

Beauty in Play: Willy Apollon's Concept of the Structure of the Address and Work with Autistic Children

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A scene comes to mind, in thinking about what Willy Apollon calls the structure of the address in relation to the aesthetic experience of children. It's something I saw at a river beach in Montreal last summer. A boy, who is maybe two years old, is standing in the shallows, slapping the water with an open palm. He seems interested in the effect — in the infinitely complex patterns he's creating on the surface. A man joins in, slapping the water alongside him. New patterns emerge, and the boy flaps his hands. After a few minutes a woman joins the two, and the man moves away to begin packing up some chairs and an umbrella. The woman takes the boy's hand and begins to wander up the beach, wading with him in the shallow water. He stops to slap the water, and the woman looks on. Time passes, and they continue their way slowly up the beach as the man packs. When my eye wanders back to the pair, I notice the boy suddenly grab the woman's hand. The boy's gesture transforms the woman's posture and expression, but he doesn't see her smile. He's preoccupied, and unsteady — toddling, as toddlers do. The woman's hand had just been at hand, support and leverage as he worked determinedly to turn himself around. I wonder what could be floating past the boy in the very slow current that drew his attention. A bug, a leaf, some dandelion fluff? Maybe something with a slight wake, that creates different ripples and patterns of light than the boy does. He seems interested in what things do. The woman's smile fades and the boy slaps the water. Soon the man has finished packing, and the trio move out of my line of sight.

Whereas the psyche is limited by the pleasure principle, what Apollon calls "the spirit" — a capacity to represent what doesn't exist,

to want it, and to create it, for better or for worse”¹ — has no limit. The spirit forces open a space, “the aesthetic” in the being. Apollon defines the aesthetic as “a space created by the insistent rupture of the psyche by the spirit, which defines, in the being, the beautiful, that which the being must conserve as a witness to its manifestation, and the sublime, that which of the quest transcends the social and the cultural, and articulates the being to the human beyond the stakes of civilization.”² For children, who have not yet discovered the borders of their culture or how their civilization defines the human, there is no distinction between what is beautiful and what is sublime. In adults, meanwhile, the aesthetic space, a resonant space that sings on its own in the presence of some things, and not in the presence of others, defines what each wants to make more space for in the collective, when they see it, and also what each will stake their life on, whether or not any others agree. It is only when the person discovers that something beautiful cannot be conserved in the culture, because there is no room for it in the interpretation of the human given by the civilization, that the sublime, what the being will die for, takes shape as distinct from the beautiful. Some children, gambling on a dimension of experience that is inadmissible within the structure of familial relationships that is maintained by the culture — a structure of relationships that carries within it a certain interpretation of what it is to be a human being — refuse to enter into the address that is structured by the culture. In concrete terms, this means that these children do not play the roles that are expected of them in the culture, and in the family. This decision to not enter into a relation with the others on whom their lives depend, constitutes a risk that has consequences which the child cannot imagine, nor manage. In what follows I try to take the measure of this choice, as well as to think

1 Willy Apollon, Séminaire de Montréal (Video Conference, January 29, 2022). Lecture notes.

2 Willy Apollon, “The Fundamental Concepts of the Metapsychology” (Groupe interdisciplinaire freudien de recherche et d’intervention clinique et Culturelle [GIFRIC], Handout, June 17, 2020). My translation.

about what it means to accompany a child who has decided to not enter into what Apollon calls the structure of address.

In his 1980 seminar on Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze offers a brief development on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile, or On Education* that is helpful to introducing the structure of the address — which Apollon describes as “what conditions what the one says to the other, and what conditions what the other hears, of what is said to them,”³ — as it first appears in the experience of children. In Deleuze's reading, Rousseau's main point is that interactions between adults and children are conditioned by “relations of dependence.”⁴ “Dependence-tyranny, dependence-tyranny, with perpetual reversal, slave-tyrant,” Deleuze says. “That's the child's situation, in society, from the very start. The child is a slave because he depends entirely on his parents — and, consequently, he becomes the tyrant of his own parents.”⁵ Adults, when they play with children who don't speak, tend to address them with interpretations about what they might want. When a child cries, Deleuze explains,

It's like when a cat meows. A cat doesn't meow to say, “I want some milk”; that's an adult proposition, a human adult, “I want some milk,” “a cat meowing.” It's what Americans say when they are undertaking good proposition analysis: “to meow” is not an object proposition. “I want some milk” is an object proposition; “to meow” is not an object proposition, it's a relation proposition. “To meow” is about the relation of dependence. When a cat meows in an apartment,

3 Willy Apollon, “Psychanalyse et mondialisation” (GIFRIC, Video Conference, June 10, 2020). Lecture notes.

4 Gilles Deleuze, “Seminar on Spinoza: The Velocities of Thought,” trans. Charles J. Stivale, in *The Deleuze Seminars*, Purdue University, Lecture 4, 20, December 1980, <https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/index.php/seminars/spinoza-velocities-thought/lecture-04-0>. Translation modified.

5 *Ibid.*, 20.

this is the relation of dependence: it's attracting the master's attention. A child crying is not an object proposition; it's not "I want some milk." It's "Mama, ooo ooo!" "Hey, you over there, mama!" It's a proposition of dependence. Immediately, the mother brings the child some milk. In other words, it's in the same situation that the child is made a slave and turns themselves into a tyrant. [...] You see what Rousseau means – and this is where it becomes very profound – he says: this is the matrix of all social situations. The slave-tyrant is the social situation, it's the key social situation. And here Rousseau throws out the great statement of *Emile*: education ought to consist in substituting for dependence on people, dependence on things. Look: substitute for dependence in relation to people, dependence in relation to things. That is: never bring something to the child; bring the child to the thing. There – you are already changing the situation. Of course you have to bring the child. They can't walk – fine – so you bring them. But it's the child who will be displaced, it's not the thing that will be displaced. And you will turn the child more and more toward propositions that might be called object propositions and less and less toward propositions that might be called relational propositions. Substitute for dependence on people, dependence on things. That means, change the situation. Do you understand?⁶

Indeed, when a young child calls for attention, it is common for adults to address that child, much like the cat in the Paris apartment in Deleuze's example, by offering something they think the child might want, or by asking the child to tell them what he or she wants. The call to do otherwise is, concretely, quite radical. Deleuze goes on to suggest that what he is emphasizing here in *Emile* is entirely consistent with Spinoza's thought, in that "the effort of reason will typically be an

⁶ Ibid., 20-21.

effort to select in situations what is apt to give me what Spinoza calls joy and to eliminate what is apt to give me sadness. [...] Or, to select what is apt to give me independence, and eliminate what is apt to give me dependence. Well, so, this is word for word what Rousseau called the ‘materialism of the wise or sensitive morality,’ and that’s what ethics is.”⁷

The extent to which clinical practices reinforce dependence in relation to people, and the expectations these relations engender, is visible in the fact that childhood neurodevelopmental assessments often involve observing how a child responds in scenarios similar to the one Deleuze describes. A slide about “initiating and responding to social interaction” from an educational tool for parents about childhood development created by Florida State University College of Medicine shows this quite literally.⁸ The slide contains two video clips of a clinical assessment that is administered as part of the Communication and Symbolic Behavior Scales Developmental Profile.⁹ One video clip is labeled “Typical,” and the other, “Red Flags for ASD” [Autism Spectrum Disorder]. Both video clips begin with a toddler, a young boy, seated at a table between a clinician and a parent. The clinician takes out a bubble blower bottle, with a wand inside, unscrews the lid, takes out the wand, and blows bubbles such that the child following the bubbles with their gaze is facing first one adult, and then the other. The child is encouraged to pop the bubbles as they float past, and the adults cheer when he is successful. Once the game is established, the clinician returns the wand to the bubble bottle, and, screwing the lid tightly closed, puts it down on the table in front of the toddler, saying, “Here

7 Ibid., 21.

8 Autism Navigator (Florida State University, 2016), <https://resources.autismnavigator.com/asdglossary/#/section/9/initiateInteraction>.

9 The profile, developed by Barry M. Prizant and Amy M. Wetherby, is sold through Brookes Publishing. Nancy Volkens confirms that the clip is part of this assessment in “Early Signs of Autism Spectrum Disorder,” *The Asha Leader*, April 2016, vol. 21, 44-49.

you go — they're for you." Presented with this unopenable gift, how will the child respond? Will the child interact "socially"? Will the child act in a way that shows he is correctly situated in relations of dependence on people?

This is where the assessment begins. "Badah!" says the young boy, in the first video clip, labeled "Typical."¹⁰ He picks up the bubble bottle and shows it to his mother. He tries briefly to unscrew the lid, then looks back at the clinician. "Mama open? Give it to mama," the clinician says, pointing at the woman across from her. After a moment, smiling, the boy hands the bubble bottle to his mother. "More bubbles, would you like more bubbles?," she asks. This is where the clip ends. In the terms that Deleuze puts forward, this assessment produces a situation that verifies whether the child is dependent on people, or dependent on things. In the "Typical" video, where the child gives the "thing" — the bubble bottle — to his mother, "dependence in relation to people" is substituted for "dependence in relation to things."¹¹ This relationship of dependence on people is, as Deleuze says, "the matrix of all social situations."¹² It is the typical situation.

From the first moments of the second video clip, "Red Flags for ASD," it is clear that the toddler has not taken the same interest in the bubble-popping game as it was being established. Whereas the toddler in the first video clip was interested both in the adults' responses and in popping the bubbles, this toddler does not seem focused on either. His mother is trying to help him with the game, and she is guiding his hands, almost hand-over-hand, toward a bubble as it floats toward them. The child is not interested in what he is supposed to be interested in. The bubble pops, but it is unclear whether he popped it or whether it bursts of its own accord. "You got it, you got it!" the clinician quickly says, interpreting the child's movements as a response to the clinical and parental expectations that orient the assessment. The clinician

10 Ibid., section 9.

11 Deleuze, 21.

12 Deleuze, 21.

then replaces the wand, and, screwing the bubble bottle shut, places it in front of the boy. “Here’s the bubbles, they’re for you,” she says. The child then knocks the bottle over, and watches it roll, jerkily, across the table. The clinician rights it, saying, “do you want more — do you want more bubbles?” The boy knocks the container over again, this time pushing it so that it rolls yet more jerkily away. The clinician and the boy go several rounds like this, until the toddler is lifting the container up and letting it fall so that it rolls haphazardly toward the other side of the table. The clinician says his name, repeats it anxiously. In an aside, to the mother, she again interprets his acts as situated within the relations of dependence — the structure of the address — that the assessment aims to evaluate: “He says: ‘Maybe if I keep rolling them, maybe somebody will take them.’” “Can you give them to mama?” the clinician asks. “Give them to mama, give them to mama.” Finally, the clinician picks up the container to hand it across the table herself. The boy grasps the bubble maker as she does so, working to turn it sideways as it passes into other hands. Anxious to hold onto the bubble bottle, the boy’s mother looks to the clinician for a cue. “Yes, if you want to open them,” says the clinician. “I’ll do it, if you want me to — it’s up to you — okay, you go.”¹³

The clinician’s remark about the boy’s experience — “he says maybe if I keep rolling them, maybe someone will take them” — evidences an effort to find a correspondence between the question the boy is asked — whether he wants more bubbles — and his play. This comment — which seems offered as a kind of consolation to the mother for the fact that the child’s behavior does not meet the clinician’s expectation — suggests that the boy is thinking about how to get “more bubbles” but is unable to solve the problem. The clinician has repeated his name, and still she has heard no response to her gift of the bubble bottle. Watching the container roll, again, I wonder if the boy is fascinated by the jerky way it moves across the table. We can’t know what the child is looking at, but it’s interesting to note that there are complex

13 Autism Navigator, section 9.

and interesting things going on in the motion of the bubble bottle that he is rolling across the table. The abstract to an article by a team of undergraduate physics students at the University of Lyon underlines the complexity, and interest, of the motion of the bubble bottle, as well as the kinds of experiments that are necessary to understand what is at stake in this motion:

When a half-empty bottle of water is pushed to roll on a flat surface, the oscillations of the fluid inside the bottle induce an overall jerky motion. These velocity fluctuations of the bottle are studied through simple laboratory experiments accessible to undergraduate students and can help them grasp fundamental concepts in mechanics and hydrodynamics. We first demonstrate through an astute experiment that the rotation of the fluid and the bottle are decoupled. The equations of motion are then derived using a mechanical approach while the hydrodynamics of the fluid motion is explained. Finally the theory is tested against two benchmark experiments.¹⁴

When the bubble bottle rolls, complex interactions of mechanics and hydrodynamics are visible in its movement. We do not know what the boy is interested in, but it is important to note that following his interest, rather than interpreting the child's actions as if they were in accord with what is culturally accepted as the structure of relationship between a child and an adult, reveals an unexpected scene of aesthetic experience. Something beautiful is happening, that we would not have access to if we did not follow the creativity of the child's interest. This event in the scene underscores the deafening nature of the structure of the address as it is explicitly imposed and as it functions to condition the responses that can be heard. The bubble-popping slide shows how

¹⁴ Andréane Bourges, Amélie Chardac, Aude Caussariou, Nicolas Plihon, and Nicolas Taberlet, "Oscillations in a half-empty bottle," *American Journal of Physics* 86, 119 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1119/1.5009664>.

expectations about the way children should respond in the address repeat the slave-tyrant scenario — that Deleuze calls “the matrix of all social situations” — as a measure of assessment.

Whatever the consequences of the event in terms of diagnosis, it is important that the experience of the bubble-popping game henceforth forms part of both women’s experiences of their relationships with their children. The mother of the child in the first clip is reassured by the experience that her child is developing normally. In the second clip, the clinician’s comments and prompts suggest that the boy has failed — even, willfully failed — to enter into the structure of the address as it is determined by the culture. For the authors of the video glossary, he does not “initiate or respond to social interaction” in “typical” ways: his actions are “Red Flags for ASD.”¹⁵ The clinician is not in a position to remark on the creativity of the child’s play or his dependence on things, but only on his failure to engage in relations of dependence on people as they structure what is addressed to a child and what can be heard of a child’s response. “[N]ever bring something to the child; bring the child to the thing,”¹⁶ Deleuze proposes. There would be consequences for the clinician were she to allow the container to roll off the table onto the floor, and then pick up the child and put him on the floor so that he could continue to play with the bottle. Following the child’s aesthetic sensibility involves going beyond what is acceptable within the frame that the culture imposes. Non speaking children would seem to know something about Deleuze’s sense that “the effort of reason will typically be an effort to select in situations what is apt to give me what Spinoza calls joy and to eliminate what is apt to give me sadness.”¹⁷ Seen from this perspective, this dependence on things is a choice to select situations that give joy. It is important to take seriously this choice of independence in relation to people and dependence on things — as Deleuze and Rousseau do — rather than see a refusal to initiate or respond to

15 Autism Navigator, section 9.

16 Deleuze, 21.

17 Deleuze, 21.

social interactions as a defect in the child.

The structure of the address conditions, in general terms, what is addressed to children, and what parents expect to hear in response. It is in the perspective of the child's experience that I understand Apollon's description of psychic structure in terms of the structure of the address that determines the relationships between individuals in a culture. Some children, neurotic children, work to "succeed within the structure of the address,"¹⁸ by responding to their parents in the ways they are expected to respond. In order to preserve a dimension of lived experience, of the spirit, that is incompatible with what is expected in the culture, autistic children leave the structure of the address the moment that they encounter the relations of dependence on people that condition it. This is not because of a problem in the attitude of the parents, but because the way that social relationships are structured constitutes a loss of access to experience. From this perspective the child is not taking a position against his or her parents, but deciding to not enter into the alienating relationships that are "the matrix of all social situations."¹⁹ As the bubble popping slide indicates, there are not very many occasions for children who do not act within this economy of exchange to discover that it is possible for them to go further with others in dependence on things than they can go alone. The very idea that an adult could accompany a child in this rather than bring them into the structure of the address goes against cultural ideals of good parenting, as well as against clinical and therapeutic norms.

Amelia Oldfield is a music therapist who works with children, and who often works with non speaking children who are newly diagnosed with ASD. In turning to her work with children, I want to consider how she makes spaces where children can go farther, with others, in the investigation of the universe of things. As Deleuze underlines in speaking about *Emile*, bringing the child to things, rather than bringing

18 Willy Apollon, "L'Adresse improbable: Psychanalyse et mondialisation" (Video Conference, March 2, 2022). Lecture notes.

19 Deleuze, 21.

things to the child, is an emancipatory gesture. A few examples from her work will clarify how the structure of the address limits what others can hear of what these children say or do, and how facilitating a relation to things breaks with this structure. In *Interactive Music Therapy in Child and Family Psychiatry*, Oldfield describes how she works to determine a new client's position with respect to being addressed — by observing how they respond to her singing them a song:

The 'Hello' song (see Appendix 6) is a gentle, lilting song in $3/4$ time, which I sing to the child accompanying myself with chords on the guitar. I include the child's name in the song and will vary the style, speed and length of the song depending on the age of the child and on the way the child is responding to being sung to. I sit opposite the child singing directly to him or her, but again I may turn my chair slightly or face another direction if I sense that this direct contact is overwhelming or very uncomfortable for the child. If I feel that the child is acutely embarrassed, I may make the song very short and make a comment like: 'It's a little strange being sung to like this, isn't it? We'll now move on.' This beginning has many functions. It establishes straight away that I am going to be actively involved in playing myself and am not just going to listen to the child performing to me. I can observe the emotional response (or lack of response) that the child may have to direct adult warmth and affection. The child may show embarrassment or pleasure, or may reject me by putting hands to his ears or her ears or turning away. Some children will find it difficult to listen to even a short song and want to get up and find their own instrument or strum while I am playing. Other children will immediately want to inform me of past musical moments in their life or start fantasizing about making up their own band. I can observe whether the child's emotional response seems usual or unusual and whether

the child has particular difficulties listening or focusing.²⁰

In her sessions, Oldfield structures a space by acting outside the relations of “dependence on people” that condition the address to a child. This allows Oldfield to offer families opportunities to witness the play of a child who is engaged in the field of “dependence on things,”²¹ the creativity and aesthetic sensibilities of their child, beyond what is registered as a defect within the structure of the address that is imposed by the culture. Her acts do not work to bring children into the structure of the address, but offer a different basis for relationships, in the experience of musical dialogues. What Oldfield is able to hear — and thus to respond to — and the responsibility she takes for shaping the “sound exchanges” that take place in her sessions, allows her to accompany children in their explorations of the things that interest them.

In each segment of *Operation Syncopation*, a documentary film about her work, Oldfield and her colleagues interview a different family that she saw as part of her doctoral research seventeen years earlier.²² Oldfield, her colleagues, the parents, and the now adult children sit together to view clips from the footage of the music therapy sessions, while talking about why and how the sessions were helpful. In one segment, Oldfield reviews footage of Jamie’s sessions with Jamie and his mother. “You had a specific game you played,” she says to Jamie, “and it was your invention, nobody else did this — you picked up the beaters and you did this [demonstrates tapping two drumsticks together] [...]. Because you weren’t wanting to use words yet. You could do it just with the sticks.” Jamie’s mother, watching the episode, remarks to Oldfield that it reflects “what you said about initiating, because it’s

20 Amelia Oldfield, *Interactive Music Therapy in Child and Family Psychiatry* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006), xx.

21 Deleuze, 20.

22 Amelia Oldfield, *Operation Syncopation: Music Therapy and Autism*, directed by Maxim Thompson (2017), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gaVtUHO_k_RM.

hard to tell who starts and who copies — but he’s waiting for you, isn’t he.” Though surrounded by percussion instruments, Jamie is free in this space to pick up two drumsticks, to tap them together, and to be accompanied in his playing — without anyone bringing him a drum. The clip they are watching, which features Jamie’s invention, develops into an episode structured principally by a short modal folk melody that reflects the rhythms of Jamie’s initial motif. The melody serves to set the space apart, to shape their phrases into equal and predictable measures, to compel their dancing, and to bring the episode to a close. Rather than directing his play through cultural expectations, Oldfield follows Jamie’s interest, working to maintain a space of aesthetic experience, rather than to control it. She is not trying to show Jamie what drumsticks are for, or how to follow rules in a game. Rather, she is accompanying Jamie in his exploration of his own aesthetic universe.

Late in the film, the director, Maxim Thompson, who had sessions with Oldfield as a child, and Bill Thompson, his father and the producer of the film, participate in a version of the semi-structured interviews that they have been filming. When Oldfield suggests to Maxim Thompson that the sessions were helpful because they allowed him to communicate, a conversation ensues in which Maxim Thompson reflects that it must have been difficult, for his parents, that he did not speak until age 4. He continues by proposing that the sessions were actually for his father. “I just existed, you know,” Maxim Thompson says, to Bill Thompson. “If I wasn’t in that, I would have carried on, doing whatever. It wasn’t really for me, it was for you.”²³ Bill Thompson agrees:

I think you’re right, and that’s something which I’ve noticed in the filming and while watching the work. That there’s that sense as a parent, that it gives you — gave me, let’s make it personal — a way of engaging with a child who is otherwise quite difficult. Not in terms of difficult behavior, but it is quite difficult

23 Ibid.

because you're not clear who you're engaging with. And the sharing, the rhythm, that music gives you is a basis on which to build, and I think that was really, really important. So yes, that is, you put your finger on it there, that is the thing that music therapy offered me, and therefore allowed me to offer things to you. It made it easier for me to be your father, at a time when you were finding your own way, into being who you have grown up to be.²⁴

For the director's father, Oldfield's sessions were important because they gave him more access to his son's experience, which in turn led to new means of accompanying his son in his life and his interests. In this sense, it is worth noting that the title of the film, *Operation Syncopation*, suggests a project to correlate two intervals of time, creating a rhythm in which the emphasis is on a response that comes in an unexpected place. "We asked all the parents what advice they would give to a parent with a newly diagnosed child with autism spectrum disorder," Oldfield continues, in her interview with Maxim and Bill Thompson. "So what about you," she says, turning to Maxim Thompson, "what would you say"? "I guess anything I would have to say would seem kind of trivial," he replied, "considering that you just saw what our answer was, and so, yeah, I hope it helped."²⁵ Maxim Thompson does not respond directly. Oldfield already had access to his answer in the film he made, and in his response that the sessions were for his father. In this, his response echoes Deleuze's observation, that helping young children to do things leads to independence, and to joy in engaging with others. It is important to note that neither the video clips of the Communication and Symbolic Behavior Scales Developmental Profile, nor the video clips of the musical episodes with Oldfield, nor the testimony of parents, gives us access to the experience of children, or to

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

their relationship to speech.²⁶ The only way to know what another person is experiencing is if they take the risk of sharing their experience.

A relatively recent shift in terminology among researchers and autism rights advocates away from “non verbal” toward “non speaking” functions to distinguish speech and communication, because it is possible to communicate without speaking. At the same time this terminology suggests that “non speaking” is a stance or a way of being. In *The Mind Tree*, Tito Mukhopadhyay, who did not speak in childhood and learned to communicate with others using a letter board, writes about his retreat from the address at time of his grandfather’s death. He describes his experience of looking at things in the mirror, and imagining the space inside the mirror as a space where he is free of the address. He explicitly notes that there are no voices inside the mirror, and that the people who live there seem satisfied:

Mother would sing ‘Ba Ba Black Sheep’ or ‘Twinkle twinkle little star’ and he would do the actions. She was desperate to show that her child was not retarded before taking him to the next specialist. But with Dadu’s death, he lost interest in

26 A letter to the editor that was recently published alongside a study by Laura Blauth and Amelia Oldfield criticizes Oldfield and Blauth for interpreting where a child smiles in their sessions as a “sign of resilience.” They remind Oldfield and Blauth that smiling can be masking — just a way of surviving the situation. Indeed, looking at quantified data, there is no way to know whether a session was joyous or an experience in reeducation. Some music therapy aims at bringing the client, “smiling,” into the therapist’s space and the structure of the address, and the letter attests to this problem. Ming Yuan Low, Kerry Devlin & Stephenie Sofield, “A response to Blauth and Oldfield’s ‘Research into increasing resilience in children with autism through music therapy: A statistical analysis of video data,’” *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy* (2022) 31:5, 481-483, DOI: 10.1080/08098131.2022.2116472. This attempt to provide a quantitative analysis risks covering over the very stakes that this qualitative testimony, by former clients, brings out.

these actions.

It looked absurd to exist. The boy refused to accept the existence of his body, and imagined himself to be a spirit.

Imagination took shape to lead his mind to a world of fantasies. By mere wishing he could feel that he was there. He believed that there was a world inside the mirror. He felt that the images were as real as the objects around him.

I am a spirit who can go there. The world certainly is a better place in there, thought he. I am sure of the fact that he was with so much suffering that he wanted to escape there at any cost. By imagining himself as a spirit he could go there and feel the world.

It was as silent as he wished it to be. The people were not in a condition to use their voices, but they understood each other well. The children were also there. But they just thought. The people had the contentment of an abstract kind. Their eyes actually showed what each one thought. They reflect the staircases that the boy imagined.²⁷

Mukhopadhyay's description of the silent plane of the mirror helps us see how strategies based on the idea of a space divorced from what is carried on the voice can be a means through which children protect against what they experience as the imposition of the address. What Lacan identifies as fundamental in the mirror stage is the gap between something experienced, and what the other can observe. For the boy in *The Mind Tree*, the fantasy of the world inside the mirror is a defense against the structure of the address that appears to the child in this stage of development. Mukhopadhyay is not identifying with the image in the mirror, where the reflection is the limit of what the other can observe. The silent images that appear in the mirror show the world as a world of objects, of things, rather than a world of relations of de-

²⁷ Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay, *The Mind Tree* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011), xx.

pendence on people, where, as Mukhopadhyay says there is “so much suffering.” This space divorced from the voice allows him to preserve his experience, against the interpretation that comes from the other, that aims to substitute what is observed, for what is experienced.

Echoing, or, more radically, speaking in another’s voice, can function in a similar manner. This allows the child to enter into language — into communication — while avoiding the address — the question of what the other wants for or from the child, and of what the child has to give up to satisfy the other. In “Événement et avènement de l’Autre,” published in 1997, Apollon brings out a distinction between language and speech that is at stake for these children. Apollon writes that “the constitutive operation of language [*langage*] would thus eliminate from the language [*la langue*] its subjective values, its rhetorical possibilities and its fundamental dimension of the relation to the Other.”²⁸ Generally, what children who echo seem to want is a language devoid of subjective dimensions. A recent article in *Autism Parenting Magazine* indicates how useful the concept of the structure of the address could be for parents who are looking for ways to accompany their children. In “Echolalia Autism: Why Does My Child Repeat Me?,” Elizabeth Ives Field writes: “Caleb fell down the steps into his backyard and cried out in a startled voice, ‘Are you okay? Are you okay?’ Then, as his alarm abated, he shifted to ‘You’re okay, Honey. You’re okay!’ and pushed away his mother as she ran to dust him off.” For Field, Caleb’s echolalia indicates that his active and receptive communication skills are delayed:

Like most children with autism who echo language, four-year-old Caleb uses whole chunks of other people’s conversations to express himself. He remembers their words easily and often associates them with similar situations. In the example above,

28 Willy Apollon, “Événement et avènement de l’Autre,” in *L’Universel, perspectives psychanalytiques: Conférences et écrits* (Québec: Gifric, Collection Savoir Analytique, 1997), 64.

he recycled the words and tone his mother had used the last time he fell. A child with autism such as Caleb may have a very strong memory and good ability to imitate speech and sounds, but poor understanding of language. He does not recognize that I/you pronouns shift with the speaker, nor does he separate individual words from the whole phrase or sentence he is echoing. He cannot use the words he echoes to create new sentences. Many of his echoes are questions because adults ask children a lot of questions. Like many young children with autism, Caleb does not yet answer or ask typical questions.²⁹

Field suggests that parents consider using this echolalia as a strategy to attain the responses they want to obtain from their children. She proposes, for instance, that a parent could tell the child about his or her experience rather than asking a question, thus using the anticipated echo as a tool to get the expected response: “If he is obviously enjoying a food, acknowledge it with a comment instead of asking if he likes it, which he may echo instead of answering. For example, say: ‘Ranch dressing is yummy,’ or: ‘Mmmm, it’s a good cookie,’ either of which is true from his point of view if he repeats it.”³⁰ Field adds that “[t]here are plenty of communicative tools and teaching options you can use at home or with speech language pathologists to support your child and help them with language acquisition.”³¹ National early intervention programs provide similar support, relying in great measure on such specialists to try to bring children into the structure of the address.³²

29 Elizabeth Ives Field, “Echolalia Autism: Why Does My Child Repeat Me?” *Autism Parenting Magazine*, June 28, 2021. <https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/echolalia-autism-child/>.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 See, for example, the program Agir tôt in Quebec: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/family-and-support-for-individuals/childhood/child-development/the-agir-tot-program-early-screening-to-better-address-childrens-needs>.

Repeating, however, is also a means of not responding. Examining Caleb's response to his fall through the lens of Deleuze's comments on Rousseau and Apollon's concept of the address, allows an alternate approach to what is at stake. We can propose that when Caleb acts out his mother's part it is as part of a strategy to avoid an exchange. From this perspective, borrowing his mother's words and intonation allows him to complete the ritual around falling before she can reach him. It is a way to avoid the interaction that would end up with him pushing his mother away. This way of hearing Caleb's echo — "Are you okay? You're okay, Honey" — is based on an understanding of how a person can enter into language, as a strategy to be with others, while remaining outside of the address. It is a technique to preserve dependence on things, rather than enter into dependence on people. Thinking about the child who repeats remembered fragments of speech as having discovered and developed a way to avoid engaging with what adults address to them makes it possible to understand why certain questions, addressed to children who echo their interlocutor, are often met with silence. "What should we play?," for example, is a question that in most situations implies taking on a role, or negotiating the question of what the other wants, or risking giving the other person access to what one imagines. Often a child who has discovered the tactic of responding to the other by echoing the other's speech will remain silent when asked a direct question.³³ Too often, an adult's response to this silence on the part of a child who echoes is to ask them to choose between two possibilities, or to suggest that the child expresses him or herself using the pictograms available on a device. Indeed, this is the same structure of the address that requires the child occupy the role of slave or tyrant. What I want to underline here is that there is a difference between these various techniques that aim to bring non speaking children into the structure of the address, and work, such as Oldfield's, that accom-

³³ The video clip "Immediate Echolalia" uploaded to YouTube by Luke Steuber works with the question "what's your favorite?" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9FQSCjJX9A>.

panies the child in a relationship to things in order to offer, to the child, the opportunity to discover that it is possible to go farther in experience with others, than it is possible to go alone.

As the bubble popping slide shows, children who are not in the structure of the address are — in a practical and concrete sense — in a difficult situation. They may not discover language at all and require substantial support in their lives. Or they may discover it only as a means of protection, rather than as a social space in which to act with a few others from outside the field of exchange, on the basis of a capacity they risked their lives to conserve. The way that non speaking children play, by exploring things that give them joy, rather than responding to what the other asks of them, challenges the way that human relationships are structured. It challenges the way children are addressed, which is “the matrix of all social situations.”³⁴

For Apollon, the spirit, the capacity to imagine what does not exist, precedes the advent of the other: “[A] child is a human being that arrives, a spirit that has the capacity to think, that has something to bring to the collective, and that is the only one that can bring what it has to bring.”³⁵ A child who does not take the risk of speaking, has realized “that if they ever speak about it, their parents’ reaction, the reaction of adults, will be quite negative, since it [what the child brings] doesn’t exist. And they will rush to the doctors, to the psychologists — because it is only what the culture presents as receivable that the child must say. If the child says things that are not receivable in the culture where they are, then they immediately become the object of the psychologist or the doctor.”³⁶ There is a danger, in speaking, for a child who does not compromise, and who pursues his or her joy rather than trying to give the response that another hopes to receive. When a parent, or a therapist, engages a child while respecting the child’s dependence on things, this challenges what is acceptable as a way of

³⁴ Deleuze, 21.

³⁵ Apollon, Journées annuelles de l’ÉfQ (Video Conference, June 12th, 2021). Lecture notes.

³⁶ Ibid.

engaging with another human being. Accompanying a child in his or her dependence on things, in acts of play, is an occasion to witness, in Apollon's sense, manifestations of the spirit that might strike one as beautiful or sublime. As Maxim and Bill Thompson attest in their film, this can open a path to new possibilities of relationships with others.

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