

## Spectres/spectrums of autism<sup>1</sup>

Eric Laurent<sup>2</sup>

### Spectres/Spectrums of Anxiety

The title I have chosen [*Les spectres de l'autisme* in French] evokes the book written by Jacques Derrida at the end of the 90s, in which he underlined the inexorable presence of Marx.<sup>3</sup> The further we get away from "Marxist" politics, the more Marxist doctrine and its criticism of the capitalist system regain force (a life beyond the grave in a way). The theme of spectres echoes the famous first sentence from the Communist Party Manifesto: "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism".

Autism is neither haunting Europe nor America, whether in its Latin or Northern territories, but its presence is being felt ever more insistently nonetheless. Since the revision the DSM-IV<sup>4</sup> came into force, there has been a veritable epidemic, which poses an acute problem: how can we account for it? How can we explain that in twenty years, the number of entries brought together in this category has increased tenfold? As it is difficult to put this down to a mutation in the human species, autism is really the spectre/spectrum haunting our health bureaucracies.

Even so, it was rather anxiety that made me choose this title, namely the anxiety of users who fall into this category. This anxiety came to light after the conference presentation announcing the DSM-V – whose proposed publication date of 2012 has been pushed back because of the wave of protest it gave rise to – and this has provoked a real scandal.

It is worth noting that the entry on "Asperger's" had been ear-marked for removal from "syndromes without organisation" so that it could be reinserted as part of the autistic spectrum [*spectre des autismes*] – this term [*"spectre"* in French] no longer to be understood in the sense of a phantom, but in that

<sup>1</sup> [In this article the author plays on the ambiguity of the word "spectre" in French, which means both "spectre" and "spectrum". Where the equivocation is necessary I have kept both words with a dash between them to preserve the ambiguity; where this ambiguity no longer applies, I have chosen the word implied by the context. T.N.]

<sup>2</sup> Eric Laurent is a psychoanalyst and a member of the ECF. This text is the rewriting of a lecture given on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2010 at the Instituto clinico de Buenos Aires (ICBA). Editing by Pascale Fari and Nathalie Georges-Lambrichs.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Derrida J. *Spectres of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf London: Routledge, 1994

<sup>4</sup> Cf. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 1994, text revision 2000.

Eric Laurent

of a luminous beam. In a press conference, the association of subjects said to have Asperger's then expressed their anxiety at loosing their diagnostic specificity, thereby demonstrating the absurdity of the differential criteria used to distinguish them by dissociating their cognitive faculties, which remain intact, from their supposed inability to read the emotions or affect felt by others. Refusing to be confused with those who do not share their cognitive capacities, they have formed a lobby group to assert their specificity and escape the spectrum/spectre [*le spectre*] which keeps getting bigger and bigger. We must be attentive to this anxiety on the part of the subjects concerned, for as this signifier represents them for all other signifiers they have a legitimate right to be catalogued in a fitting manner.

### Diffraction and sleight of hand

In order to grasp where the causes of this anxiety lie, we must reconsider the very strange character and destiny of "autism" as a category, insofar as it was one of the most remarkable consequences of the reincorporation of psychiatry into medicine at the end of the 1970s. Psychiatry, which until then had been about the relation subjects establish between themselves (paranoia being an illness of the public square [*la place publique*]<sup>5</sup>), lost its singular status to become a biological discipline centred on the body, in the sense of the organism. However, characterised by an extreme flaw in the relation, autism had the advantage of being set apart from disorders in speech and language use – schizophrenia and paranoia remaining difficulties or disorders at the level of the social bond. Autism could thus be considered as a purely physical disorder, freed from the constraints of language and the relation to the Other. From this moment, it was a question of promoting this category in the greatest possible number of cases, to the detriment of that of psychosis, by arguing that diagnostic errors had occurred.

Following current trends, the emphasis shifted from language disorders to mood disorders, re-classifying schizophrenic subjects as "bipolar". This repositioning allowed the maximum concentration of disorders with a view to finding a biological determination, especially a genetic one. Hence the paradoxical surprise: instead of providing a simpler causality, the signifier spectrum led to an explosion.

This reminds us that the whole machinery of the DSM is directed against the classical form of clinical psychiatry inherited at the start of the twentieth century and then reconfigured in the 1950s with the inclusion of schizophrenia, isolated by Bleuler, and mood disorders. The simplification

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Lacan, J. "Structure des psychoses paranoïaques" in *Ornicar?* 44 (1988), p. 5-18: "the delusion of inter-pretation is a delusion of the hallway, the street and the forum".



brought about by the DSM and its list of syndromes cast the previous categories to the four winds. However, this work of reorganisation is unceasing, insofar as it is precisely correlated, not only to the opinions of American psychiatrists who wish to exercise their right to vote on these categories, their usage and their usefulness, but also to the shifts brought about by science, in total ignorance of the current state of the clinic – the priority being given to scientific shifts with little concern for the clinical forms at stake.

Thus, the publication, engaged in the renovation of this manual, hopes to take another step forward, amplifying the spectrum of autism once more: its extreme poles being autism and bipolar disorders, which include schizophrenia as one of its variants. It thus begins with autism and communication disorders to end up with what pertains to the relation to the other and to affective disorders. Communication versus the relation to others! This evolution strikes a chord with the general tendency of psychiatry, which increasingly favours mood disorders over language disorders.

This resonates with the hopes of medicalising autism, which still lacks its medication of reference. Autism is still a stumbling block for pharmacopoeia, so useful for the psychoses. The only avenue that remains is invention, while trusting in the power of intention: oxytocin is already being advocated for autism, since this hormone is promoted as a mediator that is supposedly capable of stabilising the relation to the other. Does it not play a major role in a mother's relation to her child? Not only are mothers with a higher rate of oxytocin more interested in their offspring, they are also more faithful partners. For (and this is a delicate point), experimentation has established that the behaviour of the female rat changes in captivity. Seeking less external activity, the female rat no longer takes the same joy in passing from one suitor to the next. It is for this reason that a supposed fidelity is invoked! It is a real sleight of hand; a change in a mode of behaviour, or the fact that it has ceased, is observed and the explanation proposed is that, thanks to oxytocin, there is more fidelity and more involvement in the couple. All that remains is to place oxytocin and dopamine at the two extremes of the spectrum!

This conception which places the male at the autistic end and the female at the other has the merit of simplicity; it evokes the famous theory of Simon Baron-Cohen (Oxford)<sup>6</sup> for whom autism is certainly due to an excess of testosterone, which explains the prevalence of autism in

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Baron-Cohen S., "Is Autism an Extreme form of the Male Brain?", *Advances in Infancy Research*, 11 (1997), 193-217, available online.

masculine subjects (four out of five), while women are three times more exposed to the risk of depression from puberty onwards.

Such levelling of the clinic can only produce a strange, badly defined spectrum favouring the multiplication of cases that supposedly belong to the pole of autism, so much so that an expert has deduced that one person in fifty will be diagnosed with autism in ten years time. It is too much.

### The return of the particular

It is thus extremely salutary to find that the enthusiasm of Health bureaucracies for extending the autistic spectrum has met with resistance on the part of those to be included in it and that this category is generating a vast diversity because of the paradoxes that this very extension entails. While so many hopes are raised at the prospect of reducing the explanation of autism to a genetic basis, the last published studies (as well as others bearing on applied genetics) are no longer focused on typical variations for a very limited set of genes; today they are counting on the performance of new machines which allow them to study sets of genetic mutations on a broader basis and much more rapidly, whether it be on a mass scale or on an individual basis or whether they prove to be very numerous for certain subjects entered in the aforesaid "autistic spectrum".

Contrary to the scientific dream which used to aspire to a reduction to a simple basis, taking massive variations into consideration makes it necessary for researchers to study over a long period of time cases that are always different. This horizon allows us to think that the future of the spectrum of autisms rests on autistic people themselves, in other words on autistic subjects, each with a singularity of their own.

Faced with this diversity, for those who make an effort to enter into relation with these subjects from a psychoanalytic perspective, the difficulty is such that it becomes necessary to call upon the invention of a particular solution, made-to-measure. In fact being confronted with this impossibility has no other remedy than an invention which must each time include the leftover located at the limit of a subject's relation to the other.

### Rim of *jouissance* [bord de *jouissance*]

This difficulty draws our attention, in particular, to a category containing subjects who have isolated themselves for a long time, such as in autism with "encapsulation". This term refers to subjects who have no image, who have no reaction to the image of their body, who have put in place, instead of the mirror that does not work, a neo-corporeal barrier, in or beneath which they are totally enclosed. The encapsulation functions as a protective bubble in which the subject lives; if he does not have a body, he has his capsule or his very solid bubble behind which he keeps himself to himself.

In the nineties, I worked in a day hospital for five or six years, with autistic children; in this context, I proposed, in 1992 that in autism, the return



of *jouissance* occurs, neither in the Other as in paranoia, nor in the body as in schizophrenia, but rather on the rim [*le bord*].

This was at a time when Jacques-Alain Miller was reconsidering Lacan's contribution by no longer organising the clinic of psychosis on the basis of foreclosure, but by systematising the way that *jouissance* returns – in the body or in the Other. This allowed us to broaden our perspectives.

In this context, it seemed opportune to examine how one could support the hypothesis of this return, of this opaque presence of *jouissance*, with this curious limit, this neo-rim, which is the place where the subject is hidden (be it incompletely, as Bruno Bettelheim had grasped) under a massive form of defence, if it is not the product of its own void. In the experience of the treatment of these subjects, how could this rim be displaced?

Many times, at the start of treatment, this form of quasi-corporal envelope was clearly in evidence as an un-crossable limit beyond which no contact with the subject seemed possible. A certain amount of time was always necessary, varying from case to case, before something could be hooked, so that this neo-rim could come loose and be displaced, constituting a space (belonging neither to the subject nor to the other) where exchanges of a new kind, articulated with a less threatening other, could be produced.

### Play spaces

Inside this space, negotiations with the other are possible. Some elements of play can be introduced. In fact, even if this term "play" is not an entirely adequate one for qualifying these metonymical beginnings, I would nevertheless like to keep it in order to uphold the idea that what we install with psychoanalysis is indeed a space of play. In the neuroses this play space is one of equivocation, as Lacan calls it in "L'étourdit";<sup>7</sup> in psychosis, it is used for the construction of a personal language capable of including certain elements of equivocation; and it is also one in which the construction and displacement of this new rim can occur.

There is no question of reducing the way such play spaces are established with autistic subjects to a technique or method capable of producing a loosening and opening. In a certain way, all's good – *anything goes* – when it comes to trying to open that instant of attention when a subject who had previously been sealed in absolute indifference yields, be it to enter into a relation at a given moment, to flee, or even to bring his exact way of repeating his mode of relating to the other to an end. The very way in which we address the subject implies that we do not intend to reduce this approach to a technique or to a form of learning – such things do exist and

certainly in the behaviouralist perspective, in which the giving of rewards serve to reinforce (as they put it) the effects of the supposed learning.

If gains in knowledge and rewards signify anything from our perspective, it is insofar as every extension of unconscious knowledge, of the unconscious as knowledge, is at the same time an effect of *jouissance*. Play implies an indissoluble knot between the gain of knowledge and satisfaction, or even the beyond of satisfaction. We aim at the immersion of the subject in this play space, which has nothing to do with communication or the learning relation.

When I say that all's good, it is not trivial for all that. It is a way of showing that one cannot give a finite description of what it is worth doing. It would be more accurate to say that not-all will do, as one cannot reduce what will do to a closed set, but this doesn't stop one from saying "anything goes" – it sounds better than "not anything goes". For the not-all, a better expression will have to be found.

Thus, in a group of autistic subjects, one can use the transitivity of one to try to provoke a little epidemic: an autistic subject that can bear to exchange an object with the therapist can provoke the interest of another who cannot bear it, insofar as the exchange puts into play the extraction of an object that constitutes an integral part of his rim. It is sometimes possible to provoke an exchange between these two subjects, to construct a chain between them, while making sure that there are a sufficient number of pens, for example, for each to have their own, which reduces the aggressive tension. And each time the exchange of an object is produced, each time it crosses the border and passes to the other side or is included there again, it is accompanied by a word derived from phonemes or words that the subject has at his disposal. It is thus not only a question of a practice with several therapists, but of the practice between several bodies of autistic subjects. Even if they form a group, one does not understand it as such, because the transitivity of bodies is something quite different.

It is not the imaginary effects of the group which are taken into account, but the exchanges which can be produced in the real. It is thus a question of obtaining the extraction of a key object in the constitution of this very space.

### Extractions, displacements and inclusions

The objects of autistic subjects can be very curious. Temple Grandin, a world famous autistic subject, today professor at the University of Colorado and world specialist in the management and welfare of livestock devised a particular kind of *cattle chute* or *squeeze chute*: a cage or "device for holding an animal for branding, vaccination, or castration".<sup>8</sup> She developed

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Lacan J. "L'étourdit", *Autres écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, p. 491

<sup>8</sup> Grandin, T., *Emergence: Labelled Autistic* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).



specific systems for handling livestock – curved corrals, which are less brutal than right angled corrals, in order to get the animals into the corrals in the most efficient way possible, while at the same time avoiding their suffering. The meat has more flavour when it has not been pumped full of stress hormones produced by the poor animal before it is killed. It also allows the weight of the animal to be kept at the highest level, so there is no loss. T. Grandin is thus highly thought of by those whose job it is to kill these animals for profit. For her, it is about something completely different. In developing new methods for bringing cattle to slaughter, her objective was not to make the meat taste better, but to save these poor beasts from suffering. We are far from the transitional teddy or doll and this point must be clarified with more attention, but an object is certainly in play.

Her mother noted that, already as a young girl, her daughter sought refuge by wrapping herself in things, to contain herself. She also said that, before becoming fascinated by cattle chutes after a visit to her aunt's ranch, and before she had constructed her own personal "squeeze chute", which she will also call her "hug machine", these enveloping objects were her daughter's transitional objects, her "*comfies*", her security, and that she maintained a strange relation of rejection with them. In her book, Temple Grandin cites a letter from her mother "And dear, don't worry about the cattle chute, it's a 'comfy'. Remember when you were little and you rejected all your 'comfies'. Your need to turn to the cattle chute now is natural".<sup>9</sup> When she was eighteen, Temple constructed a squeeze machine of her own, a *hug machine*, in order to calm her anxiety. By contrast, since childhood she had found clothes bothersome, they had to be loose fitting. She used this personal cattle chute every day for a long time. In 2010, she mentioned that it had broken in 2008 and she had not repaired it: "*I'm into hugging people now*".

This device tells us something about the way the subject can preserve a fixed relation with an object which enters into her world, an object which takes a form and at the same time gives one. The Lacanian matheme of the object *a* is undoubtedly more able to qualify the way T. Grandin captures a body, whether it is the body of an animal or her own. She stated herself that she used to "put [herself] in a cow's place".<sup>10</sup> This identification holds no mystery for her, her body is not contained but enclosed by a rim [*bordé*],

<sup>9</sup> Grandin, T., *Emergence Labelled Autistic*, p. 116; cited by J-C in *L'autiste et sa voix* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), p. 139. I thank Philip Dravers, colleague of the London Society and translator of this article in English for having found the precise English citation and for having clarified the confusions between "cattle chute" or "squeeze chute", and "cattle trap", engendered by the translation of this term in French "trappe à bétail".

<sup>10</sup> Grandin T., *Emergence: Labelled Autistic*, op. cit., p. 168. "When I put myself in a cow's place, I really have to be that cow and not a person in a cow's costume".

locked inside this form. Here, what the object *a* puts in form, presses into a form, the en-form of the object *a* is the squeeze chute, which gives a form to the panick-stricken object gaze (her own and that of the animal, "wild-eyed and nervous"<sup>11</sup>) and articulates it with the body.

Other cases show how a subject is led to include a transitional object – it would in fact be a marvel if he really constituted one. When a crisis or disturbance is at its height, certain autistic subjects extract shit from themselves by inserting their hand into their anus in a quite horrible form of fist-fucking. It is less frequent in the clinic today now that these children are more closely looked after, but I remember a time when this was happening quite often. How can one go from this brutal extraction to dolls [*poupées*], shitty objects, ragged and shapeless [*informes*], sometimes stinking, because they are really in continuity with this extraction of the anal object from the body? And, on this basis, how can the object be transformed by distancing it from the body, with the help of a device capable of taking it up in another way? As in the example of the "squeeze chute", which can be included with others, some subjects testify to such effects of extraction when they come to extract and at the same time separate from these objects that are so close to the body.

The space of this rim then itself acquires a distance in relation to the body. It is a locus for the transformation of the fundamental cry or, more precisely, the fundamental noise of language (which is left after the refusal the signifier) to which the autistic subject is submitted. The extreme sensibility of some autistic subjects to noise (for example, the case of the child who covers his ears when a plane passes overhead at thirty thousand feet) is known without statistical studies, which are numerous, having shown that the cause of autism resides in this auditory sensitivity and in the transmission of noise to the brain. Since these auditory problems have not been established, the noise in question does not explain the difficulty that autistic subjects have in listening to what is said to them. Which leaves what we are well aware of in the clinic: an autistic child is located in a space that is not constituted in terms of distance. As soon as the plane enters the subject's visual field, whether it is ten kilometres or only a metre away, it is there, close by, and the same goes for its sound, considering the disjunction between the visual and the acoustic. The fundamental noise is not the noise made by the plane's engines, what remains is the noise of language, which never stops.

How can we treat this object then? I remember a subject who had two little sticks that formed his own unique system, two little sticks that he used to make a noise with all day long. The analyst who was treating him

<sup>11</sup> Grandin, T. *Emergence: Labelled Autistic*, op. cit. p. 86.



responded to it with his voice. For many weeks and months, the subject banged his little sticks against each other in the sessions, until the analyst vocalised the thing, very softly, saying "ti-ti-ti-ti-ti". One day, taking advantage of the fact that the therapist was sitting crossed legged on the ground, the subject placed the little sticks in the false hole of his partner's folded knees and uttered a "ti-ti-ti-ti" himself. He was then able to pass from the exchange of the "ti-ti-ti-ti" to the naming of other things. There you have one way of inaugurating the first chain that allows a subject to come out of his enclosure.

To be able to immerse himself in this space, the subject must sometimes isolate himself – when he can bear it. In other cases, peer immersion can be suggested, for example in story workshops, through a narrative story, or a story animated with puppets. In a case presented to the Forum of Barcelona, a menacing wolf had captivated the attention of a subject who became fixated on the image for months without wanting to know anything about it, invaded by a terrible fear, while the other children identified themselves with the wolf or killed him with the most exuberant energy. Until the day he got up and uttered these words: "I am a shitty wolf." With this identification with the shitty wolf, certainly not separated from the object *a* (a wolf covered in shit both inside and out), little by little the idea of speaking emerged, he was able to speak with a small bird: it was not a "ti-ti-ti" but a "tu tu tu ti titu ri ti tui" of the little bird. This sequence constituted a beginning, even if, as you know, there is no link with the subject's immersion in the bath of the story's language, which is a pretext, for it is not a question of role-playing. The question is not whether the subjects play the role of the wolf or not; it's about making it possible for there to be (at a given moment in this exchange of words, in this calculated immersion) the chance of an exchange between the silent, shitty wolf and the little bird, so that, on this basis, the subject can hook himself onto something.

### Extraction as an act of language

The sessions with these subjects, each in their own way, bear witness to the fact that something of the body must be extracted so that something different can then enter into the subject's language, in their personal dictionary.

Nevertheless, one cannot make the inclusion of a signifier and the extraction of a certain quantity of object *a* equivalent to each other, as in a system where the Archimedes principle creates an equilibrium between levels. It is a question of finding something capable of displacing the limit of the autistic rim. Once the extraction of the object has occurred, signifiers endowed with a special status can come into play. Let's take the example of a Spanish subject, who extracted what for him constituted the function of the Other from the television. He is autistic, but, these days the television is the Other for everyone. From now on there are two fundamental Others: the

television and the computer screen, the web page. In fact, for the great majority of us, what exists is what we see on television; inversely, what is not seen on television does not exist. To say that something was on television adds existence to it, a real weight and it doesn't inspire the same confidence if this cannot be said; you don't have the idea that it truly exists. At the same time, people spend less and less time in front of the television and more and more of it in front of their computer screens, so much so that what appears on the screen is endowed with consistency. What existence will remain for a book that has not been digitalised – for whom will it have an interest, a true existence?

Autistic subjects are in fact very centred on this televisual Other that guarantees the stability of the speaking Other and seems a lot more reliable than everybody else. So, this subject constituted his language out of catch phrases he had heard on the television, the scraps and ends of the discourse of the Other. Since the Spanish child in question was from Galicia, where a famous right-wing politician had the slogan "I can promise and I promise", this young autistic was heard shouting out this refrain one day with the utmost vigour. It really was a question of choice, as it was a concentration of the whole universal discourse. To extract this is an act of language (in Austin's sense), it is truly an act of promise, and thus, in some way, the act itself. But it is also a tautology: as soon as it is extracted, it no longer refers to anything other than the statement [*énoncé*] itself, separated from its enunciation [*énonciation*]. This seems an ironic act, the psychotic irony that consists in isolating the catch phrase "I can promise and I promise" in the Other, which anticipates the Berlusconi of videocracy – television as the discourse of the master. When the autistic subject picks out this or that cantilena, he becomes, in a sense, an analyser of the common discourse that we repeat amongst ourselves.

### Treating the "foreclosure of lack"

As for the famous literalism that characterises the extraction and constitution of the autistic subject's language, what sense do we give it? Take this subject who, when he gives something to an educator whose name is Reyes, cries "I am going to see *los reyes mages*" [the "three kings" or "three wise men" of the bible]. Here there is neither a metaphor, nor an equivocation, but rather a world in which, at the same time and literally, Reyes and *reyes mages* are equivalent. His world was constituted in this way and the subject used very strict procedures of verification to verify that he really was addressing someone named Reyes. He got all the educators involved in confirming who Reyes was, while at the same time making this false equivocation between Reyes and the three Kings. The verification procedures consisted in addressing the educator in order to say the following: "You are called Reyes, thus you are the three Kings; but you, what is your name?" He verified that he could effectively address her, that



he could give up the object demanded to her and that he could give it up to the right person without any possible equivocation. At the level of language he could thus support this link of literality between Reyes and the three kings [*los reyes mages*], but not at the level of reference.

We can also bring the undeniable prevalence of autism in masculine subjects into the discussion, as it is well proven. Freud explained why women are more likely to have a problem with mood or depression when the loss of love is at stake and Lacan complicated the question a little, but we can question why women cry, on the one hand, and, on the other, why men are more autistic, which is something women agree on: not only are men fetishists but autistic too, the one and the other not being without a link. As Lacan spoke of the "fetishistic style of masculine love", what mutation does it undergo in the space of autism? Perhaps you recall the article in which Jacques-Alain Miller commented upon Rosine Lefort's Wolf Child case and this subject's reaction when he discovered the hole in the toilet.<sup>12</sup> For him, this hole provoked horror and he tried to cut off his penis to throw it into it, which Jacques-Alain Miller suggested calling "the bringing into play of this minus that is attempting to get inscribed in the real"; thus alluding to the fact that the subject's full world does not allow the lack to be included or given a place, which he thus had to produce. If one follows this hypothesis, one can understand why children saturated by the penis are much more sensitive to the foreclosure of the lack. For a subject, in his relation to the other, it is not the same thing to have or not to have this appendage. In so far as the relation to this appendage is gradually constructed, how can it be linked with this particular sensitivity to the foreclosure of lack?

The example of another autistic subject provides an illustration, when he tells us how he plugged the hole (in other words the hole of language) with mathematics. Very gifted at mathematics, he came up against something unbearable when his professor wanted to teach him set theory, encountering a limit there. Brilliant at calculus, he could not bear the axiom that states that the empty set can be added, included, in any set without changing that set. This put him in a rage and he wanted to know nothing more about this horror until the teacher had the cunning idea of saying to him, "It's like that because it is, it is a definition". As this axiom was part of the law of the world, if it was like that because it was like that, he could begin to bear the idea that something so horrible could exist in set theory.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Miller J-A, "La matrice du traitement de l'enfant au loup", *La Cause freudienne*, 66 May 2007, p. 148

### To conclude

This is the essential part of what I wanted to transmit. We must gather together and broadcast information about our practice with these subject and make the results obtained known by publishing them in various publications in order to have the chance of being heard by decision makers.<sup>13</sup> One cannot reduce autistic subjects to a system of relations based on repetitive learning and think that it achieves better results than psychoanalysis. We must defend our point of view and defend these subjects who can truly benefit from this immersion in language, provided they know how to handle it.

\*

In the course of the lively discussion that followed this lecture, Eric Laurent indicated that, as far as he was concerned, the conversation about autism should bear not so much on the question of knowing whether there is a passage between autism and schizophrenia (a question that has all its worth from a psychiatric perspective and which keeps health bureaucracies busy in trying to establish which "squeeze chute" is best suited to shut the subject away), but on the development of a Borromean clinic of cases approached in their absolute singularity.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Not only must one lean on the law, one must have an influence on it as well. Such was the case for the Forum of Barcelona on autism organised in June 2010 in response to an emergency. The quasi-autonomous government of Catalonia was on the point of instituting a law concerning autism; the cognitive-behavioural lobby wanted its own methods to become the fundamental reference for the treatment of autistic subjects. The forum of Barcelona was organised to demonstrate the existence of a determined and well-argued opposition, on the part of "mental health" professionals oriented by psychoanalysis. A great variety of interventions brought together practicing therapists, parents and families of autistic subjects, artists sensible to the theme of autism, subjects emerging from autism and who were in a position to testify to the treatments that they had received, etc. Those who were named the Mental Health "users", subjects suffering or ill, more or less cared for or cured, showing that they agreed to oppose the monopoly of behaviourist reference. We must thus be active in this area and change the direction of legislation that could have devastating effects. Autism, no doubt, lends itself to suppositions of all kinds, but above all it lends itself to statutory regulations which are currently being concocted all over the world.

<sup>14</sup> The discussion that followed this intervention has not been entirely reproduced here. In the course of this discussion, Eric Laurent pointed out: "undoubtedly, in autism there are phenomena that fall under the jurisdiction of psychosis, such as the return of the signifier in the real, while others are more specific. It is not in terms of categories that we should orient the debate, but rather in terms of particularity, the greatest particularity that we can aim at in each case. How do the three consistencies of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary come into play and how can they be shifted? It is always more interesting than infinite discussions where the particularity of each case gets lost in generalisations of a greater or lesser degree. In particular, this clinic allows a finely tuned approach to differences between rim phenomena [*phénomènes de bord*] and body events, legible on the basis of a "clinic of the circuit". Initially, this approach was used with children who were between early psychosis [*la psychose précoce*] and autism, cases of



Translated by Philip Dravers

serious childhood psychosis without it being a question of autistic subjects with a neo-rim. Completely scattered, these subjects are a-drift in the world in a state of deliquescence with a body that appears fragmented, as we say in psychoanalysis. But this category is already too general; this is, in a way, where the problem starts, since it is a question of establishing what this scattering is. For subjects who have no limit or rim, how can a limit be constructed; certainly not through any kind of learning, but by constructing a metonymic rim for the drive circuit, a form of drive rim [*bord*], by making use of the "materials" (games, displacements [*déplacements*], words, etc) that present themselves? The metonymical circuit can be used for the construction of drive borders provided that it is not simply a question of drawing pictures or placing toys on the ground or on the table. It could consist, for example, of giving an object to the child, taking the child to the toilets with the object in a little sack, and extracting it from it; the child who comes out of the toilets bringing the paper with him thus enters a new circuit, etc.

According to Deleuze, the body without organs appears as a sphere or the surface of all surfaces; this topology therefore gives too much consistency to the rim, since it is not only a question of constructing this rim, but of being able, then, to displace it, to avoid it functioning as an absolute neo-rim. For this displacement not to constitute purely and simply a forced entry, an invasion, it must be produced through a body-event, which is to be considered, not as any old effect of signification, but as an extraction of *jouissance*, the subject coming to let go of something of the charge of *jouissance* which affects his body and this, without this giving-up of *jouissance* being too unbearable for him. Sometimes this can happen by throwing a balloon. Or again through an exchange of looks: the subject with his eyes lost in the clouds or in the sky is rather the captive of the world, looked at by him; a meeting, of gazes which intersect put in play a possible extraction of the object gaze.

The tools that Jacques-Alain Miller has extracted from Lacan's last teaching are very useful in thinking this clinic. Besides, it is in asking how to use these tools that I was let to rethink what I perceived twenty years ago. These tools allow one to reopen things in another way, and we must make use of them.