

Body, image and repetition memory in autism

Cleuber Cristiano de Sousa¹, Joana de Vilhena Novaes².

ABSTRACT

Introduction: There are vital needs that keep us going even when we are worn out or without a clear expectation of achieving some transfer to some external object. Unlike common sense, the demands of life do not come from what we want from the outside world, that is, from our material aspirations. The Outside depresses us, but it does not cause us melancholy. What requires us to drive comes from within, from the lived body itself. For Jerusalinsky (2012), the repeated search for transference in autism constitutes fragments designated as partial objects. It also relativizes the imagined totalization, and dispenses with being only that agent who lives on the other side of the mirror (maternal agent).

Objectives: The objective of this work is to present the body as a memory of repetition in Autism and what would be the consequences of placing this body in relation with the internal and external world, with spaces, others and oneself. **Methodology:** In discourse analysis, we use movement and relationship as a theoretical-analytical device. Thus, the production of meanings is understood in comparisons, relations, dissonances, approximations and displacements. It is in the event and in the analysis of other (non-linguistic) materialities that we will present the results. **Results:** The experiential experiences of childhood and the relationship between mother and baby are essential for the subjective constitution and the production of meanings in the formation of the psyche. Affective life, emotions, identifications and the strengthening of the bonds of social belonging are anchored in this phase and from there emanate all the threads that link the unconscious content. The case study of the mother A.S. and her relationship with the little R.A. demonstrated that the child with autism is constituted in the primary and secondary identifications regressive and partial, with a singularity of its own constituted in the repetition. The symbolic and imaginary contents to *remember and repeat* are repeated without success in the elaboration. **Conclusion:** This work focused on the considerations launched from Merleau-Ponty's (2011) studies on the body that inhabits the world and makes it a lived world. All the premises about the affective life, formation of the psyche and the unconscious come from the studies of Sigmund Freud and the successor psychoanalysts who affirmed or refuted his writings, contributing to psychoanalysis becoming a theory in process. The case study presented in this work is about the little R.A., four years old, and his mother, their personal history and the constitution of a subjective body in the memory of repetition.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Autism, Image, Replay memory, Body.

INTRODUCTION

In 1906, Pouller analyzed children diagnosed with childhood dementia who were oblivious to social contact, defining this fact as "a state of Autism Spectrum Disorder." E. Bleuler, in 1911, attributed it to "loss of contact with reality, caused by the impossibility or great difficulty in interpersonal

¹ PhD student at UVA, Veiga de Almeida University, in Psychoanalysis, Health and Society.

² Professor of the Master's and Doctoral Program in Psychoanalysis, Health and Society at Veiga de Almeida University. Coordinator of the Center for Beauty Diseases at PUC-Rio. Researcher and psychotherapist at the Interdisciplinary Laboratory of Research and Social Intervention LIPIS/PUC-Rio.



communication", as Autism Spectrum Disorder (Kenyon, Kenyon, & Miguel, 2002, p. 11). Leo Kanner, an Austrian psychiatrist, who lived in the United States of America in 1943, investigated 11 cases of children between the ages of 2 and 8 who were part of his therapeutic follow-up. L. Kanner described "[...] the inability of these children, from the beginning of their lives, to relate to people and situations. " (Kanner, 1943, p. 242). He also observed resistance to change, or insistent monotony, different responses to the environment, stereotyped movements, echolalia in language, inversion of pronouns, and deficits in social contact (Klin, 2006).

The studies on autism, which come from the research of the Austrian psychiatrist living in the United States, Leo Kanner, in 1943, were published in the work *Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact*, known as Autistic Affective Contact Disorder. In the journal *Nervous Children*, Kanner. This research described the cases of eleven children with an obsession with the preservation of sameness and extreme isolation from birth.

Kanner's (1943) description already shows a relationship with the intensity of imaginative life, alienism and the absence of responses to external stimuli: Leo Kanner (1943) described under the term Autistic Affective Contact Disorder a condition that he characterized as "extreme autism, obsessivity, stereotypies and echolalia", relating them to phenomena of the schizophrenic line. (Volkmar et al., 1997).

The subjective approach of psychoanalysis is based on the existence of vital needs that make us continue to follow even when we are tired or without a clear expectation of reaching some external object. Contrary to popular belief, the demands of life do not come from what we want from the external world, that is, from our material aspirations. This does not cause us melancholy: Melancholy is characterized, in psychic terms, by a painful dejection, a cessation of interest in the external world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a decrease in self-esteem. (Freud, 1914).

Reactions to loss are ideal or material in nature. There is a quotient, a kind of pondering of what is left of these reactions of loss (absence of transference of libido to an external object) and from this point of view we will call melancholy. There is the impoverishment of the self and one has in it the lost object, which, when it is decharacterized, is depersonalized: It is through the search for a past and outdated satisfaction that the new object is sought, and that it is found and apprehended elsewhere than at the point where it is sought. There is a fundamental distance here, introduced by the essentially conflictual element included in every search for an object. (Lacan, 1994/1995, p. 13).

The psychotic structure is very similar to the symptoms of this melancholy, even though it is a very delicate subject and in the discussions several authors do not agree with this position, we start here to use the clinical line of reasoning of approximation of this autism with psychosis: (...) It is a much more energetic and successful defensive modality, which consists in the ego rejecting the unbearable representation, together with its affection, and behaving as if the representation had never appeared. But at



the moment when he has achieved this, the person finds himself in a psychosis that admits no other classification than 'hallucinatory confusion' (Freud, 1893-1899/1987, p. 59).

On the other hand, mourning for Freud (Mourning and Melancholy, Freud, 1917/2010) is a cause for the relative impoverishment of the self and inhibition of the mechanism of topographical balance, which feeds only one of the instances in the topic: Psychoanalysis informs us that there are two methods of finding an object. The first (...) is the 'anaclitic' or linkage, based on the attachment to primitive infantile prototypes. The second is the narcissistic who seeks out the individual's own ego and finds it again in someone else. The latter method is of great importance in cases where the result is pathological (Freud, 1915, p. 229).

According to Jerusalinsky (2012), autism is a structure alongside psychosis, neurosis and perversion. The subject who appropriates language and is out of step in the rupture with the signifiers of the other is inserted in psychosis. This does not seem to be the case, because the defense mechanism operating in autism is exclusion and not foreclosure: "The details of the disease, infantile schizophrenia, really do spread everywhere, and can be found in the description of any normal child" (Winnicott, 1963/1996 p. 176-177).

There is, in this case, an aversiveness which is the result of a contained and tension-driven unpleasure which expresses the motor movements, stereotyped, and repetition: We recognize our mental apparatus as being, above all, a device designed to master excitations which would otherwise be felt to be distressing or to have pathogenic effects. (Freud, 1914/2006, p. 92).

The most complex thing in the process of relationships with autism is to understand that the lost object does not bring pain, but rather pinches the process of emptiness, for the replacement of this object, without the understanding of the identity of thought. For Freud, the painful is not the loss of the object, but the hard work of mourning and its hyper-sensation of attachment to the representation of the lost object: This route of discharge thus acquires the all-important secondary function of communication, and the initial helplessness of human beings is the primary source of all moral motives. (Freud, 1895/2006, p. 379).

In this case, the pain of attachment is what requires hyper-investment and not the pain of separation from an external object, what hurts is not separating but becoming more and more attached. Bringing it to exclusion, in the case of autism, there is a universe of sensations that are responsible for this substitution, which is copiously experienced and experienced in circularity: The repressed is, for us, the prototype of the unconscious. We realize, however, that we have two kinds of unconscious: one that is latent, but capable of becoming conscious, and another that is repressed and is not in itself and without further work, capable of becoming conscious. (Freud, 1996, p28).



For autism, then, we must cast the apparent and decisive distinction for the clinic in the elementary concepts between loss and lack. The defense is found in a constantly narcissistic relationship to overcome the depressive process of withdrawal and exclusion and, resulting from it, substitution, as a propelling element to indifference and distancing. In order to overcome this isolation, there is a loss of reality which distinguishes itself in neurosis and psychosis: neurosis does not repudiate reality, it only ignores it; psychosis repudiates it and tries to replace it. (Freud, 1924/2006, p. 209).

In the opposite direction of loss, there is lack, functioning as a propeller of the desire for life that detaches itself from loss as an incursion into the perceptual identity of connection to the lost object. As the antidote to loss, there is only the substitutive representation of lack. And it is in this path that autism can be used: It is a question of the phallus, and of knowing how the child realizes, more or less consciously, that his omnipotent mother is fundamentally lacking in something, and it is always the question of how she is going to give him this faulty object, and that she always lacks herself. (Lacan, 1956-57/1995, p. 196).

According to Freud (1900), only desire is capable of putting the psychic apparatus into action. The primeval experience refers to the reminiscences of the baby's experiences that still persist in our body sculpted in psychic memory: Traumas are either experiences about the individual's own body or sensory perceptions, especially of something seen or heard, that is, experiences or impressions. (Freud [1938] 1996, p. 89).

The prototypes are hunger and the breast, and there will always be the search for satisfaction from this first experience of pleasure. It is in the encounter between the need and the other that tension dissipates and pleasure sets in. This other is the one who plays the role of promoter of this primary satisfaction and of the realizer of the function of primary care and protection: The totality of the event then constitutes the experience of satisfaction, which has the most radical consequences on the development of the individual's functions. (Freud, 1886-1889/1996, p.370).

Mental treading or facilitation is the repetition of this activity that is satisfied in the whole process of constitution of contemplation of a perceptual identity, which is also hallucinatory: The condition under which one attributes to one's own representations a hallucinatory liveliness and, in this way, after a successfully successful defense, the person falls into hallucinatory confusion (Freud, 1893-1899/1987, p. 60).

Freud treats it as hallucination, because the insistence on the attainment of perceptual identity allows for exhaustive investment in the representation of this primeval experience. The imagery trace left by the experience of satisfaction is temporalized in the actualization of the saying, which is an action, but does not cease to merge into the hallucinatory act. And it is in this path, once again, that there is an approximation to psychosis: The apprehension of the body by the subject requires, however, that a new



operation take place. This operation, by which the body is subjectivized, is of the order of the imaginary, insofar as it depends on the investment of an image – the image of the body (Elia, 1995, pp. 152–153).

The body will not be satisfied with the image, it desires the material and this movement will not be able to meet this need, resulting in the experience of helplessness. The wear and tear of investment in this imagery experience that will not be enough to feed the body is unnecessary, but it destroys the investment that would produce the satisfaction of the libido: Anxiety is accompanied by more or less defined physical sensations that can be referred to specific organs of the body. The generation of anxiety sets the generation of symptoms in motion and is actually a prerequisite for it. (FREUD, 1926/1986, p. 155).

The source of the drive is endogenous, we call it the source of the interior of the body, because of its constancy and its action lies in the failure of the reflex mechanism to deal with the external factors of desire and how this can be modulated with the internal desire: The drive is the psychic representative of the stimuli that come from the interior of the body and reach the psyche. as a measure of work demand imposed on the psychic as a result of his relationship with the body. (Freud, 1915).

The experience of satisfaction is the starting point for dealing with the accumulation of energy from somatic needs and psychic activities. This experience is gradual and the body is the mediator of this experience. It is through my own body that I experience myself and the other, and also the world that we see and we need to learn experientially to see it.

There is an action and reaction in what is expected of a subject's attitudes towards experiential experiences. In these relationships, only desire moves and dynamizes the psychic apparatus. If the blockage in libidinal investment or desire becomes scarce, the psychic movement loses its rhythm. Desiring something is part of the phenomenon that sets the psychic apparatus in motion, and in this decrease of instinctual investment, the fuel capable of animating the experiences becomes insufficient and the wheel stops turning.

The autistic subject does not feel the same pleasure, but is satisfied with the corresponding updating of the experience, starting to seek reparation for the loss. In this game of conformation, there are no winners. The mnemonic mark refers to the reminiscences of this support that, inscribed in the memory, is located as an image in the scope of what will be the real, the impossible. This satisfaction is hallucinatory and will bring failure in the instinctual investment, because it results in mental confusion and confrontation between desire and need.

METHOD

In Discourse Analysis, we use movement and relationship as a theoretical-analytical device. This proposal resembles shredding, in that the real cannot be achieved. Thus, the production of meanings is understood in comparisons, relations, dissonances, approximations and displacements.



The internal, external, and transitional psychic spaces are diffuse in autism, due to a partially impoverished identification and the use of the transitional object in an inappropriate and inconsistent way. Social withdrawal is a manifestation that arises from an unfinished process of strengthening a self and an absence of holding and handling, when there is no accommodation of the psyche in the body and also the absence of time-space integration.

It is necessary to observe that a concept in Discourse Analysis is not only relational, but also intertwined, because interdependence occurs in the emergence of meaning. This notion of archive occurs as a reading of material structure for writings and objects, and also as memory, constituting itself as a significant materiality. Thus, autism has its concept in this psychoanalytic lens, in addition to being nuclear based on material historicity.

The central point of the methodology used when thinking about autism is that there is a consonance between the recognition of speech not only as verbalization, oral and written, but also of images, the pictorial, the forms and the realization of the memorable meanings in repetition. Thus, the event is an important term in DA, because for Pêcheux (1975), the structure of discourse is language and when we think of language we almost always associate it with the verbal, which is also a significant materiality of the non-verbal.

R.A. AND A.S. AND THE IMAGE AND MEMORY OF REPETITION IN AUTISM

According to the mother's report:

Since she was a baby, R.A. had a lot of resistance to put on slippers and closed shoes, but it was really resistance to crying.
So we only wore sandals.
When he started going to daycare we tried again, the slippers even with the elastic, he just wouldn't stop wearing shoes, he would walk and take off his slippers.
Until the time came for hippotherapy, when we had to put on our shoes. I reported it to the psychologists, and they started working on it with him.
Every day he went to therapy.
I put the shoe on it and repeated it to include it in the neural pattern
Walked 1 (one) min
And I took it off
Another day 2 (two) min
And I took it off
And so it went on increasing
Here, at home, when we were going out, I also wore closed shoes
Even if getting in the car he was going to take it out
Then I'd put it back on when we were going out
Before we knew it, he was already willing to put on shoes
No crying
With the flip-flop it was different, a little more difficult.
I told my mother about his fixed interest in the Minions, when a song plays, or when he sees a Minion doll on the street he is amazed.
Then my mother said she would buy him the Minions' slippers
To see if he'd be interested
When she arrived with the slipper he saw the drawing opened such a beautiful smile



And put on
We've walked it over and over again at home, and now we're in the training of walking with the slipper at home, and then we've generalized to a natural environment.
He already makes a point of putting on the minions' sandals.
With 1 (one) week he got the slipper and is already wearing well. In a sequenced manner.
I thought: how fixed and repetitive interest makes a difference for them!
Today I know that everything that has minions, means of transportation (truck, bus and train) captures his full attention and motivates him to perform the instrumental activities of daily living.

DISCUSSION

Mother A.S.'s report confirmed that little R.A. developed a resistance to the use of clothing and footwear from an early age, especially for footwear (tactile aversiveness/DSM-5 – Diagnostic criterion B4/Hyper-reactivity and hypo-reactivity), then accustomed to remaining barefoot. This heightened sensitivity caused a flight of demand, or even avoidance, of performing functional or self-care activities, such as dressing occasionally for parties and events that required more formal dress or another task that required a more developed tactile skill.

As much as his mother insisted on wearing closed shoes or even more open ones such as flip-flops or any other of this nature, he did not accept it and presented negative behaviors or tantrums. The change occurred from the moment the mother started an activity with repetition memory and reward based on praise and words of safety and support, with the aim of making him more comfortable and safe. Repetition memory in autism is one of the most promising strategies in the affective relationships of children and their mothers, maintaining the bond of social and family belonging.

According to his mother's report, little R.A. has always had a preference for minions, which are yellow fictional characters in the shape of pills, and they are all the same and behave in a similar and coordinated way, corresponding to the repertoire of the child with autism, maintaining their routine and self-regulation. His maternal grandmother, knowing this network of preference and understanding the situation, presented her grandson with a slipper of the minions, R.A.'s favorite character.

This initiative inaugurated the primary and regressive identification trait and, after this reinforcement in the strengthening of the bonds of social belonging with the family, it enabled an identification and the transfer of libidinal energy to an external object. According to her mother's account: "she doesn't take off her minions' slippers for anything anymore".

FINAL THOUGHTS

In the infantile phase, there is a moment of transition that occurs in overcoming the stage of absolute dependence to the relative one. This direction occurs to the extent that the baby has access to transitional objects and/or transitional phenomena, which in the case of R.A., son of the mother A.S., was the insistence on the sameness of the minion characters and was presented by his maternal grandmother



with sandals with the images of the drawing. Repetition memory in autism initially occurs with the motivating element, as a network of preference, which is later the space for the expansion of this child's social communication.

Care of daily living is expressed in adaptations and arrangements of environments, contexts and situations that come from all forms and in multiple directions. Thus, this care is related to the countless universe of protective actions and also to the knowledge that they need to have in order to become independent and capable of developing instrumental activities of daily living.

In the case of this relationship between R.A. and his mother A.S., two fundamental procedures are perceived for the memory of repetition to be effective. The first is the structuring of a self based on primary and secondary identifications in the family context. The second and most important is that the effort of this satisfactorily good environment lasts even after the initial months of this psychosoma. A good breast that expands and extends its primary maternal care for the integrality of this subject that has been constituted in subjectivity.



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ATTACHMENTS

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORDS

Figure 1. Development of matching skills for execution of identification, discrimination, generalization and naming.



Figure 2. This activity is for R.A. to name the slipper and know its function, characteristic, and class. It is important for the development of developmental skills of personal and functional care, in instrumental activities of daily living.



Figure 3. The first results of the activities of matching to the model and discrimination and generalization in the natural environment of R.A., with the mother by her side, reinforcing and establishing the bonds of social belonging.



Figure 4. Generalization of the use of the Minions sandals, an item of preference of little R.A., gifted by his maternal grandmother.

