



# LACUNAE

APPI International Journal for Lacanian Psychoanalysis

Issue 10 May 2015



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## EDITORIAL

*MEDB RUANE*

This year in Ireland, a number of autistic children were treated with bleach by their parents. The industrial-strength compound, called MMS, had been promoted as a cure that could produce a better-behaved child who more closely resembled what passes for “normal”. Gardai interviewed the parents but none were prosecuted for child abuse. It seems that none will be: the Gardai had intervened because the compound was not licensed (The Examiner, 13 April 2015).

It takes very little imagination to consider the effects on the children in question, who were probably restrained while the ‘medicine’ was administered orally or anally, never mind the consequences of being forced to absorb it. Extreme, yes, desperate too, but not so far away from the ‘hugs-rewards’ and ‘slaps-punishments’ method explored in Jean-Claude Maleval’s extended essay here, ‘Who are Autists?’ Starting with the question ‘is there such a thing as an autistic structure?’, Maleval builds on Lacan’s structural indication that “autistics hear themselves” to emphasise the autistic’s primary intimacy with his or her voice, which produces a split between  $a$  and  $S_1$  such that the voice is an object of jouissance which is specified differently from the verbal hallucinations of a psychotic subject (1975, 1989, p. 19). Working with Éric Laurent’s notion of jouissance on the rim, where three mutually-implicated elements protect the subject and localise the jouissance – the autistic object, the double and the islet of competence – Maleval argues historically and conceptually for insisting on a psychoanalytically-informed theory of the autistic as subject who must not be ‘bleached’ out by demands from master and scientific discourses. The essay advances *Lacunae’s* work to introduce contemporary psychoanalytic theory on autism to the white noise of non-analytic discourse in Ireland, having published Lieven Jonckheere’s study of Donna Williams’s writings in issues 7 and 8.

For Olga Cox Cameron, Lacan's elaboration of the human condition as "irredeemably tragic" in *Seminar 6 Desire and its Interpretation* (1958-59) is among his most "towering achievements". There, Lacan introduced his listeners to the founding catastrophe that marks the inception of human subjectivity by means of grammar firstly: the function of negation, the slippage of the personal pronoun and the collapse of the distinction between subject and object. That represents a turning point in *Lacan's* theory of the object. The note of impossibility in the very structure of desire – which Ophelia's grave provoked for Hamlet - kneads mourning into subjectivity, such that by the end of the Seminar, the notion of object becomes inextricably linked to impossibility itself.

Russell Grigg rotates notions of desire and object via those of memorialisation and commemoration to ask what mourning really means. Leaning partly on Julian Barnes's *Levels of Life* (2013), written after Barnes's life partner Pat Kavanagh died, Grigg teases out the theory and ethics of mourning to say that "it is as living memorials that we carry the mark of lost loved ones on our souls." This insistence of the lost in the living, he argues, requires both public and private, material and psychical work. Memorialising what is lost entails leaving a record of the object's disappearance in the Other, as *i(a)* does over the *objet a*. In melancholia, by contrast, the "collapse of semblants that otherwise veil the object persists, and the 'grimace' of the object, like the grimace of a skull behind a beautiful face, is exposed".

Stephanie Farrelly's finely-detailed vignette from the clinic of the child elaborates how an emerging subjectivity plays and works through not only "Anna's" particular crisis after being bullied at school, but also the gradual articulation of her father's silence after the death of his parents – inaugurated by Anna's dream - and of her mother's fear of losing her "baby" to the work of growing up. Here, the analyst is made use of to traverse what the client and her family could not.

As Maleval's vignettes show, however, happy endings are not guaranteed. Ana Ruth Najles stands back from hypermodern consumerist assurances of satisfaction to consider the subjective effects. Her critique mobilises Lacan's notion of the "all-pervasive child" to interpret a myriad of ways in which neo-liberal forces

corral subjectivities to market demands. She links Giorgio Agamben's notion of "bare life", as opposed to "qualified life" (1995), to the escalating processes of segregation and lack of recognition (and respect) for those who don't "fit" neoliberal market definitions. Like a lottery slogan, if you're not in, you can't win. And if you're outside the consensus, she warns, you may not even count.

Such complex global forces problematise subjectivities as twentieth century psychoanalysis had defined them. Rob Weatherill situates the discussion across a range of psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic practices in a quest to articulate an ethics of the subject - and an ethics of psychoanalysis. Drawing on thinkers and practitioners from Nietzsche and Freud to Primo Levi, Lacan and Veronique Voruz, among others, he notes a rise in "victimhood" and a subject full of *ressentiment*, who is "nihilistic, devitalised". For him, this provokes "a slave morality", where the rule of *jouissance* sets subjectivities adrift.

Éric Laurent's latest book *Lost in Cognition*, read by Claire Hawkes, analyses the question via a robust critique of ego-centred treatments. His rebuttal of one-size-fits-all therapies undermines the curative claims of cognitive models, especially CBT, by showing how the "unconscious" consistently evades and eludes the treatments of those for whom it does not officially exist. Meanwhile Colette Soler's study of the later Lacan in *The Unconscious Reinvented*, read by Carol Owens, carefully assembles Lacan's steps towards an elaboration of a real unconscious as a zone without remainders and without construction, where language touches or is touched by the body and where interpretation mobilises o-objects such as voice, gaze.

The voice as an object of *jouissance* is one of many intriguing features in Neus Carbonell's paper on the knotting of language and the body in childhood which, incidentally, also illustrates the importance of using contingency, chance, in the clinic. The work of childhood is a work of "body building" where the body is organised as an enjoying substance. Her patient Mike, an autistic, was two years old when he was first brought to see her. The work was difficult for them both and, as Carbonell notes, "it illustrates how entrance into language is not made through sense but through *jouissance*, what Lacan called *lalangue*. And this

is always the case. The issue is that the speaking being also needs the signifier, that is, the field of the Other”.

How this Other field strikes the subject determines particular and singular responses to the void. The question in the contemporary clinic is not merely one of *jouissance* or desire but of how subjectivities become structurally articulate, each in its own way. Francesca Biagi-Chai creates here a compass of Lacanian theory on the *sinthome* and on suppletion across the principal seminars and across classical structures. Often used indiscriminately, she argues that in fact the terms are distinct and can be distinguished not only from the seminar on Joyce but as early as Seminars 3 and 4. Again, the object voice implicates itself. “The work of *lalangue*, according to Lacan, is to inscribe an enunciation by means of the fall of the cuts, by the emptying of meaning. This is the point where Joyce, through his writing, emends the Name-of-the-Father, and learns to speak in the sense of going towards the Other”.

Marlene French Mullen asks how psychoanalysis works with suffering. Taking the signifier “favourite” from Freud’s life and texts, she argues that it has a composite function for him and goes on to unpack theories of identification from the *einzigster Zug* to *traits unaires*, concluding with the notion of semblances as they come into play at the end of analysis.

Carol Owens looks differently at contemporary symptomatology by examining cinematic treatments of so-called sex-addiction, some of which rely on “the fantasmatic belief that they are all caused by the same object a, this operation itself one of the natural consequences of the disruption of the social bond.” Forefronting Lacan’s words in seminar 10 on what Don Juan does with women and what a woman wants with Don Juan, she cites Lars von Trier’s *Nymphomania* and asks if ‘nymphomania’ in his sense has something of an unspeakable feminine *jouissance* or if Don Juan has incarnated as a woman.

For the analysand attempting to speak, the voice resonates in the void of the Other. The voice as an object of *jouissance* is heard close up in Eve Watson’s meditation on how interpretation functions or not within that



register. She writes of a clacking associated with women especially and, considering Freud's case of Emmy Von N., notes that Lacan spoke of the voice as a peacock's feather that emerges from the gas-tap to tickle the analyst's ear (1963-64/2004, p. 169).<sup>ii</sup> Lacan's few but curious words on the ear in the same seminar (5 June 1963) continue to intrigue.

Sarah Meehan O'Callaghan develops the theme of the specular other as it applies to subjects whose bodies don't match the ideal. Working from disability discourse towards psychoanalysis, she takes some of Freud's key remarks in *The Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) to question how corporeal pain affects subjectivity and questions the relative paucity of literature within the psychoanalytic archive.

This tenth issue of *Lacunae* celebrates the eclecticism and richness of writing in the contemporary Freudian-Lacanian clinic. Now that the journal is in double figures, let the reading begin.

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<sup>i</sup> Lacan, J. (1989). Geneva Lecture on the Symptom [1975]. Trans. Grigg R. *Analysis No. 1*. Melbourne: CPR. 7-26.

<sup>ii</sup> Lacan, J. (2004)1963-64. Book XI: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac.