

Disorder in the Real and Inexistence of the Other:

What subjective effects?

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Introduction

My talk today is building on a short piece I wrote for the series *Papers* in July. *Papers* is the title of an on-line publication of the World Association of Psychoanalysis and they are part of the preparation for the 2014 Congress (so when it comes out in English you might recognise some elements of what I will elaborate here today).

The title for the 2014 Paris Congress is, as you know, *A Real for the 21st Century*. Miller presented the theme for this Congress at the Buenos Aires Congress in April 2012, in a talk entitled *The Real in the 21st Century*.¹ This text is readily available in English on the website of the WAP. I will say more about this extremely condensed and interesting piece in a while, but for now I will just extract the signifier which Miller used to specify the Real we are confronted with in the 21st century: **disordered**.

“There is a great disorder in the real in the 21st century”: that’s the formula he proposed as a reference for the future work of the WAP. This signifier, **disorder**, acts as a quilting point for what the 2012 WAP Congress, which dealt with the transformations of the symbolic **order**, uncovered: namely, that there many, profound transformations of the symbolic **order**.

At this point I want to make a theoretical precision: in an intervention he made in Italy, published in *Mental* as two pieces under the titles *Milanese Intuitions I and II* Miller builds on Lacan’s theory in *The Logic of Fantasy (Seminar XIV)*: In *Seminar XIV*, Lacan suggested that the fantasy was the invisible matrix of the subject. In his *MI*, Miller adds that so is the case for the structure of civilisation: it is an invisible matrix that must be deciphered and reconstructed through the effects it has on subjects, truth, jouissance. We can reconstruct the structure of civilisation just as we can a subject’s unconscious through the analytic experience. That is because the subject is trans-individual.

So what subjective effects do we have as indicators of the structure of civilisation? There has been a host of mutations in subjective organisations, on a mass scale especially in the past two decades: changes in sexuation with the challenging of heteronormativity and the supposed ‘natural’ model of the nuclear family, development of bioengineering technologies and so changing definition of the human, rise in addictive behaviours and depressive affects, of ordinary forms of psychosis, of treatments of jouissance through direct interventions in the body (elective surgery, plastic surgery, body art), of technological apparatuses for jouissance, of virtual reality taking always more consistency over what the inhabitants of the internet call IRL [*in real life*]. This proliferation of subjective inventions, of singular modes of jouissance, of new forms of social bond is what allows Miller to propose two distinct but correlated propositions as to the structure of our civilisation: 1) that there is a great disorder in the real (2012); 2) that the Other is now without the Other (2014).

As subjects of the 21st century, wise to post-structuralism, deconstruction and cultural relativism, we already knew that there was no such thing as an a-historical, transcendental experience of objective reality. We knew that realities were effects of the discourses that produced them. We even knew that realities were always singular, framed by the window of our fantasy. But to suggest that the real

¹<http://www.wapol.org/en/articulos/Template.asp?intTipoPagina=4&intPublicacion=38&intEdicion=13&intIdiomaPublicacion=2&intArticulo=2493&intIdiomaArticulo=2>

itself was subject to change – that’s another kettle of fish. Some of Lacan’s most famous sayings even indicate that the real is, on the contrary, what does not change, always returns to the same place, is glued to the heel of the subject, immune to dialectical operations, is what always repeats in the same form, etc.

So two questions I will try to address today:

- 1) How can we hear this proposition, Miller’s quilting point, that there is “a great disorder in the real”? Does it mean to say that the real can change?
- 2) And how does this new signifier, this **name** for our real, articulate with this other theme, now well rehearsed in our Schools, of the **inexistence of the Other**?

I will open our reflexion for today with a brief reference to Lacan’s *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. Why this Seminar? There, Lacan had already argued that changes in discourse produced more than changes on subjective organisations; they also produced changes on the real. And what he developed in *Seminar XVII* has, once again, proved extremely prescient.

1. Seminar XVII: Science produces a non-natural environment, filled with objects that are not modelled on objects of the body

In *Seminar XVII* Lacan devised the four discourses to formalise and interpret a specific shift in civilisation. He argued that the university discourse, in the guise of the discourse of science, was fast becoming the master’s discourse, excluding all truths but formal truth. In Chapter XI of this *Seminar*, Lacan indicated that this shift transformed our very environment. “Sexual sense”, the imaginary of sexual sense, was losing sway in the ordering of the human experience.² Our environment was less and less organised according to the male and female principles, Lacan suggested. Instead, we now lived in a world organised by a symbolic order divorced from desire, and which produced “formal truth”. What is formal truth? Simply put, something is true because every time you apply the same formula you obtain the same result. The ‘natural’ world of science qua *connaissance* – or knowledge obtained through perception – was giving way to the alethosphere, or the world of science qua formal truth: “Insofar as science only refers to an articulation that only takes form in the signifying order, it is constructed out of something where there was nothing beforehand.”³ And in the place of objects of the body, the more classical guises of object a, the alethosphere produces lathouses, the objects of the real of science.

This dimension of our times was recently explored at the NLS Congress in Athens, for which the phrase ‘I-objects’ was coined to refer to the lathouses of the *geek* era. This is what Miller said of objects ‘a and I’ in his concluding speech to the Congress:

In other words, in this category (of elements that produce a jouissance supplementary to phallic signification), we not only have objects that come from the body and are lost for the body, either naturally or through the impact of the symbolic, we also have objects which reflect these first objects in various forms. The question being are these new objects completely new or are they merely reconstituted forms of primordial objects a. (Miller, *The Other without the Other*)

Whether our lathouses are “merely reconstituted forms of primordial objects a” or not, what remains from Lacan’s invention of the alethosphere and the lathouses to characterise the environment produced for the human by science is that nature functions less and less as an effective

² Lacan J. *The Seminar Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Chapter XI, trans. Russell Grigg, W. W. Norton & Co. [2008].

³ *Ibid* at 160.

name for the real, as a way to make sense of the human experience. A baby produced by artificial insemination by a woman who had undergone sex change but kept her uterus, and whose partner had had a hysterectomy, as happened in 2008: that cannot be accounted for using the fiction of 'nature'. So we can already see, from Lacan's proposition in *Seminar XVII*, that the conjunction of science and capitalism is producing a world filled with objects, and more and more with subjects, that cannot be resorbed in imaginary, sexual sense, that cannot be ordered by the fiction of nature.

To this first reference on the changing status of the real we can now add Éric Laurent's and Jacques-Alain Miller's joint 1996-7 Seminar, *The Other that does not exist and its Ethical Committees*.⁴

2. "The Other that does not exist": Science dematerialises the real

In this seminar, Laurent and Miller spoke of the *dematerialisation of the real* brought about by the discourse of science. How are we to understand this dematerialisation? According to Miller in the first lecture of the year, our time is a time at which "the real, or rather the sense of the real, has become a question." Our crisis, he continues, is not a crisis of knowledge but a crisis of the real: "the immersion of the contemporary subject in semblants means that the real is now a question for everyone." Miller ascribes this crisis to science, which took over from religion in making sense of the world around the time of the wars of religion that ravaged Europe in the 15th-16th century. Science initially fixed the real in place, operating what Miller calls a "scientific fixation" of the real: identifying so-called laws of nature, imagining the world as a book of laws to be deciphered, read, and transcribed, in order to then modify nature using her laws. The idea of science then was that the real obeyed a natural order. But the progresses of science have had two unexpected consequences:

1. instead of deciphering immutable laws, science is now showing us the randomness of the real, that the real exceeds whatever laws of causality seemed to hold sway. As Miller put it in that Seminar, science has dissolved "the *fixion* of the real to the extent that the question *what is the real ?* only attracts contradictory, inconsistent, in any case uncertain answers" (20/11/1996). And in his 2012 WAP speech he adds "with the infinite universe of mathematical physics, nature disappears... with the infinite universe nature disappears and the real begins to be unveiled." = so nature was a veil for the real.
2. Science and capitalism together have multiplied semblants to the extent that it seems as if the real, the real which is at stake in the analytic experience, no longer exists: nothing seems impossible: I want a better body/better looking child/lose weight/travel around the world super fast/fly/be a musician etc: the odds are in your favour: the limit that the impossible places on human actions is always pushed further back, to the point here it's not much of a limit any more: as Miller puts it, "the use of semblants is in vain, ineffective, or even fundamentally nefarious, if there is an impasse on the real at stake." (20/11/1996) The real at stake is this impossible which marks the human experience, however much we seek to deny it/postpone our encounter with it.

This dematerialisation of the real is correlated to the inexistence of the Other. I will explain this point later, but for now I will just say that in this Seminar, and in works leading up to the NLS Congress in Athens which took place in May this year, the inexistence of the Other is specified very precisely as the dissolution of the bond between S and s:⁵ in other words, with the dereliction of the NF, called by Lacan "the cornerstone" ... "according to tradition" (Miller 2012), there is no way of knowing what language means, except by endlessly talking with each other to reach agreement on everything from

⁴ Laurent E. and Miller J.-A., « L'Autre qui n'existe pas et ses comités d'éthique », *L'orientation lacanienne* (1996-7), unpublished.

⁵ This is developed by Éric Laurent in "Psychosis, or Radical Belief in the Symptom", *Hurly-Burly* n°8, October 2012.

the meaning of words onwards – hence the second part of the title of the Seminar: *and its ethical committees*.

For now, let us take note of this point: if science dematerialises the real, it is not by attacking the real itself, but by undermining the connection between S and s, thereby dissolving the fiction of a natural order. So we begin to have the idea, having looked at these two references, that the disorder in the real has to do with the fact that nature can no longer pass for the real – and this is what Miller develops in his 2012 text, our third reference.

3. “The Real in the 21st Century”: *Nature is no longer a name of the real*

The dematerialisation of the real by science (so dissolution of the sense of the real plus real eaten away (*gangréné*) by proliferation of semblants) can be correlated with what Miller says in his Presentation of the 2014 WAP Congress: “previously”, he states, “the real was called nature. Nature was the name of the real when there was no disorder in the real.... When nature was the name of the real you could say, as Lacan did, that the real always returned to the same place.” The return of the seasons, the spectacle of heavenly bodies, which always returned in the same place, were opposed to the signifier, which is characterised by displacement: as Miller puts it, the “rhetorical agitation of the signifier in human speech was [...] framed by a weft of signifiers fixed like the heavenly bodies”. The real as nature functioned as the Other of the Other, it guaranteed the symbolic order. In other words, human, agitated existence was once framed by the laws of nature, anchored in fixed signifiers, and people organised their lives according to what seemed natural (sexuality, family, seasons, temporal and spatial constraints etc).

This may seem a bit abstract: we can illustrate the idea that human existence is organised by the fixed signifiers of the laws of nature with what Michaël Ferrier says in his account of Fukushima – and what happens when these fixed signifiers lose their hold on the real:

Whoever has lived through an earthquake knows it: in a few moments, the entire world is shaken to its foundations: the coordinates of space and time are in a complete shambles. Time stretches; space is fractured. The cardinal points themselves become fragile clues, uncertain landmarks. If in addition there is a tsunami and a nuclear plant explodes and then – beyond the natural, human, industrial and political disaster that ensues – our whole way of life is called into question.⁶

Ferrier’s words are showing us that as soon as our human existence is des-anchored from the fixed signifiers of a supposedly natural order, we are at a loss: nothing makes sense.

Yet the natural order is what is currently disappearing: Miller punctuates the transformation of our times by saying that “capitalism and science have combined to make nature disappear. And what is left by the vanishing of nature is what we call the real, that is, a remainder, by structure, disordered.” ... “the real has broken free from nature.” .. and “the real emancipated from nature is so much worse that it becomes more and more unbearable.”

To conclude on this point, and to be precise, I want to remind all of us that what Lacan called the real is not reality, *it is a register of the human experience*. This is what some scientists forget when, for example, they write a DNA sequence: they are not transcribing the real in a language that would allow them to manipulate it by changing an element in the sequence, they are using a human, contingent language to apprehend the organism, the living.

⁶ “Qui a vécu un tremblement de terre le sait: en quelques instants, le monde entier vacille sur ses bases, les coordonnées de l’espace et du temps sont complètement bouleversées. Le temps s’étire, l’espace est fracturé. Les points cardinaux eux-mêmes deviennent des indices fragiles, des repères incertains. Pour peu qu’un tsunami s’en mêle et qu’une centrale nucléaire explose et c’est – au-delà du désastre naturel, humain, industriel et politique – toute notre manière de vivre qui s’en trouve interrogée. » (*Fukushima : Récit d’un désastre*, Ferrier p. 13)

With this mind, we can return to Miller's advances: he is demonstrating for us is that in the not-so-distant past, the real was disguised as nature, and as nature it anchored otherwise agitated – because enslaved to the signifier – human existence. Today, because science and capitalism 1) have populated the world with non-natural objects; 2) have demonstrated that the real has no sense, no regularity, the idea of a natural order of things is disappearing. This echoes with Lacan's assertion in *Seminar XXIII* that "the real is without law." It's an affirmation by Lacan of the consequence of the fact that nature can no longer function as the Other of the Other, in the sense of an Other that would fix or guarantee the Other of language. Which means that language, in its function of nomination of jouissance, has explicitated by Laurent in his closing intervention at the NLS Congress of Tel-Aviv in 2012, is faltering – I can explain this more later but for now, let us look at what we mean when we talk about the inexistence of the Other.

4. Landmarks in the Lacanian Orientation on the Inexistence of the Other

In our field, there has been talk of the inexistence of the Other for nearly two decades now. Even though the idea that there is no Other of the Other, that there is no metalanguage (*Science and Truth*) – i.e. there is no language which could say the truth about language -, has been around for a long time, it's only over the past two decades that the idea has come to occupy centre stage in our orientation. It became really prevalent in a few landmark moments:

- 1) The clinical trilogy of the 90s (the conversations of Angers, Antibes, Arcachon) started with a discussion of the unclassifiable cases analysts were encountering in their practice. It quickly became apparent that these supposedly unusual, rare cases were in fact becoming the norm of our clinical practice. The third volume in the series culminated with the invention by Miller of the concept of ordinary psychosis. In the Paris-English Seminar on ordinary psychosis (2008), a little over ten years after the introduction of the notion, Miller specified that the invention of OP was not designed so much to introduce a new concept or clinical category but as a signifier designed to « attract [...] sense » (*Quarto* 94-5, 41) – it's a signifier that we can use to talk about cases in which psychosis is deduced from the absence of neurosis but is not triggered, medicated, supplemented. OP is therefore « more of an epistemic category than an objective one. It has to do with the way we know. » (*Quarto* 94-5,42). The subject of my talk is not OP, so for now I will just say that it names the generalisation of inconspicuous forms of psychoses, and that this generalisation is a consequence of the inexistence of the Other.
- 2) Next, the joint Laurent-Miller Course of 1996-7, *The Other that does not exist and its Ethical Committees*, explored the hypothesis that the inexistence of the Other was the matrix for the changes of our civilisation: from universalism (a world organised by one S_1 , the Name of the Father) to globalisation (a world organised by a multiplicity of S_1 s: *essaim*).
- 3) Miller gave another punctuation in Athens in 2013, clarifying Lacan's position on the inexistence of the Other in his closing speech, entitled *The Other without the Other*. He proposed this as a reference for the next NLS Congress in Gent. Miller reminds us that Lacan first coined the now famous formula, "there is no Other of the Other", in 1959, in *Seminar VI: Desire and its Interpretation* (p. 353). A clarification is useful: when we say "inexistence of the Other" in our field, it does not refer to the inexistence of the Other of language. It refers to the inexistence of the Other of the Other: in other words, when Lacan says there "there is no Other of the Other", it means there is no Other of Law of the Other of language. To say it otherwise, there are no laws that would make the Other of language consistent. Miller

makes this very clear in *The Other without the Other*. It is in this text that Miller best clarifies the two statuses of the Other for Lacan: the Other of the signifier, on the one hand, and the Other of the Law, on the other hand. And the Name-of-the-Father is the signifier of the Other of the Law, the Other of the Other of the signifier. This is the sense of Lacan's famous formulation in the *Preliminary Question*: "the Name-of-the-Father [is] the signifier which in the Other, qua locus of the signifier, is the signifier of the Other qua locus of the law" (*Écrits*, 2006: 485). In other words, the Other that does not exist, as Miller puts it (4/12/96), it's a quilting point "overcoming the disjunction between S and s".

- 4) Miller develops the idea that Lacan changed his position from *Seminar VI* onwards, after having worked very hard to find laws for language – Miller names five registers: linguistic (metaphor and metonymy), dialectic (recognition), mathematical, sociological (kinship), Freudian (Oedipus and first paternal metaphor). The failure to find laws for language, Miller continues, is what inspires the concept of *lalangue*: "which is distinguished from language in that it is precisely without law. Language is thus conceived as a superstructure of laws that capture *lalangue* as that which is without law." (*The Other without the Other*). To conclude on this point, we can add that having identified the five registers of the law for Lacan allows Miller to propose a new definition of the symbolic: in the last analysis, the symbolic is simply what obeys a law in whichever register. Hence the name for the symbolic of **symbolic order**. It follows that the real is, by contrast, disordered, since with the vanishing of nature it is evidently without laws.
- 5) This entails a consequence at the level of the matrix of civilisation: the structure that produces subjects as effects is that of an inconsistent Other: the inexistence of the Other (of Law) of the Other (of language) makes the Other (of language) inconsistent.
- 6) In turn, this entails consequences at the level of our clinical practice: an inconsistent Other produces the need for each speaking being to find his or her own way to organise his or her world: we are witnessing what, in his presentation of the 2013 NLS Congress in Tel-Aviv, Eric Laurent called a *generalisation of the singular psychotic effort to the whole of the clinical field*: neurotics and psychotics both have to invent a symptom with which to make a social bond. It also accounts for Lacan's statement "Everyone is mad, that is, delusional.": Miller (2012) argues, "it translates the extension of the category of madness to all speaking beings who suffer from the same lack of knowledge concerning sexuality." The inconsistency of the Other of language radicalises one's solitary relation to Being and Existence. Finally, as Miller asks it in the third lesson of *L'Autre qui n'existe pas*, how is one to construct an S₁ out of an inconsistent Other? He ends up arguing that there is no other universally valid identification than that of "consumer", but whereas a classical S₁ would entail a "negativisation of *jouissance*" (see *Seminar 9*) the identification 'consumer' has to do with surplus-*jouissance* as what plugs castration.

5. **Ordering the Real through Virtualisation: From Natural Laws to Codes and Algorithms**

How does the 21st century handle a disordered real, a real divorced from nature, a real non-amenable to scientific fiction? By replacing natural laws with codes that, if they don't write the real in scientific language, if they don't claim to decipher a knowledge supposedly in the real – as some scientists believe they are doing, for example, when they write a DNA sequence – try to guide human behaviour by sifting through quintillions of data-bytes collected via the internet, smartphone and credit card use, consumer habits, social networking sites, and so on. Big data, as it is called, is

analysed by *quants* (a relatively new profession, short for quantitative analyst) using ever more complex algorithms,⁷ and whose functions are threefold: 1) to predict human and non-human behaviour on the basis of probabilistic calculations ; 2) to influence human behaviour by channelling people's activities according to past choices and supposed preferences (online shopping suggestions, Facebook and LinkedIn contact suggestions; match-making by dating agencies; student and employee recruitment); 3) to perform functions humans used to carry out, but more rapidly, more efficiently (trading on financial markets, giving medical diagnoses, driving cars,⁸ delivering prescriptions, writing near-instantaneous news articles, programming music on the radio, etc.).⁹ Algorithms recently came to fame when they malfunctioned and engineered a crash on Wall Street (May 6, 2010), or again when it was revealed that they were routinely used by Intelligence Agencies such as NSA or GCHQ to sift through everyone's electronic communications using key words of word combinations. Currently, most people's reaction to algorithms is oscillating between seeing them as a utility or a menace.¹⁰ There is no judgement about their very existence, the sole question is as to their use.

Codes and algorithms are replacing laws, natural and human, in ordering the real. They are *of* science, but they do not operate as a fixation of the real. They create an order which is little reliant on sense: they rely on probabilities extracted from comprehensive data analysis, and they are responsive to unpredicted events, transforming the unpredicted turn of affairs into yet another variable. An imperfect algorithm is just an algorithm which is lacking a variable; it is never inconsistent, but always incomplete. 'Bots', as the gigantic computers treating Big Data are called, even analyze human language, in emails or phone conversations, to sort humans into categories (leaders/followers; personality types etc).

There is no doubt that we are witnessing the emergence of a new, pervasive, modality for the treatment of the real. It goes by way of a *virtualisation* of the real, yet it leaves the 'real real' intact. This may be why the dimension of trauma is returning with a vengeance – this may be one of the reasons why the theme of the 43rd study days of the ECF this coming November is so relevant.

Could one of the names of this 'real real' now be, somewhat ironically, *nature*, which returns as the primary disorder in climate change discourse, in the guise of natural catastrophies?

Conclusion

What we have seen, going through the elaboration led by Miller in the past twenty years, is that psychoanalytic theory and practice both are being profoundly reconfigured in a continuous effort to "bring our analytic practice up to date" (Miller: 2012). It is crucial we, as practitioners but also as interpreters of our time, a mission Lacan ascribed to analysts in his first Rome speech, take account of the profound change in the matrix of civilisation which Lacan first named more than half a century ago with his "there is no Other of the Other".

Why does it matter? In March 2013, Miller spoke to the French legislative commission of the Senate during the debate on the 'marriage for all. He spoke, for example, of the fact that there were means

⁷ Algorithms are sets of instructions leading to an answer or output according to the information at hand.

⁸ Prototypes of the Google car, driven by algorithms collecting data and instructing the car accordingly, are currently being tested in Silicon Valley. The only accident the Google car has ever had was when a human was behind the wheel.

⁹ On the rapid growth of the use of algorithms in all sectors of human life, see Steiner C., *Automate This: How Algorithms Came to Rule Our World*, Penguin (2013).

¹⁰ As argued by Chris Steiner during his TED talk, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_aLU-NOdHM

of acquiring children that were not taken into account by current French laws, and that the danger in not taking account of what really happens in the symbolic was that it returned in the real: with this very clear, unquestionable statement, Miller was reminding the audience of the dangers in believing that you could continue dealing with the present in terms of the past.

Lastly, it is not because the real for each subject is ultimately without law that it cannot be ordered in the analytic experience. In fact, as Miller puts it in his 2012 text, the unconscious is an interpretation of the real. Analysis brings forth the transference unconscious, thanks to which we begin to order our real under different headings: after a few years of analysis, we start to think: 'oh this must be my symptom', 'this is my fantasy', 'I used to have this Ideal' etc. And at the end of it we should be able to circumscribe "the hole in knowledge" which the real is: in other words, an encounter with something which has no meaning: analysis, in Miller's terms, is "a search for the real stripped of meaning."