pre-linguistic and biological explanations. My task is to disclose reification in order to highlight discourse. The conscious delimitation of the study of autism to discourse is also aimed at negating reification in my own arguments, creating room for the study of language, speech and culture as actual entities instead. In practice, this means that I will not adopt language like ‘displaying traits of autism’ and ‘autism spectrum disorder’ myself and will only study this in my case studies as a part of my textual analysis. As a scholar in the field of Cultural Studies (see also Waltz, 2005), my task is to precede assumptions on ‘autism’ in order to be able to critically reflect on the discourse of autism as a speech act, in order to act as a clean slate myself.

My study of ‘autism’ as a reified speech act does not allege or assert anything about the ontology of autism (Nadesan, 2005: 2). I simply do not have the qualifications to say anything about this. Studying autism as a discourse does not negate the possibility of the existence of autism in any way, as phenomena like art and the economy do not have biological origins as well and are widely considered to be real and actual nevertheless. What is important for now is that I study cultural depictions as historically and geographically specific cultural objects that themselves are products of the process of ‘doing’ the discourse of autism that is present in society as a whole: in slurs, in formal and informal discussions on deviance, in speculations on someone’s mental health, etcetera. My case studies form delimited entities in which a discourse of autism comes into being: through a study of actual textual elements that are present in the case studies, the social and cultural ‘choice’ to frame human diversity as ‘autistic’ can be analyzed by looking at these elements.

Deviating from existing literature on cultural representations of autism

Previous literature on the cultural representation of autism tend to employ a strongly mimetic stance on cultural objects, assuming that art gives a mirror onto the 'real' and film fails to do that and offers a 'misrepresentation' instead. Such a mimetic approach is very tenaciously present in almost all of the literature that is available on the subject. In 2005, a conference on representations of autism was held at Case Western University, which resulted in the 2008 book *Autism and Representation*, edited by Mark Osteen. Divided into parts on clinical accounts on autism, art made by people who identify with autism, autistic biographies, and popular depictions of autism, the book chapters in *Autism and Representation* frequently use ideas from neurology, cognitive neuroscience, and the like as theoretical frameworks in textual analyzes of case studies (Berger, 2008). Stuart Murray has published several articles on the cultural representation of autism and published his book *Representing Autism: Culture, Narrative, Fascination* in 2008. Before him, Autism Studies scholar Mitzi Waltz has written and lectured about depictions and metaphors of autism (see Waltz, 2003). Other articles come from Dutch psychiatrist Douwe Draaisma (2009), the American neuro-ethicist Jennifer Sarrett (2011), and several MA students who have written their MA thesis (see Beek, 2011; Palen, 2014).

Most of these sources explicitly employ a reflective approach towards their case studies, as many arguments that are made in them carry the assumption that the meaning of a work lies in a reality that is assumed to be mirrored (Hall, 2007: 24). Here, the reality is thought to be lied in personal accounts of people who identify with the concept of autism as well as in quantitative research. As Sarrett writes: "Many in the autism community concerned about the misrepresentation of people who are 'on the spectrum', attribute faulty depictions to a lack of 'autistic voices; informing the public of their realities and the ways they would like to be portrayed" (Sarrett, 2011: 142), also counts clinical language as a misrepresentation (144). Formulations like this assumes a clearly delimited 'reality' of 'autism', often defined as the voices of autistic people themselves, that is made opaque by art and culture. As the American film studies scholar Mark Osteen says in his introduction of *Autism and Representation*, "movies have placed a screen between their audience and any authentic sense of life with autism" because of persistent "stereotypes" (Osteen, 2008: 30).

Even though the intention to represent and do justice to the everyday lived experience of people who identify with the concept of autism themselves is commendable, a strong mimetic stance on cultural depictions of autism as either 'right' or 'wrong' is not compatible with my Cultural Studies approach that emphasizes the discourse of autism as performative and constructive. Within the study of images, the study of "resemblances" is rejected by thinkers such as the American

philosopher Nelson Goodman (1906-1998), who criticizes the assumption that any object can be copied with a passive “innocent eye” that transcends space, time, and bias (Goodman, 1968: 6-8). This view is shared by many academics in the field of Cultural Studies (see Peeren, 2006: 68). My consideration of Nieweg and Hacking has comparably shown that the eye that looks at ‘autism’ or ‘people with autism’ is not passive but instead discriminates and classifies and thus actively (but unconsciously, as this is a process that is completely embedded in everyday society) contributes to the cultural construction of the notion of ‘autism’.

Nevertheless, academics like Murray tend to reify ‘autism’ as a pre-discursive entity in their textual analyzes and do not account for their approach of ‘autism’ like I do here. In the conclusion of *Representing Autism*, Murray writes: “Just as autism has always exist, so it will always exist” and explains the study in his book as “how autism is being framed and discussed across a wide range of narratives [...] and has sought to explain the ways in which it operates as a curious fascination of the present” (Murray, 2008a: 207). This description precisely point out the danger of falling into reification and circular reasoning that is continuously present in his work, as he frames ‘autism’ as an entity on which discourse is projected. ‘Autism’ is untied from its spatiotemporal status as a nominal category (Nadesan, 2005: 9) by means of the inclusion of literary case studies that precede the discourse of autism. This is especially evident in his reading of the American author Herman Melville’s 1853 story “Bartleby the Scrivener” as a literary text on autistic presence (Murray, 2008a: 50). ‘Autism’ as a category did not even exist as a word back in 1853, and therefore, reading ‘autistic presence’ into it is inherently a time-bound choice rather than a disclosure of an entity within the text. In that case, ‘Reading’ ‘autism’ becomes an act of “conjuring up a rabbit that has been stuffed into the hat beforehand”, to borrow Nieweg’s reification metaphor (Nieweg, 2005: 693; my translation). Subsequently, concerning circular reasoning, Murray presents a question that already contains his main argument: that autism in cultural objects is being presented to the public as an object of curiosity at the expense of the complexities of the lived experience of people with autism, failing to affirm these “presences” in the world (Murray, 2008a: xviii). The vague and unspecified nature of terminology such as “fascination” and “presence” worsens the risk of falling into circular reasoning as their unspecified nature limits potential definitions, that will produce a mere repetition of the use of the word in his text *as if* it was a definition on its own. In order to clearly mark out “fascination” and “presence” as a theoretical foundation, he could easily have referred to the postcolonial scholar Edward Said’s notion of exotic othering (Milton, 2014a) and studies on the phenomenology of social reality (Milton, 2014b), respectively.

The major flaw of these studies into the “paradigm of (mis)representation” of autism (Murray, 2008b: 244) is that they obscure that they themselves are involved in the active and performative

autism meaning-making process, just like any other citizen or cultural object. Murray himself discursively declares the 'presence' of 'autistic presence' in cultural objects exactly because he is involved in studying cultural representations of 'autism'. As discourse transcends individual will, like I stated in my tree example, everyone is 'culpable' of this, However, since Murray is a Humanities scholar himself, it should be his task to disclose this. This thesis will try to do so nevertheless.

In comparison with previous literature, I try to avoid circular reasoning on reified objects and employ a more constructivist notion of culture. I study the occurrence of words and signs in a cultural object rather than an assumed entity of human difference in an opaque mirror. I both consider the use of pathologized language in and of itself as well as imagery of human difference that accompany those words. My textual analysis is based on the study of cinematic elements or means in my case studies in order to fully do justice to the material of the case studies themselves rather than an assumed materiality behind the discourse of autism. My critical analysis is thus an academic intervention that is explicitly aimed towards a focus on material: cultural objects solidify the circulation of a discourse in culture and delimits what can and cannot be said or shown with regard to the discourse of autism.

The use of autism-related words in *Rain Man* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

In this analysis of the use of autism-related terminology, that is, high-functioning autism in *Rain Man* and "Asperger's disease" in *Extremely Loud*, I adopt my study of autism as a discourse and my constructionist approach to cultural objects to a close reading of the scenes that feature said words. As this involves a dissection of each scene into specific choices in editing, spoken text, and mise-en-scène, this means in this case that the cultural objects are nothing more than the sum of and interplay between those choices and that the characters, including those who are identified as autistic, are perceived as nothing more than the direct constructions out of these cinematic means. I do not assume a reality behind these constructs, but consider cultural texts as a mediated expression of speech on autism and container of the discourse of autism as it is embedded in time and space. A cultural object features cinematic elements to explore, as they create a concrete thing out of the discourse of autism that is made unconsciously present, embedded in society, and internalized by individuals.

In *Rain Man*, the discourse of autism is inherently bound to the cinematic space of Wallbrook, the institution in which the character Raymond resides. The narrative revolves around the greedy yuppie Charlie, who misses out on the inheritance of his late father, excepting a car, and seeks for the anonymous trustee of the money. This leads him to Wallbrook (a name that is seen engraved on the entrance in establishing shots) (figure 1), where he encounters several inhabitants with a visible disability (figure 2). Being surprised about the secrecy of his father's links to the institution, he finally

encounters a man who has barged into his car outside. Clinician dr. Bruner verbally confirms that the man is Charlie's brother Raymond.

The scene that immediately follows features a shot that pans from a frame that captures Raymond, his personal assistant, and Charlie's girlfriend watching *The People's Court* (the tune is heard) on TV in Raymond's room (figure 3), to Charlie and Bruner, who are located on a hallway (figure 4). Raymond's room and the hallway are separated by a mirror that reflects Raymond and his PA and a thick brown wooden wall. "Is he crazy?" the spectator hears Charlie say. "No", Bruner replies. Charlie asks again "Is he retarded?", which is also repudiated. Charlie's reaction "But he is here" reflects his lack of knowledge and words regarding both disability and the nature of Wallbrook as an institution: if Raymond is neither "crazy" nor "retarded", what else could he be? Bruner then fills Charlie's discursive void and introduces the term 'autism': "He is an autistic savant". Charlie does not know what it means, which underscores that the word is new. Bruner expounds the word by placing it into a historical context ("They used to be called 'idiot savants'") and referring to skills and deficiencies. He corrects Charlie's use of the word "retarded" with "high-functioning autistic" and defines the latter as a communication and sensory processing disorder. *Rain Man's* road movie plot is foreshadowed in Bruner's remark that Raymond has to protect himself against dangers by strict routines, as the plot continues with Charlie's choice take Raymond away from Wallbrook in an attempt to bring him to his attorney, whilst Raymond still sticks to daily routines like watching *The People's Court*. In conclusion of the scene, the MacGuffin of Charlie's greed (see Wang, 2014; Epstein and Wiesner, 2013) Charlie's attempt to retrieve his father's inheritance initially drives the plot but becomes less important when Charlie and Raymond grow closer together) is contrasted by Bruner's remark that Raymond does not understand the concept of money.

In this scene, Charlie is thus introduced to the discourse of autism, a discourse that he himself as an outsider does not speak but that is bound by the borders of the cinematic space of Wallbrook and its residents. Douwe Draaisma, a psychiatrist himself, confirms the importance of the "white-coat scene" in cinematic narrative, but interprets its lack in later films as a sign of the occurrence of "autism stereotypes" (Draaisma, 2009: 1476-1477). This suggest that expertise could and should be evident in a cinematic narrative. However, in my constructionist study of the discourse of autism, expertise is a cinematic construct in which a certain discourse of autism comes into being. The word "autism", specified by the words "savant" and "high-functioning", is used by Bruner, a character who Charlie encounters for the first time within Wallbrook and who emphasizes the many years he has spent with Raymond there. As the film clearly establishes Bruner's connection to Wallbrook as a cinematic time-space, the presentation of space and time allows Bruner to be able to employ precise clinical language surrounding autism and intelligence ('savant'), of which he stresses its changeability

through time. Charlie is not bound to Wallbrook and is thus stuck to crude slurs like “retard”. For the sake of the dramatic unity of time, place, and action (see Butcher, 1951), Bruner refers to two characteristics of Raymond’s autism that are relevant to the plot to come: his lack of understanding money and his dependency on routines like watching *The People’s Court*.

The discourse of autism is not confined to a specific place and cinematic construction of expertise in *Extremely Loud*: the protagonist himself briefly mentions “Asperger’s disease” in connection to his own “oddness” during one of his travels through New York City. In the aftermath of his father’s death during the Twin Tower attack on 11 September 2001, Oskar finds a key in a vase. A locksmith endorses that the key had once belonged to a ‘Black’. Determined to continue the series of scavenger hunts that he undertook with his father, he decides to visit every single person called ‘Black’ in New York City. The first ‘Black’ he seeks out and encounters, Abby Black, lets him enter her home. After Oskar discusses a picture of an elephant and recalls what he knows about them, Abby’s husband shouts at her and walks down the stairs while calling someone. The tension on Abby’s face suggests marital problems, which is underlined by her remarks about her divorce at the end of the film. Abby sits down the stairs, crying, when she remarks: “You must think this is very odd”. Oskar says (figure 5): “Oh, I think a lot of things are odd. People tell me I’m very odd all the time. I got tested once to see if I had Asperger’s disease. Dad said it’s for people who are smarter than everybody else but can’t run straight. Tests weren’t definitive.” Abby does not respond to this recall (figure 6). Oskar then resumes his references to his father, asking Abby if she is sure she does not know him.

The scene during which the discourse of autism is used is part of a larger plot element that involves an individually planned quest for the right lock, which largely consists of unsupervised walks through the urban space and selected number of domestic places in New York City. *Extremely Loud* does not feature a place in which the discourse of autism are confined and where characters are explicitly constructed as experts. Instead, Oskar recalls his Asperger’s syndrome test in a reaction to Abby’s remark on the strange situation that she assumes Oskar is finding himself in, ignoring her reference to her husband. He paraphrases words of his own father, who is not depicted as an autism expert but as an employee in the World Trade Center instead. His language is neither completely informed (like that of Bruner) nor informed (like that of Charlie), as he uses the word ‘disease’ rather than the formal definition “Asperger’s Disorder” or “Asperger’s Syndrome” (used in the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), that was applied by the clinical world from 1994 until 2014) and employs a spatial metaphor of not being able to ‘run straight’ (that is, determined and in the ‘right’ direction) instead of a set of characteristics like both the DSM and *Rain Man*’s use of the word ‘autism’ do (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Oskar’s remark about “tests” that “were not definitive” points at the appearance of the discourse of autism as a discourse that *potentially* applies

to him, contrary to Brumer's unambiguous statement that Raymond 'is' an autistic savant. Overall, Oskar's use of the term "Asperger's disease" does not establish any character as autistic nor any kind of cinematic space as a place where the discourse of autism resides, a term I borrow from the concept of the establishing shot from film analysis (Bordwell, 2003: 17), but instead functions in a fluid constellation of cinematic space and a representation of autism expertise.

It is exactly this fluidity that makes a performative and constructionist approach of the cinematic world of *Extremely Loud* even more relevant. Oskar is a cinematic construct and not a person in flesh and blood. His words does not mean that clinicians could not ascertain whether he actually has Asperger's Syndrome or not, as the spectator does not get to see anything of this. The only moment in the film which the discourse of autism is called up is during the scene that has been analyzed here. Within the visual vocabulary of the film and the specific choices of cinematic measures that I have dissected, the discourse of autism is fleshed out as a brief mention of "Asperger's disease", followed by the remark that tests results were not definitive. These two formulations exists next to each other and together bring a discourse of autism into being: 'autism' is acted out by the word "Asperger's", while the latter remark adds further ambiguity to the viewer.

Indexes of deviance in *Rain Man* and *Extremely Loud*

A mere occurrence of spoken words related to the discourse of autism is not enough and should be accompanied by a consideration of mise-en-scène, montage in the film as a whole. This should be done carefully, in line of my aim to approach the discourse of autism with a blank slate: for me, the pronunciation of autism does not mean that a character 'has' autism, and as a Cultural Studies scholar, I do not intend to disclose a person's 'autism' and reify it as a concrete thing within a film. Instead, I am concerned with the way in which pathologized deviance is made evident with cinematic means.

This is why it is important to ask a broader question here: in which way does one construct stances on human difference outside of pathologized language in and outside cultural objects? I will give an answer to this question with the help of the American semiotician C. S. Peirce (1839-1914) and his notion of indexicality as a classification of signs. This will build on the performative quality of the discourse of autism by means of a closer consideration of the question how deviance and disability is signified in society.

In his study of the relation of the sign to the object its refers to, as presented in his text "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs", Peirce identifies three kinds of signs in a trichotomy (Peirce, 1955: 101-102). First, an icon possesses and shares some characteristics with the referred object (102). An

abstracted depiction of a person in a wheelchair, used for disabled toilets and disability parking sign, is an icon for disability. Second, a symbol does not resemble the referred object but instead denotes the object on the basis of cultural laws and practice (102). The puzzle piece is a famous symbol of autism (see McGuire and Michalko, 2011: 162). I will focus on the index, which is a sign that does not necessarily have any resemblance to its object of reference or any peculiar characteristic in and of itself, but instead is “affected” by the object itself (Peirce, 1955: 102, 107). As Peirce states: “[the index] is in dynamical (including spatial) connection both with the individual object, on the one hand, and with the senses or memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign, on the other hand” (107). Smoke indicates fire, because the presence of fire has directly produced the presence of smoke, and thus, the object (fire) has affected the occurrence and appearance of the sign (smoke) itself. As smoke indicates fire, it can be seen as a proof of a fire in the eyes of the person who perceives it. Smoke can also be a “probable indication” (108) for something else, like a person who smokes a cigarette.

In the discourse of autism, and of any disability, the study of indexes is particularly fruitful, as it opens up a view of the construction of the discourse of autism and in society as something that is greatly driven by expectations of indexes. The DSM classifies and defines “Autism Spectrum Disorders” as a list of “diagnostic criteria” of symptoms that appear to the user of the book during the act of examining an individual (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In clinical examinations, the symptom as it appears to the examiner is an index of an illness (Deledalle, cited in Gross and Harmon, 2014: 45), and in the case of autism in the DSM, the indexical signs are behavioral patterns in an individual. The discourse of autism is thus grounded in signs, that is, traits, behavior, and symptoms, that appear before a perceiver who is known with ‘autism’ as an object (otherwise, the perceiver will not be able to see signs as indexes of autism as the link with the referred object cannot be made). These signs are perceived to be directly affected by the object of ‘autism’. The indexical quality of the discourse of autism can be found in everyday speech. Indexes are not confined to the timely ritual of the examination, as charity funds often urge the wider public to “learn the early warning signs of autism” in a child (McGuire, 2013: 100). People are described or describe themselves as persons who “display traits of autism” as a taken-for-granted formulation, even in literature on the cultural representation of autism (see Murray 2008a: 111, 143, 178, 180). This discloses the relationship between the sign and the person who perceives it as an index: the word ‘display’ implies a perceiver of the sign as it is used in order to denote an intended ‘to-be-perceived-ness’. The lack of instant indexes points proves its importance for the discourse of autism and disability even more, as ‘autism’ is often called an ‘invisible’ or ‘hidden’ disability (see Osteen, 2008: 4-6). Here, the utterance of the term ‘hidden disability’ offers a verbal compensation for this lack.

Indexical signs are thus omnipresent in the discourse of autism and disability, to such an extent that a failure to offer clear indexes leads to compensational strategies.

What could Peirce's notion of indexes specifically mean for the study of cultural objects? As I argued before, it is not enough to just look at scenes in which 'autism' is uttered, as a textual analysis should cover a cultural object and its narrative as a whole. In one of his examples of indexes, Peirce describes two men who respectively point out and perceive a chimney that is on fire, and a traveler who encounters the perceiver. When this man declares that the chimney is on fire, the traveler asks for more details regarding the house on which the chimney in question is placed. According to Peirce: "[The traveler] desires some *index* which shall connect his apprehension with the house meant" (Pierce, 1955: 109; original emphasis). This particular desire is of concern to me in my study of the discourse of autism in cultural objects. When a particular person is verbally referred to as autistic, the curious will ask further questions like: 'How does their autism reveals itself? How can one tell they have autism?', and so on. Similarly, a film can satiate the desire for indexes, invoked by utterances of the term 'autism' in relation to a character, by delivering imagery that contains indexes of deviance in relation to the remaining characters. In the following readings of both films, I will consider visual, aural, and verbal indexes of (pathologized) deviance outside of utterances of the word 'autism' or analogous terminology.

Rain Man is particularly saturated with indexes of deviancy. Indexes of Raymond's deviance are overabundant in its plot, in which Charlie and Raymond travel through the United States by car in an attempt to reach Charlie's attorney and eventually grow closer together. Many of them have already been analyzed in previous literature. In her MA thesis, Anne van de Beek points out the film's tendency to depict visualized tokens of deviance that underline Raymond as a deviant and out-of-place character: he is shown wearing too tight clothing and carrying props like a portable television during several scenes throughout the movie (Beek, 2011: 29-30). Furthermore, Murray narrows his focus to the juxtaposition of indexes of autism with indexes of exceptional intellectual ability (Murray, 2008a: 102), with which he argues that popular depictions of autism have privileged the savant figure to such an extent that it has led to "misapprehensions of the actual nature of autism" (Murray, 2006: 31).

In addition to this, I would like to point out Raymond's negotiations of space as indexes of deviance that is pathologized as "high-functioning autism", as this fits the central focus of my thesis and its research question. In each scene in which Raymond is featured, Raymond makes small rocking bodily movements with his head, upper body and legs that the other characters do not make. This acting choice is visible and apparent within the *mise-en-scène* of the film but rarely impacts the plot. The

movements prompt Raymond's brother Charlie, who is not identified as autistic and who has not mastered the discourse of autism as constructed in the film, to repress these movements or take advantage of them. For example, the scene in which Raymond refuses to fly with any airline company with a history of plane crashes ends with a long take of Charlie getting mad at and forcing him to grab the backpack that he is holding in his hands. The two, framed right in the middle of a shot and moving towards a blurred crowd in the background, walk away (figure 7). Whilst Charlie walks with unfaltering steps, Raymond shuffles in the same fashion as the occasional rocking movements. Charlie makes a few pulling movements with the backpack in order to urge him to follow his steady pace and stop staring distractedly at unseen objects (figure 8). This particular shot and its mise-en-scène thus exemplifies Raymond's deviance by comparing his particular negotiation of space to that of Charlie's, whilst Charlie visibly attempts to seize control over this deviance. This notion of control is dropped when Charlie decides to use Raymond's eidetic memory to his own advantage and to blend him in with the slick space of Las Vegas and its casinos (figure 9). He tries to learn Raymond, now sharply dressed, how to dance by joining his tilting movements and small steps with his feet while giving instructions (figure 10). Even though Raymond's movements are equally present throughout the film, the way in which Charlie reacts and interacts with these movements constitute a specific plot motive.

Scenes in which Raymond moves away from Charlie and walks freely through urban space are indexes of pathologized difference that mirror the notion of wandering in clinical literature. The British PhD student in clinical disability studies Steve Graby laments the classification of 'wandering' as a medical diagnosis in his 2011 talk "Wandering Minds", stating that it easily pathologizes the walking behavior of people with autism and other disabilities in a way that spares people without a diagnosis (Graby, 2011). As indexes of deviance regarding Raymond are pervasively present in the plot and mise-en-scène, it is important to note that *Rain Man* also involves moments of wandering. In one scene that contains such a moment, Charlie parks his car near a busy street in a small town and jumps out in order to call a therapist for Raymond. In the reflection of the phone booth that is used, Raymond, who is supposed to stay in the car, can be seen walking away (figure 11). After Charlie's realization that Raymond has walked away, he searches for him and finds him at the centre of a zebra crossing, taking a stop sign too literally and standing still. Here, Raymond's aimless and unannounced walk and the increased bodily distance from Charlie form yet a new index of deviance.

Rain Man's construction of the discourse of autism transcends a mere utterance of the term 'autism' and explicit identification of Raymond as an autistic character by means of an omnipresence of indexes of deviancy that ranges from an overly tight pair of pants to an act of wandering. The

Hollywood film enables the spectator to perceive an unlimited stream of clearly defined indexes on the silver screen, which fulfills the desire for a passive and undisturbed consumption of indexes.

By contrast, indexes of deviance in *Extremely Loud* cannot easily be addressed by this notion of an all-encompassing presence of deviance and is instead a lot more ambiguous, due to Oskar's traumatic past. Again, I will only focus on negotiations of space as indexes of deviance here. Oskar's unsupervised walks through New York City cannot be grasped by the notion of wandering, as the film depicts the planning that precedes the walks and his negotiations of space are rarely compared to those of a character that is oblivious to the discourse of autism or to the alien in general. Nevertheless, moments of fear and panic are explicitly mentioned and discussed by Oskar in his non-diegetic voice-over. On his way to Abby Black, who resides in Brooklyn, he decides to walk through a crowded city street. He states: "Because public transportation makes me panicky, I walk. I have always had a hard time doing certain things, but the worst day made the list a lot longer." A frightened Oskar is being shown running in the direction of the camera, filmed in shallow focus (Bordwell, 1997: 65) (figure 12). The comment on having a hard time doing certain things is accompanied by a short flashback that shows Oskar walking on a staircase in his apartment building out of fear of elevators. On a non-diegetic level, Oskar lists details in the street that invokes fear, in a voice that becomes louder and louder as he increasingly becomes frightened. The details he lists include running people, airplanes (figure 13), and "children with no parents" (figure 14), which evokes the memory of 9/11 and the imagery of the news coverage of that day.

Whether the scene depicts the sensory processing difficulties that form an important part of the discourse of autism in society and the clinical world (see Kern and Trivedi, 2006), or depict a trauma re-enactment, is left unclear through specific choices related to the film's script and mise-en-scène. These cinematic means are probable indicators for both possibilities. Oskar's remarks concerning his fears, induced by the sight of sensory triggers, both invoke the clinically accepted assumption and definition of autism as a "lifelong condition" (Murray, 2008a: 139) and the notion of the traumatic event and its aftermath. Walking down a busy street is presented as something Oskar has trouble doing, as he points out in an explanatory and didactic style. The temporal dimensions of these remarks consists of a juxtaposition of two markers of time: some things "have always" been difficult, and other things have been difficult ever since "the worst day", which refers to 9/11. The things that are "hard" for Oskar to "do" are not grouped in each of these categories. In terms of cinematography, the shallow focus could denote the intensity of the crowded space and its details, but also the stress that Oskar undergoes while seeing details that reminds him of 9/11. Finally, the prop of the tambourine that helps Oskar to calm down might be seen as an index of autism (figure 15). Its sound is heard throughout his attempt to reach Abby Black's house. The tambourine could be

seen as a stimulating device (see Weststeyn et al., 2005) that is used to generate a state of relaxation through repetitive sounds and movements, but as the discourse of autism is evoked in the film with an accompanying statement that “tests were not definitive”, this depends on the interpretation of the spectator. Together, these cinematic elements can be read in different ways and do not have a more unambiguous status of tokens of pathologized difference that is evident in *Rain Man*.

This difference could be attributed to the fact that both films assume a different role and of the spectator. *Rain Man*'s audience is a passive voyeur who is conveniently fed Raymond's pathologized deviance, as it was made during a time in which the public awareness of the concept of autism was nil. *Extremely Loud* allows and invites the viewer to reflect and speculate on Oskar's inner state, as the contemporary audience is familiar with the discourse of autism that now freely flows through cultural objects and society and is thus enabled to speculate. The study of the discourse of autism as the expectancy of indexes, as revealed in the study of the cultural object itself, implies that the meaning of an artwork is always constructed in an interaction between the object and its (intended) readers. Future research projects could more thoroughly study the interaction between the cultural object, its production, its reception, and its place within a cultural-historical context. Cultural sociologist Wendy Griswold's notion of the cultural diamond can help here (Griswold, 2013).

Conclusions

This chapter, containing readings of *Rain Man* and *Extremely Loud*, has presented my approach of the discourse of autism in cultural objects, which is twofold: it considers the exact pathologized language that is used in a specific context, and it looks at indexes of deviance. This has been given the form of a comprehensive consideration of an adequate approach of autism and a textual analysis of the two case studies. The same structure will also be used in the upcoming chapters.

In an attempt to avoid reification and a naïve reliance on mimesis, 'autism' is studied from a neutral perspective as a cultural phenomenon, stripped naked of each assumption concerning the ontology of autism, with a special emphasis on semiotics and performatives. Culture is studied as one link within the dynamic social process of 'doing' the discourse of autism and is analyzed by means of a textual analysis. A textual analysis dissects a cultural object and thus uncovers the discourse of autism that is not a product in but of its specific cinematic means. This process is a constructionist approach at its core. Outside of cultural objects, reports, educational videos, fundraising campaigns, clinical accounts, and so on can be analyzed in the same way, as they all contribute to the construction of the discourse of autism.

This does not assume that the concept of 'autism' and all the lived experiences that have been identified as manifestations of autism in individuals is inherently discursive; I would like to use cultural theory to widen up the way in which one can speak about diversity and *counter-metaphors* as a way to offer *new discourses* next to the ones that were presented here. This will be the focus of chapter two.

How do YouTube videos made by people who identify with the label of autism represent and negotiate subjectivity in space?

In this chapter, I will present my readings of two personal accounts, that is, objects that are made by people who identify with the concept of autism themselves. My case studies consist of two YouTube videos that are posted by users that explicitly claim to have autism themselves, both in the content of the video itself and in comments on the YouTube website. The first video is called “What it’s like to walk down a street when you have autism or an ASD” and was posted by the YouTube channel “Craig Thomson” in 2010. This video depicts a walk through an unidentified city street, filmed with a handheld camera that gives the illusion of a long *point-of-view shot* (see Branigan, 1984) that simulates the lived experience of any person with autism. Whereas the maker of the video does not explicitly reveal their identity, the second video, *In My Language* (2006), was made by non-verbal autistic activist Amelia (then Amanda) Baggs. Baggs has entered the public eye through her blogs, on which she writes about her multiple disabilities under the pen name “Ballastexistenz” (Ballastexistenz, 2013), and through her public appearances in interviews (Gajilan, 2007). In the video, posted on the channel “silentmiaow”, Baggs subverts common assumptions on autism and meaning through the concept of the translation.

In my reading, I will continue my study of the discourse of autism in cultural objects as performative and constructionist. I do not intend to speculate on the ‘actual’ condition of the producers of these personal accounts. Instead, I again focus on the way in which a certain discourse of autism comes into being out of choices in cinematic measures. The choice to approach the personal accounts as products made by people who *identify* with the concept of autism is invigorated by insights from the field of Cultural Anthropology. In his study of the YouTube video blog (vlog) community, the British anthropologist Ben Belek states that the community can appropriately be described as a *discourse community*, a term he borrows from scholar in English James Porter, as it is a common interest and language (restricted according to the customs of the autism community and discourse of neurological diversity) that binds the vloggers together (Belek, 2013: 46). By the act of *sharing* meaning surrounding the identification with the same condition, creating new words, and negotiating existing ones, the discourse community is getting its form (47). The notion of the autism community as a discourse community further underlines the importance to consider its members as active participants in the construction of the discourse of autism, instead of as people to be ‘understood’. The textual analysis aims to uncover this construction, which can help social scientists to do further research into discourse communities.

A textual analysis resulted in these findings: whereas the “What it’s like” video aims to educate on autistic subjectivity through comparing a performance of normalcy with “autistic” experience of overwhelming egalitarian accumulations of stimuli, the video “In my language” explicitly breaks with regular discourses of and dominant language on autism as well as the wish to give a ‘bite-sized gaze’ ‘through the eyes of autism’ by showing a translation of movements through space into verbal language instead of education on normalcy and pathological deviancy.

However, this chapter does not only present a textual analysis in which the discourse of autism in a cultural object is disclosed and whose vocabulary is enriched by concepts and insights from cultural theory: my choice of introducing a new word as a potential theoretical concept forms the exact core of my main argument in this chapter. This chapter presents the insight that the word ‘autism’ fails to grasp the preoccupation with space that comes to the fore in the two YouTube videos (as well as in my previous two case studies, one might argue), which invites a formulation of a *new* word that can grasp this preoccupation nevertheless. Such a new concept, that is meant to adjust the analysis to the exact visual and textual vocabulary of a case study, is called a *counter-metaphor* in this thesis. The term ‘counter-metaphor’ is derived from previous studies into autism and metaphor, like the Broderick and Ne’eman article that was discussed in the introduction. The counter-metaphor will be extensively explained as a conscious intervention into the flow of signs and meaning that together form the discourse of autism in cultural objects and everyday life. In its quality as a *conscious intervention*, it could potentially be used as a creative and emancipative tool outside of the field of Cultural Studies.

This piece on personal accounts and the new tool that can be used to closely consider them with an unprejudiced attitude will start with a short overview of the development of the notion of autistic people having a voice on their own, foreshadowing the concept of the voice as presented in the “In My Language” video. It will then present the analysis of the two YouTube video’s by discussing the shortcomings of the notion of ‘autism’ as a preoccupation with the self. Subsequently, the usefulness of the atopos alternative, as defined in the introduction of this thesis, in an analysis of the personal accounts will be defended. On the basis of these insights, the notion of the ‘counter-metaphor’ will be delimited by means of defining what it means and does not mean, and how it can be extended to practices outside of the field of Cultural Studies and the academic world as a whole.

Deviations from autos in YouTube-video’s

Studies into metaphors on autism are particularly fruitful for my inquiry into the discourse of autism. The excavation of the metaphor as a figure of speech in the language that is used in and outside the clinical world analyzes *language* and its use instead of a ‘reality’ that is or is not correctly depicted.

Because of this, it undermines reification and acknowledges the discursive nature of the concept of autism. For example, Waltz's talk "Metaphors of Autism, and Autism as Metaphor" effectively deconstructs claims of an objective distant view of science with her study of Bettelheim's metaphors as an exercise of power over the discourse of autism. His image of the empty fortress (lend from the myth of Parsival) in which the child is hidden and is about to be freed by psychoanalysis grants power to the therapist figure, who is automatically assumed to be the catalyst for the quest to uncover to child 'behind' the autism (Waltz, 2003). Through a distinct and sentimental choice of words, Bettelheim effectively justified his practice and thus controlled the interrelationship between autism, knowledge, and power in the age of the 'refrigerator mother' theory, effectively upholding the necessity for metaphor.

With their study of the 'shell' metaphor as a withdrawal from space, Broderick and Ne'eman also evoke the discursive justification of the refrigerator mother narrative, as children were thought to be *actively* and *deliberately* withdraw from their frigid mother (Broderick and Ne'eman, 2008). However, their approach falls short when it comes to a consideration of language and power, because their reading of metaphor lacks a reference to the actual etymology of the word 'autism'. The 'autos' already contains the exact spatial transgression that they attempt to disclose in 'autism metaphors', and therefore, it already encloses metaphor in and of itself. Similar to the reification in previous literature on cultural depictions of autism, 'autism' itself is lost out of sight, so that researchers could miss out on important insights surrounding autism as a cultural phenomenon. The Canadian researcher of disability in culture Patrick McDonagh does discuss this particular etymology in his article "Autism and Modernism", in which he quotes Bleuler as defining autism as "the most severe schizophrenics [...] [who] live in a world of their own" (Bleuler, quoted in McDonagh, 2008: 102) and points out that this definition "remained without a clear referent, a vague signifier condemned to a free-floating existence", until both Kanner and Asperger adopted the word and appropriated it for their own task of examining their own cases (McDonagh, 2008: 103). This implies that autism had been a linguistic construct that existed as a loose signifier before two influential figures in the clinical world solidified it into the disorder category in the form in which it is classified and referred to today, despite voices that say that people who identify with the label of autism do not describe living in a world of their own at all (Biklen et al, 2005; Davidson, 2007).

In my approach of my case studies as active constructs of a discourse, I would like to argue that their textual and visual vocabulary fail to conform to narratives of withdrawal from space and therefore challenge the exact metaphor that lies within the etymology of 'autism'. Not only is my choice to focus on negotiations of space a way to specify my research question, it also is a crucial strategy to deconstruct the persistence of 'autism' as a reified disorder with the help of mediated accounts of

lived experiences of people who identify with the condition. The two videos do not feature a withdrawal from space, but are nevertheless concerned with specific transgressions of space. Whereas “What it’s like” simulates the sensory processing of an autistic person who enters a city street, “In My Language” features Baggs’ peculiar negotiation with space and materiality in her home. Since the act of moving through space forms the central point of departure of both videos, I would like to argue that the visual and textual vocabulary of these videos is characterized by an *outwardness* to space. I hereby will give a close reading of both YouTube Videos in order to show how this outwardness is expressed through cinematic means and recited text.

The video “What it’s like” presents autism as a difference in its connection to and perception to space. It consists of two point-of-view shots of a “neurotypical” and an autistic person (specified as an autism spectrum disorder) who move through space. The shots are introduced this way with the help of intertitles (figure 16). Probably unintentional, the video proves the performative nature of both walks by showing the shadow of the camera and the person who is carrying it (figure 17), which reminds the viewer of the artificiality of the situations: apparently, the cameraman has acted out ‘normalcy’ and ‘deviancy’. The individual perspectives of the two ‘archetypes’, as depicted in each shot, are made apparent by significant differences in camera movement, sound, and changes that are added in the video’s postproduction. During the “walk in a Neurotypical persons [sic] shoes”, the camera is static, even though the frame slightly wobbles due to the handheld camera that is being held by the cameraman (figure 18). The straight line of the path within the city street is strictly followed. The shot that is presented as the perspective of a person with autism adds lighting and city sounds that are enhanced in postproduction, and introduces new camera movements. The camera now moves freely and whimsically, showing several details on and around the path instead of a steady survey of the steps that are taken and the path that is about to be tread. This shot is accompanied by short texts that are superimposed on the video. The texts further clarify the choices in cinematic measures that are made to clearly separate the “neurotypical” negotiation of space with the “autistic” one and explain how they contribute to the overall depiction of “sensory overload”. They state that the video intends to remove aural depth, which refers to the enhanced sound effects (figure 19). Another text tells the viewer that the sensory overload, consciously evoked in the video, can cause “anxiety”, and thus gives further information about the inner state of the autism archetype as a perceiver of the details (figure 20). The quick camera movements, pointing to specific details on the footpath, are described to be “distractions” and thus point at a ‘failure’ to focus on the straight path that is walked on (figure 21).

With these text and camera movements, video presents the negotiation of space by this archetype as a deviant and peculiar image. Similar to the indexes of Raymond’s deviance, that are constructed in

contrast to his brother and fellow traveler Charlie, indexes of deviance are evoked by the comparison between the 'normal' and the 'peculiar' and by the intention to inform the viewer about the nature of the lived experience of the person with autism. Just like *Rain Man* and *Extremely Loud* construct a presumed audience by making stylistic choices that are adapted to this audience, "What it's like" assumes an audience that wants to be pointed out what the peculiarity of 'autism' and that is oblivious to the lived experiences of people with autism. The supply of choices in cinematic measures as indexes of "autism" in contrast to "neurotypicality" thus has an educative purpose.

By contrast, "In My Language" transcends a mere educative purpose, because it contains a clear message that aims to subvert assumptions on life with autism by pointing out and rejecting presupposed notions of the interaction between a person with autism and their surroundings. Initially, Baggs is located in a domestic place, with a clearly identifiable living room. She rocks her body and flaps with her arms and hands, touching objects that she encounters (figure 22). An intertitle with the words "A Translation" then appears on the screen. The images of Baggs continue, but now, a computer-generated voice can be heard saying: "The previous part of this video was in my native language". These words, along with the word "translation", establish and confirm the presence of language in the previous section, spoken by Baggs. The status of Baggs negotiations of space as a language is confirmed and further explained with this statement, pronounced by the computer voice:

Many people have assumed that when I talk about this being my language, that means that each part of the video must have a particular symbolic message within it, designed for the human mind to interpret. But my language is not about designing words or even visual symbols for people to interpret. It is about being in a constant conversation with every aspect of my environment, reacting physically to all parts of my surroundings.

Commenting on a shot that shows Baggs' finger touching a jet of tap water, she adds that the image shown depicts such a conversation, which is described to be language in and of itself (figure 23). The shot is presented as language rather than a sign for something else. Baggs literally subverts the notion of autos as formulated by Bleuler when she says:

Ironically, the way that I move when responding to everything around me is described as "being in a world of my own", whereas if I interact with a much more limited set of responses and only react to a much more limited part of my surroundings, people claim that I am "opening up to true interaction with the world".

Even though the video has a similar two-part structure as “What it’s like”, the relationship between these two parts is different. The second part does not only clarify and interpret the first part, but also first and foremost explicitly negates the occurrence of indexes of pathologized deviance, deprived of meaning. Instead, the image of Baggs negotiating space and touching objects represents her native language in and of itself, as the very outwardness to space constitute her language. The audience is given a mirror onto its own (assumed) bias: rather than interpreting and imposing meaning onto bodily movement that is believed to signify nothing, it is invited to accept the fact that the bodily movement is meaningful.

“What it’s like” presents an intensified outwardness to space as an index of deviance that is commonly referred to as ‘autism’ or ‘autism spectrum disorder’. The video introduces the spectator to this peculiar negotiation of space. “In My Language” establishes movements through space as meaningful expressions and thus as an alternative structure of signification in and of itself, just like spoken words together constitute a language. As they subvert the ‘autos’ metaphor that is inherent in the word ‘autism’ and thus in the reified construct of ‘autism’, both videos problematize ‘readings’ of “autistic presence” in cultural objects (Murray, 2006: 29; Murray, 2008b: 247). For me, this suggests that the ‘presence’ of the cultural objects and the persons who identify with the concept of autism who made them could and perhaps should be considered with the help of another term instead.

Atopos and YouTube videos

In the previous parts of this thesis, textual analyses were accompanied by pre-existing theory. In this section, I adapt my own theory, that is, the notion of atopos, to my case studies in order to closely consider and grasp both this counter-metaphor and my case studies.

The introduction of atopos is a virtual, hypothetical parallel to the actual etymology of ‘autism’. What if Bleuler never studied severe forms of schizophrenia and watched “What it’s like” and “In My Language” instead? Would he have considered employing a different word from the Old Greek language? Would he have chosen ‘atopos’, and if so, what would that imply for the discourse of autism as it is produced in the clinical world, in society, and in (popular) culture? As ‘atopos’ means ‘strange’ in a spatial sense, that is, ‘out-of-place-ness’, the ‘free-floating existence’ of such a term would probably have taken a different direction than the Old Greek word ‘autos’ that eventually developed into the classified disorder called ‘autism’. In the introduction, I listed a few concepts from various disciplines that all mark a blur of borders. Atopy in immunology problematize the borders between the body and the space and objects around it, as the body expands or absorbs space in case of contact with allergens, resulting in discomfort or pain. In geography, atopia has been defined as a

world without borders, which implies that the distinction between natives, people who originate from the soil that they find themselves in, and foreigners, people from outside, similar to the alien metaphor (that effectively combines an otherness in connection to space with the non-human). Atopos thus presents an intricate crossroad of potential meanings that somehow can all be used in readings of case studies that feature the discourse of autism, all with the notion of spatial transgressions as a binding factor. The counter-metaphor as a crossroad outside of traditional pathologized language is the key to its use as a semantic tool for textual analysis, and therefore, it will enrich my understanding of my case studies.

In its presentation of a strange outwardness to space, “What it’s like” makes evident the exact corporeal transgression of space that is summoned by the manifestation of atopos as a metaphor within the immunological concept of atopy. This finding enables me to consider the notion of ‘sensory overload’ as mentioned in the video, itself a concept that originates from occupational therapy (see Schaaf and Miller, 2005), without the necessity to refer to clinical insights. Instead, the concept of atopos as an intricate transgression of space helps me to have a closer look at the exact cinematic measures that are used to establish the strange (defined in the video as that which is not neurotypical) outwardness to space.¹ I do not impose a clinical theory onto the video (this video defines autism so-and-so because autism is characterized by this-and-this) but instead *develop* theory *out of* the visual and textual vocabulary that unfolds itself in the video.

For example, his becomes evident when one looks beyond the educative purposes of “What it’s like” and look at the actual representation of space as conveyed by the framing of the shots. The “neurotypical” and “autistic” subject is not visible at all, except for an incidental shadow of a person with the movie camera that reminds the viewer of the constructed nature of the walks. In relation to the shot that presents “neurotypical” perception, the fickle camera movements suggest a body that is in constant flux in relation to its environment, as a focal point that is present in the first shot is missing. The lack of a steady movement on a path and the fickleness of the camera hovering over a hedge, the discarded cigarette, as details that “distract” suggest a full preoccupation with space and external stimuli. This is very similar to the notion of *legendary psychasthenia* as invoked by the French intellectual Roger Caillois in his 1935 essay “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia”. The essay is a study of insects that blur their distinction with the space around them through mimicry, which often does not have any defensive purposes: other means like immobility are much more effective, and many instances of mimicry only make insects more vulnerable (Caillois, 1935: 91-92, 96-97). Caillois argues that such a (sometimes even masochistic) fascination with correspondence and

¹ Thanks to dr. Mitzi Waltz for pointing out the origin of discourses on sensory overload from occupational therapy.

similarity is a wish to become “assimilated” by the “lure” of external space (97-99). The depersonalization that ensues leads to a blur between a sense of self and the space that surrounds it, which is put into words with the help of the pathologized notion of legendary psychastenia (100-101). Even though I am cautious to adopt pathologized language into a metaphor in and of itself, the term can help to point out both the large preoccupation with space in “What it’s like” and the usefulness of *atopos* as a word that is used to define a negation of borders in relation to the video. Besides the blurring boundaries between space and a notion of the ‘self’, art historians might be interested in the lack of a focal point in “What it’s like” in this legendary psychastenia. Potential similarities can be made between the “distraction” in “What it’s like” and the modernist art of painters like George Grosz (1893-1959), who painted cityscapes without a clear point of focus to look at (see Whitford, 1985: 60). Such theoretical and historical analogies can thus be made and further studied with the help of *atopos*, which could lead to insights that could not have been found with the help of considerations of common scientific and clinical discourse. Without losing my focus on the cultural object and its discussion of ‘autism’ as a speech act, the counter-metaphor affirms the “autistic persons [sic] shoes” because I consciously ‘do’ words as an active academic intervention and focus on the textual and visual vocabulary as it unfolds on the spectator’s screen. “Autistic presence” is thus affirmed by getting rid of ‘autism’ in favor of words that aim to precisely grasp actual texts.

This affirmation is especially significant in the case of “In My Language”, as “being in a constant conversation with every aspect of my environment” is presented as a language in and of itself, and the act of “reaching” is the speech act in itself. As Baggs’ video aims to subvert common notions of pathologized difference and abilities, a new structure of signification can help to reach out to this message and be empathic to her message without exploiting or colonizing it (Osteen, 2008: 8). Baggs confirms and affirms her voice as one that exists next to the language of verbal persons (her ‘second’ language, expressed with the help of a typing program). Her voice is constituted and arises out of motility and corporeality, and therefore, it challenges poststructuralist critiques of the voice as something that can never fully be fixed and authentic (Chadderton, 2011): Baggs challenges the understanding of the voice and agency, and thus of the affirmation of the self, as discursive and raises awareness of space and materiality as meaningful in and of itself instead of deprived of meaning. Here, *atopos* can function as a method to continue the message that is conveyed in the video and further turn the voice inside out, as it points out the importance of transgressions of space through functioning as a crossroad of meaning (the strange, space, and borderlessness intersect). By employing language related to the ‘autos’ in analyses of “In My Language”, Baggs’ voice can only become ‘lost in translation’ as it still depends on discursive constructs of the subjectivity of people who identify with the concept of autism. By contrast, the formulation of the counter-metaphor is like

putting a hand on an Adam's apple and feeling the vibration when speaking in order to become aware of the corporeality of the voice that is inherent in "In My Language". It makes the presentation of voice through cinematic means more evident.

It is fruitful to gain insights from philosophy and from previous literature on cultural objects produced by people who identify with the concept of autism in the further development of both my understanding of the representation of voice in "In My Language" and atopus. The article "Towards a Postcolonial Neurology", written by the American scholar in English Ralph James Savarese, offers a reading of the memoirs of the Indian non-verbal autistic man Tito Mukhopadhyay that is very similar to my notion of atopus in combination with the readings of the video and also calls for new understandings of autism on the basis of his reading. In his discussion of the British neuroscientist Oliver Sacks' aim to enter the everyday lived reality of his patients as an anthropologist, he argues that it could be fruitful to consider "the possibility of a different sort of understanding" of difference as a "postcolonial neurology": a specific form of celebrating "cerebral difference" (Savarese, 2010: 273-274). This suggestion is backed by a reading of the works of Mukhopadhyay, in which he cites his remarks on his body that feels "scattered" in space. For Savarese, Mukhopadhyay's focus on that what is "around" him opens up the possibility of a "new geography of the possible" (279). Such a new geography, interpreted through the metaphor of the postcolonial, could potentially counter the colonial discourses of charities that has framed Mukhopadhyay's work as the expressions of a person who has managed to write his memoirs *despite* his 'autism' and gives hope for a 'cure' (277-278).

Savarese's approach of Mukhopadhyay's statements has greatly influenced my thinking on atopus, and hopefully will eventually reinforce the thinking on postcolonial neurology as well. The focus on the world "around" the body and the body in constant motility (as it is constantly scattered) is very similar to my ideas on atopus and the way in which this counter-metaphor could potentially enrich a reading of my case studies. Similarly, the metaphor of the postcolonial mirrors the 'out-of-place-ness' and the notion of being an eternal foreigner in space that is conveyed through atopus, and the feeling of being "scattered" in space that Mukhopadhyay is quoted to experience comes close to my discussion of representations of negotiations of space as legendary psychasthenia. The similarities between my call to focus on an outwardness to space and Savarese's coinage of the postcolonial neurology are evident, which evokes the hope of a continuation of my thinking on atopus beyond this thesis. However, I would like to reject the notion of a *neurology* as a new kind of understanding of the condition one calls 'autism', as it runs the risk of essentializing and reifying deviance as neurologically grounded nevertheless. My aim is to subvert such essentialism by recurring to a pure and unbiased consideration of negotiations of space in arts and culture.

The aims of phenomenology can help me with that, as it invites me to define the corporeal sense of self, voice, and agency that is conveyed in “In My Language”. Baggs is shown touching a jet of water, which she explains as an interaction with the water in the computer-generated voice. With this explanation, she confirms that the interaction is her speech. This presentation of speech mirrors the practice of phenomenology, which attempted to offer an epistemology of the world that is based within the bodies and minds of subjects that are directed towards the world. The philosophy of phenomenology’ was developed in its current form by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Building on the descriptive psychology of Franz Brentano (1838-1917), that states the laws of human mental life disclose themselves during conscious acts aimed at objects, Husserl sought to develop a philosophy that was concerned with describing phenomena, things in our direct outside world, as they are given to our intuition (7-10). The notion of ‘givenness’ means that experiences are as such to someone, to specific human subjectivities and bodies (11). Experiences are concrete manifestations of the human consciousness being in a concrete space, or a life-world. Objects in a concrete delimited space are correlates in the world that are addressed during appearances, and the process of referring to this correlate by subjective consciousnesses is called intentionality (16). I do not literally adopt the philosophy of phenomenology to my work, but instead include Husserl’s thoughts in order to point out that my study of the subject with the help of the atopus counter-metaphor starts from a consideration of characters (or any represented sentient being) in cultural objects that are bodies that move through and are in an eternal interaction with cinematic space. In future studies on atopus, the (represented, mediated) phenomenological subject will be my point of departure.

The presentation of the voice in “In My Language” can be easily approached as representations of phenomenological subjectivity and interpreted with the help of the notion of the “body schema” as formulated by the French philosopher and existential phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty is interested in the body in movement: people are not only passive receivers of the space surrounding them, but are actively maneuvering through it. This active being-in-movement could be called motility. In the chapter “The spatiality of one’s own body and motility” from his book *Phenomenology of Perception*, he explains the notion of a body schema in order to address the body and its spatial elements within space. The body schema is an awareness of our own body, its body parts and its location in space: most people are capable of registering each change in the position of one’s body and knowing in which point in space which body part is located, and could create a visual impression of all of those “kinesthetic and articular impressions” at a given moment in time (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 113). Moreover, the body schema is a “total awareness of [...] posture in the intersensory world”, in which the body is perceived as being aimed towards a

particular goal (114). During given situations, the whereabouts of the body are perceived as parts of a coherent whole, anchored in front of its task. The body form exists towards these tasks; the body scheme is thus a “way of stating that my body is in-the-world” (115). The body, its parts and its movement thus exists in space and is self-aware through its orientation towards external objects. Those external objects or figures stand out from both bodily space and external space (115-116). In this construction, delimited points or specific ‘heres’ are always perceived through the existence of a “zone of corporeality” that stands before ‘other’ things; during several concrete experiences, the space of the body as an object in and of itself forms the “heart” of space, as “there would be no space at all for me if I had no body” (117).

I would like to state that Baggs’ voice is an affirmation of her ‘being-in-the-world’ that gets its sense of unity as a person with agency *out of* its awareness of the body and its parts, that are constantly expanding through space. Baggs’ negotiation of space as represented in “In My Language” does not make clear that she constant searches for her body parts, which Mukhopadyay’s description of his body as “scattered” does make clear. Her body schema gets shape and is depicted in the video as something that is made apparent exactly because the corporeal whole as being in reach to objects in space is presented as a form of agency. It gains intentionality because the motility, the being-in-movement, of Baggs’ body, as framed by the camera, is so evidently present. “In My Language” is thus Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the body made explicit. This explicitness makes clear that a consideration of phenomenology is crucial in future studies of atopos.

It may seem that my reading of Baggs’ video “In My Language” defies the constructionist approach that I am employing in this thesis, as I have read her video as a presentation of her ‘language’, whereas the notion of ‘language’ is constructed through the specific use of a non-diegetic voice, intertitles, editing, and framing (Baggs is clearly seen moving through a domestic place). My discussion of Baggs’ voice was prompted out of the finding that the video constructs a subversion of indexes of pathologized deviance. Therefore, the usefulness of the atopos counter-metaphor as an analytical tool in my reading of “In My Language” lies within the study of the *message* that Baggs constructs and conveys through cinematic means.

What is a counter-metaphor?

I have defined atopos as a counter-metaphor. The intervention of formulating a new concept needs a thorough explanation of its ontology and implication for further action in and outside the academic world. The counter-metaphor goes beyond a mere textual analysis and discourse analysis of the discourse of autism in culture and offers a whole new critical, affirmative approach towards signification and depathologization. In a textual analysis, a theoretical framework only serves to bring

a reading into words, but the counter-metaphor as an academic intervention consciously intends to create a new discursive reality. Not everything can be a counter-metaphor: an expression can only be so if it is *intended* that way, which makes a term like atopos a *conscious* act of creative signification rather than a word alone. This subverts the unconscious production of realities through speech acts, as the fact that the production, reproduction, distribution, and circulation of the discourse of autism is made obscure in everyday practice. The counter-metaphor seeks to change this. They thus broaden language in order to form an alternative to the dependence on pathologized language in society and popular culture.

As it *broadens* language rather than *replace* it, it does not mean that I substitute the word 'autism' as a pathologized disorder. Atopos does not mean that 'atopism' covers 'autism spectrum conditions' better than the word 'autism' does. If I had argued this, I would have fallen into the process of reification that I am trying to undermine. Additionally, it would suggest that people who identify with the concept of autism are *inherently* bound to each other. Ian Hacking's concept of 'making up people' suggests that people can only be part of a group of autistic people when they are defined that way, as he argues that labels generate changes in the persons labeled. The insight of the autism community as a discourse community teaches that its members belong to each other by negotiating the discourse of autism. This could potentially be expanded to a shared act of suggesting atopos and creating more counter-metaphors together in general, which could help to transcend an autism community and form new communities and alliances out of new words, works of art, buildings, and so on. For example, immigrants are also defined as arrivals from another place, and the language of trans people is also based upon the notion of 'being trapped' in one's body. Even though one should be careful with appropriation, possible collaborations could bring forth new insights and counter-metaphors within an alliance. A new structure of signification can potentially be created by anyone.

This brings me to the following: I have created a counter-metaphor in this thesis with the intention to enable other people to create their own counter-metaphor or further develop the atopos counter-metaphor. It is a term that is explicitly my own construct that may not refer to each cultural object that somehow features the discourse of autism. If someone finds certain words or a visual vocabulary that cannot be grasped by the discourse of autism or by the current use of pathologized language embedded in contemporary society, they are free to create a new counter-metaphor themselves. This choice is the very thing that constitutes the counter-metaphor in the first place.

In my case, a counter-metaphor is a word, but the term can potentially encompass theatre, dance, non-verbal communication, stimming, visual art, and so on. This is especially important for those who are deemed to have no voice on their own. Outside of academia, the act of creating counter-

metaphors can be an activist one, it can happen everywhere. My intention is to ultimately develop the conscious process of using counter-metaphors as an emancipative (discursive) tool that can be adapted to the lives and experiences of a wide group of people in and outside academia.

In academia, it is a way to open up possibilities for a theoretical framework outside of cultural studies and autism studies. It is an alternative word or concept that becomes relevant in case a cultural object cannot be fully grasped by discourses and metaphors related to autism. Chapter three will contain a more comprehensive consideration of the way the atopus counter-metaphor can be implemented in the practice of Cultural Studies. Outside of the Humanities, the counter-metaphor can especially be useful for Participatory Action Research projects. These involve a collaboration between academics and non-academics (people with disabilities, members of a community or minority group) in order to answer a research question through *co-operation* and *inclusion* rather than the study of people as research objects, which eventually aims for social change (see McIntyre, 2008). This aim mirrors the act of the counter-metaphor, as I also depart from the intention to 'understand' a clearly delimited 'target group' and to derive knowledge out of observation, and try to *create* new words and knowledge on the basis of a pure consideration of phenomenological subjectivity instead. In research projects that involve people who identify with the concept of autism as co-researchers, Participatory Action Research can be acted out through considering and developing counter-metaphors.

Outside of academia, the act of creating counter-metaphors can happen at any potential instance. My intention is to ultimately develop the conscious process of using counter-metaphors as an emancipative (discursive) tool that can be adapted to the lives and experiences of a wide group of people in and outside academia. Anyone who feels prompted to challenge dogmatic discourses of (neuro)diversity can join in: people whose "native language" and other people who would like to study or work with art, space, material, and so on. A painter, sculptor, or video artist can deliberately create and/or process one in their artworks. Moreover, as counter-metaphors can be somatic or spatial, they can form the backbone of dance projects and utopian architecture objects that attempt to create new movements and new places.

Conclusions

This chapter has presented a move that lies at the core of my main argument in this thesis: that cultural texts on 'autism', viewed from a constructionist approach, oftentimes do not fit within the dominant reified metaphor of 'autism' but need a new structure of signification² that includes

² Thanks to dr. László Munteán for coming up with this phrase in relation to my research.

considerations of spatiality and corporeality without essentializing difference. My case studies can be easily read with the help of my atopos counter-metaphor, as the act of formulating one affirms the voice and the agency of people who identify with the concept of autism. In my study of personal accounts as expressions of a discourse community, it not only has become clear how everyday lived experience is put on video as a medium, but also adds something new to the raw material. I have spent a lot of words on an elaboration of exactly this principle in order to open up possibilities of further development of the discourse.

I have introduced the counter-metaphor as a critical intervention in my textual analysis. As I do not propose an 'anything goes' philosophy and would like to explore the actuality of lived experience in visual culture, it is valuable to define what is actually considered with the help of such a counter-metaphor and what the concrete occasion and intention of this intervention is. I also need to elaborate the function of the atopos counter-metaphor as a theoretical construct that can enrich my textual analysis of visual culture that employs the discourse of autism. Therefore, my third chapter explores cinematic space (more specifically, the urban space of Central London, the zoo, and spaces as constructed by a person who identifies with the concept of autism) with the help of Rosemarie Garland-Thompson's concept of the misfit as 'material discursive becoming', and, on the basis of this reading, the exploration of the body and embodiment in disability studies.

How can the atopus counter-metaphor be integrated as a theoretical concept in the study of space in film and literature?

This chapter will further explore the potentialities of atopus as a theoretical concept in the study of cultural objects that employ the discourse of autism. It will gloss over some beginnings of future research on the cultural representation of autism that incorporate and further develop my discussion of autism as a discourse and the (academic) intervention of formulating a counter-metaphor. The readings that will be presented in this chapter built upon the findings that the atopus counter-metaphor can help to focus on space, challenge indexicality and the semiotics of the 'hidden disability' and depart from a represented phenomenological subject instead, prioritize space and embodiment, and prompt new conceptual connections surrounding diversity. Just like the act of countering traditional notions of withdrawal from space and a preoccupation with the self triggers the use of cultural theory like the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, a counter-metaphor like atopus can be integrated as theory in and of itself in order to introduce and employ predefined abstract thought into readings of arts and culture.

This chapter will cover the fact that the best way to implement atopus as a theory in Humanities research is to make it complement the use of existing debates on disability, the body, space, and so on, in accordance with the case study that is discussed. This will meet towards the aim of considering film and video as closely as possible and to set up a broader language focusing on space, movement, and voice that is free of any assumption of a pre-linguistic existence of autism on the one hand, and that leaves open the possibility to further develop a new structure of signification on the other. It attempts to actuate a development of predefined structures of thought in its focus on literary and cinematic space, in which case studies, existing theoretical frameworks from urban planning and posthumanist philosophy, and my definition of the counter-metaphor are closely interwoven and form a crossroad of meanings.

Rather than an exhaustive source of conceptualizations of culture on autistic persons, this chapter will offer further thoughts and explanations on the themes of materiality and transgressions through space as addressed in the previous chapter. The theoretical implications of atopus will mostly be addressed and roofed over with the help of disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thompson's term 'misfit' as a new disability concept. On the basis of my consideration of the word 'misfit', two comparative textual analyses will be presented, that are respectively concerned with the representation of the City of London and its public transport system in literary works, and with meetings between animals and people who identify with the concept of autism in memoirs and documentaries. When necessary, the limits of the atopus counter-metaphor will be addressed, as

atopos is not meant to be a substitute for 'autism' and does not try to define 'autism' 'better'. Not every cultural object can be considered with the notion of atopos, which should be pointed out clearly in textual analyses. This does not make the atopos counter-metaphors less valid, but instead acknowledges the fact that a counter-metaphor always needs to be backed by cultural, spatial, or material actuality in order to function as a discursive tool for new words. Eventually, the priority lies within the stories that could and should be heard and the counter-metaphor as a *tool* to help this process to become fully realized.

Regardless of its role of atopos in it, the first analysis will consider the question how the urban space of Central London and its public transport system is negotiated in literary works on autism. a passage on a visit to Central London in the 2006 memoirs *Born on a Blue Day* from the British autistic savant Daniel Tammet, the 2003 Mark Haddon novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and the travel from Swindon to London that is undertaken by the protagonist Christopher Boone. My reading of both case studies employs the American urban planner Kevin Lynch's conceptualization of the mental image of the city. The second analysis asks how affinities with animals within negotiations of space are depicted in mediated personal accounts on autism, and will make use of the American philosopher Donna Haraway's notion of the *companion species* as described in her 2008 book *When Species Meet*. Here, the case studies consist of work from Dawn Prince-Hughes and documentaries on Temple Grandin and her own constructed spaces. These two analyses of common themes in arts and culture on autism will form a direct cause to suggestions on atopos as a theoretical framework.

Atopos and the 'misfit'; strengths and restrictions

The implementation of atopos as a theoretical framework mainly consists of its further elaboration with the help of interdisciplinary theory. This is a process that is enforced by findings of cultural objects that cannot be grasped by the autos metaphor, which is why I will further build onto my findings as presented in chapter two. In the previous chapter, a comparative reading of two YouTube videos made by persons who identify with the concept of autism confirmed the usefulness of an interpretation of the 'autistic subject' in cultural objects as atopos. The videos are concerned with a conception of the 'self' as an entity in constant assemblage and interaction with external space. One video presents this notion of subjectivity in an educative manner that defines deviance by delimiting the normal. It is precisely the self in flux what constitutes the language of one person depicted in the other video, as the acts of a phenomenological subject are deliberate and meant to stretch out to the world. This last statement can be further developed as a closer consideration of agency in space could open up new narratives of empowerment for people who have been identified as 'deviant' in connection to a normalizing society. In order to facilitate an opportunity for further research on this

topic, I do not want to offer an exhaustive exploration of every theory or discipline that can be used to further define and delimit 'atopos' and to develop new counter-metaphors, as I will give myself and others the opportunity to do this later on. This is why I will employ a term from the field of Disability Studies that comes close to both my research questions and my aim to further develop my atopos counter-metaphor. I implement a reflexive and critical reading of Garland Thompson's concept of the misfit to both my case studies and my atopos counter-metaphor, in order to evoke new words and clarifications.

Disability Studies is a field of study that was established in the United Kingdom and adopted in the United States in the 1970s (Hoppe et al, 2011: 13-14). In line of the social model of autism (16-17), it considers disability (covering physical, mental, intellectual, and cognitive disabilities) as a social and cultural issue (9-10). Within this notion of disability as a social phenomenon, it exists next to the notion of impairment, which refers to deviances in bodily structures (10). Disability is studied by focusing on environmental sources of exclusion rather than the acknowledgement and treatment of a medical condition (15). Within the field of Disability Studies, criticism has been voiced on the dominance of the social model in its conceptualization of disability. Scholars state that it is problematic to assume that 'disability' will 'disappear' in case society is completely adjusted to the needs of people who are labeled as disabled. In relation to this, it has been argued that an exclusively social model of autism overlooks the importance of the body and embodiment in everyday lived experience (17-19).

Garland-Thompson's 2011 article "Misfits" is written within the academic tradition of Disability Studies and reconciles a social and material approach of disability in her conceptualization of the misfit as a way to think about "the lived identity and experience of disability as it is situated in place and time" (Garland-Thompson, 2011: 591). Disability is seen in as a discursive and material relation between "flesh" and "world" (592). Such a notion of lived embodiments negates a strong binary ensemble between disability and impairment, as well as the notion of disability as dematerialized obsolete in case of a removal of social and cultural barriers (591-592). Garland-Thompson's approach is strongly informed by the paradigm shift from the discursive to the material (594): studies of performativity depart from an exclusive focus on social produced realities and move to an understanding of phenomena in their "material-discursive becoming". Within this view, reality comes into being through different encounters with different sorts of material with agency on their own through time and space (592).

In case of a "fit", the encounter is harmonious and proper and allows the individual to negotiate space anonymously and in a sustainable way. For individual bodies, situations of conflict are lacking

because of a good synchronization between the body and its environment (593, 596). By contrast, a “misfit” forms a crossroad of meaning that involve a verb that means “to fail to fit” and a person that does not fit in well, and therefore functions as both the encounter between the material body and space as disharmonious and the person (the ‘misfit’) who is affected by this disharmonious encounter (593). The arrangement of material constitutes the misfit, as the environment does not sustain the body during the encounter between them. People thus do not exclusively ‘misfit’ because of social exclusion, but because the material layout of the world produces encounters that either lead to sustainable harmony or to exclusion (594). The act of misfitting is still performative, but here, the enacting of agency occurs in relation to the material world; a misfit is a “disjuncture” in the process of becoming. As this process is fluid and indefinite, one can either ‘fit’ or ‘misfit’ at different points in space and time, depending on the choreography of bodily negotiation through space (594-595). Through this processes of fitting and misfitting, that can occur to anyone at any given place or time, discourse is materialized (a term that is adopted from the American critical theorist Judith Butler) as bodies always enter a world that is adjusted to bodies that conform to notions of the ‘normal’ (595).

Through the lifespan, embodied life stories consist of processes of fitting and misfitting. As such, misfitting is pivotal to identity formation, in which identity is understood as being in flux and recognizing one’s own flesh (596-597). Similarly, agency and citizenship can arise out of a recognition of misfits in society: “To misfit into the public sphere is to be denied full citizenship” (601). Disability can give an advantage here, as the experience of misfitting can give a larger awareness of one’s own embodiment in space. Therefore, it can give a “privileged political position” in the formation of a voice of one’s own: “the experience of misfitting, if it is theoretically mediated, structures the narrative aspect of identity and is structured by the material world. Misfitting has explanatory power to produce a coherent narrative of how inferiority is assigned and literal marginalization takes place” (ibid.). The voice is thus relational and grounded in dynamic encounters.

Garland-Thompson’s discourse can contribute to my definition of autism as a theoretical framework provided that it is addressed in a critical way. As I develop my counter-metaphor into theory by processing existing concepts from other fields, *atopos* can be more thoroughly addressed by a critical consideration of a term like ‘misfit’. The notion of the misfit as a particular disjunctive interaction with space is similar to my aim to look at cultural objects that feature the discourse of autism as a preoccupation with space. The disjunction encapsulates the strangeness-as-spatial that lies within the definition of ‘*atopos*’ as being ‘strange’ or ‘out of place’. Garland-Thompson’s term acknowledges notions of the self and of disability as entities in a constant flow and dynamic transformation, subjected to both discursive and material realities. This has become clear in chapter two: for

example, the 'legendary psychastenia', as experienced during the shot that is presented as autistic perception in the "What it's like" video, causes a 'misfit' during a process of entering space (filled with both social cues and the material presence of tangible, aural, and visual stimuli) within a borderless transgression (the cinematic gaze penetrates space through "distractions", space penetrates the autistic subject in the form of inner "anxiety"), constructed through cinematic means. Until now, I have considered such borderless transgressions with atopos, but the concept of the misfit is suitable as well. Processes of "material-discursive becoming" in which fits and misfits occur, as conceptualized by Garland-Thompson, can thus be absorbed in atopos.

However, I will be careful with Garland-Thompson's dichotomy of 'fitting' and 'misfitting', as it conceptualizes the lived experience of disability in relation to "harmony" as well as "proper" ways to negotiate space and time, which is not my intention. The atopos counter-metaphor is a critical intervention into common language on 'autism', which also includes its divide between 'normal' and 'abnormal' beings-in-the-world and thus of binary oppositions that define people who identify with the label of autism as 'other'. In my reading, I will critically consider negotiations of space as a *form* of fitting in, rather than a strict mis/fitting dichotomy, as it suits better into atopos as a potential theoretical framework. The term mis/fit will refer to both fits, misfits, and any other potential form of fitting that Garland-Thompson has not highlighted but that may be relevant nevertheless.

In the upcoming textual analyses, I will explore the atopos counter-metaphor as theory, enriched by the above critical negotiation of the "Misfits" article, and will point out the limits of both terms in some of my case studies as I have encountered them too. If possible, the atopos metaphor as enriched by new disability concepts allows me to read cultural objects that feature the discourse of autism as represented *material-discursive becomings*, that is, as literary and cinematic encounter between material bodies and environments. Such encounters are both socially produced and studded with material objects, that reveal a certain phenomenological subjectivity. Such a reveal is fruitful enough to trigger future research in the concepts of space, disability, and agency. At the same time, I have encountered findings that do not correspond to the atopos metaphor, and this will be pointed out clearly. The spaces that are analyzed are clearly delimited and aimed towards a brief understanding of negotiations of space in film and literature. In order to find words intended to interpret the readings of all case studies to come, I will make use of the terminology of one particular theorist in each section.

How are negotiations through urban space in London represented in the literary works on autism *Born on a Blue Day* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*?

This section will contain a brief comparative reading of two literary texts, the memoirs *Born on a Blue Day* and the novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Both feature the city of London as an urban place to be entered and negotiated by the autistic protagonists, who both narrate the works. I will give readings of the representation of Central London in general as well as specific places like the London Underground and an unidentified railway station that is stated to be located in London. In order to retrieve meaning out of the presentation of literary space in my case, I will use the Kevin Lynch's 1960 book *The Image of the City* as a point of departure. In my textual analysis, the representation of London consists out of *environmental images* that are "the result of a two-way process between the observer and his environment" in which the observer plays an active role in the development of the image of the city (Lynch, 1960: 6). In the case of a reading of literature, this implies that an image of urban space is conveyed through a literary character that is deliberately perceiving, structuring, and navigating space (2). The narrators will thus be a main point of focus: I will discuss the mental image of London that the protagonists construct during their visits to London as represented in the two literary works that will be discussed here. This particular theoretical approach will be too brief and generalized to form a groundwork for further studies on autism and urban space yet. For now, it will form an approach that will adequately aid me in my consideration of social spatiality in written media as something in which the protagonists are involved themselves while actively moving and perceiving space and that is thus shaped by this particular encounter.

In one chapter of the memoirs *Born on a Blue Day*, autistic savant Tammet tells about his secondary school years and his experiences with one friend, Rehan, who brought him on travels to Central London. Coming from the much mellower Dagenham, East London (Tammet, 2006: 124), Tammet feels overwhelmed by the London Underground and the streets of Central London and is glad to be helped out by Rehan, whose friendship he fondly recalls. This friend is said to be familiar with Central London and to visit the Underground frequently in order to visit London's tourist attractions. When Tammet joined him in the London Underground, he followed his friend, who had bought a ticket and knows the way through the metro station (129). He recalls his memory of a match and a cigarette package with a warning sign. In the metro, he perceived the map of the Underground and the shaking movements of the train. Tammet describes Central London as a whole as being "full of people and noise and different smells and sights and sounds", which caused unpleasant feelings and made his "head hurt". Rehan then brought him to quieter places without large crowds, like museums

and libraries. Tammet comments that this helped for him, remarking that he felt “safe” whenever he was with his friend (130).

Similar to the notion of “sensory overload” in the “What it’s like” video, Tammet recalls his experiences with an abundant number of sensory perceptions. Entering a metropolitan space, he thus experienced an “*intensification of nervous simulation*” which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of inner and outer stimuli” (original emphasis), which the German sociologist Georg Simmel identified as a key feature of the psychological layout of the metropolitan man (Simmel, 1903: 175). Being affected by an enumeration of multisensory stimuli, Tammet states that “there was too much information for me to mentally organise [sic]” (Tammet, 2006: 130). The stimuli that are perceived by Tammet are arranged in a non-hierarchical order, each divided by the word “and”. “People” are presented as one division of these stimuli, as they form an anonymous whole in the shape of a “crowd” that harmonizes within the overwhelming intensity of city space.

Tammet is thus presented as “misfitting” within Central London, as he presents himself as someone who entered its urban space and did not synchronize with the presence of sensory input and the flow of the crowd. Instead, he experienced a painful transgression of space, as the intensified space surrounding him affected him internally. Because his head hurt, his flesh had been touched by space. The misfit in this instance can be further elaborated with the help of the notion of the mental image of the city as explored by Lynch. Lynch’s aim is to study the way citizens form mental images of the city through its *legibility* (Lynch, 1960: 2). Ideally, people can maneuver city space because the cityscape is planned so clearly that people can form a concrete whole out of its loose parts. Within the interaction between the material actuality of the city and the persons who enter it, space is being recognized, organized, and structured, because citizens rely on sensory cues to orientate themselves in their environment (3). For Tammet, the misfit entirely consists out of the lack of perceived legibility due to the overabundance of cues. Because all the stimuli are perceived with equal intensity, quick orientation is impossible and space becomes incomprehensible. The inclusion of an anonymous crowd as one of the stimuli emphasizes the misfit (Garland-Thompson, 2011: 596): the people perceived by Tammet are presented as having the benefit of visual and material anonymity in their collective navigation of the metropolitan space. Their being-in-the-world is less pronounced than that of Tammet, and therefore, they are presented as persons who fit, in contrast to the narrator, who is clearly defining his body and relation to space. Lynch recognizes the negative impact that disorientation can have on citizen’s well-being (4-6), and indeed, Tammet feels physically affected.

However, his friend serves as a navigator. In *Born on a Blue Day*, the environmental images of London because of Rehan's negotiation of space. Lynch formulates the image elements of the city and discerns the path, node, district, edge, and landmark (8). The image of the London can be divided in several districts, that is, identifiable larger parts of a city (47), because Rehan is the person who guides Tammet from the peripheral Dagenham (Tammet, 2006: 119) to Central London, where Tammet remarked a change in the intensity of stimuli. Furthermore, his sensory overload is compensated by visits to museums, galleries and libraries, where he is taken to by Rehan. Besides behaving there in the way the places are socially constructed and arranged for, Tammet also finds rest there (130).

The notion of safety and comfort in personal perceptions of space is common in literature on the topic. In his study the negotiation of university campuses by autistic students, the British educationist Manuel Madriaga discusses their tendency to seek for a "safe space", which is a concept from the geography of impairment that states that people with disabilities often need to exclude themselves from public space in order to seek refuge in their private space and shut out social stigma (Madriaga, 2010: 40). In the case of autism, such safe spaces are mostly free from "sensory overstimulation" (41), which is also the case with Tammet's preference for museums and libraries in Central London. His safe space is not constituted on withdrawal, but instead opens up access to social space, as his friend is the person who guides him to these quieter places. The "fit" in space is thus generated by a negotiation of space together with a guiding friend. In this case, the material-discursive becoming from misfitting to fitting does not only get shape in a negotiation with urban space, but also in an outward negotiation with other people.

In *The Curious Incident*, however, this is not the case, as the protagonist Christopher travels alone and takes the initiative to be in movement through London himself. This is the only case study in this thesis that does not directly feature the discourse of autism within the literary work itself: even though the protagonist Christopher's personal assistant at his school is often mentioned, which indicates a specific need for care, no-one mentions an actual diagnosis. Nevertheless, the book has been promoted as a work on an autistic boy (Haddon, 2003: blurb) and has been discussed as a work on autism in several sources of academic literature (Murray, 2006; Murray, 2008a; Burks-Abbott, 2008; Berger, 2008). The discourse of autism mainly lies within the enumerating style of the book, in which many sentences start with a coordinator before an independent clause. This results in a stream of impressions and occurrences that is just as equalized as the lack of aural perspective in "What it's like" and the frequent use of the word "and" in the passage on Central London in *Born on a Blue Day*.

Sentences that start off with “and” can be found at the end of *The Curious Incident* as well, when protagonist Christopher decided to travel to London to live with his mother, who was thought to be dead (Haddon, 2003: 130-132). Christopher orientates himself on the basis of his mother’s address during his arrival at an unidentified railway station in London and is referred to the London Underground to continue his travel there, where he loses and finds his pet rat (166-184). When he finally arrives at the right metro station, Willesden Junction, he walks in the direction of his mother’s home with the help of an atlas that he is given by a shopkeeper (184-189). During this travel as a whole, Christopher completely relies on signs and icons that are available on the railway stations and the London Underground in order to find his way to his mother. These cues are all visualized by diagrams, differences in layout and fonts, and drawings and display arrows, icons of public transport services, and maps. Through these visualizations and the precise enumerating nature of Christopher’s perceptions of the spaces that he enters, his route is completely worked out on paper and the reader gets the impression to follow him step by step, in contrast to Tammet’s generalized depiction and subdivision of stimuli that is used in *Born on a Blue Day* to convey sensory overload.

Unlike Tammet, Christopher does not have a person to negotiate space with. He instead maneuvers the public transport on the basis of his own reliance on the equalized perception of stimuli and the precise orientation on cues of the route that he has to follow. As a first-person narrator, he comments on this particular perception of space with the words: “I see everything. That is why I don’t like new places” (140). With the help of Lynch’s understanding of the analysis of the environmental image into the components of identity, structure, and meaning, I would like to argue that Christopher functions as a misfit in urban space because of his aloofness to the semiotics and choreography of social interaction. According to Lynch, the environmental image must be clearly identifiable as such in order to enable people to orient themselves in urban space, its structural elements must be obvious, like the relation of the image to the viewer and to space as a whole, and it must convey a certain meaning (Lynch, 1960: 8). By describing and depicting a wide range of detected stimuli, Christopher is shown to be very preoccupied with identifying what is happening around him. However, when he wants to see if he has reached London by train and the depictions of brands and slogans, he loses his ability to identify signs around him. To signify this, one of the flows of depictions of news flashes, advertisements and brand names changes into an incomprehensible sequence of icons (Haddon, 2003: 169-170).

With regard to the difference between identification and meaning, my argument is that Christopher is presented as a misfitting other by his lack of understanding of social cues that are present in urban space because he equalizes stimuli of other people with any other identifiable cue in the space of London. Similar to Tammet’s perception of the anonymous crowd, the presence of other people’s

voices are there but are only repeated without the inclusion of any reference on their meaning: the reader is invited to find out the. For example, when arriving in London by train, Christopher stays longer before he gets out in order to avoid being seen by the policeman that approached him earlier. A conversation between two men that pass him is subsequently written down:

And then a man stood next to the shelf and said, "Come and look at this, Barry. They've got, like, a train elf"

And another man came and stood next to him and said, "Well, we have both been drinking".

And the first man said, "Perhaps we should feed him some nuts".

The way in which this conversation is recorded is very similar to Christopher's enumerations of signs in public transport, in which words and impressions are registered as empty signifiers and are not given any meaning, linked to each other by the word "and". However, as the reader is able to conclude that Christopher must be alone in the train on the basis of the description of its arrival in London, and the depersonalizing remark on the "train elf" thus must refer to him, it extends a reading of urban space as an abundance of stimuli: for the reader, it is clear that Christopher is made fun at by drunk people. Whereas Tammet's perception and movement were defined as neutral and were compensated by an orientation towards safe spaces, Christopher's equalizing perception and indifference towards social space clashes with the actual content of the stimuli as selected for inclusion in the book: if the two voices talking about a train elf had not been there, Christopher would not have been the Other here. Tammet is a misfit through a fluid and fickle relation to space that is made challenging through intensified stimulations in a metropolitan surroundings; Christopher is one in relation to normalized expectations of grasping social contact in urban space. In the latter case, a connection to the social construction of pathologized difference is necessary in a future reading.

How are affinities with animals within negotiations of space depicted in mediated personal accounts of Dawn Prince-Hughes and Temple Grandin?

The readings of urban space in connection to narrators have shown the complexities of analyzing case studies in relation to theoretical concepts like the misfit: even though the concept of the misfit can help to further consider atopia, a case study like *The Curious Incident* asks for a loose approach of the concept of the misfit and the atopia counter-metaphor. It shows a normalizing narrative of alienation of urban space instead of a fluid bodily transgression of space. I would like to extend this critical consideration of the possibilities and restrictions of the "misfit" into a brief non-anthropocentric inquiry on encounters between animals and people who identify with the concept of autism, as I think that both the notion of agency through transgressions through space that is

enclosed in the atopos counter-metaphor and the understanding of mis/fitting as a constant process in relation to material and cultural space. I will discuss passages from Dawn Prince-Hughes' *Songs of the Gorilla Nation* as well as the representation of Temple Grandin's hug machine. With a non-anthropocentric approach that will be conveyed with the help of a discussion of findings and thoughts from the article "Autistic autobiographies and more-than-human emotional geographies" from the Canadian geographers Joyce Davidson and Mick Smith as well as Donna Haraway's notion of the *companion species*, this will add a critical stance on the question what it means to be human. This will leave open the potentiality to study the human self as a fluid transgression in connection to depathologizing difference.

Both mediated personal accounts of Temple Grandin and Dawn Prince-Hughes blur boundaries between the human and the animal by means of anthropomorphism and animalism and find a "fit" and form alliances with animals through processes of becoming in a structure of relations. I would like to argue this by discussing the first passages on Prince-Hughes' preoccupation with gorillas. In *Songs of the Gorilla Nation*, the chapter on her first visits to the zoo following her tumultuous youth and status as a school dropout evoke the notion of a safe space outside of unpleasant stimuli from an urban space of Seattle, similar to Tammet's visits to museums and libraries in London. She states that she felt a "course of action", that is, a deliberate choice made with individual agency that shapes her life to come (Prince-Hughes, 2004: 91-92). The personal act of visiting the zoo frequently and being engaged with the life world of animals eventually culminated in a special fondness for the gorillas, who she observed from a bench (93-94). The bench is described as a connection between the "outside world" and in the place of residence of the gorillas and as a place in which "understandings" began to play a big role, like the changes in seasons that took place and the sensory involvement in the zoo space that came with that, and in which bodily awakenings occurred inside Prince-Hughes (95). Her "fit" with the gorillas in the shape of action and understanding thus does occur in a space in which animals were held in captivity, in a way that was not experienced by "other human people". Her affinity with the animals closely mirror Baggs' argument on language as she says about visitors who approached the gorillas as "stupid animals": "The gorillas don't speak human language, look the way humans look, move the way humans move. They are stupid [...] We are the animals who don't speak the language, look the looks, move in the right ways. Captivity is for observing. Sit. Ignore. Endure. Remain [...] It is easy for those who are not captive to forget that those who are remain individuals" (95-96). The switch from the "they" that quotes the rude visitors to a "we" effectively puts a reflexive mirror in front of humans and their discourse of othering, reminding them that the captive are not silent but speak instead. Prince-Hughes increasing interest and knowledge eventually enables her to access academic space to further study and learn about the behavior of gorillas, what

both enables her to approach people (whom she could “just ask” about the things they want to learn) and gorillas (100-101). This eventually led to a longer project of learning on the gorillas and on the self as well (111). The notion of the zoo as a safe space blurs the boundaries between the human and the animalistic; Prince-Hughes recalls one instance of panic when she did not know how to open a door, and after the zookeeper opens this door, she is greeted by her reassuring eyes with the “deep and calm brown” of gorilla eyes. According to Prince-Hughes, it was easy for her to approach and talk to this particular zookeeper because of this (108).

Even though the moments of “fitting” in are still taking place within negotiations the man-made space of the zoo, Prince-Hughes as narrator of her memoirs effectively breaks down barriers between the human and the gorilla that is conveyed by the setting of the spectacle of the gorillas in captive. Attracted to the zoo as a place of comfort, and the bench right in front of the gorillas in particular, she has the chance to “breathe in” and absorb space, and the rain and the seasons that inhabit it. Through the break of boundaries between the self and space as well as the assemblage of one’s status as a human and the animals as a “gorilla nation”, “understanding” is achieved. This is not necessarily bound to either the gorillas or Prince-Hughes herself, but affects reassurance as a whole, as animalistic understandings of human body parts bring a sense of comfort. Comfort is achieved in a constant interrelation with the space of the zoo that involves bodies, movement, and language that are both defined as ‘human’ and ‘non-human’. In the zoo, Prince-Hughes negotiates space and forms a harmonious whole with

Comfort is also achieved by the American cattle expert Temple Grandin’s invention of the *hug machine*. Just like Prince-Hughes, Temple Grandin, as depicted in films and documentaries, is concerned with the well-being of cattle in their negotiation of material space made by humans. The ethologist’s livestock handling facilities have been employed for many years in order to improve the well-being of cattle in human industries like slaughter plants. As told by a non-diegetic voice-over and Grandin in the BBC documentary “The Woman who thinks like a Cow”, an encounter with a “squeeze chute” at her aunt’s farm inspired her to make use of the device herself in order to put her body to rest (figure 24). Photos depict a young Grandin in the chute. The documentary then displays the hug machine as her device that she built herself, based on the chute (figure 25), after which Grandin demonstrates the posture that she has to adopt in the device (figure 26). Small mechanisms help to make its interior pillows bigger and tighter (figure 27). Various parts of Grandin’s body, positioned in the device, are shown (figure 28). She explains that hugs as performed by people have been too intense for her. A psychologist is then shown (presented as such through text) who elucidates the scientific consideration of the hug machine and the effectiveness of its “controlled deep pressure touch” that has a positive calming effect on the body. Using my own theoretical framework, the

tangible qualities of the hug machine can easily be described with the help of phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body schema, as the touch of the squeeze affirms corporeal borders in space so that one does not have to feel "scattered". The representation of the hug machine thus highlights the borders between the body and the space that surrounds it, in order to prevent an unpleasant feeling of losing one's body in space.

As the spatial and material quality of the body schema is extensively presented, this makes the Grandin documentary the only case study in this thesis that features an autistic person who has created and conceived her own spaces and controlled delimitations of the space surrounding her. She has intervened space, just like I intervene discourse and semantics through the counter-metaphor. Her livestock handling facilities involve a mutual conveyance of a clear delimitation of space which the cattle are orientated through, similar to Tammet's friend who maps the urban space of London for him. Furthermore, the hug machine can disclose bodies in space that need to be calmed in a way that was originally intentioned for cattle. The act of entering the squeeze chute is *mimicry* in Caillois' sense, that is, controlled movement through space in correspondence with the motility of cattle (not in a *resemblance* to cattle, as the title of the documentary may seem to suggest) and their coordination of space as controlled by human beings, out of a wish to negotiate space and materiality in the way cattle does as well as an affinity with animals.

I would like to defend an understanding of Prince-Hughes' and Grandin's accounts as a fluid transgression of the human and the animal that breaks down the binary between the two. This could open up a way of thinking that does not put the human at the center of ontology and epistemology but instead affirms flux whilst respecting material corporeality of all parties involved. As Prince-Hughes points out in her affirmation of the language and movement of gorillas, humans privilege themselves by the assumption that humans have language and meaningful movement and that any transgression of space that does not conform to that is "stupid" and devoid of meaning. In Grandin's 'mimicry' and Prince-Hughes' 'understanding' of gorillas, the notion of comfort within these phenomena can easily be explained as a non-anthropocentric atopolis form of mis/fitting. The material anonymity in a sustainable surroundings, as Garland-Thompson describes the state of "fitting in" (Garland-Thompson, 2011: 596), is not further specified, but is strongly implied to relate to humans in a social environment. Because animals are not addressed in Garland-Thompson's text, the status of the species as human is an element that is made anonymous too. In this sense, 'humans' already 'fit' in an anthropocentric space and time because of privilege, simply because Garland-Thompson does not make this explicit. By contrast, Grandin's and Prince-Hughes' 'becoming' in time and space involve a growing affinity and correspondence with beings that are not marked as human in space, which not only involves animals, but also the material of the wood on the bench and

the squeeze chute. Their relation to, expansion through and absorption of space and materiality is in constant flux between categories such as 'primates', 'human', and 'cattle'. Even though their understanding of beings do not fit in an environment that marks the being-in-the-world of humans and therefore still form a "misfit", if one would expand one's understanding of fitting to a non-anthropocentric being-in-the-world, they easily "fit". New categories of fitting may be useful to further approach the difficulty of the binary opposition of "fitting" and "misfitting", even if these categories are concerned with a fluid interrelation through space that can evoke "fits" and "misfit" within any individual. Nevertheless, as Garland-Thompson states that the act of misfitting can empower people to rearrange environment and acknowledge vulnerability (603), the notion of misfitting in an anthropocentric environment could potentially form an opportunity to challenge fitting as a human being as well as the "fit" as a normative state of being.

Future inquiries into new ways of fitting that are concerned with challenging human privilege can be studied by the discussion of non-anthropocentrism or post-anthropocentrism in critical debates on posthumanism (see Braidotti, 2010). The possibility of challenging traditional conceptualizations of the self and the human has been studied in the field of Autism Studies, but fail to grasp the non-anthropocentric encounter that I have attempted to analyze here. The article from Joyce Davidson and Mick Smith is concerned with a constant interrelation with "non-human others" as expressed in autobiographies written by people who identify with the concept of autism, as many people with autism point out that they relate themselves to animals and objects. This could potentially challenge notions of autism as indifference towards social space, as these interactions and interrelationships "have profoundly emotional qualities of a kind more usually associated with social settings" (Davidson and Smith, 2009: 898). For Davidson and Smith, a qualitative study of personal accounts revealed connections to a directly experienced natural world that "apparently offers some respite from the disruptive, intrusive, and communicatively overburdened social world" (899). This notion of "respite" from human-based social choreographies is exactly the notion that I would like to undermine in this chapter, as I start from the notion of comfort as a non-anthropocentric notion of being in, understanding, and connecting with space in order to undermine divisions between the human and the non-human. Gorillas also have a "social world" when looking at non-normative forms of communication and affect, and cattle also need relief, even though these negotiations of space are greatly shaped by human interventions in space as the gorillas live in captivity and the cattle must be oriented to the slaughter for human consumption. Theories on the posthuman could potentially help to acknowledge this.

An engagement with debates on the posthuman in cultural theory is offered by Stuart Murray in his 2013 book chapter "Autism and the Posthuman", in which he explores their possible implications for

the subjectivity and agency of people who identify with the concept of autism. He expresses his concerns about the notion of posthumanism (as formulated by Paul Collins) as a way to move beyond a state of agency that transcends the body, stating that it could potentially overlook the everyday lived and materialized experience of autistic persons (Murray, 2013: 54-55). However, Murray's argument that posthuman philosophy could potentially "leave human embodiment behind" (56) is too bold with regard to the manifold ways in which one could potentially address and undermine anthropocentrism, which could potentially have the very aim to affirm materiality and the corporeal. In her MA thesis on autism autobiographies and the theoretical cyborg figure, Teunie van der Palen states that Murray's "conception of the posthuman is closer to transhuman and to the popular, futuristic perception of the posthuman than to [...] more critical and affirmative branches of posthumanism" (Palen, 2014: 27). She also includes a Merleau-Pontian reading of accounts of people who identify with the concept of autism in order to shelter embodiment nevertheless (46). The example of Murray shows that extensive debates on posthumanism fall into the risk of becoming straw men arguments, as posthumanism can mean anything to anyone.

In order to grasp Prince-Hughes' and Grandin's non-anthropocentric negotiation of space of and animals within it, and ease Murray's concerns, it is already very fruitful to briefly include Haraway's notion of *companion species* in my discussion of atopus and the misfit in both case studies. In her book *When Species Meet*, she describes the sensation of touching other species as a form of mutual becoming in space and the world rather than an act of affirming the human 'being' (Haraway, 2008: 3-4). She argues for an understanding of negotiations with space and animals as a meeting of "species" (5) in order to break down the Great Divide (a term she lends from Bruno Latour) between humans and animals (9). A companion species can refer to any 'species' with which one is in a state of respect and connection with (16-19). Similar to Prince-Hughes' research into primates, she offers the example of research on baboons, that involves mutual acknowledgement between humans and baboons and entering space in a relationship. This recognizes the situatedness of both species through time "in situated histories, situated naturecultures, in which all the actors become who they are *in the dance of relating*, not from scratch, not ex nihilo, but full of the patterns of their sometimes-joined, sometimes-separate heritages both before and lateral to *this* encounter" (25; original emphasis). The ontology of species occurs in a becoming with species in a mutual choreography (26).

The notion of becoming in encounters with species forms a perfect template for both future research on accounts on animals as written by people who identify with the concept of autism and a further elaboration of atopus and mis/fitting as non-anthropocentric transgressions of space and time. Such transgressions are acknowledged by the very fact that people like Prince-Hughes and Grandin

become in encounters with species: Prince-Hughes understands their non-normative language, whilst Grandin mimics the tangibility of cattle in constant encounters in space and time as represented in personal accounts. Naturally, memoirs and documentaries follow traditional narrative structure and could therefore construct the very dance between species that is at stake here. When considering Haraway, it could therefore be fruitful to analyze small scenes and brief instances of encountering in (mediated) personal accounts. As atopus seeks to affirm the actual phenomenological reality of people who identify with the concept of autism in and outside the study of cultural objects, Haraway's accounts of material touch of animals are a very effective way to actualize becomings amongst species. Haraway thoroughly criticizes the Deleuzian notion of the "becoming-animal" (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), that is, the theorized fluid pack of animals within which one can form alliances, as a form of disrespect against actual tangible animals (Haraway, 2008: 27-29). It is exactly this actual being-in-the-world with animals in concrete events of encounter and, in the case of Grandin, the process of creating spaces that facilitate the presence and tangibility of animals, that can be affirmed through new studies and, if desired, new counter-metaphors, to Prince-Hughes, Grandin, and other instances of (organized) encounters between people who identify with the concept of autism and other species (see Solomon, 2010).

Conclusions

In this chapter, considering two potential inquiries on cultural objects on the discourse of autism, atopus has been adopted and further developed in relation to choices and findings in the selection and analysis of the material (both case studies and previous literature) that was available to me. The choice to focus on preoccupations with space that introduced the switch from autos to atopus had facilitated a focus on specific spaces and encounters with stimuli in the outside world. Inspired by previous findings in this thesis, this paved the way for new theoretical concepts (mapping the city according to Kevin Lynch, Haraway's companion species) and approaches of my case studies. Chapter 2 introduced a framework of thinking about transgressions of space as an affirmation of agency. In this chapter, this offered me the opportunity to make connections to concepts from specific fields, like the mis/fit from the field of Cultural Studies. Such a hybrid improves a critical consideration of previous theory and aims to establish collaborations with scholars in this field in the future.

As it turned out in my readings of my case studies, atopus both covers instances 'fitting' and 'misfitting', depending on the nature of a spatial transgression that can be put into words with my atopus metaphor. This shows that the atopus counter-metaphor covers both pleasant and unpleasant lived experiences. Therefore, it is not an unilateral discursive construct on 'autistic pride', but offers the opportunity to talk about both positive experiences and disabling forces from social

and material reality. In instances of mis/fitting, *comfort* was a very important theme and needs to be elaborated on in order to fully affirm perceptions and negotiations of space by people who identify with the concept of autism. However, *The Curious Incident* could not be approached by the atopus framework as introduced in the last two chapters. The fact that this novel is the only case study that is not considered as a 'personal account' needs a critical reflection in future studies of voice and authorship in arts and culture that feature the discourse of autism.

Overall, the atopus counter-metaphor can facilitate a broader theoretical framework and new findings that could have been overlooked otherwise, just like it aims to facilitate debate and new words in and outside academia. It is not exactly a new framework on its own, although it could be one when it offers the perfect words to address a given case study; it is first and foremost intended to set meaning. I thus would like to stress again the fact that this chapter is only the beginning of future research.

Conclusions

This inquiry will be concluded with a provisional answer on the research question that was asked at the very beginning of this thesis: what is the discourse of autism in represented negotiations of space in literature and visual culture? This thesis contained an extensive reflection on the practice of researching this question in order to give a thoroughly informed answer on this question that exceeds a mere textual analysis but that additionally creates theory and opens up possibilities for further research and emancipative practices. This has led to a twofold consideration of my case studies that is grounded into the core theme of this thesis and its results: *that there are several cultural objects featuring the discourse of autism that cannot easily be put into words by a notion of withdrawal from space and into a world of one's own that is enclosed in the word 'autism', its etymology, and its presence in everyday discourse.* On the first level, I have studied pathologized language as a discourse in literary and visual culture. On the second level, I have suggested a depathologized new structure of signification that either discursive or non-discursive, and have introduced one potential 'counter-metaphor' that could bring such structure into motion.

In the study of pathologized discourse of language in negotiations of space in cultural objects, the study of language as a discourse rather than a condition is delimited. Semiotics and the notion of *performativity* from the philosophy of language have proven to be fruitful, as they open up the opportunity to study the signs that are used to signify autism rather than 'autism' itself in order to clearly separate the study. It also became clear that language and cultural objects on autism are *constructs* that let a discourse of 'autism' *come into being*, which should always be studied as such through a dissection of the formal qualities of cultural texts. This respects actual cultural objects in order to prevent reification of autism in research. In my case studies, it became clear that the employment of 'autism' and related terminology is bound to the construction and localization of people who are assigned to speak about autism in cinematic space. Whereas terminology related to autism in *Rain Man* is bound to the cinematic space of the institution and is used to inform and outsider (both the non-autistic brother and the public), *Extremely Loud* relies on an audience that already is informed, as words are not bound to one particular place and expert. Outside of pathologized language, the discourse of autism could be read in *indexes* of deviance: indexes in *Rain Man* are continuously presented in cinematic space, but indexes of autism in *Extremely Loud* are more ambiguous. In each cultural object, 'autism' is thus 'enacted' within the representation of negotiations of space itself in order to negotiate the normal (as displayed in the "What it's like" video and evoked in *The Curious Incident*, for example) and the deviant. Future studies will employ the textual analysis that is formulated here and will add a more Foucauldian stance in order to further

explore who is enabled to employ the discourse of autism in a given space and time, as well as theories on *visual literacy* (Considine et al, 1992) in order to study the place of culture within the production, distribution, and circulation of the discourse of autism through time and space in society as a whole.

Studying the discourse of autism in and of itself is a purely empirical act, regulated by critical theory. The second level of my answer provides a more philosophical approach that transcends a mere textual analysis. The intervening argument for a new structure of signification is a plea to make explicit the speech act of naming diversity as an empowering tool that can extend discourse to spatiality, materiality, affect, and so on. This is an attempt to challenge the dependency on pathologized language in analyses of representations of autism and turn this into an active production of discursive and pre-discursive knowledge by people in- and outside academia. The production of knowledge *affirms* diversity and challenges restricted discourse and spaces through the creation of new ones. The atopos counter-metaphor that lies at the core of my reading of the discourse of autism and negotiations of space in literary and visual culture both acknowledges that 'autism' might not be the right word for the readings of my case studies and sets into motion a new interdisciplinary theoretical framework with new connections between existing and new concepts. Whereas chapter two was concerned with pointing out the strengths of abandoning 'autos' in favor of 'atopos' in a textual analysis, chapter three opened up a stream of interdisciplinary thought that has not ended yet and will inevitably be followed by more findings, words, and concepts.

Atopos acknowledges and affirms the phenomenological reality that is conveyed by the works of and about Amanda Baggs, Dawn Prince-Hughes and Temple Grandin as in a constant non-anthropocentric interaction and encounter with the outside world whilst transgressing space in fickle borders between the body and space. It is exactly this acknowledgement that assigns agency and a voice: it sets the self in movement, always in interaction with the direct environment. Atopos offers an opportunity for new cultural theory surrounding human diversity in a way that transcends a mere observation that labels change the person that is labeled. However, the term is not suitable for readings of any possible case study, as my reading of *The Curious Incident* has proved out. The act of formulating counter-metaphors should always be occurring in relation to the actual object of research.

The importance of atopos for case studies in documentaries, memoirs and YouTube videos suggests that the counter-metaphor is mainly useful for cultural objects that are presented as personal accounts. This may open up possibilities for its use in activism, inclusive projects, Participatory Action Research, and so on. It must always be stressed that there is already a lot going on surrounding new

conceptualizations of diversity, as attendants of the 2015 edition of *Autscape* has pointed out.³ As the counter-metaphor points out the *intentional act* of formulating a counter-metaphor, my inquiry attempts to offer a *facilitator* for the formulation and distribution of new voices and knowledge in places where this is already happening. This will adjust the formulation of counter-metaphors to the needs of the people who matter in the creation of a new structure of signification.

Overall, this thesis has inevitably been more than just an analysis of space in literature and visual culture, because of its strong empirical-philosophical input. Rather than urging others to give 'real' accounts that display the 'truth' on autism, people can also embrace the status of 'autism' as an important cultural phenomenon in order to create more knowledge and deliberately construct new 'truths' themselves. 'Truth' may not necessarily be 'out there', but everyday lived experience is.

³ Credits go to Dinah Murray and Caroline Hearst.

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Appendix: Figures



Figure 1

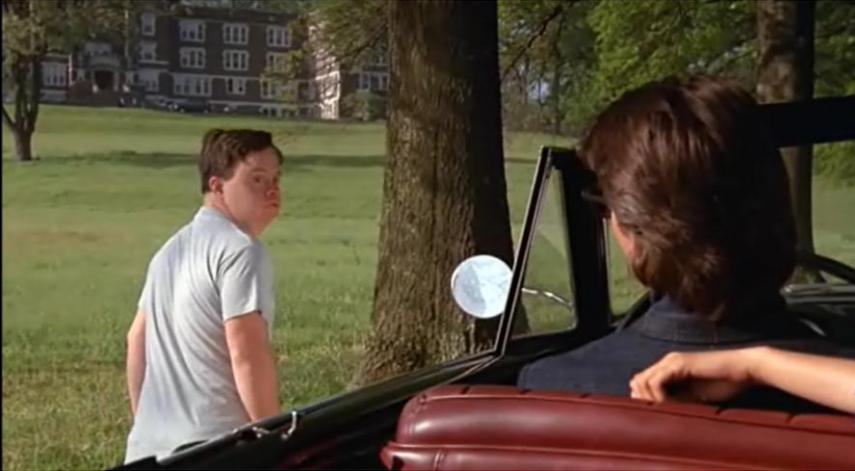


Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15

A walk in a
Neurotypical persons
shoes

Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

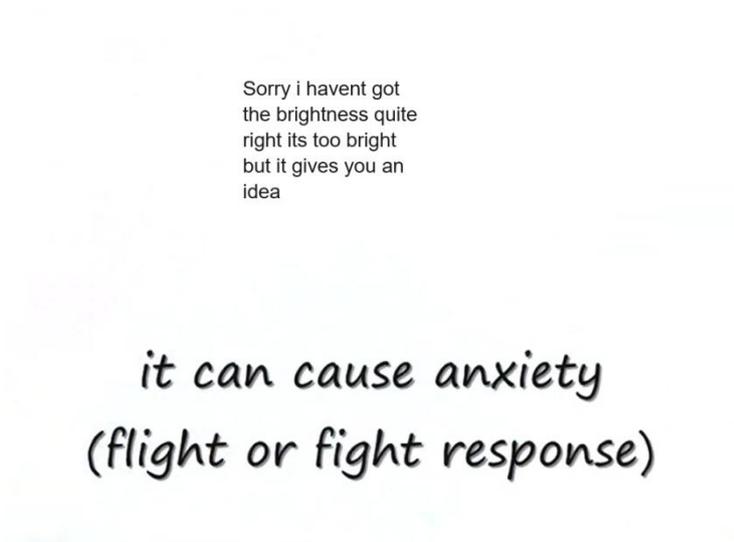


Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27



Figure 28