

Interview: Other Voices. A different outlook on autism

<http://unesaltresveus.teidees.com/>

Iván Ruiz Acero interviewed by **Laura Petrosino**.

Iván Ruiz Acero is a psychoanalyst in Barcelona and a musician. He is a member of the Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis and the World Association of Psychoanalysis.

Iván is also the Co-ordinator of the Service for Care and Treatment of Autism and Childhood and Adolescent Psychosis of Igualada (Barcelona). He is the director of the documentary entitled *Other voices*.



Laura Petrosino is a clinical psychologist and practicing psychoanalyst. At the time of this interview, which took place in Brussels, she worked as a practitioner in *Le Courtil*, a Belgium institution oriented by Lacanian psychoanalysis (www.courtil.be)

On Sunday July 3rd 2011 Iván Ruiz (director of the documentary "Other voices. A different outlook on autism") spoke to us about the details of this Project, of his position with regards to autism and of what psychoanalysis may contribute as a possible treatment.

LP_ How did the idea of making this documentary come about?

IR_ The idea arose, on the one hand, in relation to the current sociopolitical situation in Spain, where there is a truly brutal offensive by cognitive-behavioural therapies (CBT) to regulate the field of autism. At a political level, for example, there have been bills and proposals that seek to unify the treatment for autism by CBT only. On the other hand, I have worked in this field for many years. My idea then was to make a documentary that can reach the general public and transmit what psychoanalysis can contribute to the treatment of autism, showing both its effectiveness and validity. In fact, the most important thing for me was to make, out of the traumatic encounter with autism, something beautiful. For instance, I composed the music especially for this documentary, taking great care also of all aesthetic details.

LP_ And for this you have chosen to interview parents and analysts?

IR_ Indeed. Two years ago we created in Barcelona an association of parents of people with autism, who had opted for a psychoanalytic treatment, either privately or at a public level, in institutions, out-patients centres, specific schools or day-care centres. The idea is that these

parents can testify to how psychoanalysis has allowed them to relate to their children differently. This association is called *TEAdir* (<https://associacioteadir.wordpress.com/>), an acronym homophonic to the words “has something to say” in Catalan. The proposal is that the parents can talk to each other and also defend psychoanalysis as a possible treatment. Furthermore, the association has adopted the documentary as its own, and it is the entity that is collecting funding and donations.

LP_ And what is it that these parents have to say?

IR_ They are parents who know psychoanalytic theory; they don't necessarily read Freud or Lacan, but they know what the voice, the gaze and subjectivity mean; and they value the question of responsibility, of how their children choose; and they transmit something of how they relate to their children as parents, without having to become their therapists. They speak so naturally that I find it admirable. I also interviewed some grandparents; they are analysed grandparents, who testify to the subjective effects that psychoanalysis produced in them allowing them to coexist with autism in a different way. To hear parents saying that psychoanalysis has been useful to their children is not that common in Spain.

LP_ Do you also work in any institution with children with autism?

IR_ Yes, I work at a public “early intervention centre” for children from birth to six years old. It is complicated, I try to see the children more than once a week, but sometimes that is not possible. I have to make do with the budget difficulties proper to the public health system. Apart from my work in the public centre, I have been working for many years on the Project of creating an institution in Barcelona that would be psychoanalytically oriented. It is very complex, but this year we are organizing one-week therapeutic camps for children with autism. They are conceived as a germ of a future residential facility.

LP_ In the Early Intervention centre, do you work in your office?

IR_ Yes, there are children who come to us with stereotyped movements and actions, where the *jouissance* generated by them does not leave initially much room to intervene, but there are others for whom this *jouissance* becomes anguishing as they cannot get out of it. It is interesting to see how this anguish [anxiety] is what allows them to accept the work with somebody else, somebody who may help them out and move on to something else. The

whole question is how to help them get out from that without prohibiting them from doing it. It is the clinic of the case by case proposed by psychoanalysis, which allows us to bring the subject's singularity to the foreground.

LP_ Do you also work with the parents?

IR_ Yes, I try to work with the parents so they can take up a position. This is, generally speaking, a complex issue, because autism requires a very special form of presence, a knowing-how to be there without being completely there, and for parents this is usually difficult. The most common tendency is to either be permanently present, so that the child does what he is supposed to do, or not to do anything, that is, to erase oneself from the scene in order not to disturb the child and not provoke a crisis. The question is how to find a way of being with them that is not intrusive when parents have the responsibility for their child's education. This is also something that deserves to be treated on a case by case basis.

LP_ And how did you think of the interviews with the analysts?

IR_ I tried, above all, to throw light on the relation between the analyst's subjectivity and his or her work with autism. It may seem paradoxical but I believe one has to be a bit autistic to be able to work with autistic children. The encounter with autism is to me the most obvious form in which you can verify the existence of the real in the clinic. Because the drama of autism is that the real brutally resists passing into the symbolic, and it therefore presents itself in its starkest form. And that directly generates anxiety in the analyst, it produces a radical not-knowing. This is why in the interviews I did try to transmit something of that choice. What interests me is how they can testify to their subjective position with regards to autism and to their desire for this clinic emerged. My proposal was that they speak of their own subjectivity implicated in their practice, and of how their own analysis allowed them to work with autism. This is why I proposed to each analyst to sit down on the couch.

LP_ There are lots of couches¹ in the documentary... There is also an ancient Greek theater...

¹ The interviewer plays with the words "couch" (in Spanish "diván") and the author's first name "Iván", obtaining a condensation: "There is a lot of Iván in the documentary". [TN]

IR_ Yes, indeed, there are a lot of couches. I thought about the couch mainly as a homage to Freud; and the question of the theatre, I didn't think much about it at the beginning, it is mostly an aesthetic one...

LP_ It seemed to me that it was a very interesting idea to include, through the couch, the body of the analyst.

IR_ Yes, it is true, the analyst's body and his movements are very present in the documentary. For example, at times of cutting during the film, as a punctuation, I have chosen a dancer and a child, who is not recognised but in whom a certain continuity can be perceived, between the stereotyped movement of the child's body and the sublimated gesture of dance. But there is also the question of time. Through the ancient theatre I wanted to highlight the actuality of a theory and a practice that is already over a century old.

LP_ How did you choose the analysts?

IR_ Most of them are from Barcelona, Madrid, and also from Bilbao and Zaragoza. There are three analysts from elsewhere in Europe: Antonio Di Ciaccia, Jean-Robert Rabanel and Alexandre Stevens. The initial idea was to do something more modest, but of course, the risk was that it would remain too local. I wanted to do something broader, I thought of extending it to all Spain, and finally I thought that it could be even broader and that is why I interviewed an Italian analyst, a French analyst and a Belgian one. The local dimension has its importance, of course, but for psychoanalysis to survive the attack of CBT we must assert the importance of a network like ours, an international network, spreading its psychoanalytic institutions worldwide.

LP_ Besides the testimonies of parents and analysts you have filmed a young man with autism...

IR_ Yes, his name is Albert. The documentary provides for him, a possibility of explaining to the world what happens to him. It is interesting, because he cannot write by himself, and the documentary allows him to somehow write something, to fix or pin something down with the help of an other. He will be the thread of the documentary. The argument will be the introduction of Albert, traveling to Brussels to discover in the city, the Tintin Museum, of

which he is a big fan... Last Friday we were filming Albert and his family were in the museum... he truly seemed to have entered a completely new world...

LP_ It is a documentary that is very faithful to the ethics of psychoanalysis in so far as it is a subject who is at stake...

IR_ Yes, that's right. And Albert has a stunning clarity with regards to what happens to him; he does not lose himself in stories as in 'I will I say this, will I say that'; he testifies in an amazing way to the real weight that words carry. There are no veils or differentiation between the signifier and the real; for him there are no semblants, there is no lying truth. Everything has the same value and nothing is forgotten. This is his drama, of which the public may learn so much...

LP_ How did the possibility of participating in the documentary arise? Did you offer it to him?

IR_ Yes, because there is in him a fascination with TV series. He likes to imitate some characters, reproduce dialogues, it is something rather mimetic which gives him a body. So this idea of taking the place of the main character of an audiovisual project interested him; he immediately said yes, and for over a year he counted the days and hours waiting for the shooting to begin. It has been something very important for him. He was the first to whom I showed the trailer, to have his opinion, and he liked it very much. Albert wanted to use this médium to explain what happens to him, for his drama is that the other does not sufficiently understand his "little thing", as he calls it.

LP_ Albert shows well how the other with whom he has problems is not the other as fellowman. That his drama is the fact that others do not understand him means that the other as fellowman [semblable] exists and is important to him. This implies a particular conception of autism that goes beyond the observable, beyond behaviour, which seems to be the pivot of Anglo-Saxon theories. You propose a conception of autism that above all takes into account what is heard and the subject's relationship with his statements [sayings].

IR_ Yes, autism is not so much what prevents a subject from taking the other into account, but that which presents itself for a subject as impossible when it comes to speaking. I think autism has much more to do with the issue of speaking than with the presence of the other

or with mere language [speech]. There are autistic children who do not speak and others who cannot stop speaking, but the difficulty in both cases lies in not being able to pass on to the Other something of what happens to them, it's rather that. My idea is to provide a sufficiently broad view of autism so that autism is not reduced to pathological behaviours or not sufficiently enough learned behaviours the child displays, and—at the same time- to show that autism is not just anything that can fit into the so-called autistic spectrum. Autism is, somehow, something paradigmatic in the human being as speaking being. One could say that autism is at the very heart of the human being, the autistic zone in relation to the Other. The human being suffers from speaking; speaking in the sense of passing something of one's own into the Other. This sometimes manifests itself in opposite ways in autism: there are the subjects who don't say a word because that would mean an excessive exposure, and there are those who cannot stop talking because they do not manage to get rid of that real that language cannot capture.

LP_ Somehow, Albert manages to transmit something about humanity and, in this sense, he is a sort of contemporary philosopher...

IR_ It is true...

LP_ Many thanks Iván for this interview.

IR_ Thanks to you.

Documentary *Other voices. A different outlook on autism*

Official web: <http://unesaltresveus.teidees.com/>

Trailer available at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cms-2iZiFdU> (English)

Translated from the Spanish by *Florencia Fernandez Coria Shanahan*