Cinemautism

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Abstract: National Autistic Society defines autism as affecting "how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people and how they make sense of the world around them." Regulation of experience is needed despite the difficulty in inferring and understanding the provisional knowledge and subjectivities of others. Much like the "other people" described by those with autism, the on-screen assemblage of such a cinema appears to know what to reveal, what to conceal, where and how to be. But when and how might the much-debated screen-mind relationship produce a frustration of otherness or tamper with an audience's ability to ascribe provisional knowledge to others? This article argues that cinema is required to be regulated to be socialized to the reception and response of "others" (the audience) through normative techniques. Yet all normative (fiction) films threaten to be "autistic" or to expose the autism within viewers. This article proposes a form of cinema—cinemautism—to challenge a neurotypical cinematic form.

Keywords: autism, cinema, Deleuze and G[illegible]ri, post-human, schizoanalysis

> A society whose values produce autism so perfectly as its excluded other does not deserve to survive; nor will it.
>
> —Alan Kirby, *Digimodernism*

An Autistic Cinema Assemblage

This article sets out a proposition for an autistic cinema assemblage, what I am notionally calling a *cinemautism*. The ideas I explore here are concerned with how both social space and narrative film space are constructed and negotiated, in terms of the complex array of interpretive and inferential methods deployed to extrapolate sense from our interactions, interpersonally and on the screen. I use the Sally-Anne Test—one of a number of psychological tests used in the process of identifying autism in children—as a means to examine how forms of telling common to normative fiction cinema are predicated on inferential capabilities, and on a certain spatial and behavioral orthodoxy. My interest lies in how proximity and orientation between social agents/characters are proscribed and maintained and whether the autistic experience of the social world may suggest other dynamics for cinema. This idea derives largely from recent progressive attitudes toward autism lead by advocates within the autistic com-

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munity, which counter the popular understanding of autism as cognitive deficit or social inadequacy, and instead look to how autism may offer society (which, after all, includes those with autism) ways to transcend the restrictions of existing social contracts and norms. I argue that such a territory for autism has resonance with Deleuze and Guattari's ([1972] 1982) concept of schizoanalysis and the body-without-organs, and that autism may have much to offer these concepts. Taking up some recent ideas for autism as a potential successor to schizoanalysis, I suggest that cinemautism might be adopted as a strategy for overthrowing the regulatory practices of cinema much in the way that schizoanalysis mounted an assault on the hegemony of psychoanalysis and the notion of uniform identity.

Cinemautism is, I propose, a body-without-organs[1] that moves, in many and diverse directions, away from established modes of representation and the supremacy of the symbolic, toward a profound engagement with a social reality less predicated on customary human interaction. Cinemautism has some commonality with this notion of autism as schizoanalysis. It identifies a potential cinematic arrangement radically different from the inferential model. Cinemautism also has confederacy with Deleuze's (1989) concept of the time-image and, within it, minor cinema.

The first portion of the article defines autism, or at least scrutinizes an identified spectrum whose definition and parameters shift, and decries certain myths and common misrepresentations, particularly within normative narrative cinema. This requires a brief survey of Hollywood's so-called age of autism, beginning with Barry Levinson's Rain Man (1988), and its many gross inaccuracies, followed by a succinct attempt to uncover certain functions underpinning normative cinema which have striking resemblance to the characteristics of autism. The remainder of the article outlines a different kind of cinematic assemblage, by way of some tentative examples. These are not necessarily films that respond specifically to aspects of autistic experience but ones which do formally occupy common ground in terms of a rejection of the inferential model and of socio-spacial conventions. The work of Shane Carruth, Josephine Decker, and Carlos Reygedas involve spatial continuity going awry and feature parallax events and narrative systems that are provisional rather than certain.

Instead of offering a formal description of particular difficulties autistic individuals experience with inference, intentionality, and encountering others, cinemautism opens up extra-linguistic operations for the moving image, not so much reflecting the autistic experience but learning from it and moving with it. It is a way of realizing a different kind of cinematic arrangement, one that offers a new corporeality, for bodies and identities on the screen, and spectatorially in response to them. It is also, crucially, a method for analyzing films and social culture, a way of doing and reading films. Taking a cue from the filmmakers mentioned above, and their forebears, I conclude that cinemautism is a cinema

to come. Within this proposition is a provocation: to re-think the social contract of film telling and search for a cinema that refuses the symbolic or inferred and is instead concentrated on embodiment, networks, relations, and patterns.

Autism Defined

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a disorder that affects the development of social and communication skills and is characterized by stereotyped patterns of behavior and varying degrees of sensory processing abnormalities. According to the National Autistic Society, approximately 1 percent of the population has ASD, which occurs more frequently in males than in females. Autism affects how people communicate with, and relate to, other people, and how they make sense of the world around them. Persons with autism have said that the world to them is a mass of people, places, and events, which they struggle to make sense of and which can cause them considerable anxiety. For autistic persons, the rules of the social world are confusing and confounding. Autistic persons also commonly have an inability to form meta-representations and therefore have trouble comprehending invisible social codes, body language and boundaries, and metaphor in speech. Regulation of experience is needed—often in the form of clarification, repetition, and fixation on routine, schedules, and sameness—but the difficulty in understanding the provisional knowledge and subjectivities of others is always there.

The Sally-Anne Test

The Sally-Anne test, developed in 1985 by Simon Baron-Cohen, Uta Frith, and Alan Leslie involves the use of two dolls in a playful scenario commonly enacted to measure a young person's social and cognitive ability to attribute false beliefs to others. The Anne doll 'tricks' the Sally doll by secretly taking Sally's marble from her basket while she is absent from the room, and hiding it in a box. Sally returns, and the subject of the test is asked, "Where will Sally look for her marble?" The answer demonstrates the child's ability to differentiate between her own knowledge and that of another's. Of the subjects who are unable to infer information from the scenario and thus incorrectly think that Sally believes her marble is in Anne's box (because the subject of the test knows it to be true), around 80 percent will be on the autistic spectrum.

For a child to pass this test, she must arrive at the correct answer to the belief question, by identifying that what Sally believes (the marble is in her own basket) does not tally with reality. In other words the answer is reflective of Sally's perspective, but not with the participant's own observations. In the Baron-Cohen ~~(1995)~~ study, 80 percent of the autistic children answered incorrectly. Baron-Cohen saw this as a developmental delay in acquiring what he termed a "theory of mind" (ToM), asserting that the ToM is the ability to detect other people's emotions and thoughts, and that this is typically delayed in chil-

dren with autism. Baron-Cohen coined the term "mind-blindness" to account for this deficiency (Baron-Cohen 1995). According to Baron-Cohen, those with mind-blindness tend to focus on temporal or behavioral regularity, on evident pattern, rather than on deduction. The mind-blind cannot infer commonsense emotional responses from movements, motions and gestures, nor can they easily make sense of the silent invisible operations involved in everyday social interaction.

The Sally-Anne test sparks my interest for two reasons. First, because of the mental, spatial, and social operations it sets out as 'neuro-typical' and how these can be mapped onto cinematic operations. Second, because of how the test uses a narrative of falsity and anti-social behavior. (For example, in the numerous iterations of the test available online, psychologists refer to the Anne doll as "Naughty Anne.") The test depends on subterfuge, in that child participants believe they are involved in play and not a test. It also presupposes an understanding of mendacity as a concept: naughtiness is itself a product of societal manipulation or the need to manipulate in order to gain control and power as a social agent—a concept young children may not readily comprehend. Often people with ASD find it hard to formulate beliefs about beliefs in general, and talk of learning to lie as a means of initiation into the neuro-typical world. The autistic person also has difficulty comprehending chains of intentionality; for example, Anne *thinks* that Sally *thinks* that Anne *thinks*. Crucially, Autistic children have trouble understanding the mental states of deception and pretending, finding it hard to produce "pretend scenarios" when playing.

The Sally-Anne test is not without its critics. Many regard the format as unnecessarily complicated and confusing, the test carrying with it anxiety and a sub-text of correct behavior, partitioning autism as a syndrome that needs correcting. The data accumulated by Baron-Cohen (1995) from this and numerous other tests and scenarios may be complicated by factors such as language, and in some instances autistic children manage to pass such false belief tests without difficulty, or fail to pass the test based on indicative eye line to object, when in fact they are cognizant of the whereabouts of the missing marble. Ruffman and colleagues (2001) offer a compelling third possible place for the marble: the covert hand or pocket of the educational psychologist overseeing the test. Certainly there is an increasing doubt about the theory-of-mind explanation for autism within the scientific community.

I am regarding the Sally-Anne test not only from the perspective of the person being tested, but also from the perspectives of both dolls—not just the Anne doll, for whom the tested person is asked to find empathy—but from the point-of-view of Anne, *the falsifier*. Here I am adopting Deleuze's ([1990] 1997) term "falsier," which he uses when discussing his relationship with Guattari. In Deleuze's concept, a falsifier is a mediator, a second term whose function is to test the first term, to test the test, so-to-speak, for falsehoods and

mine "the capacities of falsehoods to produce truths" ([1990] 1997: 126). I am interested in this power, of falsity. I intend here to use the test as a method through which to interrogate how normative cinema offers viewers provisional knowledge, revealing parallax topographies, partial events, and select rooms that characters enter and leave.

Hollywood and Autism

Although an understanding of ASD in public consciousness has grown significantly in recent decades, media attention given to autism has either perpetuated or created certain myths and stereotypes about what ASD is and how it affects a person's life. Films like *Rain Man, Snow Cake* (2005), and *Temple Grandin* (2010) have undeniably made autism much more familiar, but they nonetheless bias perceptions of the disorder as a condition associated with unique abilities and savant skills. *Rain Man*'s portrayal of the main character's condition has been seen as inaugurating a common and incorrect media stereotype that people on the autism spectrum typically have exceptional skills, and references to *Rain Man,* in particular Dustin Hoffman's performance, have become a popular shorthand for autism and savantism. However, such extraordinary abilities are rare in ASD. Instances of savant facility within autism are around 10 percent, only marginally higher than the general population. The general public remains largely unaware of what everyday life is like for those people with autism who have no special abilities and who struggle to make sense of the complex social environment to which they are required to adapt.

Post-*Rain Man,* normative cinema seems to have embraced autism as a subject, and yet as both Stuart Murray (2008) and Anthony D. Baker (2008) have observed, the plethora of films concerned with autism over the past twenty-five years conform to very similar structures and descriptions. Broadly speaking, a savant of exceptional ability acts as a catalyst for change or redemption for a non-autistic character, and this latter character ultimately is the true subject of the story. If we are not witnessing the benevolent good of Raymond (*Rain Man*) then we are offered its opposite, the psychotic bad of the central character in *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2011). The autistic character is an angel, a genius, or a demon, or merely a symptom that can be recovered or cured. Often autism is required to fulfill a function that might previously have been occupied by an alien or a wizard, the audience privy to the quasi-magical workings of the autistic brain as it animatedly solves puzzles (*Mercury Rising,* 1998) or sees the hidden operations of the world (*Temple Grandin*). In these examples, autism serves merely as a function slotted into a narrative concerned with other things. As Murray elaborates, autism, "Becomes just another element (like crime or drugs or any number of perceived abnormalities) to be characterized and thematized" (Murray 2008: 249). In such films we are given permission to stare at the exaggerated autistic or disabled character, rather than have access to

the particularities of individual autistic experience, or offered any meaningful insight into autistic logic. Glaring errors proliferate, particularly in terms of awakenings, transformations, and recovery.

The non-savant autistic person has no dramatic function and thus does not figure. In rare instances when it does, autism tends not to be identified, for example the character Barry in *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002), who has palpable issues when encountering a confusing social world, but is perceived by critics and audiences alike as awkward or shy, rather than having ~~Asperger's Disorder~~. The rhetoric of the hero protagonist and the notions of success that form the underlying discourse of the Hollywood film are at odds with the actual image of disability, unless disability is rewarded as heroic performance, or reconstructed (often literally) as superhuman (take for example the 2012 advertising campaigns for the superhero Paralympians). Often more attention is paid to the efforts of the non-disabled actor to ape and equate the autistic or disabled person. Performances from Sean Penn in *I Am Sam* (2001) and more recently Kalki Koechlin in *Margarita with a Straw* (2014) privilege and reward the Herculean effort an actor puts into adopting the behavior and mannerisms of the disabled-other, and this becomes a selling point for the film. The everyday, non-heroic and unexceptional experience of living with a developmental disorder such as autism, or with any form of disability, clearly lacks cinematic description.

Hollywood, Repetition, and Folk Psychology

As Stuart Murray identifies, critical theory has given scant attention to autism as the subject of cinema, and certainly little or no research exists on autism as a principle for a film form that counters existing templates. Before I turn to films that in some way redress this imbalance, I want to focus on what underpins the normative cinematic iteration, as exemplified by the autism story model described above. There is an abundance of how-to books on the art of the structure of the dramatic screenplay, and there are parallels to be drawn between what characterizes the autistic experience and systems of normative cinema arrangement.

The commercial screenwriter typically works to the law of recapitulation and repetition, espousing the dictum of "say it three times in the scene," working to the default of the three act structure, operating within a shorthand of identifiable tropes. Badiou ([2003] 2013: 111) gives a concise account of such a normative cinema, or "neoclassical cinema" as he puts it, and its predilection for pornography, the unit of families and romantic couplings, the depiction of excessive violence, and off-the-shelf hackneyed plots. Normative cinema is founded on the organizing principle of the inventory, from script to shot-list to storyboard, to schedule to edit decision. This is the logic of the chain, narrative as schema, that which constitutes a kind of geometry of cinema. The schema is so identifiable that all the viewer or reader need do in order to arrive

at meaning is look for assigned probabilities to events, and recognize pattern through repetition and rhyme, what Barthes calls the logic of the "already read" (Barthes 1991). This "already-read" is what psychologists refer to as a collective "folk psychology," the collected wisdom acquired through life experience that we draw on daily. A folk psychology cannot be reduced to a set of rules or categories but is somehow consensually known. It is this cluster of popular understandings in the mind of the viewer that the cinema relies upon to shore up its contents. The assumed existence of a folk psychology, particularly by screenwriters and film-makers, and the estimations it makes about the minds of its intended audience, involves prejudicial assumptions, and reduces the human subject to the flatness of its consensus. This storehouse of a folk psychology is a resource largely unavailable to people with autism, precisely because of its fuzzy nature. Autistic author and academic Temple Grandin (the subject of the aforementioned Clare Danes's HBO TV Movie) has written about her efforts to learn this folk psychology piece-by-piece, by mentally recording and mimicking, algorithmically, specific social operations (Grandin 2005, 2006).

Whilst the standard form of film telling relies upon inferential models and a folk psychology largely baffling to the autistic individual, it nonetheless uses categorization, repetition and rhyme, constant clarification, and the reduction of human personality to a set of two or three characteristics, to ensure that inference is possible. So for example, in *Die Hard* (1988), John McClane (Bruce Willis) is disenfranchised on three counts: renegade cop, recovering alcoholic, jilted partner. This kind of unambiguous character lack conforms to the psychoanalytic model of the human subject as reducible but incomplete, again, a concept not necessarily resonant with the autistic experience. However, this stereotypical operation has striking similarities with the desire within autism for managed and repeated data. Normative cinema, or classical cinema, as Heath puts it, is in essence the balance of repetitions, and narrative is the operation of this balance, "the order of bearable repetition" (1981: 154–157). Christian Metz (1982) speaks of pleasurable films, or "good objects," referring to Freud's theory of childhood play, where a child repeats an activity until it has mastery over it, thereby constituting the activity as good (Metz 1992). Young children begin telling stories in the form of rhyme, and this finds its correlate in the rote system of industrialized normative film narrative. In fact we might even think of Metz's film semiotics, with its various syntagmas attempting to categorize and codify the cinema, as a project with similar objectives to Baron-Cohen's 2007 Bafta nominated educational animated series, *The Transporters,* designed to teach people with ASD how to understand body language and recognize emotional expressions.

Baron-Cohen (2007) refers specifically to our "cognitive architecture," which he maintains is comprised of specialized systems for grammar induction, face recognition, dead reckoning, construing objects, recognizing emotions from

the face, and so on. There are also mechanisms for detecting eye direction, lying and cheating. These mental "modules," Baron-Cohen maintains, are designed to interpret the world in their own pre-existing terms and framework, operating within specialized lexicons—sets of procedures and formats. This type of neuro-scientific cognitive psychology is close to what Deleuze, via Bergson, refers to as the "sensory-motor schema," mental patterns that scan, measure and define a world of social agents, beliefs and desires, and link them to a language of the eyes, the data from which is fed into inference modules. We have already established that the cinema's habitual assemblages depend upon the operations of these schemas, using folk psychology, or what Barthes locates as proairetic, referential and semic codes (Barthes 1991).[2] The economy of the duration of the feature film necessitates the use of these codes, relying on the viewer to infer information and meaning from implicit and implied content, and to ascribe and maintain an understanding of the provisional knowledge of characters (e.g., I know Anne knows that, but I also know that Sally does not know Anne knows that).

This is a cinema directed at the commonsensical rather than the emergent, where no deficit of intentionality can be tolerated, and no image on screen is unmotivated or errant. The engine of plot dominates characters into being merely intentional subjects, or if they are not intentional, then this is still motivated by character determinates and governed by formula. The result is an obsessive regime of pro-filmic unity in which everything seen has semiotic value and is in service to a tightly regulated schema of character, behavior, desire, and intent. Much like Metz's syntagma, Baron-Cohen's cognitive science remains fundamentally structural—seeking to isolate discrete and specialized lexia for procedures such as body language, recognition, grammar and so on. However, the desire to make these behavioral algorithms distinct and modular is at odds with the fuzziness of all social exchange. If we assume that there is a cognitive architecture (and therefore an autistic cognitive architecture that is wired differently to the neuro-typical structure) how then is normative cinema naturalized to this system?

Proximity and Distance

In terms of the communication and reception of ideas, much like the "other people" described by those with autism, the on-screen assemblage of normative cinema appears to know, intuitively, how to communicate and interact with the other of the audience. It knows what to reveal, what to conceal, where and how to be. Such a cinema, functioning in service to story, is required to be regulated so as to be *socialized,* so to speak, to the reception and response of others (the audience). A camera must be placed not too far from, or not too close to the speaking subject; equally, this cinema ought not to be too repetitive and yet always balances the use of motif repetition; it should provide an

audience with the right angles, the necessary rooms, useful information, to arouse emotional empathy, reduce confusion and the multiplicity of inference, and be a good companion to our cognition. This cinema is architecturally constructed to dovetail to a neuro-typical mental apparatus. The register, address, and most important the sociability of the camera and therefore, via the edit, of the doing and being of the film (what it knows, where it goes, how it shows) is taken for granted and yet it is always under the threat of instability. Diegetic space is forever subject to the tectonic shifts of continuity issues, eye-line mismatches, 180-degree rule errors.

Our social orientation, to others, in rooms we enter, occupy and vacate, has directly informed the way film space is assembled.[3] The theatrical frontality of early cinema was quickly replaced by an attempt at a socially appropriate camera, giving over important spatial information about proximities between people or people and objects. Just as there are established (albeit approximate) protocols for social encounters with others—acceptable physical distance or closeness based on status of relationship (stranger, acquaintance, friend, sibling, lover), appropriate levels of eye contact, turn taking in conversation, recognizing when social situations are beginning or ending—there are regulated sets of rules for the ways in which characters encounter one another and are situated in space on the screen. James Chandler (2005) suggests that the over-the-shoulder shot is a technological method in line with eighteenth-century ideas about how we form a sentimental sense of an other, by imagining their situation and conforming to social contracts of proximity between speaking but non-intimate persons (Chandler 2005). Edward Hall, the proponent of proxemics—the study of space structuring in human—went as far as measuring intimate distance (0-18 inches), personal distance (1–4 feet, or arms length), social distance (4–12 feet), public distance (12 feet and beyond) (Hall 1966). One might conjure an image of Hall with a tape rule much like a focus puller on a film set. Per Persson (2003) writes that shot alternation, particularly in dialogue exchange, mimics a crucial aspect of real-life contextual-gaze experience. We see a person looking and we deduce to who or what the look is directed. Sometimes we mistakenly react to a person as though they are looking at us when in fact they are not. Similarly, probability but not certainty of shot-to-shot relations occurs when there is no returning shot to anchor or complete the point-of-view (no return to the gazer), no gazer feedback. As viewers, we look for best candidates if information is provisional or half formed, or if there is no gazer-object-reaction triad. Such a scrabbling to tether one subject to another calls to mind the Sally-Anne Test. The cinema, then, is not only naturalized to habitual perception but also to a normative schema of social space and its context, even though every one of us as players on the social stage will get these unspoken spatial and behavioral rules of recognition, engagement, appropriateness and acceptable distance wrong on a regular basis.

Inference, Intentionality, Erroneous Belief

Sometimes reasoning (incorrectly) can motivate character behavior through the whole of a film. Per Persson (2003) cites Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959), a tale of mistaken identity in which the global narrative evolves from an initial false belief: Thornhill raises his arm as Kaplan's name is called, and is wrongly identified as a government agent by members of a mysterious organization. An erroneous belief such as this creates dramatic tension, prompting actions based on evaluative error. In the films of Jacques Tati, such errors produce comedy—the comic effects of perceptual mistakes are exploited, generating character misdirection—but more significant, they enable what Deleuze describes as a waveform action to the narrative (Deleuze 1989).[4] However, to understand the misunderstanding, the spectator has to make causal connections between failed perceptions and mistaken beliefs.

The form the Sally-Anne Test takes has similarities with Hitchcock's concept of "pure cinema," in that it comprises of true/false assumptions made from discrete consecutive events, and strongly figures what we might describe as the pro-filmic and the pre-filmic, or off screen space. Think of Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941) for example, and the use of red herrings, or the movements of characters between rooms searching for objects as viewed by Jeff (James Stewart) in *Rear Window* (1954). Paul Messaris conducted a study of the scene in *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock 1963) where crows amass on the climbing frame close to Melanie Daniels. In the study, his student subjects experienced "uncertainty or discombobulation" in the shot-to-shot assemblage, believing the birds are within Daniel's view when in fact they are not, thus being lead down the wrong inferential path (cited in Persson 2003). Such incorrect inferential paths are the basis of horror and thrillers, both deliberately trading on misinformation (it is the cat, not the alien). In Oliver Sachs's book *An Anthropologist on Mars* (1995), Temple Grandin identifies similar "sequencing difficulties" in her social relations, describing how she has amassed a vast library of experiences over the years that she draws on like a videotape archive—mental videos of how people behave in different circumstances. Without a sense of "intentional space" as Daniel Dennet (1987) calls it, the autistic person is thrown back on temporal-regularity accounts, focusing on external information rather than inference and extrapolation of missing information, or, in the case of Grandin, they store acquired learning of intentional spaces as temporal-regular spaces.

Hegemonies of Identity and Social Construction

With these social and cinematic orthodoxies in mind, it is clear to see how autism may have a social and political agency that can serve to critique and overthrow certain social hegemonies and understandings of normalcy. In particular, the autistic community is gaining traction as a voice for challenging hegemonies of identity, social interaction, failure, lack and abnormality, rejecting

the old idea of autism as that which must be eradicated (MMR, or measles, mumps and rubella scares), as though autism is a curse we need to avoid rather than another way of encountering the world. Ian Hacking is one of a number of thinkers who is critical of Baron Cohen's cognitive architecture and theory of mind, and of the diagnostic methods used to identify and delineate the autistic individual as non-neuro-typical. Hacking instead regards autism as progressive rather than merely a condition of developmental delay. Hacking's article, "Humans, Aliens and Autism" (2009) suggests that the mantle of alien, often used by the non-autistic person to describe someone with autism, or, conversely, by an autistic individual to characterize a neuro-typical person, reveals more about conservative ideas of what it means to be human in general than it does about autism. Mark Osteen (2008: 12–13) points out that clinicians measure autism in terms of how human or not human a person is. Culturally there is still a strong desire to discover a cure or achieve recovery, in other words for overcoming autism, to regain full humanity. This can be seen in what James T. Fisher terms Hollywood's "conversion" narratives, such as Molly's temporary awakening into a neuro-typical mind in *Molly* (1998; see Fisher 2008: 51). As Stuart Murray states, it is "still very much the case that the clinical language surrounding ASD, especially connected to diagnosis, reinforces the link between the condition and an idea of the human constituted in terms of the 'working' mind" (2008: 6). The language adopted by clinicians in DSM IV and DSMV includes terms such as failure, lack, delay, repetitive, restricted, inflexible, non-functional, disturbance, abnormal. This is essentially the deficit model, in which ASD is constructed as a problem from the perspective of human wholeness, a notion that has roots in the humanist romantic tradition of the evolved human, who must strive to be ever more productive and hyper functional.

Hacking (1999: 104) goes as far as to say that the entire process of diagnosis constitutes a troubling cultural "looping," creating the condition of deficit precisely because the foundational systems and languages that are used during diagnosis are set up to produce such an end product. Simon Baron-Cohen's Autism Spectrum Quotient, an online questionnaire published in 2001, is comprised of a set of 50 questions couched in binary terms designed to clearly demarcate and play on highly stereotypical scenarios to do with parties, lists, schedules. Baron-Cohen has more recently drawn criticism for reducing high functioning autistic people to geeks (Buchen 2011). Countering such reductions, Murray (2008) sees the potential for autism to find a critical base within the discourse of the post human, where the autistic person is not required to acquire the skills to function in a neuro-typical world but rather is championed as a model for how human experience of the world might change and evolve. Murray (2008: 3) writes that, seen in this light, autism "represents a separate space of cultural enactment, and possibly agency, from any configuration of a human norm." Rather than a humanism that has had troubling attitudes toward

developmental disorders and disability in the past (eugenics), post-humanism offers a potentially radical space for autism, one that rejects the cliché of the autistic brain as a mis-wired hard drive, and instead opens up a new spaces for the consideration of identity. Such "postidentarian" thought sees a phase for the human in which a "special need" is no longer special, on the grounds that able-bodied and non-disabled humanity will cease to operate as the norm or objective.[5]

Autism as Schizoanalysis

> The proliferating symptom cluster of autism may indicate a new form of limit and that "becoming autistic" may have potential as revolutionary practice.
>
> —Skott-Myhre and Taylor (2011: 35)

Rather than be appropriated into (or defined as lack against) a consensual order of the neuro-typical, autism now finds itself, or is asserting itself, on a radical plane, as a counter to hegemonies of identity and function. In this sense, one potential line of flight for autism is as successor to schizoanalysis and its assault on systems of capital and productivity manifested in psychoanalysis. Schizoanalysis, as advanced by Deleuze and Guattari, is a strategy for overthrowing the regulatory practices of psychoanalysis, with its familial, Oedipal structures and the notion of the homogenous self, which is sick, but can be healed. In *Autism: Schizo of Postmodern Capital* (2011), Hans A. Skott-Myhre and Christina Taylor argue that, "Autism emerges in the dominant discourse as a placeholder for, or a subject to come, for an emerging form of subjectivity on the horizon of the social."[6] Deleuze and Guattari ([1972] 1984) address autism peripherally in *Anti-Oedipus,* within their discussion of schizophrenia, regarding the disorder as an extreme form of catatonia (at the time of writing in 1972 autism was still considered to be related to schizophrenia). Schizophrenia is energetically characterized by Deleuze and Guattari as capitalism's inevitable excess—the condition brought into existence by capital's limits—and the mode for schizophrenia is to dismantle systems of power and decode languages of restriction and control. For the schizophrenic there are no longer binaries of either/or, but instead ands/ands/ands. *Anti-Oedipus* reanimates Artaud's body-without-organs (BwO)—a body without Hegelian proportions, without image, without limits—and gives this assemblage its absolute potential: the movement and flourishing of anti-production. The BwO is a multi-sensory, multi-dimensional desiring machine, no longer distorted by operations that result in identity. It operates on the socius, creating networks, proliferations and combinations, and here it is possible to discern attitudes associated with autism.

Skott-Myhre and Taylor's piece arguably suffers from some of the retrograde attitudes towards autism that I have commented on here, at times reducing it

to the definition of merely its extreme elements—"obsessiveness, stereotypy, echolalia, social remoteness"—a symptom field or constellation, autism recognized as the limitation of expression, rather than its unchecked proliferation (schizophrenia). Nonetheless, the article gets to the crux of the debate, namely that of questioning the motivation to induce and integrate the autistic person into the present mode of society. Instead, they look to autism as an alternative form of consciousness and subjectivity, just as Deleuze and Guattari did with schizophrenia.[7] This is not to say that autism and schizophrenia are interchangeable terms, or in any way similar, nor is it to romanticize the often extreme challenges many with both low and high functioning autism face, but the autistic way of being (irreducible though it may be, on a spectrum that slides) may teach us something new about what it is to be human, and reveal layers of experiential potential.

Skott-Myhre and Taylor turn to Amelia Baggs (née Amanda Baggs) and her YouTube film *In My Language* (2007),[8] as emblematic of how autism refuses the field of representation in general. This eight minute film, structured in two halves, visually describes Baggs's tactile interaction with (or conversation with, in Baggs's terms) her home environment, via running water, percussive exchanges with objects, and the scrutiny of patterns and forms, before progressing to an analysis (by way of a computer text to speech tool) of how others define Baggs as a non verbal person rather than someone articulating using her own speech acts. Baggs is an active and complex figure in autism and disability politics who self-identified as schizophrenic prior to autistic. The language that Baggs refers to in the title of her uploaded film is rooted in her physical environment, drawn through a fluid interaction with the becoming of forms and relations around her. *In My Language* is therefore not operating from the place of the symbolic, instead Baggs calls it a "native language," and the video clearly privileges embodied relations, visual patterns, repetition, and a gaze fixated on layers of experience, liquidity and connectivity. Erin Manning (2009) has also written extensively on Baggs's film, reacting to the piece not as a withdrawal from social reality but as an intense and new configuration of social reality, not exclusively filtered through human-to-human experience. She writes, "Baggs approaches not objects as such but their relational potential, transforming the space into 'an ambient musical instrument that moves in a dance of rhythmic becomings. She speaks, rocks, smells, touches, tastes" (Manning 2012: 214).

Manning's own language is a somewhat garrulous response to Baggs's composition, invoking Tarkovsky and a plethora of phenomenologists, and she does not comment on the debates surrounding Baggs and her diagnostic status as autistic.[9] More recently, Baggs has distanced herself from being a spokesperson for autism, preferring to operate from the radical minoritarian position of blogger with numerous conditions and syndromes, none of which can be reduced to defining her identity. Manning is not interested in Baggs as an autistic per-

son or an autistic maker, writing that, "Holding the video to a representation of Baggs would situate her as the subject of autism. This would set her apart in a world of her own. This is exactly what *In My Language* struggles against" (Manning 2012: 221). Instead Manning champions the work not as the point-of-view of someone locked in via autism, but reaching out, in unexpected forms, directions and proliferation.

Manning, along with Skott-Myhre and Taylor, sees in Baggs's description of a hand brushing against running water, or a face touching against textures, an experiential feedback loop, the rhizome she names "becoming environment." Baggs's film generates extra-linguistic patterns rather than categories or signs, it gives relations rather than relationships, what Baggs herself describes as "things fitting together in certain ways, outside of me" (Manning 2013: 165). *In My Language* provides a useful starting point, then, for a kind of moving image that challenges the regime of intentionality and the orthodoxies of behavior in cinema space.

Cinemautism

Much like the search for Deleuzian time-images, examples of cinemautism are hard to come by, but there are fragments, and curious progenitors. What kinds of films operate in such a register? Within the milieu of normative cinema, we might think of the way Hollywood director Howard Hawks, along with a team of writers, tried but failed to gain mastery over the convoluted plot of *The Big Sleep* (1946), and eventually conceded that as long as it seemed to be telling a coherent story it didn't matter that it was not.[10] Critic Bosley Crowther wrote at the time of the film's release, that

> The Big Sleep *is one of those pictures in which so many cryptic things occur amid so much involved and devious plotting that the mind becomes utterly confused. And, to make it more aggravating, the brilliant detective in the case is continuously making shrewd deductions which he stubbornly keeps to himself. (Crowther 1946)*

In this configuration, we might think of ourselves, the audience, as the Sally doll, with Marlowe the secretly conspiring Anne, busy doing and thinking things to which we are not privy. Moving away from the normative, the work of writer and filmmaker Marguerite Duras comes to mind. Her screenplay for *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) and her own feature *India Song* (1975) function at the point of the struggle to form sense and comprehend, and feature the physical complication of character orientation, the camera taking an interest in architectural space and non-human phenomena, often neglecting, losing, or panning past the human subjects. *Je Tu Il Elle* (1975) uses vacant space, repetition and inexplicable ritual to convey the social isolation of its central character, who, for the first lengthy section of the film, cannot act, or leave her apartment.

These examples reveal a confederacy between Deleuze's time-image and cinemautism. *The Shout* (1975) is populated by close-ups of objects that serve no purpose in terms of plot, along with non-sequiturs and loose ends. Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974) is a bewildering succession of misinformation and visual and aural puns, whose semiotic function cannot find fixed ground. In Robert Altman's *Nashville* (1975), characters are hard to locate in the crowd, we lose and find them in a figure/ground struggle. This kind of deep space between camera and character has become a signature style for a certain art house cinema suspicious of the face in close-up, although detractors of filmmakers such as Michael Haneke (*Code Unknown* [2000] and *Hidden* [2005]) have argued that this distance produces 'cold films' with a lack of emotional engagement. Without the face, the eyes, the argument goes, it is impossible to know and care for the protagonists, and here again we can find similarities with how people characterize the disconcertingly distant dynamic with people who are autistic and often unable to look another person in the eye.

Many have attempted to tether the red herrings, non-sequiturs, independent scenes and character contradictions of *Mulholland Drive* (2001) to a psychology, but none have succeeded, and it remains unclear whether Lynch authors from a place of structure, or expression, or merely free association. *Mulholland Drive* thrives on our erroneous beliefs. We are mind-blind before its screen. *The Room* (2003) is unintentionally close to the eerie formal sensibilities of *Mulholland Drive* and Lynch's earlier *Lost Highway* (1997). Like a soap opera on Xanax, it has been described as outsider cinema, a front for a money-laundering scheme, and the worst film ever made. Within its uneven frame the film delivers a bewildering play of stilted and apparently unmotivated camera angles, fixation on repeated tracking moves and a complete disregard to conventional social event boundaries. There are unannounced entrances and exits and unnatural scene caps (many scenes start with "Hey Mark" and end with various characters saying "Don't worry about it," or "I don't want to talk about it"). Characters stop speaking mid-sentence, sit down behind furniture, move without clear intention, and suddenly shift in mood from hostility to friendliness with no explanation. Lines are delivered with random inflection, eye-lines stray from shot/reverse-shot mooring, players struggle to know how to use the space of the set, where to stand, often assembling in awkward lines. The result is, at first viewing inadvertently hilarious, and Wiseau himself has embraced his project's cult status as bad movie, but the film is infinitely more interesting than this. It is as though the architecture and apparatus of normative cinematic telling has folded in on itself. There is no floor plan.

Shane Carruth's *Upstream Color* (2013) is a film that deliberately defies categorization or interpretation, and actively withholds information about its characters, not only to the audience but within its own diegesis. In fact the concept of diegesis has next to no meaning when applied to the film, given

that it does not extend, logically, as a coordinated space, but rather oscillates, reverberates and repeats in terms of events and interactions. Performer dialogue is repeated in a semi-fugal structure, and is often lower in the mix than the sound design and hard to comprehend. The film features floating independent scenes that switch without connective continuity. A sequence mid-way through the film, in which a fractious couple goes through the motions of saying goodbye to each other at the door to their house, offers this mundane domestic pattern played and replayed as a set of volumes or variations. If forced to give a thematic reading, one might clutch for a story about people becoming the drugged and dispossessed victims of a viral science experiment. The film's copy material states that identity becomes an illusion as the two protagonists, unable to process, unable to relate to others, struggle to assemble the loose fragments of their wrecked lives. But Carruth fixates on color, texture, movement, sound and rhythm rather than plot, exposition and character definition. What we are given are the bodies of characters in pro-prioceptive feedback, albeit under the auspices of an indeterminate drug hallucination, in which protagonist interiority and exteriority is liquidated. Carruth's oeuvre is indebted to and often quotes the fluid nature of Terence Malick's films, catering to a differently attentive gaze, using every part of the frame and soundscape, producing a waveform duration comprised of systems, networks, relations, patterns and connections redolent of Baggs's video. Like Carruth's first feature, *Primer* (2004), *Upstream Color* is a puzzle that cannot be schematized or solved.[11] In recent years *Attenberg* (2010), *Dreileben: Beats Being Dead* (2011), *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012), and *Thou Wast Mild and Lovely* (2013) are also films that eschew inference, scene-to-scene logic, and an easily mapped space for the social encounters of their characters. Many of these examples borrow from the anti-narrative traditions of avant-garde film, and both James Peterson (1994) and Murray Smith (2011a, 2011b) have done interesting work looking at cognitive reception and experimental film, in terms of the hermeneutic desire to react to on screen events as a problem to be solved, and this desire becoming mapped on to the materiality of the film if no narrative content is evident.

Conclusion: Where Will Sally Look for Her Marble?

Baggs's film, and the work of Reygedas, Decker, and Carruth, put forward a cinema of relational embodiment, one not predicated on the neuro-typically social body and its encounters with others, nor the logic of the scene as chain as hermeneutic puzzle to be solved sequentially, but instead privileging the distracted gaze, the repeating body, the body as it emerges and becomes in relation to matter and form. These are representations of new relations and new possibilities, although only Baggs's is explicitly an attempt to articulate a language of autistic embodiment in the world. They offer fruitful possibility for how a cinemautism might find form and articulation.

Like schizoanalysis, cinemautism is a tool for countering homogeneity, specifically such standards of normative cinema as continuity editing, the establishing shot, the 180 rule, and notions of hermeneutics, character determinants and arcs and so on. We have been offered one kind of social cinema, and with it a limited and proscriptive form of (story) telling. When and how might the much debated screen-mind relationship produce a frustration of otherness, or tamper with an audience's ability to ascribe provisional knowledge to others? Cinemautism suggests a less anthropocentric social arrangement of on-screen encounters, by way of an anti-social or socially other camera, and a non-neurotypical mode of narration and narrative unfolding, one that moves away from inference, interpretation and problem solving (or passing tests) as the godhead of our relation to the world. Cinemautism provides an alternative way to view people, social conventions, and the contradictory nature of personality. This is a cinema that offers no possibility for mastery, where the narratorial element is present, but has lost its authority. Rather than identify where we are on the spectrum of autism we might instead ask where we are on the spectrum of cinema.

Donna Williams suggests that, "The logic of autism may be immune to non-autistic representation" (2010: 19). Williams goes on to quote Feinstein: 'At present, we are merely the fools of tomorrow, no more enlightened than those who diagnosed two-year-olds as psychotic, brain damaged or emotionally disturbed in the 1940s–1970s (Feinstein 2010: 294). There is an inherent contradiction to my argument, in that autism is characterized as the need to create order in a chaotic (social) world—(so far, so cinema), and yet the mind-blindness, and I use this term with skepticism, associated with autism prevents inference and extrapolation vital to the operation of cinema. It is important to stress that such a cinemautistic film form, although potentially innovative and instructive, may not necessarily be best suited to the spectatorship of the autistic individual, if we can generalize that there is such a spectatorship. There are some clear distinctions to make, between a kind of cinema assembled to reflect the experience of the autistic individual, and a kind of cinema produced for the specific modes of experience of the autistic individual, a cinema not of inference but of clarification, explicit communication, even of manageable forms of repetition. Recently cinemas have introduced autism-friendly screenings, but these involve showing mainstream films with modifications to sound levels and lighting in the auditorium, and the acceptance of noise from the audience. ~~It is also fruitful to consider~~ a cinema devised and assembled precisely for the particularities of the autistic experience and autistic cognition~~.~~ ~~Such a cinema~~ could, for example, adhere to a desire for repetition, clarification and confirmation, featuring recognized story markers, identified elements and types, clearly declared tropes in the place of codified symbols and inferred and implied information.

No film system is perfectly engineered and regulated. It is this false distinction between the proprioception and behavior of the ordered and the disordered body (of a person, of a cinema) that a cinemautism could challenge. It may have agency to destabilize the corseted body of normative cinema and release its corporeality, becoming autistic. All normative fiction films threaten to become autistic, or to expose the autism within us, the viewer, and rather than destabilizing, this may well be an emancipatory space for another human subject cinema. If there is such a thing as an autistic film assemblage, what emancipatory, affective value might such an acquired autistic perception have for the orthodoxies of our social and cinematic configurations? This is a deterritorialized cinema of social and spatial difference. I am asking, what are its assemblages?

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Notes

[1] Deleuze refers to "a new dimension of the schizophrenic body, an organism without parts which operates entirely by insufflation, respiration, evaporation and fluid transmission (the superior body or body without organs of Antonin Artaud)" (Deleuze [1969] 1993: 101–102).

[2] Barthes picks apart Balzac's novel Sarrasine line-by-line, identifying five constituent codes which, when operating in unison, form a "readerly" text. The proairec code denotes the identifiable plot activities and actions that imply further narrative action. The referential code draws upon the cultural knowledge of the reader to make rapid deductions, for exam-

ple recognizing tropes such as the pattern of a sporting event, or identifying San Francisco from the image of the Golden Gate Bridge. The semic code populates the text with detail, giving the world of the story familiarity and credibility.

[3] The word camera derives from the Greek word "kamara," which means chamber or vault but also interestingly has root fragments to do with taking (remember that Anne "takes" Sally's marble).

[4] Deleuze recognizes in Tati's films, particularly *Playtime* (1967) a waveform action, where the narrative does not build sequentially but rather consists of a series of fluid surges of activity, each gradually replacing the previous wave.

[5] Recently Baron-Cohen has clarified that autism falls within a new construct in empathy studies, that of systemising. Certain features of autism (obsessions, repetitive behaviour, which were previously regarded as purposelessness) are now being viewed as highly purposive, intelligent, hyper-systemising, and a sign of a different way of thinking.

[6] Deleuze Studies Vol 5 No.1 2011), Hans A. Skott-Myhre and Christina Taylor, p60.

[7] Schizophrenia, as characterised in *Anti-Oedipus,* is the process of unlimited semiosis, a radically fluid form of meaning that Deleuze and Guattari ([1972] 1984) treat as a radical objectivity through which to view late capitalism. Schizophrenia is made possible by capitalism, but then reclaimed and appropriated by capitalism, as its opposite: paranoia. The aim of schizoanalysis is to subvert systematicity and push through limits imposed by capitalist paranoia: schizophrenia as breakthrough rather than breakdown (Laing [1967] 1990). Rather than desiring production, it unleashes desiring machines, which are free to move in any direction on the body without organs and re-shape the forms our desire takes, overthrowing the concept of desire as lack. For Deleuze and Guattari, being is a delusion that traps desire in the snare of representation and thereby represses it: their goal is to release desire from being so it can move freely into becoming.

[8] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hI2jc.

[9] Baggs has in the past presented herself as suffering from many mental health disorders, *other than* autism spectrum disorders, including Dissociative Identity Disorder (Multiple Personality Disorder), Schizophrenia, Schizoaffective Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Depression, and more recently suffering from a number of physical health problems leaving her largely house or wheelchair bound.

[10] It is claimed that Hawks sent a cable to Raymond Chandler asking whether the character of chauffeur Owen Taylor was murdered or had killed himself, a question Chandler himself couldn't answer.

[11] Although many have attempted to do so online, using complex timeline schematics. See http://cdn.unrealitymag.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/primer-chart.jpg.

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