From Deficiency to Difference: A Critical Phenomenological Approach to Autistic Ways of Being

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Abstract

Throughout the history of Autism research, Autistic lived experiences have been pathologised — seen as lacking in the fundamental structures which shape human lived experience. Only recently, with the rise of the neurodiversity movement to mainstream prominence, has a critical lens been taken to Autism research. This paper argues that classical phenomenology is an inadequate framework for understanding the subjective lived experiences of Autistic individuals. While classical phenomenology provides methodological foundations for understanding subjective lived experiences, it often overlooks the social structures that shape certain lived realities. Thus, I will contend that a critical phenomenological lens must be applied to future Autism research for the Autistic lived experience to be accurately and justly understood as a facet of diverse human existence rather than a demonstration of existential lack. Drawing on the arguments of Davis (2020), Guenther (2020), and Gordon (2020), I will distinguish critical phenomenology from classical phenomenology, exploring how it intentionally addresses the gaps in the classical framework. These arguments demonstrate how classical phenomenology's universalist assumptions fail to capture Autistic lived experiences across multiple domains — from alternative temporal structures and attention patterns to different sensory processing and meaning-making capacities — reducing neurological diversity to pathological deficiency. Ultimately, this paper will argue that critical phenomenology is essential for future Autism research to acknowledge human diversity, abandon pathologising approaches, and centre Autistic subjectivity.

About the author

Tiffany Candice Lee (she/they) is in the final year of her BA Humanities degree, majoring in Philosophy and Psychology. Her academic interests lie at the intersection of these two disciplines, and she plans to continue engaging with both in her postgraduate studies. She hopes to pursue future research on the lived experiences of neurodiversity, trauma, and disability. Tiffany is particularly interested in understanding the adult neurodivergent experience beyond pathological frameworks, and hopes her future research will contribute to more nuanced and empowering narratives about neurodiversity. Outside of academics, she is passionate about tending to her orchids, and spending time with her family of furry and feathered companions, including her cat, Doug.

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1. Introduction

Throughout the history of Autism research, Autistic individuals' lived experiences have been pathologised — positioned as deficient, lacking in the fundamental cognitive structures which shape and influence human lived experience. It is only in recent years, with the rise of the neurodiversity movement to mainstream prominence, that the pathological lens applied to Autism research has been questioned. Conceived in the mid-1990s within online Autism communities, the neurodiversity movement is a branch of the disability rights movement predominantly associated with Autism (Pantazakos & Vanaken, 2023; Botha, Chapman, Onaiwu, Kapp, Ashley, & Walker, 2024). The movement champions the non-pathologisation of mental disabilities and advocates for the acceptance of diverse human minds. It argues that impairment and distress frequently stem from lack of support and society being ill-equipped to accommodate Autistic individuals, rather than inherent dysfunction within the individual themselves. Thus, the neurodiversity movement prompts us to re-evaluate diagnostic practices due to embedded systemic biases in frameworks like the medical model.

This new critical perspective challenges assumptions of pathology, so that Autistic lived experiences are centred, captured and understood anew. In this paper, I will argue that, alongside the medical model, classical phenomenology is an inadequate framework for understanding the subjective lived experiences of Autistic individuals, without unnecessarily pathologising them. Thus, I will contend that a critical phenomenological lens must be applied to future Autism research in order for the Autistic lived experience to be accurately and justly understood as a facet of diverse human existence rather than a demonstration of existential lack.

Classical phenomenology provides important methodological foundations for understanding subjective lived experiences. However, due mostly to its pursuit of universality, classical phenomenology has its limitations when it comes to understanding and describing the subjective lived experiences of marginalised peoples. For many modern philosophers, this flaw in classical phenomenology can be addressed by applying a critical lens to the phenomenological method — thus, paving the way for a critical phenomenology. Leaning on the arguments of Davis (2020), Guenther (2020) and Gordon (2020), I will distinguish critical phenomenology from classical phenomenology, exploring the ways critical phenomenology intentionally addresses the gaps in the classical phenomenological framework. Referring predominantly to Hughes, Ekdahl, and Boldsen (2025), I will apply my arguments to discuss the historical flaws in phenomenological Autism research and how a classical phenomenological approach has perpetuated them. Ultimately, I will argue that a critical phenomenology framework is essential for future Autism research to acknowledge the diversity of human lived experience, do away with a pathologising lens, and centre the subjective lived experience of the Autistic individual.

2. Classical Phenomenology and its Limitations

Developed in the early 20th century by Edmund Husserl, classical phenomenology originated in response to a perceived European crisis (Smith, 2018; Davis, 2020:3). According to Husserl, Europeans had become swept up in a focus on empirical science and theoretical explanations and, in the process, had become detached from the essences of their experiences. By imposing scientific theories onto our experiences, Husserl believed that we were distancing ourselves from the world as it initially appears to us (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:vii-viii). This way of thinking, which takes the world as existing outside of consciousness for granted, had become our normal way of approaching reality, the "natural attitude" (Guenther, 2020:11). Husserl proposed that this "natural attitude" needed to be suspended, or "bracketed" in order to go "back to the things themselves" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:vii; Guenther, 2020:11). This suspension, also known as the *epoché*, involves setting aside the assumption that the world exists completely separate from consciousness and temporarily removing the imposition of theoretical frameworks (Davis 2020; Guenther, 2020). By suspending the natural attitude, we are given the chance to experience phenomena in their givenness, with a fresh perspective — we see the world anew. In so doing, Husserl suggested that phenomenology could uncover the universal structures of consciousness that make subjective experience possible and meaningful (Smith, 2018). Central to this endeavour is the concept of intentionality, which understands that consciousness is always "consciousness of" something. In Husserl's understanding, consciousness is always directed towards

objects, thoughts, feelings, or perceptions (Smith, 2018). Thus, consciousness is not an isolated interiority but exists as the relation itself (Davis, 2020:4).

Overall, Husserl's mission for phenomenology was to rigorously understand the structures and essences revealed in subjective experience — uncovering the objective within the subjective and the subjective within the objective. To some degree, Husserl succeeded in this endeavour, encouraging philosophers to focus on subjective experience and lived reality. This shifts the focus away from purely theoretical or objective accounts of reality that seemed insufficient to capture the full richness of lived experience. However, in many ways, Husserl failed to identify the gaps and limitations in his theory. His pursuit of universal structures, while groundbreaking, risked establishing yet another theoretical system based on limited perspectives, potentially overlooking the ways experience is shaped by factors beyond these suggested universals.

It is important to acknowledge that Husserl, alongside the prominent classical phenomenologists who came after him, constituted a remarkably homogeneous group of philosophical thinkers. Early phenomenologists, like Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, were middle-class, educated, White European men. They did not write from the margins. Their voices belonged inside the academy. Thus, theirs became the dominant phenomenological perspective, a perspective which failed to emphasise how contingent and historical social structures influence and shape the embodied experiences of marginalised groups. These structures, such as patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity and neurotypicality, are not just external facts, but actively shape and organise the "natural attitude" itself, establishing norms that often go unnoticed without critical reflection (Guenther, 2020:12). For example, patriarchy makes male experiences seem universal, failing to account for the lived reality that men can walk down dark streets at night without fear while women navigate the same physical spaces with an embodied awareness of their vulnerability. Similarly, heteronormativity sees heterosexual experiences as "normal", not acknowledging that simple displays of intimacy like holding hands require same-sex couples to calculate safety and acceptance before expressing the kind of affection that heterosexual couples take for granted. Neurotypicality frames daily tasks like grocery shopping as straightforward, while Autistic individuals experience the same task as an overwhelming sensory assault requiring significant bodily regulation and energy management. By overlooking these ubiquitous structural and systemic influences, classical phenomenology's analyses of "universal structures" risks implicitly universalising experiences rooted in specific, often privileged, social positions.

This limitation of classical phenomenology, specifically its insufficient critique of how social structures and power relations shape what we consider universal and mould our experience, is also apparent in phenomenological Autism research.

3. How These Limitations Arise in Autism Research

Historically, Autism research has been undertaken and framed within the medical model. In psychiatry, the medical model, as Bolton (2008) explains it, involves the understanding that a person fails to do the right thing or act as expected not because they choose to, but because they are ill. Their body is not in the right natural condition — it has been damaged by disease or has an imbalance in the materials involved in mental states. This framework is institutionalised through diagnostic manuals, like the DSM-5, which categorise Autism Spectrum Disorder through deficiency-based criteria focused on social impairments and communication deficits (Bolton, 2008).

Within the medical model, there is a tendency towards binary distinctions — a behaviour is either normal or abnormal, a patient is well or unwell. Generally, "abnormal" manifestations of distress and dysfunction are identified within the individual, who is then treated with an intervention — but only at the individual, not societal, level. The intervention is appropriate should the patient see themselves as having or being a problem. If the individual identifies the source of their distress as coming from outside of themselves, they do not make for very good patients (Bolton, 2008). The medical model's individual-focused approach and tendency to operate in binaries has proven particularly problematic in Autism research.

Similar to classical phenomenology, the medical model fails to account for the ways contingent historical and social structures influence and shape individual ways

of being-in-the-world[1]. Just as classical phenomenology can be critiqued for mistaking privileged experiences for universal experiences, the medical model has correctly been accused of mistaking social norms for medical norms — pathologising what are ultimately socially defined problems (Bolton, 2008). The medical model can be further critiqued for pathologising normal diversity within the human experience. Where classical phenomenology and the medical model intersect, as they historically have in Autism research, individuals whose cognitive structures cause them to experience the world differently to the privileged "universal" are identified as abnormal or deficient.

With these vantage points constituting the predominant lens through which research has been conducted, it is unsurprising that the field of Autism research has been described as "characterised by a narrowness of perspective" (Pellicano & den Houting, cited in Hughes *et al.*, 2025:2). As the vast majority of research has focused on causation, very little research to date has endeavoured to understand Autistic lived experiences. Hughes *et al.* (2025:3) argue that, while classical phenomenology has the potential to greatly enhance our understanding of Autistic lived experience by focusing on first-person perspectives, much of the phenomenological Autism research to date has been "methodologically problematic". Classical phenomenological Autism research, for the most part, has been "neurotypically normative", labelling autistic ways of being-in-the-world as deficient and dysfunctional (Hughes *et al.*, 2025:3).

This neurotypically normative approach manifests itself in several key areas of Autism research. For example, there is a long-standing assertion that Autistic people struggle to empathise with others. Historically, classical phenomenological accounts have painted Autistic embodied subjectivity as empathy-deficient, lacking the ability to connect and resonate with others (Hughes *et al.*, 2025:11). Similarly, where classical phenomenology assumes universal structures of temporal synthesis, many Autistic people experience time as fragmented, cyclical or intensely focused rather than linear (Hughes *et al.*, 2025:7). These differences are consistently framed as abnormalities and deviations from the neurotypical standard rather than alternative phenomenological structures that present themselves within the many diverse ways of being-in-the-world.

It should be apparent at this point that classical phenomenology and the medical model work together to create a systematic framework that devalues Autistic ways of being-in-the-world. The medical model's binary thinking combines with classical phenomenology's universalist assumptions to position neurotypical experience as the standard against which all other experiences are measured. Thus, Autistic ways of being-in-the-world — whether socially, temporally or otherwise — are automatically categorised as deficiency rather than diversity.

4. The Makings of a Critical Phenomenology

It is crucial to recognise that Autistic perspectives and ways of being are shaped both from within and without: by their fundamentally different cognitive structures and the contingent social structures which pathologise and marginalise them (Hughes *et al.*, 2025:3). These forces co-constitute Autistic realities, creating a double bind where neurological differences become sites of systematic devaluation, oppression, and exclusion. This reveals the urgent need for a phenomenological approach that acknowledges the role of social structures in shaping our experience and can account for neurological diversity without pathologising it. This is the entry point for a critical phenomenology.

So what is required for the makings of a critical phenomenology? Duane H. Davis (2020) argues that the answer is intersectionality. Like Husserl, Davis (2020:3) frames phenomenology as a necessary response to the ongoing crises of our time. However, Davis argues that for phenomenology to be of contemporary significance, transcendental subjectivity must be reconceptualised within the framework of intersectionality. Here, Davis draws on the work of Patricia Hill Collins. Collins (cited in Davis, 2020:8) defines intersectionality as "the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as reciprocally constructing phenomena". Davis (2020:3) sees intersectionality as

[1]"Being-in-the-world" is a core phenomenological concept coined by Martin Heidegger. It refers to the fundamental embeddedness of human existence within an environment of meaningful relations and practical concerns (Smith, 2018). The concept highlights that human beings are not isolated subjects observing an external reality but are inherently engaged with, and act from within, a world that shapes and is shaped by their existence.

grounds for the "redeployment of phenomenology". Ultimately, race, gender, and class — and their intersections — are central in the development of a critical phenomenology.

By applying this critical lens of intersectionality, Davis (2020:6–7) critiques and reinterprets Husserl's geological metaphor of the natural attitude and the phenomenological attitude overlapping (*überschiebung*) like tectonic plates. According to Davis (2020:7), Husserl presents the overlapping of these standpoints as peaceful and stable. The phenomenological attitude slides over the natural attitude, and the world of the natural attitude remains "undisturbed by the adoption of new standpoints" (Husserl cited in Davis, 2020:7). Here, Davis takes a critical look at Husserl's metaphor — turning it against him and asking us to understand it anew. In reality, the overlapping of tectonic plates results in anything but stability (Davis, 2020:7). Instead, one plate "encroaches" upon another and our world as we know it is shaken — destabilised, "such that we mistrust the very ground upon which we stand" (Davis, 2020:7). In the spirit of a critical phenomenology, it appears that this encroachment — which I interpret as an intrusion and an unsettling — pushes up against the natural attitude, to the point of inviting us to approach our newfound instability with wonder and awe.

Drawing on the existential phenomenologists, Davis (2020:8) posits that this instability and encroachment is not something to be overcome but embraced as having practical potential. They argue that, in pursuing a critical phenomenology, phenomenology must be reimagined as a "philosophy of difference". In other words, having an awareness of the instability imposed upon us by social power dynamics, and embracing the intersectional, complex and varying ways humans appear in the world, is crucial in the makings of a critical phenomenology. Davis is encouraging us to unsettle and disturb classical approaches to phenomenological thinking, and delight in the diversity that this new perspective unveils. For example, this might entail approaching Autistic ways of being as revelatory of a diverse spectrum of phenomenological structures, rather than pathologising them as deficient. Undeniably, this is the kind of viewpoint that is essential for approaching marginalised ways of being-in-the-world anew.

In fact, Davis's philosophy of difference directly resonates with Hughes and colleagues' (2025) call for a critical phenomenology which embraces neurodivergent experiences. They ask us to view Autistic ways of being-in-the-world as intrinsically belonging to the full human spectrum. This expansive view challenges the neurotypically normative, deficiency-based assumptions that have historically narrowed Autism research. For research into the Autistic lived experience, delight in difference could be revolutionary.

5. Re-evaluating Intentionality

With Davis's (2020) "philosophy of difference", we were asked to fundamentally reconceptualise our understanding of the phenomenological method and how it applies to a diversity of lived experiences. In a similar vein, Lisa Guenther (2020) identifies the core phenomenological concept of *intentionality* as another area in need of reconceptualisation. Guenther (2020:12) argues that classical phenomenology has been inadequately critical, failing to factor in the "contingent historical and social structures" — what she calls "quasi-transcendental structures" — which shape our lived experience. To become critical, says Guenther, phenomenology must re-evaluate how it understands intentionality, and the relationship between the intentional act (*noesis*) and the intentional object (*noema*). Classical phenomenology, in the Husserlian fashion, understands that the intentional act of consciousness projects meaning onto the intentional object, i.e. the *noesis* constitutes the *noema*. However, critical phenomenology, drawing on Merleau-Ponty, sees this relationship as a reciprocal feedback loop — consciousness shapes how we see the world, but the world (especially social structures) also shapes how we are able to see and experience it in return.

Guenther (2020:13) demonstrates the importance of this distinction through the example of solitary confinement. Husserl might have believed otherwise, but periods of extreme social isolation have a significant negative impact on one's experience of the world. Here, Guenther emphasises that social and historical structures in the world impact *how* I perceive the world and have the ability to break down my capacity to experience the world as harmonious. It is important to recognise that Autistic individuals have distinct cognitive structures that affect their perception of the world and social interactions, frequently giving rise to

social difficulties (Boldsen, 2022). When their ways of being are categorised as deficient by diagnostic manuals applying the medical model, such that they are further stigmatised and isolated, this negatively shapes how they experience the world and themselves within it (Pantazakos & Vanaken, 2023). In the making of a critical phenomenology, it is important to Guenther (2020:13) that we acknowledge this reciprocal relationship between *noesis* and *noema* — noting the ways the world shapes consciousness, without forgetting that consciousness is still able to shape the world. In the end, the mission of critical phenomenology is not just about understanding and explaining the world, but also about changing it (Guenther, 2020:16).

6. Bad Faith and Disciplinary Decadence

In pursuit of a critical phenomenology, Davis (2020) has unsettled us and asked us to delight in difference, and Guenther (2020) has helped us acknowledge that just as the world shapes us, we can shape the world. So, what else exists in our current phenomenological frameworks which hinders us from making changes towards an appreciation of difference? Lewis R. Gordon offers us an answer through his exposition of the philosophical problem of bad faith, which can be understood as the problem of lying to oneself (2020:17). As Gordon explores the idea and implications of bad faith, he makes some observations that stand out as particularly important. Gordon (2020:19) notes that bad faith is social and occurs within intersubjectivity. Exemplified in racism, bad faith is seen when racialised groups are identified as human while simultaneously being dehumanised (Gordon, 2020:20). Simply put, this is lying to oneself about the full humanity of another person or group in order to justify their mistreatment. This is similarly evident in how neurotypicality operates. When Autistic ways of being-in-the-world are pathologised and Autistic people are labelled as deficient, they are automatically classified as sub-human — unworthy of the same treatment as those who share full human status. Ignoring or turning our attention away from the pervasive dehumanisation is a matter of bad faith. Another form of bad faith, argues Gordon (2020:21), is "disciplinary decadence". In this case, academic disciplines, like psychiatry, treat themselves and their methods as "complete", closed systems representing all of reality. Thus, they ignore that these disciplines are incomplete and flawed human creations. This is of particular significance in the human sciences, where those who do not conform to the discipline's pre-established expectations are labelled as problems (Gordon, 2020:21). As such, the issue is placed on the individual for failing to conform, instead of questioning the discipline's limitations or rigidities. This is particularly pertinent in Autism research influenced by the medical model, such as in psychiatry, where Autistic individuals who do not conform to neurotypical ways of being-in-the-world are categorised as deficient or disordered. This occurs when the discipline fails to question its limited, neurotypically-biased perspective.

Expanding upon this, classical phenomenology is undoubtedly guilty of what Gordon terms "disciplinary decadence". As a framework claiming universality, classical phenomenology fails to recognise its own limitations, placing blame on Autistic individuals for not conforming to neurotypical norms rather than evaluating how it might adapt to account for the diversity of lived experiences. Aligning with Guenther's critique of classical phenomenology, Hughes *et al.* (2025:3) express concern that this kind of research lens risks overlooking the greater social and political contexts which are so deeply entangled with Autistic existence — alienating and isolating the very people whose subjectivity they wish to clarify.

We can see that addressing the issue of bad faith is an important step in developing a critical phenomenology. In particular, the concepts highlighted by Gordon can be found in and applied to the challenges faced in Autism research today.

7. Applying Critical Phenomenology to Autism Research

These issues of bad faith and disciplinary decadence are clearly exemplified through one of the long-standing assertions in Autism research that Autistic people struggle to empathise with others. Historically, classical phenomenological accounts have painted a picture of Autistic embodied subjectivity as empathy-deficient, lacking the ability to connect and resonate with others (Hughes *et al.,* 2025:11). However, when applying a critical phenomenological lens, Autistic-led theories re-evaluate the issue to account for discriminatory social and structural factors. When applying Milton's theory of

double empathy[2], it is acknowledged that "empathetic resonance is fundamentally dependent on sufficient social overlap vis-à-vis expectations and norms between interlocutors" (cited in Hughes *et al.,* 2025:11). Thus, issues of empathy between Autistic and non-Autistic persons, previously characterised as a fault on the part of the Autistic person, can be more accurately conceptualised as a two-way breakdown in social reciprocity. Milton's theory demonstrates that, while classical phenomenology frames this breakdown as an empathy "deficit" and one of the many "symptoms" of Autism, it is actually evidence of fundamentally different Autistic intersubjective structures that reveal the limitations of universalist assumptions of social cognition.

However, the phenomenological gaps in understanding the diverse Autistic lived experience extend far beyond intersubjective challenges like empathy. Autistic individuals, across the spectrum, inhabit fundamentally different phenomenological structures across all domains of consciousness (Hughes *et al.,* 2025:7). For instance, while classical phenomenology assumes universal structures of temporal synthesis[3], some Autistic people experience time as fragmented, cyclical or intensely focused rather than linear. This is especially apparent for some Autistic individuals when they engage in their special interests, leading to experiences of hyperfocus and a profound capacity for deep engagement (Hughes *et al.,* 2025). This intense temporal engagement reveals phenomenological depths that typical consciousness might never access. Similarly, where classical phenomenology presupposes standard patterns of intentional directedness, Autistic consciousness demonstrates a diversity of alternative architectures[4]. For example, Autistic sensory experiences vary widely, from heightened perceptual acuity and superior pattern recognition, to extreme sensory sensitivity that reveals phenomenological richness in everyday experiences (Boldsen, 2022). The Autistic drive to comprehensively understand and gather knowledge on specific domains of interest also represents diverse structures of curiosity and meaning-making. These differences in attention, temporal flow, sensory-processing and meaning-making are not deviations from universal norms but represent a heterogeneous spectrum of alternative phenomenological architectures that challenge the very foundations of what classical phenomenology considers *universal*. A critical phenomenological approach that delights in difference would appreciate these diverse ways of being-in-the-world rather than pathologising them as deficiencies.

Although I have merely scratched the surface of the historical applications of classical phenomenology vs. a critical phenomenological framework in Autism research, it seems apparent to me that the classical phenomenological approach has been used to harmfully label the Autistic lived experience as deficient. By applying a critical phenomenological lens to Autism research, as argued by Hughes *et al.* and exemplified by Milton, we have a better chance of centring Autistic lived experience and meaning-making, leaving behind the harmful limitations of a pathologising lens.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, I have shown that classical phenomenology has provided an important framework for exploring and understanding human lived experiences. However, classical phenomenology has notable limitations, especially when it comes to accounting for the impact of contingent historical and social structures on the lived experiences of marginalised populations, like Autistic people. Classical phenomenology's pursuit of universality, combined with the medical model's binary thinking and deficiency-based approach, has created a

[2]Milton's theory of the double empathy problem challenges the traditional view that communication breakdowns between Autistic and non-Autistic people stem from empathy deficits in Autistic individuals. The theory observes that such breakdowns do not occur in exclusively Autistic or exclusively non-Autistic interactions, suggesting instead that difficulties arise from a mutual challenge in perspective-taking and reciprocity when people with different experiential frameworks interact. (Ekdahl, 2024)

[3]Classical phenomenology, particularly Husserl's work, seeks to describe the universal, invariant structures of subjective experience. Within this framework, temporal synthesis — the process through which consciousness unifies time into a continuous, linear flow — is treated as one such universal structure. This synthesis is achieved through intentional acts: retention (holding the immediate past), present awareness, and protention (anticipating the immediate future).

[4]Classical phenomenology assumes consciousness directs attention toward intentional objects in standardised ways. For example, it presumes that background sensory information remains tacit while focal objects of attention are foregrounded. However, for many Autistic individuals, sensory information often refuses to remain in the background — sights and sounds intensify and demand attention, disrupting the typical figure-ground structure of experience (Boldsen, 2022). This represents an alternative architecture — a different structural organisation of attention and perception — rather than deficiency.

systematic framework that pathologises neurological diversity rather than recognising it as part of the human spectrum. These limitations are particularly evident in classical phenomenological Autism research, where Autistic ways of being-in-the-world have been consistently framed as deviations from neurotypical norms rather than constituting a diverse spectrum of phenomenological architectures.

The development of a critical phenomenology, drawing on intersectionality and a philosophy of difference, addresses these gaps by acknowledging how contingent social structures shape lived experience and by embracing neurological diversity without pathologising it. Through the work of Davis, Guenther, and Gordon, I have demonstrated how critical phenomenology provides the theoretical foundation necessary to move beyond the harmful assumptions that have historically characterised Autism research. By applying this framework to phenomena such as the double empathy problem and diverse Autistic temporal and sensory experiences, we can begin to appreciate the rich phenomenological structures that Autistic individuals inhabit across the spectrum.

Ultimately, I have argued that adopting a critical phenomenological framework is not merely beneficial but essential for future Autism research. Only by acknowledging both the neurological diversity inherent in Autistic cognition and the social structures that marginalise Autistic experiences can we move toward research that truly centres Autistic subjectivity. This approach promises to transform our understanding of Autism from a collection of deficits to an appreciation of diverse ways of being-in-the-world, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and just phenomenological understanding of human existence.

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