

The autistic and his signature

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Clinical work with autistic people requires us to practice as close as possible to the real. Calling on Lacan's latest teaching is then essential to guide the work undertaken with these patients. At the end of his teaching, relying on the writings of James Joyce, Lacan will identify the dimension of the letter and its function: to make a *littoral*. It is through his writing – as close as possible to the letter as a break of the signifier – that James Joyce will make a name for himself, a *sinthomatic* solution that comes to replace the foreclosure of the Name of the Father in psychosis. If he doesn't have a body, he will build an Ego. This theoretical advance is a conceptual upheaval whose consequences in practice are great. The *parlêtre* clinic will replace that of the subject with a major challenge: to identify the movement that is created from the meeting of language and the body, where the letter rushes in. In autism, this encounter having the value of a tear leaves the autistic person prey to the rustling of the real in an unbearable relationship to language where the attention of the subject – who has not allowed himself to be divided – can only respond with an: "Is it?", a primordial question about being itself. It is by relying on the letter that the autistic subject will be able, alone or accompanied, to carry out a work that puts the letter into circulation. This is what the case of Thomas, a 9 year old autistic boy, teaches us.

While he was regularly – or even constantly -- in the throes of strong agitation, this young boy immediately found in music a pacifying effect that we would consider therapeutic. But the clinical experience that we are going to describe shows that we cannot reduce the work carried out from sound productions to its pacifying effect alone. An afterlife has been summoned leading Thomas to constitute a scene involving the Other. Beyond the questions of "therapeutics" our work has allowed, according to Lacan's formula, an: "improvement in the position of the subject".¹ Once again invaded by the chaos of the real, Thomas gradually became a 'little transmitter', establishing a first *scratch (griffure)* in what was until then only *tohu-bohu*.² This scratching (*griffure*) is to be understood not only as the introduction of a "hole in a real world that lacks nothing",³ of a discontinuity, but also and above all in the sense of a "mark" that can under certain conditions testify to a way of signing a relationship to the Other. This scratch (*griffure*) can indeed, by adjacency and put into circulation, become a "claw" ("une *griffe*"), a signature from which the autistic subject can present himself in the world of the Other. Our hypothesis is that the need to make a name for oneself found in the work with psychosis would be answered, in autism, by the need to cobble together a signature from whatever material lay around at hand (*bricolage*).

Thomas

¹ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, livre X, *L'angoisse*, Paris, Seuil, 2004, p. 69-70.

² Ed. note: *Tohu wa-bohu* or *Tohu va-Vohu* (תְּהוֹ וְבוֹהוּ תְּהוֹ וְבוֹהוּ) appears in the Bible in Genesis 1:2. It describes the condition of the earth (h'arretz) immediately before the creation of light by God; that is the chaotic fulness of the real immediately 'prior' to the introduction of the Word or sound.

³ Éric Laurent, *La bataille de l'autisme. De la clinique à la politique*, Paris, Navarin, 2012, p. 105.

During the first months of his life, he was a quiet child. Several attempts at schooling at the age of 3 turned out to be impossible, Thomas manifesting significant behavioral disorders. Care in a specialized institution was then necessary from the age of 4.

Thomas does not speak but can communicate by taking the adults' hands to indicate to them the object he wishes to seize. However, most of the time, a form of violence takes hold of this young boy. His integration into a group proved on several occasions impossible, leading to his exclusion from the institutions that had welcomed him. In the institution where we work it is the same; he regularly breaks objects, hits the nursing staff and other patients on a daily basis; pulling their hair and scratching (*griffant*) them. Thomas seems very distressed and utters long, high-pitched howls. His only appeasement during these extremely difficult moments consists in listening to music. Thomas then suspends his agitation and his screams; and approaches the source of the music that produces the sound and eventually places his body there. Thomas here seems to be experiencing the existence of his body envelope. We hypothesize that the sound vibrations emitted by the speakers massage the body, thereby allowing Thomas to feel a unified and pacified body. We are here at the level of what Didier Anzieu was able to designate under the term of 'Me-skin'.⁴ This sound massage makes it possible to situate the limits of his body. Our question was then the following: can music think of itself, beyond its pacifying effects – which were already very appreciable in themselves – in a structuring, subjectivating dimension? To put it

⁴ Éric Laurent, *La bataille de l'autisme. De la clinique à la politique*, Paris, Navarin, 2012, p. 105.

another way, what are the factors that would allow us to put to work Thomas' relationship to sound and to make it the framework of his relationship to the Other?

Until then, Thomas had never benefited from psychotherapeutic treatment: his agitation and his violence systematically put them in check. In view of his interest in music and in the face of the growing difficulties of the healthcare team, we tried to take care of him by relying on sound, an element with which Thomas has developed a particular affinity. Thus, we met Thomas, alone, for more than two years at the rate of three weekly sessions lasting from half an hour to forty-five minutes. In a room reserved for this use, an instrumentarium composed of small rhythmic percussions (maracas, tambourine, Basque drum, claves⁵ ...) and melodic instruments (metallophone, sound bars⁶ ...) allowed Thomas to address the sound and then the music using the clinician as a mediator.

We can distinguish three times within Thomas's journey. His listening was at first passive – Thomas did not seem interested in the proposals we made to him and reacted to them by withdrawing –; then Thomas became active in the sense of setting his body in motion through music – Thomas then began to swing to the rhythm of our productions—; and finally he became participatory, not only by his involvement as a composer but also by the beginnings of the creation by him of phonetic language expressions. These last two movements going in concert and testifying to a possible opening to the Other. Let's take a look back at this evolution.

⁵ Ed. note: A claves is a pair of hardwood sticks used to make a hollow sound when struck together.

⁶ Ed. Note: Sound bars are types of loudspeakers that project audio from a wide enclosure such as a computer.

During the first months, Thomas will adopt a rather passive attitude: curled up in a corner of the room, he sometimes swings according to the rhythms and melodies proposed, but does not show any particular interest in the sounds produced. When we try to engage him more directly, he grabs the instruments and throws them in our direction. This is what we will call – with Eric Laurent – *scratches (rayures)* to account for what is precipitated from the relationship of the autistic to the dimension of the letter, witness to some refusal that the autistic directs to the other. We will come back to it. At this moment of the treatment, the instrument is used by Thomas as a bulwark between him and us, a way to protect himself from our unbearable intentions towards him. The autistic, we know, has the greatest difficulties in supporting the requests that are addressed to him in a too direct way. These bringing out "the weight of the real on the subject"⁷ in any act of enunciation. We then decide to produce sounds without addressing them to him, without soliciting him. It is only from that point that, little by little, he pays attention to what we are doing, turning to us, casting furtive glances in our direction, and asking us to repeat what we are doing. Here Thomas begins to enter into a relationship with the musical instrument by using us as a mediator. Although he refuses to take an instrument, he now gets up to move around, wandering and swinging to the rhythm of our improvisations. Thus, while he refuses to mingle with the therapeutic groups offered to him, Thomas will invest our appointments with significance; regularly soliciting us to visit the room. If he accepts with difficulty the end of our sessions, an appeasement appears in the institution: Thomas attacks his

⁷ Éric Laurent, *La bataille de l'autisme. De la clinique à la politique*, Paris, Navarin, 2012, p. 105.

environment less. Yet there remains the high-pitched screams that he emits in the institution and during the sessions.

It is only at the end of the first year that he will accept to gradually participate in musical production by following the rhythms that we might propose via percussion instruments (tambourine, maracas ...). He will refuse, at first, to use melodic instruments (metallophone, sound blades): the important resonance that is linked to them seems unbearable to Thomas. He develops a very special use of the instruments: he taps on them very hard using our hand as a mallet. He seizes this part of our body to produce sounds and does not manage to use the instrument without this mediation. He then introduces a first form of discontinuity: the rhythm produced inscribes a succession of sounds articulated with silences. In parallel, we note that the screams fade, first in the session and then outside. Everything happens as if the rhythmic production allowed a foreshadowing of the discontinuous where the scream had hitherto presented only the continuous. This is a tipping point. By using the clinician's 'hand tool' to tap on the instrument, Thomas produces an act: he operates a first discontinuity in the sound chaos that seemed to be his own and which we hypothesize from the incessant screams with which he filled the institution. We propose to name this operation *scratching (griffure)*, another form of the precipitation of the letter.

At the end of the second year, Thomas will be able to use the melodic instruments: first by using our hand to make them sound – which has the consequence of muffling any resonance – and then by using a mallet to let the sound grow and develop. A second turning point occurs later. While we were improvising a melody with

two notes on the sound slides – a percussion instrument offering a very marked resonance phenomenon and whose sound duration is quite long if it is not interrupted –, Thomas makes a vocal melody of two notes around the sounds "O" and "A", constituent of his first name: this was a first significant shaping; an attempt to inscribe a vocalization in the field of the Other that relies on the scratch (*la griffure*) he previously performed and that raises it to the rank of signature, or claw (*griffe*).⁸ Here we are witnessing the establishment in embryo of speech that pulls Thomas away from the full and silent world of *jouissance*. Our production of a sound beat was for Thomas a support on which he relies to sketch an act of speech: a beat of two phonemes where there had been only screams and howls. Whereas, until then, Thomas had kept himself at a distance from the resonance effects caused by a subjective commitment of the voice --,⁹ this time he was able to rely on and seize this limited point of the *jouissance* proposed by the music to produce an utterance.

Subsequently, if sentences appeared they were produced only as echolalia; however Thomas was able to grasp enough language to state a few words that were peculiar to him and carried a message. It is also important to note that his relationship to the world had become profoundly modified. His relationship to others and to himself improved; his screams gradually disappeared; and his suffering was

⁸ The opposition "O / A" encountered here must be distinguished from that identified by Freud in his grandson's game. If the vocalization studied by the father of psychoanalysis signed the treatment of the loss of the object in its relation to language, in Thomas' case it is a claw. That is to say, a subjective inscription clearly manifesting a presence to the Other and to the world, without the access to the symbolic being fully effective.

⁹ We make the hypothesis that the extreme approach that he operated with loudspeakers did not aim at putting his body in resonance; but to experiment, from the vibration, the envelope of the body. His report was more massage than setting in resonance.

significantly reduced. The Other, by finding its place, generates the distinctive existence of the others. On the part of the caregivers, this experience also led to a change in their representations, and to a humanization of the relationships they could have with Thomas. Despite the little – or even the absence of – verbal expression of this young boy, the team was able to tune in to his own singular rhythm.

Let's go back to the first times brought to the fore in the care of Thomas. Faced with the solicitations of the clinician, the young boy reacted defensively. The musical instruments present in the room were then used as objects that Thomas interposed between himself and the clinician by throwing them in the direction of the clinician. These behaviors echoed what was more widely observed in the institution. Thomas was hitting, pulling his hair, clawing, or even screaming. These gestures that we could describe as violent fell on those who approached him too closely. Eric Laurent, writing about this type of behavior, invites us to read it as a sign which is a letter and to not mistake it for a message that would be addressed to the Other. He adds: "this sign testifies to the trauma on the body".¹⁰ The meeting of language (*la langue*) and the body took place in the form of a tear. By his behavior Thomas is not trying to say something. It is not just about the establishment of a border that would establish an interior/exterior. His gestures testify to his relationship with language. "The autistic is dealing with an Other fundamentally present and threatening whereby his mode of relating to the letter pushes him to get rid of the Other by incessant scratching

¹⁰ Éric Laurent, *La bataille de l'autisme. De la clinique à la politique*, Paris, Navarin, 2012, p. 105.

(*rayure*).”¹¹ The term scratch (*rayure*) is of particular interest to us here because it fits into the continuum that we propose to identify as specific to the autistic: scratch (*la rayure*) — scratch (*la griffure*) – claw (signature).¹² A *scratch (une rayure)*, as a form of the precipitation of the letter, would account for the refusal that the autistic directs to the other.

The letter according to Lacan

The concept of letter has undergone a great evolution in Lacan's teaching. To clarify the stakes, we must distinguish two essential moments. That of “The Purloined Letter” (1955)¹³ which will be completed by “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud” (1957)¹⁴ and, almost 15 years later, “Lituraterre”¹⁵ (1971), which proposes a new understanding of the concept of the letter.

¹¹ Éric Laurent, *La bataille de l'autisme. De la clinique à la politique*, Paris, Navarin, 2012, p. 105.

¹² Ed. note: Thomas' cure passes through the series of two different forms of scratching: *rayure* – *griffure*. For the English reader both *rayure* and *griffure* are translated as 'scratch'. The authors essential point, however, turns around the difference between these two signifiers in French, as they develop them. I will let the authors explain the meaning of this difference. Which they will do later in the essay. But it is essential for readers to distinguish from the outset when the authors use *rayure* and when they use *griffure* since English use the same word 'scratch'; and for that reason, I have placed the correct French word in parentheses whenever the authors use the one or the other following the English word 'scratch' or 'scratching'. In a final beat, the passage from *rayure* to *griffure* is completed by a passage to the signature (*la griffe*) completing the series comprising the cure: *rayure-griffure-griffe*. The consequence of which is that the cure proceeds not in two beats but in three beats: *rayure-griffure-griffe*. It is also important to realize from the outset that the cure which passes from *rayure-griffure-griffe* are connected to the operation of the letter, not the signifier. In a later example, the authors will describe a different, comparable passage from *rayure-griffure-griffe* by the composer Antoine Ouelette.

¹³ Jacques Lacan, « La lettre volée », *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966.

¹⁴ Jacques Lacan, « L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud », *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966.

¹⁵ Jacques Lacan, « Lituraterre », *Autres écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001.

In the first text, taking up Edgar Allen Poe's short story "The Purloined Letter", Lacan highlights the logical function of the letter: if it follows a course that seems to be subject to chance, it is not so. It is a letter that always arrives at its destination. 'Purloined' is to be understood as waiting to be revealed. It is by following this line of thought that two years later in "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious...", Lacan specifies that the letter inevitably produces "its effects of truth".¹⁶ The instance of the letter is thus linked to the unconscious and is reduced to the signifier of the repressed truth. It is the witness of the "one blunder", the failure – the letter can only be spotted by its effects -- and the overdetermination -- it always arrives at its destination -- which are specific to unconscious functioning.

With *Lituraterre* we are witnessing a conceptual leap: the letter becomes a writing of jouissance and is then radically distinguished from the signifier. A true "littoral",¹⁷ it draws the "edge of the hole in knowledge".¹⁸ Relying on calligraphy, Lacan specifies that the letter is "erased from any trace that went before". This "definition" is, as often with Lacan, counterintuitive, even enigmatic. Erasure, in common parlance, refers to a movement aimed at barring something already inscribed. This is also what appears in the etymology of the term: in the fourteenth century, the ancient verb to miss meant to erase. To miss is a derivative of the Latin *raptus*, meaning abduction. Here we have the level of the letter in its links to the

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, « L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud », *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 509.

¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, « Lituraterre », *Autres écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, p. 14.

¹⁸ Jacques Lacan, « Lituraterre », *Autres écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, p. 14.

unconscious and its formations that proceed from erasure.¹⁹ Lacan's proposal that "erases any trace that comes from before" seems to go against this understanding of the letter.

How can we hear this difference? The erasure, for Lacan, would not be an erasure but a correction coming to trace the original *Bejahung*. Bernard This and Pierre Théves in 1982 in their translation and commentary on Freud's text *Die Verneinung* (1925) propose to understand things in this way: "*Bejahen* is to answer affirmatively, it is to say yes (*ja*) to a previous affirmation issued by the other. It speaks and I say yes, so I confirm (...). To affirm in French is etymologically to make solid (*firmus*), while to deny is to make infirm.»²⁰ To affirm is to make something consistent, "firm", whose erasure would be the testimony.²¹ The letter is therefore located at the most intimate joint in the encounter of the body with language. Indeed, in *Lituraterre*, Lacan specifies that it is from the rupture of the signifier that the letter "rushes" into the place from "what was suspended matter there".²²

In *Letters of the Symptom* Erik Porge notes: "The letter, on the other hand, proceeds from a first trace step, impossible to represent, from which it arises as a *rature*.²³ Something like the crossed out S".²⁴ However, there is no divided subject in

¹⁹ In "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud", Lacan relies on Freud's developments on the dream to put forward the letter which is then "material support".

²⁰ Pierre Theves, Bernard This, *Die Verneinung La Dénégation Traduction nouvelle et commentaires*, Paris, Le Coq-Héron, 1982, p. 41.

²¹ Ed note: In this case of the prior affirmation by the other.

²² Jacques Lacan, « *Lituraterre* », *Autres écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, p. 17.

²³ Ed. note: a deletion

²⁴ Érik Porge, *Lettres du symptôme, Versions de identification*, Toulouse, Érès, 2010, p. 58.

autism. For the autistic subject we are talking about, it is not the subject emerging from the formations of the unconscious – as presented by Lacan's first teaching. It is deduced from the meeting of language and the body where the letter rushes into a place of lack. The clinic at stake in autism is that of the *parlêtre*; and it is of course the dimension of the real that we must define as impossible. The defensive construction of the psyche tries in vain to circumscribe, and as such haunt, language; threatening to overflow it in the form of deafening superegoic injunctions in the neurotic; hallucinations in the psychotic; and a rustling of the real almost without possibility of treatment in the autistic. The latter is then in an unbearable relationship with language; where the subject's attention can only respond with an: "Is it?" — a primordial question about being itself.

Indeed, the meeting of language and the body, having taken on a *tearing* value, leaves the autistic subject prey to an almighty voracious Other. If the autistic can accept to communicate but not to speak than it is out of fear of invoking the wrath of the gods, more exactly the jouissance of the Other. This Other would not ask him about his desire as happens in neurosis – "What do you want? " --, nor even about what he is like as in psychosis – "What form of object am I for the Other", or more precisely: "in what form will It enjoy me?». On the contrary, cutting himself off from the Other, he is led to wonder about his very being. An "is it? ", an abysmal question for the autistic, refers to the bowels of the *parlêtre* where the autistic is a *One*, totally alone, cut off from the Other. The clinical material taken from the meeting with Thomas allows us, relying on the dimension of the letter, to trace in a logical manner

the path from a One to a possible contact with the Other. Indeed, we were able to show that this young boy showed himself successively defensive, passive, and then summoned by the music; a testimony of his openness to the Other; or, as R. and R. Lefort testify, to a "birth of the Other".

From scratch (*la rayure*) to scratch (*la griffure*)

As we have already put forward we propose to consider, along with Eric Laurent, Thomas's gestures (hitting, scratching (*griffure*), pulling his hair ...) as a sign falling within the register of the letter. The autistic's relationship to the letter leads him to operate an "incessant scratch (*rayure*)" in order to get rid of the Other who keeps invading him. The scratch (*la rayure*) would then manifest itself as an iteration of jouissance; the image of the scratched (*rayé*) disc that remains stuck on a groove gives us a telling image. If we continue to follow Eric Laurent's proposal, the letter can fall into different registers that we must know how to grasp according to the affinities of the child: "as writing, as a number, as a fixation of speech, as a discontinuous image, or as music".²⁵ It is of course very interesting that the author places music on this list because it was music that was a first the pretext and then the medium of our sessions with Thomas; an approach which seems to have allowed Thomas to overcome the iteration of the 'stopping point' on which he was fixed until then.

The position of the clinician – and therefore the consideration of transference modalities in autism – has of course been a key element in the management of the case. Perceiving that the presence of the clinicians was experienced by Thomas as too

²⁵ Éric Laurent, *La bataille de l'autisme. De la clinique à la politique*, Paris, Navarin, 2012, p. 105.

much, the clinician decided to turn to the musical instruments and to play with them; thus freeing the child from a face to face encounter that was unbearable for him. It is then that Thomas begins to be interested in certain instruments, and even in the relationship of the clinician to the instruments. Then, subsequently, the child actively seizes the instrument offered to him. He selects percussion instruments and, using the clinician's hand as if it were a mallet, he taps. This is an essential step, the moment when we have located what we call scratching (*griffure*), which requires that we distinguish three elements that characterize this logical time: the characteristics of the musical instruments chosen, the function occupied by the clinician, and the act of tapping.

The musical instruments that Thomas invests at first are the small rhythmic percussions (maracas, tambourine, Basque drum, claves...).²⁶ They have the characteristic of producing sounds whose duration is relatively short; and this is all the more so since after striking the instrument Thomas keeps the clinician's hand pressed on the instrument which prevents any vibration phenomenon and muffles the sound as soon as it is produced. Unlike instruments such as the metallophone or the sound blades – which Thomas does not use during this period -- drums and claves emit a short sound and produce a vibration that disappears quickly or even immediately under the conditions in which he uses them.

How the clinician's function in this sequence is paradigmatic for the work performed by the autistic. If we follow the clinic precisely, we can observe that it is not

²⁶ Ed. note: claves are a pair of cylindrical hardwood sticks that make a hollow sound when struck together, used as a percussion instrument.

the sound that mediates between the child and the therapist but rather that the therapist is used as a tool that makes it possible to mediate Thomas's relationship to sound and therefore to the Other; that is, his relationship to language. When the clinician becomes docile with the autistic subject, he becomes the object of mediation, a way of summoning the dimension of the double in the therapeutic work.

We have defined scratching (*griffure*) as what occurs at the moment when Thomas, using the clinician's hand as a mallet, will come to tap the percussion and intentionally produce short sounds. By this act, he comes to the sound continuum. It is important to note that during this time Thomas will carefully avoid allowing any vibration to develop and therefore he will keep himself at a distance from any resonance phenomenon that would affect his body too much. Indeed, by keeping the analyst's hand on the instrument, he muffles the sound. We then witness a succession of muted and brief sounds that are not *rayure* scratches in the sense that Lacan defines it but are *griffure* scratches. This is our proposal.

So now we need to agree on what we mean by this term scratching (*griffure*). First of all, it is not about the scratch (*la griffure*) that hurts, the one that the autistic inflicts on himself or that he inflicts on others in moments when the Other is too present. If this were the case then we would rather be on the side of the scratch (*la rayure*) as signifying a hole in the real. The scratch (*la griffure*) that we are promoting should no longer be defined as just a "hole in a real world that lacks nothing"²⁷ but also

²⁷ Éric Laurent, *La bataille de l'autisme. De la clinique à la politique*, Paris, Navarin, 2012, p. 105.

as a "mark" testifying to the opening of a space for "negotiations with the Other".²⁸ The etymology of *griffer* is borrowed from the old High German word *grif* ("action of grasping") which is itself connected to the High German verb *grifan* ("to seize"). The scratch (*La griffure*) therefore refers to the scratch (*une rayure*) articulated at the birth of the Other. It testifies to the attempt to build a relationship with the real: a primordial affirmation that would not be transformed by confirmation.²⁹

How are we to understand this process? If, as Lacan affirms: "it is on the signifier that the primordial *Bejahung* bears"³⁰ than we can present it as the incorporation (Freud in his text on the *Verneinung* presents the process in the mode of orality) of the first body of signifiers allowing the birth of the Other. It is this incorporation that is refused in autism. Correlatively, the negative side that accompanies this *Bejahung*: the *Ausstossung*, taken as the constitution of the real forever unrecoverable outside, is non-existent. Thus, if, as Solal Rabinovich asserts, the *Ausstossung* "by separating the Other, treasure of signifiers, and the Thing, jouissance forever lost, makes the Other a place emptied of jouissance and exiled from the real"³¹, we could understand that the Thing is in no way exiled in the case of autism. This non-sharing of the Other and the Thing will have the clinical consequences that we know. The affirmation (*Bejahung*) that Thomas operates by tapping with the help of the clinician's hand on the percussions opens up possibilities for him that will allow the

²⁸ Éric Laurent, *La bataille de l'autisme. De la clinique à la politique*, Paris, Navarin, 2012, p. 103.

²⁹ Ed. note: that is, it is not a *bejahung* confirming the primordial affirmation of an other.

³⁰ Jacques Lacan, « D'une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de la psychose », *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 558.

³¹ Solal Rabinovitch, « L'affaire Bejahung-Ausstossung », *La forclusion : Enfermés dehors*, Toulouse, Érès, 2000, p. 29.

analytical process to unfold. The scratch (*La griffure*) would thus be a solution found by the autistic to pave the way for an inscription in the field of the Other: a seizure that opens to the selection of a mark that can become a claw (*griffe*), a signature. This is not an access to symbolism and metaphor but a support taken in the dimension of the letter to tinker with a signature.

In this sense, in the etymology of the term scratching (*griffure*), an occurrence that stems from the idea of grasping (1798) is of particular interest to us: the claw (*griffe*) comes to designate "an instrument that serves to make an impression imitating a signature". By extension and metonymy, in everyday language claw (*griffe*) will become a signature, as we might speak about the label of a great couturier.³² We spot this signature clinically at the moment when Thomas vocalizes "O" and "A". This signifying beat would be located in the continuation (and not the confirmation) of the movement of *Bejahung* then operating. The phonematic opposition between "O"/ "A" contains the potentiality of a language structurally established from oppositions. The letter, like what is written in the "differential couplings"³³ of language, is an edge allowing a relationship to the Other, albeit a minimal relationship to the Other for the autistic subject. The phonematic production here would be what we propose to call a sound signature: an alliance between the primordial scratching (*griffure*) and the bringing into play – at a minimum – of a pulsive object.³⁴ It is important to note that it

³² Ed. note: *la griffe* means both *claw*, something that grabs, and a *label*, in the sense that a brand label 'grabs your attention'; and, as a sign, functions like a signature.

³³ Jacques Lacan, « L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud », *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 501.

³⁴ Ed. note: Here the voice, the "O" and "A".

is from this moment that Thomas agrees to let the vibration of the instruments unfold and to use the sound plates as well as the metallophone where the resonance phenomena are extremely marked. The sound signature marks for Thomas the passage from the use of vibrations (listening or producing muffled sounds that have an effect on the body like massage) to the resonance of the body in a dialogue with the Other.

A clinical movement is then emerging that would go from the scratch (*la rayure*) to the signature (*la griffe*) via the scratch (*la griffure*). We spot this movement very clearly in Antoine Ouellette, a Canadian composer diagnosed with autism at the age of 47.

Antoine Ouelette, the "melodies in echoes"

For Antoine Ouellette, faced with the violence of language, an answer came to him: "create music". As a child his difficulties had condensed into a symptom of palilalia³⁵ that could also be detected in the iterative listening he did to certain musical pieces, which we could connect to the dimension of the letter as a scratch (*rayure*), as we have developed it. Based on the two centers of interest that he has shown since his childhood – music and birdsong -- Antoine Ouellette will carry out a genuine treatment of his relationship to the real, a scratch (*une griffure*) that he will raise to the dignity of a signature (*griffe*) in order to find a possible relationship to the world.

Antoine Ouellette explains the reason for his iterative musical listening: "If I listened to music so attentively, it was to understand how it was built in order to

³⁵ Ed. note: a speech disorder in which a word or phrase is rapidly repeated.

manage to compose it in my turn.”³⁶ He will then write completely unique compositions that do not respect a strict rhythmic framework. His music is a transcription of what he has in his head: "Bird songs have crept into my music, sometimes in a stylized way [...] sometimes in a realistic way.”³⁷ This musical writing will transform his palilalia into a solution. The first time of creation – *contemplation* -- consists of "tirelessly playing this idea [the one that repeats itself in his head] by pressing a loud pedal.”³⁸ Then he lets the idea come in all sorts of variations: "I repeat again at length the variations that I like. I write down the idea and its variants.”³⁹ Deviations are thus introduced into the crazy merry-go-round that until then had pulled him in by its whirling.

The work that is being written allows him to move from chaos to harmony. Indeed, Antoine Ouellette considers autism not as a developmental disorder but as a chaotic type of development: "I am not referring here to simple disorder, let alone disorganization, but to the chaos of chaos physics and fractal mathematics.”⁴⁰ If the evolution of a chaotic system is unpredictable, the fact remains that it is moving towards an equilibrium based on repetition and reiteration mechanisms present in

³⁶ Antoine Ouellette, *Musique autiste. Vivre et composer avec le syndrome d'Asperger*, Montréal, Triptyque, 2011, p. 119.

³⁷ Antoine Ouellette, *Le chant des oyseaulx. Comment la musique des oiseaux devient musique humaine*, Montréal, Triptyque, 2008, p. 11.

³⁸ Antoine Ouellette, *Musique autiste. Vivre et composer avec le syndrome d'Asperger*, Montréal, Triptyque, 2011, p. 296.

³⁹ Antoine Ouellette, *Musique autiste. Vivre et composer avec le syndrome d'Asperger*, Montréal, Triptyque, 2011, p. 297.

⁴⁰ Antoine Ouellette, *Musique autiste. Vivre et composer avec le syndrome d'Asperger*, Montréal, Triptyque, 2011, p. 185.

fractal mathematics via an attractor named the Lorenz attractor or the strange attractor. Antoine Ouellette then proposes the following analogy: "He [the strange attractor] surprisingly resembles the special interests of autistic people who are also often strange attractors."⁴¹ Therefore, his affinity to the autistic could be considered as belonging to the dimension of the letter, a first scratch (*griffure*) that he operates in the chaos of the world of the Other. It will then take a whole journey for this first scratch (*griffure*) to transform into a signature (*une griffe*).

In his work, Antoine Ouellette tries to transform behaviors and words into echoes via music in all kinds of forms: "I love to make a thousand vibrations resonate on few sounds. Moreover, I realized that the repeated E note was often loaded with anxiety, like an anxious bell."⁴² This creates a multitude of variations around an element that repeats itself. Here we have a magnificent demonstration of a treatment of *jouissance*. While the palilalia infinitely reiterates the element marked by an excess of *jouissance*, Antoine Ouellette brings this element One into resonance effects and thus builds a trap for the excess *jouissance*. As Jean-Claude Maleval notes: "music aestheticizes the obscene *jouissance* of the voice."⁴³ but beyond that, we could add in this specific case that it allows the letter to become a signature. Thus, in Antoine Ouellette's work, from chaos to balance, a harmony emerges: "I notice the marked

⁴¹ Antoine Ouellette, *Musique autiste. Vivre et composer avec le syndrome d'Asperger*, Montréal, Triptyque, 2011, p. 185.

⁴² Antoine Ouellette, *Musique autiste. Vivre et composer avec le syndrome d'Asperger*, Montréal, Triptyque, 2011, p. 299.

⁴³ Antoine Ouellette, *Musique autiste. Vivre et composer avec le syndrome d'Asperger*, Montréal, Triptyque, 2011, p. 299.

presence of a precise harmony in my works. It is a chord that superimposes the major [...] and the minor [...]. This harmony can be perfectly balanced, peaceful, floating as if in weightlessness: the dissociative forces (major and minor) are harmonized. But elsewhere, it is loaded with tension and creates sustained dissonances: dissociative forces are exerted, the inner balance is threatened or broken. [...] My music tells me that this harmonization is never all won.»⁴⁴

This harmony cannot be taken in the common-sense meaning of the word. Antoine Ouellette describes it as "echoing melodies",⁴⁵ which constitute his "sound signature".⁴⁶ Unlike Joyce,⁴⁷ Antoine Ouellette does not want to make a name for himself – the public performance of his works interests him less by the public's reactions than by what he hears – but rather seeks a sound signature that can only be tinkered with from the particular register of the letter.

Conclusion: from scratch (*la griffure*) to claw (*la griffe*)

All the work presented here demonstrates that for the autistic the challenge is to be able to tinker with a signature that allows him to open a space for negotiation, then dialogue, with the Other. This writing allows a connection of the autistic subject in

⁴⁴ Antoine Ouellette, *Musique autiste. Vivre et composer avec le syndrome d'Asperger*, Montréal, Triptyque, 2011, p. 299.

⁴⁵ Antoine Ouellette, *Musique autiste. Vivre et composer avec le syndrome d'Asperger*, Montréal, Triptyque, 2011, p. 298.

⁴⁶ Antoine Ouellette, *Musique autiste. Vivre et composer avec le syndrome d'Asperger*, Montréal, Triptyque, 2011, p. 298.

⁴⁷ Cf. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XXIII, Le sinthome*, Paris, Seuil, 2005.

the world of the Other, a sinthomatic solution that emerges from the dimension of the letter.

If for Antoine Ouelette, as for Thomas, the instance of the letter emerged at the beginning as a scratch (*rayure*), the work around the musical instruments – for one it is carried out alone, for the other with the support of the clinician -- allowed an act of scratching (*griffure*) in the surrounding chaos, a mark affixed on an invasive too much presence. This scratch (*griffure*) was then taken up in a circuit making it appear as a signature, with the appearance of the phonematic opposition "O"/"A" for Thomas and the harmonizing "melodies in echoes" for Antoine Ouelette. Signing— in order not to be assigned "by the weight of the real for the subject"— allowed them to move from the iteration of a jouissance to its coming into a circuit. Based on the singular border defined by the register of the letter, which here takes the form of the claw (*la griffe*) and not the scratch (*la rature*), a space for negotiations with the Other, and then dialogue, has been created.