CRITICAL AUTISM STUDIES:

travelling through autistic worlds in policy, practice and identities

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Book of Abstracts

June 13th-14th 2017

The Leverhulme Trust

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Contextualising a pre-history of autism

When we started working on autism, the first thing we asked ourselves was, what was autism before 1943, that is, the date of birth of the disease? Since human difference replicates statistically in a regular way, people in the same condition always existed, object (or not) of social, cultural and medical attention. Since we are interested into history of psychiatry, we started a research project on thousands of clinical files on the archive of the ex psychiatric asylum in the island of San Servolo, in Venice, from 1874 to 1939, to see how autism, in its whole spectrum, was treated. So in our talk we will contextualize the pre-history of autism as institutionalization, a theme that is at the core of Gil Eyal's *The Autism Matrix*, focusing on the findings of our research on San Servolo's clinical files.

Tanya Breen

Autism, offending and criminal justice

When autistic people are charged with offences, autism can impact upon every stage of criminal proceedings. Fortunately, the past two decades have seen a marked increase in research and scholarly thought on autism, offending and criminal justice. In accordance with Article 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, policies and procedures have been developed that aim to achieve access to justice for disabled, including autistic, defendants. Furthermore, courts increasingly rely upon evidence from expert witnesses in order to understand the behaviour and thinking of autistic defendants. While this sounds helpful, the medical model of disability dominates amongst expert witnesses. Drawing upon critical autism studies, this paper summarises relevant literature, and introduces New Zealand-based, doctoral research into the experiences of autistic defendants, and the opinions of autistic people about how they could be supported during criminal proceedings.

Barbara Costa

Blurring lines of debate: Autism policies in Brazil

In recent years, heated debates on autism services and policies have been happening in Brazil. The main issue is a schism on interventions and types of services that ought to be State provided. Currently, autism assistance is offered through mental health services within Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS - *Sistema Único de Saúde*). The Brazilian public mental health ethos of care is the result of a long process of psychiatric reform that has consolidated an institutional matrix of community-based services, which are not necessarily diagnosis-oriented. Several groups of autism advocacy - mostly parents associations - criticize this non-specificity of services and interventions, claiming that they don't properly address autism. As important social actors, they call for diagnosis-specific services and specialized interventions, and lobby for changes in autism's matrix of care. The most significant one, is the approval of a Federal Legislation in 2012 that recognizes autism as a disability for all legal purposes and establishes a national policy on the rights of persons with autism. This recognition of "autism as a disability" became central in the dissent between these advocacy groups and professional from public mental health services. The antagonistic positions between each side led to a polarization of the debate at a national level. However, in local contexts of care, this debate presents divergences and agreements that might challenge and complexify this wider and polarized view.

In this paper I will approach such complexities drawing from an ethnographic research in two public services that assist children and youth with autism in an industrial city in the surroundings of Rio de Janeiro. One is part of the mental health network, while the other is connected to the field of disability and inclusive education. The research revealed local dimensions of discourses and practices – sustained both by parents and professionals – that bring new perspectives on how national policies on autism relate to local autism politics, and autism lived experiences. Also these local dimensions can contribute to new understandings on the intersectionality of autism and social determinants of health.

Kim Davies & Katherine Runswick Cole

Dilemmas of diagnosis: An exploration through performance

In this presentation Kim and Katherine will perform the roles of an adult woman seeking a diagnosis of autism and a psychologist sanctioned to provide it. Diagnosis is a pivotal experience in autistic personhood yet rarely are the complexities and ambiguities, the costs as well as the benefits and the enduring if masked uncertainties associated with this diagnostic process explored explicitly as part of autistic subjectification. In our presentation we spotlight 'the diagnostic interview' as a way of exposing the interpersonal relationality – bedded as it must be in political, sociocultural and economic contexts – and the risky sorts of 'knowledge' that are in play when a dis/ability diagnosis, like autism, is at stake. In what might be described as a dramatized performative ethnography we aim to explore and then challenge the construction of 'autism' as an individual disorder while questioning the necessity and benefit of diagnostic categories based on limited notions of what it is to be human. By using the arts we hope to generate a safer space where genuine options to dis/ability, like 'autism', can be encountered and considered.

Hannah Ebben

"People tell me I'm very odd all the time": Proposing a theoretical framework for the study of autism, knowledge and power

The concept of autism has a profound social significance that cannot be overlooked in studies on the way people speak about and enact notions of deviance in the present. In order to study this critically, it is key to consider notions of truth and power in the everyday use of the term 'autism', that is, who is legitimised to decide what it entails and does not entail at a given time and place. This form of study is burgeoning in the new upcoming field of Critical Autism Studies. Further theoretical depth is desired in order to create an interdisciplinary framework of research into autism, knowledge, and power.

In my talk, I will introduce part of my engagement with theory in my PhD research on the discourse of autism in film and visual media. Practices of looking are good research areas to start with in a study of knowledge and power, as power relations can be deconstructed through the question who the lookers and the ones being looked at are. In her PhD thesis, Anne McGuire critically analyses 'warning signs' of autism in educational posters, and states

that such images convey clearly delineated ‘signs’ of autism through which people are made alert and are requested to take prompt action. I would like to expand this through the study of types of signs as classified by semiotician C. S. Peirce. Taking my case study *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2011) as my point of departure, I will share the significance of semiotics and Foucauldian discourse analysis in my study of film.

I would like to argue that the medium of film creates a specific way of looking at *Extremely Loud*’s child protagonist Oskar Schell, a boy who might have Asperger’s Syndrome, that creates a hyperaware motivation amongst the general public to ‘see’ ‘signs’. This could be one manifestation of a cultural desire to yield power over the concept of autism and over people who identify with it.

Alessandra Fasulo and Philip A. Hunt

Beyond enemy lines and other stories. Psychobiographical narratives of an adult with ASD engaged in participatory research

The authors of this contribution have been working together since 2011. Alessandra works on research in language and social interaction in a Psychology Department.

Philip studied history up to post-graduate level at Oxford, but his condition made it difficult for him to get a regular paid job. He was diagnosed with Asperger in his late 40s, about 10 years ago. Before that he was ascribed different mental health problems and was hospitalised several times for severe depression. Apart from a promising psychoanalytical psychotherapy provided by the NHS that was started when he was in his 20s, which was interrupted early and traumatically, Philip did not get continuous support and has now self-diagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder (Philip is also well-read in psychiatry).

In 2011, through a charity, Philip met a counsellor who was specialising in autism and who offered to treat him for a year. Toward the end of the intervention, Philip and the counsellor contacted the Autism Research Network based in the psychology department to donate the videorecordings of the counselling sessions for research purposes. Alessandra and Philip have been meeting regularly since, discussing the videos and Philip’s writing of his life experiences, which he took up at the end of the therapy.

The presentation will be based on narratives from the counselling sessions, from Philip's writings and from recordings of our meetings; it will aim to illustrate Philip's fine grained understanding of his condition and of how it interacted with the environment he grew up in, his family, and the scholarly community in Oxford. It will concern his experience of time and memory, and the burden of living with the idea that if his emotional life had been taken care of he could have had an entirely different existence. The analysis will offer an opportunity to appreciate how autism/Asperger is intertwined with narrative and linguistic abilities, and how those multivoiced, image-rich accounts can help making sense of a life spent, to use one of Philip's favourite phrases, beyond enemy lines.

Elizabeth Graham

ASD and secondary school support

This paper focuses on a key theme from my current PhD research which looks at the experiences of support, and supporting, pupils with Asperger's Syndrome or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Secondary Schools. This research was motivated by my own experience of being a mother to a daughter with Asperger's Syndrome who received support in Secondary school. Fieldwork has not yet begun, however, it is anticipated that there will be elements of 'normalising expectations'; at the time of the conference I will have collected data. Normalising expectations, in this context, refers to the expectation that pupils are included or 'fit in' to an educational environment that is designed for neuro-typical pupils, as opposed to adapting the environment to accommodate the needs of the young people. It also reflects the pressures that the young people may place upon themselves to be 'normal' in addition to the parents and professionals' desire for the young people to function and progress as much as possible in the same way as their neuro-typical peers. The study will consist of task-based interviews with young people, in their own homes, with a diagnosis of Asperger's or ASD who are currently enrolled in a secondary school across central Scotland: Informal discussions and semi-structured interviews with parents/carers and semi-structured interviews with school staff who are actively involved in implementing the pupil's support.

Karen Hagan

Time for a change? Possibilities, protocols and discourses in autism diagnosis

Recent research has explored the impact of autism on family life and support (Dillenburger et al, 2010) but parents' anthologies indicate a troubled road to transition and support and accuse failing systems (eg. Swezey, 2008). The limited positions ascribed to autistic people and their parents at diagnosis have profound consequences, since the complex connotations established at that point have the power to anchor subsequent meaning-making and pervade the lifetime experiences of autistic individuals and their families ((Avdi, 2005; Orsini and Davidson, 2015).

This project explored the range of discourses in which parents and professionals engage when a child is assessed and diagnosed with autism. A critical discursive psychological approach was taken to analyse data collected from four case studies in a series of stages: initial and closing sets of interviews with parents; the assessment meetings between the professionals and parents; and meetings between the professionals and parents to confirm diagnosis.

Despite parents' engagement in a range of strategies and discursive devices for negotiating power-related subject positions during assessment and diagnosis meetings, professional discourses and practices, driven by the requirement to follow, e.g. NICE, protocols, resulted in a restricting of information sharing and narrowing of possibilities for families. A review of developments in alternative psychological practices suggests there are opportunities for meaning and experience to be more positively constructed between professionals and parents.

Serena Hasselblad and Hajo Seng

Autism: A gift to the world

Autism includes useful abilities and skills such as a detailed vision, image vision, a capability to detect structures and correlations, and a great creativity. Common characteristics of autistic people is perseverance, loyalty, honesty and objectivity. A basic recipe for success in the professional life, for an autistic person, is to get to know your skills and develop them. As well as to understand your weaknesses and create strategies to deal with them. Finally you need to be able to communicate your needs in a plain and distinct way.

In this presentation Serena and Hajo will focus on autistic abilities and skills, and on differences between autistic and non-autistic ways of functioning. Serena's aim is to make the autistic world more visible and to show how different ways of functioning complement each other.

Mark Haydon-Laurelut & Karl Nunkoosing

Dialogical self, monological schedule: Analysing conversations in the Autism Diagnostic Interview Schedule (ADOS)

Diagnostic Interviews are used in both clinical and academic settings. The Autism Diagnostic Interview Schedule is one such instrument. This presentation will report on a study where transcripts of 15 Autism Diagnostic Interview Schedule (ADOS-G) interviews were analyzed and interpreted from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. Two questions in the schedule were analysed. These questions focus on focused on social difficulties and annoyance and friendships and marriage. The study interrogates the production of relationships in the diagnostic interviews. Initial findings highlight interviewee's active participation including dialogical work in the face of the monological structure of the diagnostic interview, resistance to the specifications of the interview and the re-contextualization of the self.

Nick Hodge, Lisa Reidy & Emma Rice

Constructing the autistic self in school

It is more than 20 years now since Jordan and Powell (1995) proposed that autistic behaviour results from fundamental issues with the experiencing self. This presentation will report on a small study that took this concept as a starting point to explore how teachers within 4 schools currently understand and respond to the concept of the developing self in pupils with autism. Personal accounts of people with autism and empirical research often frame the developing autistic self as fragile and tenuous and subject to the making and remaking by 'the other', the embodiment of normative expectation and regulation. The autistic self becomes corrupted, inauthentic and masked. This can result in profound anxiety and stress that manifests in self harm and withdrawal. Schools play a critical role in supporting the development of a known, authentic and valued self but there is a dearth of research into how staff understand and

support autistic pupils with achieving a robust, accepted and appreciated self. We hope that the findings from this enquiry will be the start of a conversation about the nature of the autistic self and how it can be enabled to assert its right to be within our schools.

Marianthi Kourti

Exploring the experiences of females on the autism spectrum: an emancipatory approach

In this paper, I plan to explore how the predominant discourses on autism and gender and how these affect the identity of autistic women. I plan to draw from the results of my research, which has investigated the experiences of autistic women diagnosed in adulthood using online focus groups and adopting an emancipatory approach as well as my experiences as a Specialist Mentor supporting University students on the autism spectrum. I want to examine how the double identity of being a female and being on the autism spectrum affect the personal identity and life experiences of autistic women and the implications of gender perceptions on autistic women and men equally. Finally, I want to question how the social presentations of gender can be baffling for autistic individuals regardless of gender and how that may affect their gender perceptions.

I also would like to talk about research methodology choices when engaging with autism research. Particularly I would like to talk about emancipatory research within autism research and how I used it in my previous research project. I want to talk about the ways in which it benefited the project and the results that came out of it because of the emancipatory framework I adopted. I also want to discuss the ontological, axiological, epistemological and methodological choices that come with adopting an emancipatory framework and discuss how I have dealt with them in the past as well as how I plan to tackle them in my projects in the future. I would also like to discuss how would the emancipatory approach fit in autism studies regardless of the content of the research as well as how we may engage less verbally able individuals in research using and emancipatory framework.

Eliza Maciejewska

Discourse Analysis (DA) as an underappreciated approach in autism research

A communicative interaction with an individual with autism has always been considered a challenge from the perspective of a neurotypical interlocutor. Numerous psychological and linguistic studies described non-verbal and verbal deficits of people with autism, such as lack of eye contact (Wiklund 2016) or echolalia (Tager-Flusberg 1999), which may influence the perception of a person with this condition by non-autistic people. Few of the papers on autism took into consideration the contribution of the other, usually neurotypical, participant to the conversation. As the act of communication requires the cooperation of at least two parties, it is worth analysing the utterances of both interlocutors, and verifying how their words influence the communicative behaviour of co-participants of a given dialogue.

A possible way to do this is to apply discourse analysis (DA) in the research. DA is an approach to the study of language whose aim is to identify and describe repeated patterns in the use of language of both interlocutors (Herring 2004). Thanks to this method, one can observe regularities in a communicative exchange, and use this knowledge to enhance the process of communication.

The aim of this paper is to show how DA can help illuminate the communicative practices of individuals with autism, and the ways in which these practices are influenced by the neurotypical interlocutor. The data presented in the paper come from three interviews with high-functioning adolescents with autism. The participants were asked to complete different tasks including picture description and narrative production. The results were further analysed with the use of DA. The study shows participants' reactions to interviewer's utterances, and their communicative strategies throughout the interview.

Discourse analysis is presented as an approach to the study of autistic communication, which has been neglected in research but can contribute a lot to the current state of knowledge about autism, and be an invaluable help for practitioners.

Nicki Martin & Damian Milton

The Cygnet Mentoring Project

Critically evaluated autism focussed mentoring schemes with adequate supervision are thin on the ground despite Research Autisms findings that autistic adults would prefer time limited goal orientated one to one mentoring to more ambiguous arrangements such as befriending. The Cygnet Mentoring Project, funded by Research Autism, and informed by autistic expertise, was set up to address the gap in knowledge and understanding about what good quality mentoring for autistic adults might look like. Cygnet outcomes include the development, piloting and evaluation of a mentor training resource and a mentoring scheme, with the associated documentation, protocols and supervision. Mentor training which is aimed at autistic adults and has been informed by the authentic voices of autistic members of the project steering and advisory groups. Following the mentor training phase 12 mentor-mentee pairs were recruited to trial a pilot mentoring scheme for the project over a six month period and provided feedback. Mentees were supported in setting and working towards their own clearly articulated goals and clear boundaries and supervision arrangements were built into the scheme. We are now at the point where we can report back on the project and discuss future developments.

Anne McGuire

De-regulating Disorder: On the rise of the 'Spectrum' as a Neoliberal Metric of Human Value

This talk examines the cultural effects of the spectrum as an increasingly popular way of classifying behavioural, mental and emotional states. The past decades have witnessed shifts in the conceptualization of psychiatric diagnostic criteria. Disorders that were once understood as singular pathologies are increasingly re-configured as 'spectral' pathological ranges. This rise of spectral thinking is evident in the most recent revisions to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. DSM-5 marks the beginning of psychiatry's migration away from strict categorical approaches to diagnosis, where disorder is either present or absent, and towards dimensional approaches, where disorder is measured by degree. These shifts have generated debate within the field of psychiatry (and beyond), centering on the apparent disappearance of 'normal'. Attending to the DSM-5's new severity scales, I argue that

conceptions of mental normalcy are not so much disappearing, as they are being reconfigured and put to use in new ways. I propose that spectral adjustments to psychiatric diagnostic categories represent a neoliberal deregulation of disorder. That is to say, the blurring of categorical boundaries separating normalcy and disorder is working to stimulate the market, while also grounding the emergence of novel subjectivities and forms of normative surveillance and control.

Damian Milton

Disposable dispositions: Reflections upon the work of Iris Marion Young in relation to the social oppression of autistic people

This paper looks to apply the theories of Iris Marion Young (1980, 1990, 1997) to the social position and oppression of autistic people, as previously theorised by Milton (2012, 2014a, 2014b). The concepts of 'Asymmetrical symmetry' and the 'Five faces of oppression' are explored in this regard. The paper concludes by arguing that autistic people, particularly those that have significant intellectual impairments, can be socially marginalised to the extent of occupying the social position of 'non-human' with the staggering consequences for social well-being that this implies.

Rosie Murray

ASC and girls

As the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) increases, there is a growing interest in the associated social communication weaknesses, with little focus on social communication strengths. Furthermore, little is known about the social communication abilities of girls with ASC. This study uses conversation analysis to explore the nature of verbal and non-verbal social communication between two adolescent female friends with ASC in a naturalistic setting. The study explores instances of communication breakdown and how these are repaired, moving away from a deficit-based model of ASC and providing a more balanced profile of communicative ability in this population. The findings are discussed in relation to current research in the field.

Michelle O'Reilly & Khalid Karim

Is autism a desired diagnosis? Implications for the normal/abnormal dichotomy

Background: From a diagnosis that was considered rare historically, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has now become an increasingly mainstream condition, with significantly higher prevalence rates. While ASD is a condition which evokes strong emotional reactions in families and individuals undergoing the diagnostic process, anecdotal evidence suggests that this outcome is one actively sought by families. The apparent fluidity of the diagnostic boundary, however, has implications for our accepted understanding of the 'normal child' and who has a pathological disorder.
Aims: The paper aims to demonstrate how families and individuals construct their understanding of ASD and what constitutes the boundary between disability and ability.
Methods: Two data sets are utilised for this paper. First is a naturally occurring data set of child mental health assessments from the UK-based Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, in the form of video recordings. Second is a series of focus groups with stakeholders about ASD and ASD services. These were audio-recorded. Conversation analysis is used to analyse both sets of data.
Findings: Families utilise different strategies in the assessment data to actively convince a clinician that the child warranted a diagnosis of ASD, the desired outcome. However, the failure to endorse this diagnosis is treated as problematic and required additional time. In other words, the 'ASD' outcome was treated as the preferred outcome by clinicians. The assignation of such a label creates tensions for viewing the child as disabled or not, which reflects the broadness of the label and the spectrum of the condition. In this sense the families may resist the biomedical semantics of the diagnosis, which was a focus of the discussion in the stakeholder focus groups.
Conclusions: Over time ASD has become a more accepted description of children's behaviour, one which is not necessarily synonymous with disability, by some with the condition.

Yosheen Pillay

Service Providers in Their own Voices: Transitions, Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Families

The prevalence in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis in children in Australia is steadily increasing over the last decade. The implication for the future is that there would be an increase in the number of young adults with ASD requiring adult support services, leading to growing demands on the service delivery system to meet the needs of both young adults and families. Further understanding factors that facilitate and/or inhibit a successful transition to adulthood, such as perceptions of service providers, as well as community-level components such as the availability of and quality of services for young adults with ASD, may help inform system improvements. In this qualitative study fourteen disability service providers participated in two focus groups regarding their experiences with the disability service delivery system, in supporting young adults with ASD, their families, as well as their individual responses in relation to these experiences. Through the voices of service providers, perceptions of challenges and successes of the transition experience were explored to provide a richer understanding of the transition phenomena of interest. Emergent themes point to the importance of collaborative relationships between service providers and families and individual coping strategies related to ASD challenges. Characteristics of the service delivery system, both positive and negative were also described. Findings can inform the design of future programs specifically for young adults with ASD, support services, and policies to support parent/caregiver coping and improved service delivery.

Jill Pluquailec

Challenging 'challenging behaviour' and how it sticks to autistic children's bodies in school spaces

This paper is a theoretical exploration of everyday interventions with/for/on autistic children in a UK special school setting. A discourse of challenging behaviour haunts how the everyday lives of autistic children are interpreted in education. Through a storytelling methodology, this paper seeks to explore how the everyday lives of disabled children become read as challenging, problematic and pathologised. Turning to Ahmed's (2006) work on 'affective economies' I explore a number of possibilities for re-reading, or perhaps, re-feeling,

these everyday encounters as the becoming of emotions. Getting in-between the naturalising of children's bodies and actions in school spaces opens up the potential to understand the relational dynamics of both care and control in the 'becoming' of emotions in the pathologisation of autistic children's 'behaviour' as 'challenging'.

Jackie Robinson

Participatory research proposes a new model for thinking about Asperger's syndrome

It is both epistemologically, as well as ethically, problematic if the autistic voice is not heard in relation to social scientific research seeking to further develop knowledge of autism. Ever since autism first emerged, it has remained medicalised and almost exclusively the preserve of non-autistic researchers. More recently autistic individuals have begun to contribute to autism research. However, the vast majority of research in autism is still undertaken *on* autistic people, rather than *with* them, and is often not concerned with improving the day-to-day lives of people with autism. The concepts of participatory research and emancipatory research are discussed before presenting a draft framework for what we regard as truly inclusive research in autism. Our proposals are firmly based on ideas developed by the members of the De Montfort University-based Asperger's Consultation Group - consisting of three autistic adults working in partnership with a non-autistic researcher - as well as the knowledge and experience of the other contributors, some of whom are also autistic.

Ginny Russell and Jenny Hayes

Medicalisation, Mobilisation and Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (SIT) suggests that is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s). Autistic identity can be considered what Castells (2010) terms a 'Project Identity'. This is an identity constructed to engineer social change. I argue that several conditions have led to the construction of an autistic identity.

i) Medicalisation -The expansion of the boundary of the category (autism) to include a larger proportion of individuals who have more social and cognitive resources.

ii) The means to mobilise via access to others identifying with the group–the internet and social media gives the means of group communication without face to face contact. Mobilisation requires both having the means to communicate and the resources.

iii) The autism label is experienced by the group as stigmatising. SIT predicts members of low-status groups will be more likely to define themselves in terms of their group membership if group status is seen as unfair and illegitimate.

Among other things, SIT predicts group membership may involve participation in political action designed to secure improved rights or better treatment for one's in-group. I will review such actions in light of autistic identity.

Sara Ryan

Tripping the light fantastic: Reflections on a journey through hell

In this presentation I reflect on being the mother of an autistic son who made the sun shine, on being "The Mother" who was to blame for his death, and the interwoven strands of autism, motherhood, academia, social justice and social media.

Laura Sterponi

Neurodiversity and Autistic Semiosis: A focus on repetition

Against the backdrop of dominant biomedical characterization of autism as disease and increasingly alarmist discourses on autism as a crisis and an epidemic, our paper advocates a view of autism as neurodiversity. Paralleling terms like biodiversity and cultural diversity, which are considered as valuable societal pursuits, neurodiversity promotes the recognition of different forms of brain wiring, which manifest in different ways of perceiving the world and others, none necessarily defective or inferior (Brownlow & O'Dell, 2013; Siberman, 2015; Walker, 2012). Our work contributes to affirming autistic neurodiversity by unpacking one of the most salient features of autism, i.e. repetitive patterns of behavior, notably motor stereotypies and echolalia (DSM-5 American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In mainstream autism research such perseverative behaviors are interpreted as automatic responses, often disruptive of social interaction, and with no or minimal communicative function. Neurodiversity activists and scholars, on the other hand, reframe repetitive behaviors as

semiotic phenomena. More specifically, they articulate the notion of autistic semiosis—an embodied mode of experiencing and relating to the world—and contend that for autistic individuals repetitive and perseverative behaviors are meaningful sensory explorations and forms of selfexpression (e.g. Nolan & McBride, 2015).

In this paper we invite conceiving of repetition in autism as a communicative and metacommunicative act. We construct our argument by examining how children with autism deploy repetitive behaviors in interaction. Drawing from a corpus of videorecorded spontaneous exchanges between children with autism and their family members, we demonstrate that autistic individuals mobilize repetition to engage and respond to others, as well as to resist and redirect undesirable courses of actions. As forms of alignment or misalignment with others, repetitive behaviors also function metacommunicatively, i.e. as commentary on the quality of the ongoing exchange. Drawing a parallel with art practices we also suggest that repetition in autism can constitute an aesthetic act. Many art works rely on repetitive patterns and/or emerge as the product of repetitive actions on the part of the creator. We take Tara Donovan's sculptures as case in point: her installations consist of assemblages of mundane manufactured materials—plastic cups, pencils, shirt buttons—that come to form views suggestive of natural landscapes—a white coral reef, a bank of fog, ocean waves. These installations are predicated on repetition in two fundamental ways: on the one hand we observe same prosaic objects repeating themselves over and over— stacked, juxtaposed, layered. On the other hand, the creation of these assemblages necessitates repetitive actions—piling, gluing, and binding. Our analysis of some instances motor stereotypies and echolalia in individuals with ASD compels us to suggest that certain forms of autistic semiosis are not dissimilar from artistic modes of signification.

Jan Verhaegh

Experiential understandings of autism

Although autism arguably has a strong neurological component, it is not good to see it only from a biological and neurological perspective. It is necessary to see the problems of a person with a diagnosis in all their dimensions. Exploring all dimensions means that we have to look to the whole body with all its biological and emotional needs, from its psychological functioning, to its history with its past and future and its social context. Children with a

diagnosis need to get good help, otherwise their development suffers. Professor Selten from the University of Maastricht did research about young students studying at *Gymnasium* level (The highest variant of secondary school in the Netherlands) aged 16/17 years. He discovered that the more intelligent they are, the higher the risk is of becoming psychotic. That risk was found to be about 20 times higher than for a "normal" child. The prevalence of comorbidities such as depressions, suicide, anxiety disorders and obsessive compulsory disorder, was also shown to be high.

Psycho-analysis has a bad name because it did blamed the family(and special the mothers for neurological problems. As far as psycho-analysis is seen as a psycho-dynamic therapy for social psychological developments which went wrong because their was not a good help in education then there are good things in it. Certainly people of my age who suffered from autism when they were children has been often (more or less traumatised) by severe traumatization their education. I that case psycho-dynmic therapies cannot heal autism bu can do good things in helping to correct this wrong development

From a social perspective, bullying, stigmatisation, discrimination, exclusion, difficulty to get a job, problems being able to have or maintain a relationship, are all highly-present issues. Misunderstanding and conflicts with the social environment are, without good help, more the rule than the exception. This is why it is not only important for the person with the diagnosis to have access to help, but also for there to be psycho- education in the wider environment to better accommodate the person with autism.

Currently, mental health institutions are very often ill-informed about autism and do not provide the right help. This is one of the reasons that self-advocates need to be involved in these mental health organisations, as well as in research. However, this is very difficult and is generally not done. One of the main reasons for this is that self-advocate organisations are not strong. The question we must therefore ask ourselves is how to organize people who inherently have problems with organizing?