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New forms of autism?

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In 1966, when the first epidemiological study on autism appeared in England, a prevalence of 4-5 autistic children for every ten thousand was found. Currently, according to studies conducted by the Centers of Diseases Control and Prevention/CDC (2022), the prevalence of autism is one child in thirty-six. We have seen, from 1966 to the present day, an extraordinary increase in the diagnosis of autism. Some authors even talk about an epidemic!

In Brazil, changes in public policies seem to contribute to this growing number of autism diagnoses. The Anti-Homicomial Law, of April 6, 2021, promoted the psychiatric reform, closing mental healthy asylums and hospices and engendering other models of care in health practices, which were considered more appropriate and inclusive - such as the Psychosocial Care Center (CAPS), for example.

There was also a shift in the medical specialty, regarding the attribution of the diagnosis; it went from psychiatry, the area in which autism appeared, to neurology. This dislocation seems to have been motivated by the tendency, in our times, to convey the capitalist discourse, and with this, we also verify, in the medical field, the exclusion of subjectivity. Thus, in the 1980s, with the arrival of imaging tests (MRI and others), neurology gained ground on the diagnosis of autism, creating an organicist trend. In Brazil, in 2013, this led autism to be considered an "organic brain dysfunction"! Lastly, in this scenario, why not to attribute to the to the economic interest of the pharmaceutical market the growing number of autism diagnosis, since it has led to a considerate increase in the consumption of drugs?

The fact is that, in the wake of these changes, we witness in our clinics today new forms of autism, ones in which intelligence is particularly developed and social insertion

stands out. This raises a question whether such "advances" presented in these new forms of autism also imply some structural change.

To guide us in our reflection, I will present a clinical fragment: an intelligent teenager, who is able to follow the pedagogical content of school well and has excellent grades. However, he presents a "bizarre" behavior that draws the attention of those around him. It is a behavior that usually occurs in public, such as in the classroom or during school breaks. Suddenly, he starts imitating John Travolta, just like in the movie *Grease*.

This reminds me of two moments in Lacan's work. The first, the Seminar, Book 3, *The Psychoses* (1955-56/1985), when he works on the case in which the subject tries to restore the absence of the Name-of-the-Father through an imaginary compensation. He, then, sets out to conquer the typification of the virile attitude, which he lacks, due to the absence of the Oedipus. He does this through "imitation, of a coupling, in the wake of one of his companions. Like this one, and in his stride, he indulges in the first sexual maneuvers of puberty" (Lacan, 1955-56/1985, p. 220). The friend functions as a "pilot element" (*ibidem*) that guides the boy in his attempt to structure himself at the moment of puberty. In such a way that he becomes interested in the same girl as his companion. Luckily or unluckily, the girl corresponds and he is left without his friend's reference to guide him. In this scenario, psychosis erupts.

At another point in his work, in the text "Homage to Marguerite Duras for Lol V. Stein's rapture," Lacan (1965/2003) makes us see a type of identification in which the other is affirmed in a powerful way. Duras' novel narrates a scene at a ball in which the character Lol V. Stein is enraptured by the image of another woman, to the point that she shows no reaction or distress when her fiancé asks this other woman to dance. Lol remains in the same place, petrified, watching her fiancé dance with the woman until the end of the ball. When the couple leave the dance and disappear, Lol faints. What we deduce from this is that Lol cannot separate herself from the image of the other. And interestingly, the term 'rapture' has its roots in the mystical field and points to a

state of ecstasy in which the soul feels captured by a higher force. Lol is raptured by the image of the woman, to the point that when the woman disappears, she falls to the ground. The couple's departure from the scene will mark Lol indelibly. The woman (Anne-Marie Stretter), who took her place next to the groom, also took her image with her, leaving Lol V. Stein bare.

As we know, the self is constituted from the other, in a relationship where similarities and otherness intermingle. The self is, at the same time, the other, but also is not. In psychoses, the phenomena of the "between-self" constitutes a central point, because in the absence of a "separating word" the "other is me".

Returning to the clinical case mentioned before, I wonder what makes a subject "imitate" John Travolta in Grease. The film, a musical, portrays the conflicts and impasses of a young couple (played by John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John) in the late 1950s. John Travolta's character, in particular, the leader of a gang, leads in both the men's and women's groups; he is admired and desired. In my view, this prominent image of John Travolta's character functions as an imaginary compensation at a time when the enigmas of sexuality are present in social interaction.

It is necessary to specify that this image does not seem to give access to the specular itself; what we see is an indifference between the 'I' and the 'other'. The subject is captured by the image of the other, without symbolic mediation.

In the clinical fragment presented here, the structure that seems to reveal itself is that of autism, which, without presenting itself as a classic case - with stereotypes, echolalia, isolation etc., evokes it by its structural elements.