

Autism and the Modern Identity: Autism Anxiety in Popular Film

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At the beginning of the film *Rain Man*, Raymond, the autistic man played by Dustin Hoffman, is described by his doctor as “an autistic savant” who, because of his disability, has “problems communicating and learning. He can’t even express himself or probably even understand his emotions in a traditional sense. . . . Routines, rituals, that’s all he has to protect himself . . . any break from the routine is terrifying.” The sharp viewer will note that these are also the characteristics of Raymond’s non-autistic brother Charlie, played by Tom Cruise. The point, then, is that Charlie is as “autistic” in his own way as his brother (with the significant exception that Raymond “doesn’t understand the concept of money”). Through his exposure to Raymond, Charlie becomes a more emotionally open and aware individual, more cognizant of other people, thus saving his relationship with his girlfriend and being posthumously reconciled with his father. Raymond acts as (1) an analogue to Charlie at the beginning of the story, and (2) a catalyst to Charlie’s transformation into a “fuller” human being.

Audiences have become attuned to this dynamic in the years since the release of *Rain Man*. Over the past decade, autism, presently understood as a communicative disability, has gained a certain popular status, as attested by the growing number of films and books that adapt autism (and autistic characters) for symbolic or metaphorical purposes. My goal in this paper is to examine two recent representations of autism in popular film in order to identify concerns which are implicit in the cultural construction of autism in western society. I am emphasizing films as they are involved in popular culture and in the packaging of disability to a degree which most other forms of discourse are not. My focus will be on *Rain Man* (directed by Barry Levinson, 1988), the “original” autism film, and the recent action film *Mercury Rising* (Harold Becker, 1998); both are mainstream narratives, although within different genres of popular film, and both reached large audiences. These films explore the ground between individual identity and personal relationships, which in turn underscores the structures informing representations of autism.

In each work the protagonist - not the autistic character, of course - struggles with a sense of fear and aloneness that makes it impossible to engage in profound relationships. The protagonist’s emotional growth (in *Rain Man*) or recovery (in *Mercury Rising*) is achieved through the relationship with the autistic character. But before we investigate these representations further, we should spend some time pondering the history of the idea of autism.

Autism is a recent category of disability, first defined in the 1940s. The DSM-IV identifies the “essential features” of autism as “the presence of a markedly abnormal or impaired development in social interaction and communication and a markedly restricted repertoire of activity and interests” (66); it goes on to note that “in most cases, there is an associated diagnosis of mental retardation, commonly in the moderate range” (67). Most of the terms traditionally used by experts to define autism are heavily qualified, as Alderson and Goodey observe (251), but it is not my goal to deconstruct the diagnostic accuracy or usefulness of these terms. Rather, I am presenting the DSM definition for two reasons - (1) it is the dominant description we have for autism, which (2) means that it is quite influential in delineating a coherent image of autism that can then be portrayed in popular culture.

All the same, a definition from the inside is also necessary to balance the DSM version. Donna Williams, in *Nobody Nowhere*, describes her condition as an “emotional disability,” hypothesizing that “autism results when some sort of mechanism that controls emotion does not function properly, leaving an otherwise relatively normal body and mind unable to express themselves with the depth that they would otherwise be capable of,” an “inability to comprehend closeness [which] constrains the formation of attachments and inhibits attempts to make sense of one’s environment in infancy. Without this, perhaps the child creates within itself what it perceives as missing and in effect

becomes a world within itself to which all else is simply irrelevant, external and redundant. The child . . . does not perceive the absence of emotional attachment until he or she begins to be imposed upon by a world that expects it, along with the desire to learn and to be a part of things, which usually springs from emotional attachment and belonging" (203).

Williams' assessment of autism sounds oddly familiar, reminiscent of contemporary concerns about alienation and the inability to communicate needs and desires which has bequeathed to North American culture a burgeoning self-help industry and a plethora of "chicken-soup-soul" books. The "autistic identity" -and I am searching for common ground between the DSM and Donna Williams here - is isolated, fragmented, discontinuous, and both critical of and obsessed with itself - the hallmarks, in fact, of much that we call "modern" (and increasingly, "post-modern").

In narratives, the autistic features described by the DSM are often represented as the fundamental incommunicative nature, the intrinsic isolation, of the character with autism. Other traits significant to the diagnosis of autism, such as stereotypical repetitive behavior and the emphasis on consistent and rigid structure, seem to receive less emphasis in popular representations, although they are not absent. Instead, popular images of autism more often draw on other traits that are commonly believed to characterize autism: for instance, linking it to family dysfunction and ascribing to the autistic individual a "savant" status made manifest through some sort of "special skill."

This list of features recurring in popular images of autism risks becoming tedious, so we will leave it for the time being, returning when we have established a more coherent context for it. To do so, I want to pose a different set of questions. First, why does autism get represented in the manner that it does? The short answer is, of course, that autism is used as a metaphor in the manner described above because it seems believable to an audience. That is, it works. But why does it work? To answer this question, we need to consider autism's history, and to ask why we have such a category as autism - and why did we not have it until the 1940s?

Autism, asserts Uta Frith, does indeed exist in history, pre-1940s. She notes reports of an individual with autistic-like qualities admitted to Bethlem Hospital in 1799, noting that "the boy never engaged in play with other children or became attached to them, but played in an absorbed, isolated way with toy soldiers," and that this case has "often been quoted and never contested, as early evidence of Autism" (Autism, 16). She argues further that Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard's famous subject, Victor, the "wild boy of Aveyron," displays features of an autistic child and concludes, with some confidence, that "the evidence . . . allows us to assume that Victor was autistic" (Autism, 26). In the literary realm, Thelma Grove has argued that Charles Dickens' Barnaby Rudge, a protagonist of the 1841 novel that bears his name, is the first autistic hero in English literature, evidence of Dickens' fine skills of observation.

We must take such historical and literary assessments with a healthy dose of salt, though; as Richard Ellmann has observed, "posthumous diagnosis by biographers [are] as hazardous as diagnosis by doctors when the patient is alive" (11). Early autism sightings, tempting as they are, should lead us to ask why these apparently autistic individuals were not identified in their own time as having a specific condition distinct from "idiocy," which is how they were usually characterized.

Instead, "autism" appears only in the twentieth century. Eugen Bleuler coins the term in his 1911 work *Dementia Praecox* to describe "the most severe schizophrenics . . . [who] live in a world of their own" (63). In a monograph published the following year, *The Theory of Schizophrenic Negativism*, he notes further that "autistic schizophrenics" have "turned away from reality; they have retired into a dream life, or at least the essential part of their dissociated ego lives in a world of subjective ideas and wishes, so that to them reality can bring only interruptions" (20). However, Bleuler clearly subordinates autism as characteristic of certain types of schizophrenia. Neither does his diagnostic criteria match fully what we now consider to be autism, although there are notable similarities. For a discrete diagnostic pigeonhole, we must wait until the 1940s, when autism as we now understand it (more or less) is defined twice in two years.

Frith notes the "remarkable coincidence" that Leo Kanner, working at the Johns Hopkins

University in Baltimore, and Hans Asperger, researching at the University Paediatric Clinic, Vienna, “independently described exactly the same type of disturbed child to whom nobody had paid much attention before and both used the label autistic” (*Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, 6). The two published their seminal papers only one year apart: Kanner’s “Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact” in 1943 and Asperger’s “Autistic Psychopathy in Childhood” (“Die Autistischen Psychopathen im Kindesalter”) in 1944. The two did not know of each other or of the other’s work (although - further coincidence? - Kanner was also from Vienna, immigrating to the States in 1924), and while the conditions they describe are in some points distinct, Kanner and Asperger have generally been accepted as traveling the same road: “Asperger’s Syndrome” is increasingly accepted as a sub-category of autism, accorded a place at the “higher-functioning” end of what Lorna Wing designates the “autistic continuum” (111).

It is truly remarkable that independent researchers should at the same time identify a hitherto unrecognized pathological condition and assign it a diagnostic category. So let us think of autism as something other than a pathological condition and a diagnostic category; let us, provisionally, consider it a category influenced by politics, philosophy and aesthetics. As Alderson and Goodey observe, “theories of autism concern an extreme narrowing that excludes everything except the person’s own self” (250). They draw on Robert Proctor’s work to identify political factors in the identification of autism: Kanner, in the United States, feeling “isolated as a democracy between imperialist Japan and fascism in Europe” and Asperger in Austria “during the Nazi regime of racial hygiene and exclusion of all foreign elements” (250). They go on to note that “decades later, the theories [of autism] were revived without reference to their political origins” (250). As Alderson and Goodey suggest, as a diagnostic category, Kanner’s and Asperger’s independent descriptions of autism seem coincidental, two strange strokes of genius simultaneously casting light on autistic subjects. But placed in a broader context, they are very much products of their time and place. Kanner’s and Asperger’s “coincidental” papers suddenly seem less remarkable - the writers are seeing with the same eyes, in the same aesthetic framework.

Alderson and Goodey identify a specifically political context, but their comment is no more than an aside. Because they do not further investigate the influence of the political milieu on the two writers, their point seems reductive. However, it does raise an important issue, that of the political, intellectual and indeed aesthetic context for Kanner’s and Asperger’s diagnostic practices. It directs us to what Bill Hughes identifies as modernity’s “pervasive capacity to produce strangers” (157) through “the aesthetic moment in which the gaze is disfiguring and discriminatory” (168).

Consider some of the salient observations from each physician. In his 1943 paper, Kanner writes that “the outstanding, pathognomic, fundamental disorder is the children’s inability to relate themselves in the ordinary way to people and situations from the beginning of life” (242). A “profound aloneness dominates all their behavior,” he notes, going on to observe that the children, most of whom were “looked upon as feeble-minded,” also bear “strikingly intelligent physiognomies” and, when alone, may even assume “an expression of beatitude” (247). Indeed, Kanner continues, all of the children in his survey come from “highly intelligent parents.” Perhaps more significantly, he notes, out of this group “there are very few really warm-hearted fathers and mothers” (250). The parents, like their children, are also “strongly preoccupied with abstractions” and “limited in genuine interest in people” (250).

Asperger paints a similar picture. “The autist is only himself,” he writes, “and not an active member of a greater organism which he is influenced by and which he influences constantly” (38); people with autism are, rather, “intelligent automata” (58). Like Kanner’s subjects, Asperger’s too are physically attractive: “they can be of almost aristocratic appearance,” he notes, although adding, “possibly somewhat degenerate” (68).

Perhaps most striking of Asperger’s observations, at least for our purposes, is his description of autistic children as “egocentric in the extreme. They follow only their own wishes, interests and spontaneous impulses, without considering restrictions or prescriptions imposed from outside”

(81). This passage could be describing the protagonist in a novel by an existentialist writer such as Albert Camus or Andre Gide. The observation is further enhanced by a later observation of Asperger's: "The autistic personality," he writes, "is an extreme variant of male intelligence. . . . Boys . . . tend to have a gift for logical ability, abstraction, precise thinking and formulating, and for independent scientific observation. . . . In the autistic individual abstraction is so highly developed that the relationship to the concrete, to objects and to people has largely been lost, and as a result the instinctual aspects of adaptation are heavily reduced" (84-5).

Asperger's association of autism with male intelligence is striking, and not only for its notions of what might constitute such a thing (which I suspect were fairly cliched for his time, as for ours). It also articulates a concern with specifically masculine identity, what Peter Middleton describes as the "inward gaze" characteristic of masculine identity in modern culture (9), which had absorbed writers such as D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Ezra Pound.

I do not plan to investigate modernist writing exhaustively, but rather evoke those canonical names to float a hypothesis. I would like to suggest that autism is more than a modern condition. It is also a modernist condition. The modernist aesthetic is difficult to pin down in any brief description, but can be summarized so that it is not completely amorphous. Broadly speaking, modernism conceives of the individual as both an isolated and a fragmentary self, a being who must actively create an identity by imposing structure on experience and perception in order to establish a provisional and phenomenological reality.

Writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce argued that the modern sub-conscious is articulated through a non-linear consciousness, and individuals are marked by a dynamic idiosyncratic irrational logic. Others, such as Ernest Hemingway, insist upon the alienation of the individual from society and the difficulty, if not impossibility, of communication except through ritual that is consciously imbued with meaning. Of course, the modernist aesthetic is also implicated in existentialist philosophy as it was developed and articulated by writers like Sartre, Gide and Camus.

In this intellectual framework, it would be possible for Kanner and Asperger to understand their patients in a manner unimagined by their predecessors. Thomas Kuhn has argued that when scientific paradigms shift, researchers develop new ways in which to perceive problems. These scientific paradigms are hardly exempt from broader intellectual and aesthetic movements, and shifts in a dominant aesthetic would also affect "scientific" observation. By 1940, in the new perceptual framework defined by modernism, one could understand the idea of autistic alienation, a "profound aloneness." The children who would have seemed like odd examples of intellectually disabled children fifty years earlier assumed new features for Kanner and Asperger, features their predecessors could not have recognized because they did not have the intellectual or aesthetic framework. Autism appeared as a diagnostic category when its primary features - emotional isolation, the need to establish personal rituals to impose order on the world - appeared as critical components of the modern existential identity.

Now we can consider again the use of autism imagery in negotiating the problems of identity and language, and the relationship of the individual to his or her community. That this should be autism's dominant metaphorical use in popular culture is hardly surprising, and indeed seems inevitable, given that autism may well exist as a diagnostic category because we, as a culture, require a repository for anxieties concerning the destabilized, isolated self articulated by modernism and, later, by post-modernism.

Leslie Fiedler argues that "freaks" are expressions of a "secret self," evoking an "aboriginal shudder" in onlookers (17). Fiedler's ideal freak "challenges the conventional boundaries between . . . self and other" (24). If such is the case, could not autism be, in part at any rate, an expression of the secret fear we have of disintegration, alienation and isolation? I suggest that this "autism anxiety" is at the root not only of popular representations of autism, but of the diagnostic category "autism" itself. Consider *Rain Man* as exhibiting a sort of "autism anxiety." The film opens with Charlie Babbitt, the character played by Tom Cruise, being frustrated in his attempt to make quick money by importing

Lamborginis; just as his plans founder, his father dies. Babbitt travels to Cleveland, expecting to be the recipient of the bulk of his father's wealth, for which he mistakenly believes he is the sole heir. Instead, he finds that the fortune he had anticipated has instead gone to a trustee at an institution, which he later finds is the home of his autistic brother, Raymond (who is very much a "textbook" case, his personality characteristics clearly constructed with one eye on the DSM-IV). Charlie abducts Raymond, and begins a cross-country trek back to Los Angeles and the Lamborginis, but en route runs out of cash and his credit card is blocked. However, he soon discovers that Raymond has a "special skill": he is good with numbers and can remember huge amounts of trivial information. They head to Vegas, where, with Raymond counting cards, they are able to win the \$80,000-odd dollars needed to keep Charlie out of bankruptcy. After they arrive in Los Angeles, though, Raymond's trustee comes calling, forcing an informal hearing at which Charlie agrees that his brother is better off in the asylum. An emotionally mature Charlie sees Raymond off at the train with the promise that he will visit soon.

Rain Man is a bildungsroman, tracing the growth of Charlie from an alienated, self-obsessed person to someone who can acknowledge the needs and desires of those around him. It is also a road movie, and according to the conventions of that genre, unlikely partners must learn to get along for their mutual benefit. But in this instance, the film focuses on only one individual: other characters gain importance only in relationship to Charlie.

Raymond's autism here clearly serves as a metaphor for alienation - Charlie's alienation - and an inability to communicate. Charlie needs to "get in touch with his emotions," as the self-help books would say. The first half of the movie is replete with scenes in which Charlie demands "Are you listening to me! Listen to me! I'm talking to you!" These outbursts are inflicted on employees, lawyers, and Raymond. However, when he is challenged to talk by his girlfriend (and secretary) Suzanne, he

explains his silence defensively by saying "I'm just thinking. It's nothing special. Just thinking."

When Raymond so frustrates Charlie that the latter takes him to a doctor to seek some kind of cure, we discover that Raymond is a mathematical genius, racing the doctor's pocket calculator to solve equations. The doctor also queries Raymond on his autism, asking him "Are you autistic?" Raymond responds "I don't think so. No, definitely not." But when the question is posed, the camera is zooming in not on Raymond but on Charlie. And although we do not hear Charlie's answer, we can supply one: Yes, Charlie is still autistic. Just like Raymond.

The epiphany for Charlie, when he is able to cast off his autism, comes when he discovers that Raymond is also "the Rain Man," a vaguely-remembered figure from his early childhood whom he had thought was an imaginary friend and who once sang Beatles tunes to calm him. When Raymond's double identity is revealed, Charlie reconnects to something within that allows him to feel and express emotions as a "proper" human. Shortly after, Suzanne, who had left him in anger, returns. Charlie's world is being rebuilt, with Raymond as the catalyst. Charlie is leaving his autism behind.

While autism is potentially a radical form of "being" that could serve, by its alterity, to critique and broaden conventional notions of selfhood, its use here is very conservative. In *Rain Man* autism marks a negation of being rather than an extension of it. We are never allowed to identify for any length with Raymond - he is meant to be other, and we are given a sense of his perceptions, his reality, only to create some initial sympathy so that we can believe that Charlie will be moved by him. Raymond does not grow - he is a static character, whose only change at the end of the movie is the conviction that "K-Mart sucks." With Raymond's assistance, Charlie is able to acquire a complete self: he is financially solvent, the beloved of a good woman, reconciled with his father and his lineage. *Rain Man* is ultimately about entry into a patriarchal capitalist system: you can do it right - by caring about those around you and keeping in touch with your roots - or you can do it wrong - by exploiting people and being self-obsessed. But there is no other place to go. A choice between being a responsible patriarch or a malevolent and ambitious autocrat is the only one available to Charlie. The movie tries to stabilize identity at these presumably polar positions. The only choice for Raymond is to return to

the asylum. He can not make it on his own, and Charlie can not make it living with him.

In *Mercury Rising*, the protagonist, Art Jeffries (played by Bruce Willis), is not intrinsically alienated and emotionally scarred. Instead, the film implies, he is made that way by his FBI superiors who refuse to give him more time to negotiate with a group of bank robbers whom he has infiltrated, and instead kill the gang (except Willis) in a bloody shootout. One young and frightened gang-member dies in Jeffries' arms, causing him to assault the officer who had commanded the gunfire. For his troubles, Jeffries is demoted with "delusional paranoia" (not, alas, autism) penciled into his employment file. The death scene recurs as a flashback several times in the film, so we know that Jeffries is haunted.

Meanwhile, a government code has been accidentally cracked by a nine-year-old autistic boy, Simon Lynch (played as a vacant-eyed sleepwalker by Miko Hughes). Nicholas Kudrow (Alec Baldwin), the head of the code project, insists that Simon be killed, and while the hired assassin manages to execute the parents, the boy escapes him. The remainder of the film involves Art Jeffries trying to protect the boy and bring the killers to justice as the body count rises.

The protagonist's emotional journey is predictable. He is initially frustrated by Simon, but, driven by a sense of responsibility and justice, is able to learn to care for him. More importantly, he also is forced to go to other people - a friend from the FBI, a woman he meets on the street - for assistance. The lone agent realizes that he needs other people.

This film is primarily an action flick, so there is little overt concern with character development. When Jeffries tries to make friends with Simon - "Art is a friend," he says to the boy-he is rebuffed with the lines, "No, Art is a stranger!" This line could be a reference to the entire film, but it also marks the relationship between the two characters, Art trying to prove that he is a friend, the autistic Simon just as insistently maintaining his isolation. But Simon's autism is also a reflection on Jeffries' own emotional alienation. Shortly after the exchange quoted above, and after killing a would-be assassin on the subway, Jeffries walks back into the train and, standing behind Simon, mutters "Who are you." Like the zoom shot of Charlie Babbitt while Raymond is being asked "Are you autistic," the question applies to both characters. Art Jeffries has to discover himself as well as Simon. Later, when discussing Simon with Thomas Jordan, his sole friend from the force (a black cop, thus also an outsider), he has no answer for Jordan's question: "Are we talking about him, Art, or are we talking about you."

The film explores Jeffries' struggle to maintain independence while becoming emotionally functional. He tends toward the isolated and aloof. Kudrow, on the other hand, explains his crimes as patriotism and subordination to the national interest: "America is one big team," he says, suggesting that he is playing his team role in ordering the deaths those who could compromise his code. For Jeffries, the middle way, where he can be both independent and emotionally engaged, is represented by his commitment to Simon and, in turn, to those who help him save the boy.

Simon himself remains no more than a medium through which the emotionally wounded Jeffries can be healed. The character is not developed - he could just have easily been a machine that breaks the code, except for the importance of his relationship to his protector. The role is performed as one of Asperger's "intelligent automata." The scriptwriters grant Simon the ability to express fear (there is a lot of screaming), but other personal characteristics are muted. At the end of the film, however, Simon embraces Art Jeffries, a sign to the audience that, appearances to the contrary, Jeffries has not only broken through the child's emotional barriers but has also proven himself in the role of "a friend."

These two movies were both mainstream successes, with Dustin Hoffman winning an Academy Award for his efforts, and *Mercury Rising* making a decent profit despite generally indifferent reviews. But despite the garlands and dollars, the autistic characters are not developed. In fact, Hoffman said of his role, "I can't do a character here. I've got to have you think this disability is my own" (quoted in Hucyk and Gregory, 54). Hoffman says he was performing "autism," not the role of a particular individual with autism. The same is even more noticeable in the performance of the young

actor in *Mercury Rising*.

Autism, as Donna Williams has pointed out, is hyper-individualistic, and as such performs a critique of individualism. By pushing to the boundaries the degree of alienation or separation that people can experience, the concept of autism also challenges the notion of the individual, the one, as self-sufficient, because, as Williams and others have again pointed out, people with autism also need the support and acceptance of a community if they are to survive happily. That is, identity is something that must be negotiated, for people with autism as well as the rest of us.

Both of the mainstream films presenting autistic characters also deal with the problem of identity: what it is, how to express it or reconcile oneself to it. These films flirt (unintentionally?) with the idea that the autistic continuum also moves through the human continuum - the idea that, to borrow an image from Anne Alvarez, we all have "autistic islands" (itself a nice inversion of Leo Kanner's notion that people with autism have "islets of ability"). However, in the end, anxiety wins out. The protagonists shed their autism while the autistic characters, confirmed as truly different, return to their separate worlds.

In *Rain Man*, Raymond Babbitt performs an ironic function -his autism cures Charlie of Charlie's own increasingly "autistic" behavior, enabling him to go forth into the world of commerce and capital a better man. Raymond, having served this function, is exiled again to the asylum. In *Mercury Rising*, Simon and Art are both outsiders, and the story is in part about their "bonding." The emotional payoff for the audience (after the bloody deaths of the villains) is to be found in Simon's confirmation of Art in his new (non-autistic) identity as a "friend." Simon is placed in a foster home and returns to his classes at the Chicago Neuropsychiatric Training Institute. The ending feeds the hope that one day, Simon, like Art, will be less autistic.

Why the interest in autism? As I have suggested, *Rain Man* and *Mercury Rising* express a sort of "autism anxiety." This anxiety, I suspect, is based in concern over the stability of identity in a fragmented contemporary culture. *Rain Man* seeks to reaffirm the dominance of a "benevolent" patriarchy, to show that conventional structures of identity can indeed work if only we try harder. Dustin Hoffman has said "Deep down, *Rain Man* is about how autistic we all are" (quoted in Huyck & Gregory, 54); but it isn't really. It's about how autistic (how text-book!) Raymond is, and how fortunate Charlie is to be able to overcome his "autism." The condition is admitted within Charlie briefly, but ends up being all Raymond's. Plucky Charlie is the one we are ultimately all meant to identify with - the guy with the girl, the money, and the car. *Mercury Rising*, on the other hand, subordinates the autistic character to the benevolent protector whose assumption of responsibility and sense of duty enable him to rise above his own "autistic" inclinations. Art Jeffries' "autism" was a moral abdication, a retreat from good intentions that went astray (as the constant flashbacks remind us). Simon offers Jeffries the opportunity to recover his authority, thus reaffirming the primary importance of the individual will in defining identity.

I have tried to make two main points here which deserve some sort of brisk summary. (1) Autistic characters in film tend to represent a component of the protagonist's identity, existing to tell us things about the protagonist, rather than to be characters in their own right. (2) Autism - the idea of autism -is presently a useful metaphor for socio-cultural reasons. The contexts in which we establish identity are enormously unstable, threatening the idea of (and desire for) a unified yet socially connected self.

Autism is more than simply a good metaphor for expressing this sense of threat. Its feasibility as a diagnostic category may well be predicated on the growing concern over what constitutes the self, over how identity can be formed and stabilized, over how definitive structures can be maintained. The anxiety of identity characteristic of modernism needs a repository, a containment centre, a contrast group to allow us the belief in our own identities. What could better address this desire than the idea of autism?

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