

The Borders between Autism and Psychosis

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The borders between autism and psychosis are determined by the position that the subject takes with respect to the entry into language during the mirror stage. An ethical choice on the part of the subject of the unconscious seems, very early in life, to determine the passage or the refusal of passage into the field of the Other. As a result of their experiences, certain children choose to reside in the present instant and to build their own space by surrounding themselves with objects, while other children take the risk of language and enter the time of the Other through which their history will be structured. We will address this question through consideration of the autobiographies of autistics and the clinical testimonies of psychotic patients.

Introduction

In order to understand better what distinguishes autism from psychosis, we looked to the information and personal reflections that autistics themselves have given us in their autobiographies. Mostly written by autistic people with so-called “Asperger’s syndrome” and proffered as a disinterested gift to others like them and to humanity, we turn to these texts because, as in our clinical practice with psychotics, we want to gain access to the subject’s own experience rather than to wade through the commonplaces of scientific literature, which goes no further than hypotheses based on observations of patients’ behavior and on tests designed to support theories about their brain function and the modification of their biology. The autistics who have overcome the lack of understanding that they have encountered in order to publish their writings or to bear witness to their experience on the Web have offered up a priceless treasure that allows us to enter the universe in which they evolved and to renew our knowledge of human beings. Such are, among others, the writings of Donna Williams, Daniel Tammet, Dr. Temple Grandin (Professor of Zootechny at Colorado University), John Eider Robinson, or these tableaux for two voices produced by Sean Barron and his mother or Kim Peek and his father (on the web). Only diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome at forty-years-old, Robinson asserts, “Asperger’s is not a disease. It’s a way of being” (Robison 5). In fact, we will adopt his distinction as we try to separate observation of his behavior in relation to socio-cultural norms from engagement with his subjective experience. In this second phase of our reflections on autism, we will attempt to establish the elements

that make up this very particular way of being and to show how they trace a very clear border between autism and psychosis.¹

I. The Relation to the Mother's Voice

Before entering into the system of places ordered by language, there is the relation to the mother's voice that, in the mother tongue, names things for the child. Prior to the mirror stage the child is grappling with the Voice of the Other inside him, a Voice that parcels out his body and threatens his integrity. The mirror stage creates an external Other, a symbolic Other that, making the child enter into a system of relations, the social link, will allow him to negotiate his existence with the internal Other. But the entry into language defined as a system of places and of relations between these places, cannot be effected without a certain loss, the loss of the unmediated relation to mental representation—the mental object—by the Voice called up by the audible which mobilizes the subject's drive. Moreover, the infant's identification with the image gleaned from the mother's smile only succeeds because the meaning of this image derives from an originary deception: in fact, there is no common measure between the image in the mirror and the child's internal world or his lost object, because it is a reflection that corresponds to the mother's object of desire.

The autistic refuses to enter into language because he runs afoul of this alienation from the maternal other's object of desire. The autistic subject—which is, of course, the subject of the unconscious since its position is determined during the first years of life—chooses to remain within the hallucinatory universe of his own mental representation. He does not enter into the complex and alienating relation to the desire of the Other and its myriad norms, ideals, and prohibitions to which he must subordinate his own mental object. The psychotic steps in the relation to the other of language; he can speak and succeeds in expressing his feelings with spoken language. His main characteristic is that he identifies a defect in the structure of language and devotes his life trying to restore it. His endeavor being dictated by the voices of an Other, an imaginary entity. Contrary to the autistic who does not experience auditory hallucinations and does not produce a delusional construction, because he has evacuated the other from his system, the psychotic is led by the voice of the other which orders

and imposes the restoration of language—the social link—by creating a new structure for the social link, a new system of places and relations.

What the neurotic adheres to, the autistic withdraws from. Accordingly, for the autistic, the neurotic's normality is in no way an enviable condition. Donna Williams, for example, often reaffirms her "refusal to belong to the world." In her book, she writes: "As for people, I have only ever classed them in two categories: 'us' and 'them.' I am not the only one. Most people think in the same terms, except they give them a different meaning, more laden with value-judgments. . . . The mentally disturbed have turned their back upon a normality that is very often alienating, and that people have been conditioned to believe is the best they can hope for. . . . They ignore degrading detours and subterfuges and react in a simple and instinctive manner" (288). Brilliant!

II. Language and the Mother Tongue

It is through the mother tongue that the child enters into language—earlier defined as a system of places and of relations between objects, things, and persons, a system governed by laws. Nonetheless, before the child can enter into this system of places ordered by language—to which the mother tongue gives him access by naming things for him so that he can construct a shared perceptible universe—he must confront the other fundamental aspect of the mother tongue, that of the mother's voice, which bears her desire, with which he must establish a relation. It is precisely such a relation to the desire in the voice of the maternal other, this desire of the mother that would alter his being, which the autistic child refuses. In this respect, Sean Barron makes the disconcerting and persuasive statement that he could not recognize his mother among a group of women until he was 5 or 6 years-old. "I never really looked at her," he adds. "She was a presence that I felt more than I saw, a negative presence. It was the same with my father" (Barron 34). For the autistic, the mother, no less than the father, who is a "voice" that only becomes meaningful to the child when it is introduced and made visible by the mother's desire, are reduced to the status of a presence of things in space, which eliminates all relation to the desire within the voice and the gaze.

The autistic does not want to enter into the time or the space conditioned by the desire of the Other, nor to be delivered up to the Other in the Other's space, as if

he were working to “save his skin” from the desire, the drive and the *jouissance* that would intrude through the voice of the Other, through the audible. At the very beginning of his life, he seems to have encountered an exteriority within the maternal voice, a “foreign Thing” within the uterine environment, a “thing” whose effects are so unbearable and traumatizing that he will spend his entire life avoiding its return. Donna Williams writes: “I only ever engaged with and made room for things, never persons” (89). Indeed, with an often surprising coherence, she speaks regularly of her privileged relation to things and objects. When she was 18-years-old, for example, she perplexed her professor when she handed in a paper for her literature class in which all the words for things were capitalized: this was the way in which she had implemented the rule of capitalizing proper names. For her, proper names were the names of things. (Williams 183-4). Privileging the relation to things rather than to persons, she had also avoided confronting the desire and the demands of the Other.

The choice, which characterizes the autistic’s subjective position, of the relation to things over the relation to other human beings can be explained with reference to the frightening and terrifying experiences with other people in early life—experiences such as the suffocating terror that forced Donna to “sleep with her eyes open.” In their testimonies, autistics evoke paralyzing impressions of being engulfed by a roaring immensity (Williams 262) or the panicked anticipation of the destructive invasion of their interiority by the “external world.” A state of “extreme emotional tension” (Williams 291) inflects their everyday lives, causing them to adopt modes of appeasing this tension that hinge upon surviving in a state of retreat or flight.

III. Creating Safety in a Universe of Objects

The autistic creates his own perceptible space, a universe of objects where he lives from instant to instant in order to protect himself from the audible and the impact of the object of the Other. Isolated in his room in the summer while other children played in the sun, little Daniel “watched time go by,” immobile, absorbed by microscopic objects that he perceived in the air, such as motes of dust illuminated by the sun, or captivated by the light and colors that the declining day lent to the objects in the narrow space where he confined himself (Tammet 66). Donna Williams relates a similar

experience. “I discovered that the air was full of little stains,” she writes. “If you look at nothingness, you will find that it is made up of splotches.” Whether she was lying alone in her small bed or surrounded by people, she would “summon them”:

There they are! They are coming, these brightly-colored feathers traversing white space. . . . And if people passed through and obstruct my enchanting view upon nothingness? I would look beyond the people. And if they bothered me? I would simply rise above them and concentrate upon the desire to lose myself in the splotches, looking through the intruders with a serene expression, appeased by the sensation of letting myself become entirely absorbed in the splotches. . . . Eventually, I learned to melt into everything that fascinated me, patterns upon painted paper or a carpet, a random noise, or, even better, the dull and repetitive sound I obtained by tapping myself on the chin. (19-20)

When they were still very little, both Donna and Daniel mobilized their psychic energy to “melt into” the objects constituting the visible. Some objects in particular caused them a curious fascination—primarily, it seems, the objects that other human beings find least detectable, like dust in the air; the most meaningless objects, such as the pattern of a carpet or painted paper; and the most imperceptible, such as the gradual changes in the declining light cast upon objects or the rhythm of a random noise. Donna Williams indicates that her “hypnotic voyages” into the heart of colors, sounds and sensations, constituted “ineffable experiences” which brought her “extreme happiness” (Williams 199). For Daniel Tammet, numbers had color. On French television, June 30, 2007, at the talk show “On n’est pas couché,” he explained how he had created a universe with them, a world of colors, textures, movement, and emotions: “when I was little, numbers were my friends. They were a place in the world without sadness, without problems, without difficulties, without death, without war. When I think of numbers, I see numerical landscapes in my head. They make up another world where I can walk around.”

Where does this fascination with objects come from? On the basis of their testimonies, we conclude that there is a certain moment in their history when the autistic child discovers that establishing a privileged relationship with objects, things, noises, or rhythms, blocks what he experiences as the annihilating intrusion of the speech and voice of the Other and thus offers him the calming effect—the “extreme happiness”—that he is looking for. It is as if he were looking to “save his skin” from the

jouissance of the Other. When Tammet escapes others by plunging into the safe world of his colored numerical landscapes, he has succeeded in creating his own universe; he has built it with something audible—numbers; but he lends it univocal meaning by using form and color to make it visible, perceptible. For the autistic subject, the system of objects and actions binding these objects together constitutes a singular way of managing the drive within the mother tongue, thereby countering its effects of *jouissance* which disorganize his neurophysiology and which, at a certain moment, the autistic subject experiences as a threat to the very possibility of his existence.

Donna confirms this hypothesis. Even as a child, she realized that an intensive experience of fusion with objects could abolish her problem with the mother tongue and transform the flood of speech bearing *jouissance* and the desires of the Other into a simple succession of disagreeable noises (Williams 108). “From then on,” she writes, “people were no longer a problem: their words vanished into an indistinct mumbling and their voices were reduced to a catalogue of noises” (19-20). Daniel Tammet expresses the effect of his singular relation to things in a slightly different manner: “When I raised my eyes, I always fell upon a mouth that opened and closed as it spoke. . . . When someone speaks to me, I often have the feeling of looking for a radio station, and most of the discourses enter and exit my head like parasites” (84-85).

For the autistic child, the audible is the place of the Other; it generates a “perceptible field” that organizes the space of the Other, a space that pertains to the Other. He thus refuses the audible in the mother’s voice. And in order not to be “affected” by the drive at work in it, to be spared, he constructs his own space, where he lives from instant to instant, surrounded by objects that make this space into an immutable place, a “perceptible field” that belongs to him alone and where he withdraws from the time and the desire of the Other. With objects and things, the autistic creates his own “universe” of perception on the basis of his own time. He thus avoids entering the time and space of the Other and the social link. As we can see from the stories of their experiences with things, autistics choose to remain within the present instant. Refusing to project themselves into a future that would be determined by the uncontrollable drive introduced by the mother tongue, autistics constructs his life within a single dimension, that of space. Effacing the desire in the voice of the other in

order to integrate it into a catalogue of meaningless noises, he reduces what is non-perceptible and interpretable in the mother tongue to something perceptible bearing a single meaning that he has carefully organized.

The space of perception-consciousness organized by the autistic is only populated by objects that it is possible to move and control without risk. When she was 15-years-old, Donna began to work in a store as a salesgirl, and she was delighted to find herself in “a world made to order”; she found it “marvelous to be surrounded by shelves,” “to be able to gaze upon rows of packages classed in numerical order”; and it was “hardly believable” that she was being asked to do “what she loves most in the world,” something at which she excelled: “putting things in order,” a chore that other employees avoid. “The different bosses of the store fought over my services to introduce order into the disarray of their shelves” (Williams 135). “To reestablish order is my dream, my passion, my sense of security, my happiness. . .” (136). Nonetheless, when a customer would approach her to ask for help, she would act as though she does not see him; when he called to her, she would be incapable of interrupting her work and would ask him to wait a minute. If he insisted, she would say dryly that she had asked him to wait, or, condescending to serve him, would do so with “such repugnance” that he would complain to the manager about her insolence (136). The drive and the desire that come with the voice of the other disturb the organization that the autistic has put in place to live exclusively with objects and things, without the other. Donna recounts that she could “become mentally deaf and blind to everything” except music, which was her weak point because it “never failed to awaken her senses” (123). Within her universe, which she always wanted to purify of the Other’s impact, and despite her determination not to register the audible, her “musical sensibility” rendered her “vulnerable” (94) by provoking emotions within her that were beyond her control. It is as if, despite her withdrawal into “a world so far away that no one can reach it” (109), the audible forced its way into her through music.

IV. A Language Without the Desire of the Other

An ambition shared by many autistics is to develop a new univocal language—a language without metaphor, emptied of desire, a language that would not take any

Other into account. Daniel Tammet writes, “I had trouble understanding or reacting to others’ emotions; I often used numbers to do it” (15). Later, he adds,

I often had trouble understanding abstract words. For each of them, I had a mental image that helped me to grasp it. For example, the word *complexity* made me think of a braid. . . [and] the word *triumph* suggested the image of a large trophy. . . . [With] ‘interro-negative’ sentences. . . I become very confused and my head hurts because someone who poses questions does not state clearly what he is thinking. . . and I do not like it when the same words can refer to two completely different things. . . . As a child I found idioms very upsetting. (172-173)

The abstract word, the idiom or the signifier that refers to several signifieds, the style, are as inaccessible to autistics as an appropriate reaction to others’ emotions. In fact, everything that pertains to the impact of the other in the mother tongue; everything that bears witness to the others’ emotions or gives rise to the interpretation of desire confronts him with something arbitrary that he cannot decode. Equivocity in the mother tongue can only be interpreted if one takes the other into account; and this is precisely what the autistic cannot do because, very early in his life, he decided that he could only survive by living in a world where the relation to the other could not affect him.

When Donna’s mother rented a piano and, with the help of a professor, set about deciphering scores in order to be able to play them, Donna would sit down and play melodies of her own devising or even Beethoven. However, since she could not learn to write music using staves and the codes recognized by the musical world, she created her own system in order to record her creations, without worrying about the “inconvenience,” which might seem important for a creator, of being the only one capable of reading what she had written.

For many years during his childhood, Daniel worked on producing his “own spoken language”—a “language” for him alone, which, he hoped, would allow him to express his particular experiences and to speak with exactitude about himself in the hope of remedying his solitude and the disorientation he experienced when faced with “his schoolmates’ mother tongue” (Tammet 180). With this “personal spoken language”—an expression that we adopt here, even if it seems oxymoronic, because it characterizes an ambition proper to autism—in which each word would correspond to a thing or a lived experience, Daniel aspired to eliminate the unbearable distance

between the word and the thing that the inherent incompatibility of language with the real leaves gaping. He has had to abandon this impossible quest. An experience from his adolescence seems to be bound up with his failed ambition, as we understand it:

Lying on the floor of my bedroom. . . I was trying to represent the whole Universe within my room; I was trying to reach a concrete understanding of the nature of the 'whole.' In my mind, I went on a voyage to the margins of existence and I explored all of it, asking myself what I would find there. At that moment, I started to feel extremely ill and I noticed my heart pounding in my chest, because, for the first time, I understood that thought and logic have their limits that no one can go beyond. Realizing this frightened me and it took me a long time to recover. (232)

At the heart of autism lies the rejection of the object of the voice of the Other and the deadly *jouissance* that it transports and that frightens the subject because of the hole which it opens in his universe, a universe which he would like to be founded on logic and rationality, and where his existence would be watertight to the impact of the other on his emotions. As a child, Daniel Tammet refused the audible introduced through the mother tongue; he was frightened by the effect upon him of the alterity borne within the voice of the other. Nonetheless, he still tried to communicate. For lack of a personal spoken language, he became interested in Esperanto “whose verbs do not change with the person,” he says (178), and he joined a group of Esperanto enthusiasts on the internet (178). As for other languages, he learned their words embedded in sentences. He chose the words he found beautiful and with which he had developed an aesthetic relationship (171), or the words and combinations of words that provoked in him a particular emotional response (169).

However, as the autistic severs himself from the desire that haunts the voice in the mother tongue, he also severs himself from the rhetoric and stylistics that inflect our relation to words within the mother tongue in view of the other, the interlocutor. When Daniel speaks with someone, it often happens that he only hears fragments of sentences and must perform a mental exercise in order to assemble these fragments and give them a meaning (167). Even if he can succeed in quickly assimilating a sentence “to make use of it,” (by photographing the words of a foreign language, by visualizing the sequences of a story, by memorizing common sentences, or by drawing inspiration

from these as models to construct his own sentences), Daniel Tammet admits that his autism does not always allow him to understand what others think or what they feel in certain situations. (234)

V. The Metapsychology of the Autistic Subject Position

Following his precocious encounter with something unassimilable and terrifying in the audible, the autistic creates a world of objects for himself into which he attempts to insert the mother tongue itself by treating it as an object. This is what Tammet did. Lacan writes, “A voice cannot be assimilated; it is incorporated” (320). In other words, one cannot isolate mother tongue from the effects of the audible—the effects of the drive triggered by the voice within the human being and inscribed within him to form his body. Precisely because the autistic is “up close to the drive,” stuck to the letter that constitutes his body, bound to an unstable equilibrium within the hole of subjectivity, without defense against the threat of being devoured by the *jouissance* of the Other, he cultivates an ability not to inscribe what comes through the voice of the Other, through the audible.

*In a world under glass, you can watch the world pass,
And nobody can touch you, you think you are safe.
But the wind can blow cold, in the depths of your soul,
Where you think nothing can hurt you till it is too late.
Run till you drop, do you know how to stop?...
Run and hide, to the corners of your mind, alone,
Like a nobody nowhere.*

(Williams, *Nobody Nowhere*, Introduction)

Make no mistake, Donna Williams announces to autistic people, you are nobody nowhere. Watch out for anything that comes from the other world. Barricade yourself against attack. Hide yourself within the solitary depths of your soul! It is strange advice with which to open her book. Strange but good because it is founded on her own experience.

“If someone touches me, I no longer exist”: this utterance—which serves as the title of the French edition of Donna Williams’ autobiography, *Nobody Nowhere*—clearly evokes the mode in which the autistic child organizes his relation to the world. He must retreat into the far corners of his mind in order to protect himself against the desire

that traverses the gaze, the voice, and the gestures of the Other. In light of the autistic testimonies that we have been discussing, we could revise the title to read: “*if desire touches me, I no longer exist.*” Desire opens to the other in two ways: through the response of the drive itself in the form of disturbing and terrifying emotions that it causes within the body of the subject; or through the effects produced by the expression of these emotions upon people in the exterior world who grasp them as a sign of vulnerability and thus have a response that the autistic receives as a libidinal counter-attack.

Whether it comes through the voice, the gaze, or gesture, the autistic guards against encountering anything that bears desire. We have already spoken at length of the voice. As for the gesture—for example, gestures of solicitude, kindness, understanding, love, or even gestures intended to do no more than express “a minimum of direct affection”—such gestures terrorize the autistic subject to the point of throwing him into such a “state of shock” (Williams 66) that certain of them feel compelled to take their own lives. “I have a problem,” says Shan, an autistic man who became a friend to Donna Williams. “ ‘I have fallen in love with you. The problem. . . is that I want to kill myself.’ ‘I know,’ Donna responds” (291). The gesture invested with phallic signification, which makes a place in this world for the expression of desire, is unbearable for the autistic persons. Autistic couples expect this from one another; so even if it is painful, one partner will not hold it against the other if he flees.

Returning to photos of herself as a child, Donna Williams counts three ways in which she was able to avoid looking at people: the first was to “to look right through what is in front of her” (281), her eyes frozen in a “dead stare” (286); the second “consists in looking at something else, off to the side” (281); and the third way is to look with one eye upon nothing, the void, while turning the other eye inward, which serves to embroil vision in confusion. Donna is not the only one who employs ruses as spontaneous forms of defense against sinking her gaze into the gaze of other people. What she was protecting herself against was the unbearable impact of the other gazes upon her, gazes heavy with desire, bearers of demands and *jouissance*, uncontrollable emotions shot through with hatred, devouring love or lacerating anger. In his book, *Look*

Me in the Eye, John Elder Robinson tells how he managed not to look people in the eye despite the insistence of those around him.

“Look me in the eye, young man!” I cannot tell you how many times I heard that shrill, whining refrain. . . .I heard it from parents, relatives, teachers, and all manner of other people. . . .My father would say, “Look at me! What are you hiding?”. . . .By the time I was in grade school, my father was buying his Gallo wine by the gallon jug, and he had made a pretty big dent in a jug every evening before I went to bed. He would say: “Look at me,” and I would stare at the abstract composition of empty wine bottles stacked behind the chair and under the table. I look at anything but him. When I was little, I ran and hid from him and sometimes he chased me while waving his belt. . . .He would say “Look me in the eye.” (1-2)

“You are hiding something from me!” This account compels us to ask: What would the young John’s future have been like if his father were able to read the contempt and hatred hidden within his inaccessible gaze?

The position of the autistic child with respect to the people around him can be summarized in three exhortations: “Do not touch me! Do not speak to me! Do not look at me!” It is as if he said to the other: your drive causes me to panic, the object of your desire and the uncontrollability of *jouissance* will annihilate me. Therefore, I will barricade myself within my ultimate refuge, making the letter of my body into a rampart against the hole of my subjectivity.

Willy Apollon’s theoretical developments make possible a metapsychological elaboration of the structure of the autistic subject position, which can be reduced to 6 key points: three elements on the side of the Other—the voice, the gaze, and gestures with a phallic signification, three dimensions of the unconscious which determine the effect of the Other upon the autistic child--an effect that unfolds into three other elements forming his unconscious—the drive, its inscription in the letter of the body, and the hole around which the drive revolves, the hole of subjectivity.

Conclusion

The borders between autism and psychosis are determined by the position that the subject takes with respect to the entry into language during the mirror stage. We have established that the autistic has not entered language. He has dismissed from his

life the audible within the mother tongue, the alterity within the voice of the other which he encountered precociously in a ravaging experience. Consequently, during the mirror stage, he does not enter human language; for, to enter language supposes that one accepts being affected by the desire and *jouissance* of the Other. On the contrary, he uses all of his psychic energy to empty the mother tongue of affect, whether it is communicated in the gaze, gestures, or the voice; and he concentrates instead upon building a world of things and objects that serve as ramparts against the Other and as “friends” within the relational desert into which he withdraws.

The psychotic, however, takes a step into language and confronts the Other of language. This is his mistake. He is seized by Voices, captive to their injunctions and their command to undertake the reconstruction of the universe of language. The energy of the psychotic’s drive is entirely invested in this enterprise. The impossible identification with the object of the mother’s desire at the moment of the mirror stage propels him into a quest that will only result in his alienating submission to the voice and *jouissance* of the Other. When he was 10-years-old, Mr. F. looks in the mirror and “God tells him that he is the son of God,” which he accepts as a fact. For him, this is a reasonable explanation of the intimate convulsions that he has endured since childhood. From that point onward, when he looks in the mirror, he sees the Son of God, the son whom he must be in order to complete his enterprise. Roger, commenting on a photo of himself at 2-years-old, says: “I have an uneasy look in my eye. You know, as a child, I was taciturn; even the circus could not make me laugh. I found the caged animals pathetic; they were so powerless, subjected to masters who exercised their power over them to make them do tricks that had nothing to do with their nature. I had already decided to change the world in order to stop all abuse of power.”

Psychotic people and autistic people teach us a great deal about a humanity that would be founded upon respect for differences in ways of being and ethics. We will conclude our reflections with a very moving passage from Donna Williams’ book where she tells how, at the conclusion of her ordeal, she could use her critical perspective upon her own life experience, within a school for autistic children, to forge a link with a completely lost and devastated autistic child. Adroitly, she exchanges the all-too-human figure of a doll for a hairbrush, an unthreatening object, soft to touch. Then she helps

the child to construct a refuge where she will not need anyone: she introduces the little girl to a ritual that combines a melody with a rhythm connected to the child's body.

It was night-time and the children were being put to bed. . . . Anne screamed in terrified hysterics as one of the professionals sat on the bed next to her tucking a doll in next to her, which seemed to horrify her all the more. Oh, those symbols of normality, dolls, I thought. Oh, these terrifying reminders that one is meant to be comforted by people, and if one can't, one is meant at least to feel comforted by their effigies.

The woman sitting on Anne's bed was screaming at her over and over again to shut up and propping the doll back in its place with every shove Anne made to push it away. It was more that I could take. Physically I moved the woman out of the way, moved the doll, and gave her my brush. Anne ran fingers repetitively through the bristles listening to the soft, barely audible sound in her ear and the sensation on her hand. I began to hum a repetitive tune I used to hum to myself over and over again as I tapped her arm in time to the hypnotic tune. Give her something consistent to hold on to, I thought. There'll be all the time in the world for the experts to undo it. Anne's crossed eyes were frozen in a dead stare, and she became silent between sobs. I took her hand and made her tap her own arm as I had, the tune and the rhythm and the tapping held totally constant.

I heard a soft but audible rhythm coming from outside me. . . .

Then, for a frozen fifteen seconds, in that torchlit dark room, she completely uncrossed her eyes for the first time since I'd met her and looked directly into my face as she tapped and now hummed. . . .

What was important, however, was that as I left she continued to tap and hum the tune between short burst of fear. (Williams, *Nobody Nowhere* 196-197)

We could say that Donna Williams has here performed an act similar to that of the analyst: she has successfully reached the subject of the unconscious in Anna, touched this subject in its most intimate position, and obtained a response.

Translated by Steven Miller

¹ Our first reflections on this subject were presented in the talk “The Mirror and the Other in Psychosis and Autism,” at *The Clinical Days of the Freudian School of Quebec*, San Francisco, 5 March 2009, unpublished.

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