

## **The Limit: a Fundamental Question for the Subject in the Human Experience**

Willy Apollon

GIFRIC

*From oneself to the Other, from the unrepresentable quest of desire to the space of the receivable structured by the social link, from the audible (where the time of the quest is structured) to the visible (where the absence of its object reveals itself), the human lacerates itself in the impossible articulation of a passage to the limit. Borders that are forever to be reconstructed recount something that is impossible to say, in the process of which each one of us ceaselessly redefines his or her position in the difficult response to the only question that counts : “ up to what point can I go too far, without cutting myself off from others ? “<sup>1</sup>*

In a recent documentary about the 388, the center for the psychoanalytic treatment of young psychotics that Gifric has created in Quebec City, Dr. Danielle Bergeron, the director of the center, made a remark that will serve as an essential theoretical reference for the problematic that I will develop here. She drew attention to the fact that scientific data, the theoretical problematics and the clinical approaches that they refer to, are all based on observation, whereas the psychoanalytic clinic and the metapsychology that founds its ethical practice are instead founded on experience that belongs as much to the clinicians as to the subjects of psychoanalysis. Reference to an experience that cannot be the object of either observation or experimentation by a third party is decisive today in the debate that opposes psychoanalysis to those so-called scientific approaches that contradict it.

It is important to measure the radical difference between these theoretical and clinical approaches, which indicate two points of view that, in many ways, pose two opposite conceptions of human reality. Dialogue between these two conceptions is not only desirable, but necessary. But first, they must be correctly located and positioned. My position here will be to emphasize that the problem is not simply a matter of two opposing conceptions or philosophies. Rather, the problem has to do with the expression of two fundamental dimensions of the human experience. My aim here will be to explore these two dimensions of experience, which, in a certain fashion, both nullify and found the question of borders on the side of observation, and the question of limits on the side of subjective experience.

Scientific observation places the human subject in the position of an object—one thing among others in a space that is defined and controlled. Psychology, psychiatry, medicine, and a whole host of other disciplines that are of less concern to us here, all understand the individual and his or her behavior and social conduct—or the parts of the individual and their behaviors—as things, as objects that are observable in a space where the rules of acceptable behavior for such objects are defined for those who observe them. Whether observation is direct or technologically assisted, it remains the case that one cannot separate the results of the study from the rules that govern and define both the modalities of the gaze and the analysis of the observer—either for the scientist or the clinician who bases her approach on science. Indeed, the human sciences are aligned, almost exclusively, with the model of the natural sciences, and particularly with biology. Their data is collected in the same way, such that whether it is collected by direct observation or by technologically assisted observation, the observations will have been determined by a community of observers who define the framework of its reception. It is from within this scientific framework that the notion of conclusive evidence derives its prestige. The individual is reduced to scientific data that sanctions the status of a thing within a scientifically controlled, defined space: he is reduced to his conduct, the behavior of the parts of which he is composed. It is important to underscore the fundamental dimension of nomination [*la nomination*] within this operation—namely, the observation of an object. Technically assisted observation, which can take on extremely complicated technical dimensions, realizes its essential function only in partitioning reality with all the rigor that contemporary computer science and mathematics allow. Indeed, each section of this partitioned observable reality can be reduced to analyzable numbers that can be used to construct computer models. The naming of each section of observed, or potentially observable, reality, or even of each piece of each section of reality, can and must sustain the illusion of a reality that is technically reconstructed, and which is thus susceptible to a corrective intervention. What is underestimated in this operation, once it passes from the scientist to the practitioner, is that being can no more be reduced to what is observable than the individual can be reduced to his image in the mirror. The illusion that sustains such an error is without doubt a particular instance of confusing the internal limits of science

with the boundaries that must define the relationship between science and the practices claimed by it.

This is a human problem whose foundation in experience we must explore with respect to what psychoanalysis today allows us to say about this experience. To do this, we must return to the stakes of what psychoanalysis has traditionally designated as the Freudian stages of the development of the child—not so much to give a new account, but to defend the hypothesis of what is logically implied in the experience of the human being. Indeed, the problematic of the stages of a child's development is generally presented as a discourse that wants to be scientific and that takes account of the observations of psychoanalysts and of others who claim this approach. Such observations, and the excellent research that has sustained them and is still being promoted today in order to better understand the development of the child, deserve all of our attention. But parallel to these observations, the psychoanalysis of the child introduces a number of questions that add to these observations a dimension that is not reducible to development. These questions bear very precisely on what is at stake for the child, which these observations can never account for.

### ***The Audible: the Rupture of the Spirit***

To introduce these questions I will refer to Jacques Lacan's mirror stage and Freud's phallic stage. These references allow for highly effective hypotheses, both theoretical and clinical, regarding the experience of the child both before and after the mirror stage, and during and after the phallic phase. Lacan's mirror stage is concerned with the moment that the child recognizes himself in the image at which his mother smiles in the mirror. This observation is especially important insofar as it introduces a logical question that does not belong, precisely, to the order of the observable. To sustain this line of questioning I will first consider the period before the mirror stage, when the child is barely able to distinguish forms in the masses of light and shadow.

We have often mentioned that the child enters into humanity through the distinction that he necessarily experiences in his being, well before he is conscious of it, between the father's voice and all the sounds that accompany his embryonic existence within his mother. This voice distinguishes itself in that it has specific effects in the

uterine environment of the child, as much through the drive responses of the mother to this voice, as through the incalculable effects of these affective and drive reactions of the mother on the neurophysiological formation and functioning in which the development of the child is engaged.

The strangeness of this voice, its exteriority with respect to everything that generates sounds in the uterine environment of the child, and its effects on this environment will no doubt cause the child who is yet to be born to be resensitized to the voice of the mother as distinct from the sounds of the neurophysiological functioning of the different organs that are in play in this uterine environment. This surging forth of the audible in the living being and in the child's universe determines his entrance into humanity, or its birth into what we traditionally call the spirit (where the French *esprit*, much like the German *Geist*, designates both the "mind" and the "spirit," or the spiritual dimension of the mind).

Without going more into detail about the event that marks the first humanization of the child to be born, I want to discuss the primordial temporality of mental representation within it. A common confusion consists in taking the mental image for a mental representation. The former presupposes visual perception. The mental image reproduces, within the interior silence of the living being, the perception of an object in the space in which its environment is structured. As such, the mental image is the reproduction within consciousness of an external visual perception. What we call consciousness is constituted through this capacity for reproduction, which allows the living being to position itself in space. But the fundamental point we must emphasize here is that the perception at stake in the mental image is not only visual, but is sustained by a process of nomination that identifies as specific a form in the environment. Indeed, for the mental image to be possible, not only must the form that it reproduces be perceived, but this visual perception must be able to be replaced by the simple statement of the name of the perceived reality. The mental representation is not sustained by any form that is perceived in the reality of the environment. It subsists in the pure time of its enunciation, independent of all perception. It is constituted in the audible, without the support of a perception that would attach it to some entity within the environmental space. Indeed, there is a complete and total difference between

naming a tree, a cat, the light or anything else that a visual perception could support in reality, and naming a god, an angel, or tenderness, for example, which are pure mental representations without any perceptual support in reality. The mental representation is constituted within the field of the audible that structures human temporality, just as Beethoven's Ninth Symphony cannot be reduced to any factual account that would attempt to make it visible. It is a veritable effraction of the living being, which opens onto a dimension where things escape its control.

First, the child is confronted by the mental representation in its specifically auditory dimension. Nothing of what he can perceive corresponds to this auditory event that traverses his body and which is for him the object carried by the voice of the Other. The fact remains that this object of the voice, with respect to which he is powerless, defenseless, and without recourse, is not without effects that at times ravage both the being of his mother and his own being. It is this originary time that we suggest should be considered as the experience that overdetermines everything that is otherwise observable in the behavior of the child in the oral stage. This radical experience of the confrontation with the audible and the management of its effect of effraction in his being is without a doubt at the origin of the constitution of the child's body, and above all requires more investment of energy than even feeding, which finds itself subverted. The manuals of biology and neurophysiology have habituated us to a logic of functioning considered natural to the organism. Their strategies are taken from observation and from experiments that tend to make observation more precise in order to make it more clinically profitable. But they remain silent about what they can neither observe nor experiment upon, but which we cannot logically ignore. The work entailed in the child's confrontation with the audible and his management of its consequences overdetermines the formation of his body (as the site of this effraction) and its detachment from the organism, making it function at times according to a logic that has more to do with the effects of the audible than with the neurophysiological logic.

This surging forth of the spirit or mind in the subversion of his biological being forms the basis for the child of what will be later experienced as an absence of boundaries, on the one hand between the spiritual (the subversion of the audible) and the biological, and, on the other hand, between the psychical, or the being's reaction to

the effraction, and the spirit or body. Where the object of our discussions is concerned, it is in this primordial time that the subjective conditions of the experience of the limit are decided, in the places where fundamentally no boundary is conceivable. The time of the living being's effraction by the audible, the pure mental representation, can prove to be very painful, and even terrifying for the being at the dawn of his existence. From the neurotic to the psychotic and from the psychotic to the autistic these questions of boundaries and limits have not ceased to preoccupy clinicians, both analysts and others. Depending upon whether one trusts observational data or the logic of the experience, the opposing responses introduce boundaries along with the designation of the observable. Here also, we must go back to the source.

### ***The Mother Tongue***

For the child who is grappling with the effraction of the audible, the function of the mother is very rapidly put in place. In the animal, the female is the progenitor, she engenders a being in a physically determined environment. The woman is a mother, she engenders the human being in the audible, in the effraction of the physical by a dimension that is neither presentable, nor observable, nor experimental, and that transcends the physical and confronts the being with an original response that is not an adaptation. It is also true that the ethical conduct of the human mother cannot be calculated or studied through the behavior of an animal progenitor.

Beyond extending the affective, corporeal uterine environment, the mother names things to permit the child to access visual perception, which is the basis of consciousness and of the construction of space. Little by little all the objects in the immediate environment will be named and situated by the mother. Thus a space is constituted out of things that are seen because they are named and which can come to occupy the imagination and the consciousness of the child. This constitution of perceptible space by the mother tongue frees the child from the bewildering and frightening hold of the audible. It is certainly true that the words that name the environmental world for the child and that situate him among the things furnishing the space that he will, from then on, inhabit, have an audible dimension. They are the objects of the maternal voice. But at the same time, these words reflect something that

the child perceives in space. They are not pure objects of the audible that traverse the subjective time of the child, which neither he nor his mother can grasp, and with respect to which he is without recourse. Within the mother tongue, words join the audible to a visual perception where that which is heard has its effects limited by perception itself. This limit is much more important in that it is overdetermined by an entire culture. The mother tongue not only creates the space of visual perception that marks out for the child the effect of the effraction of the audible; it articulates the surging forth of spirit to consciousness such as it is defined within a given culture. Through the mother tongue, the child perceives that which is named within his culture. By naming things and by structuring space the mother tongue articulates the consciousness of the child to a historical culture, which offers in itself a boundary to the audible and to mental representation.

In opening the child to the space of perception and to the consciousness of things, the mother's speech allows him to be born into the symbolic, to that part of the audible that rules the lives of humans, that detaches them from the physical environment in order to plunge them into the universe of the spirit where the things said and wished for, indeed the things that are imposed upon us, do not have any consistency in observable and experimentable reality and are not objects of science. This act of engendering the child in the symbolic also forms the ground of what Freudians call repression. It is indeed in this domain of pure mental representation that a historical society makes the choices that mark the life of each of its members. In putting in place the mother tongue, the mother's speech determines for the child the radical difference between what is heard and said without being present to visual perception and that thus escapes all control, and what constitutes the space of the collective and individual consciousness, where what is said can be seen and falls under the control of the Other. This specific experience to which the child is led by the mother's speech conditions the child's experience of the limits between himself, others, and things, such as those that confront him in the stakes of the mirror stage and the anal stage.

This constitution of the space of perceptible things by the mother's speech leaves intact, to a certain point, the universe of the audible, where the mental representation of the object of the voice continues its work in the child's being. The

child is therefore confronted by a double universe, that of things *said*, and by virtue of being named rendered perceptible and delivered to consciousness, and that of things *heard*, which provoke anxiety and remain outside of what is named in the mother tongue and not presentable to visual perception. This second universe risks, at every moment, contaminating the first, thus introducing anxiety and compromising security. The things in the perceptible universe can thus lose their consistency if the universe created by the mother tongue is contaminated or penetrated by the universe of mental representations. The border between these two universes appears porous. To protect themselves from the universe of the audible, from the moment they experience the construction of a space of nameable and perceivable things, some children, in particular autistic children, can develop an attitude of rejection with respect to the audible. The perceptible then overtakes the audible, to the point of trying to eliminate it, in order to protect the being from the effects of the signifier of the Other. Despite the logical function of the mother's speech in articulating a share of the audible in the constitution of the space of the perceptible, for these children such an operation seems to lead to nothing but a blurring of the borders that separate the mental representation and its effects in the body from the universe of things that visual perception presents to consciousness. To limit the action of the audible that he cannot control, it becomes logical to reduce to a minimum the possible contacts with the Other.

***From the Lack in the Other to the Object of Desire***

Indeed, the mother's speech supports the child in producing a space of perception that conditions its consciousness of being in the world. This speech also introduces the child to the difference between the space where he perceives the things that are said and the intimate temporality in which he grapples with the things that are heard but which he cannot perceive. The child is certainly not conscious of this difference, which is not without effects in his body, but he must nonetheless manage the consequences of this difference. In particular, the child cannot not search the space of visual perception for that which is heard without being named in the mother's speech. Something in his lived experience escapes being named by the mother's speech. And that which is thus lacking in the space of perception continues to subvert, in his body,



the logic of the organism. Both the mass of food and the mass of excrement return him to the lived experiences that do not necessarily fall under the nomination of maternal speech. But these internal objects, in particular the mass of excrement, may nonetheless sustain for the child a certain relation to the audible and to its effects on his being in the world, of things that are heard and that are not perceptible in space that act on his being.

It is at a specific moment between the sixteenth and eighteenth month that the mirror stage, first identified by Henri Wallon as an apparatus that promotes the unification of the body image, then taken up by Jacques Lacan to articulate the formation of the 'I,' comes into effect. We must here take the mirror stage into consideration to detail the logic of the experience that imposes itself on the child. Many things have been written after Lacan and Dolto about what can be observed, or even experimented on, in this decisive moment of the formation of the subject of speech. What I want to draw your attention to here is a particular experience that the child must manage at a precise moment. Indeed, we could advance the logical hypothesis that the child who comes into contact with the mirror as the specific site of production of the perceptible seeks in vain for the image of what is heard but not presentable in the space of reality constituted by his mother's speech. We must not underestimate this hypothesis. In the same fashion, the child will not perceive, in the mirror, the image of what he feels, in particular the image of the effects of the signifier on his being. Thus, the experience of the mirror—where the child, like everyone else, is only dealing with one half of the image of the bodily surface—will be a primordial experience of lack for the child. He searches in the mirror, just as he has searched in the reality established in his mother tongue, for the object carried by the voice, for an image that would make the audible perceptible for him, and that he does not find. It is probably his first experience of lack, of a specific form of lack in the space of reality that mobilizes in him a quest that structures his subjective time. Once again, the fact that the child is not conscious of the phenomenon that escapes our observation, but which the logic of experience imposes, does not at all prevent this quest for the unrepresentable that is created in him by the audible, by the signifier that came from the Other, from being henceforth at the heart of his life. Thus another scene is established, which Freud calls the unconscious, over which the child

has no control, and where all that is essential in his life, his desire, the irrepressible quest for an unrepresentable object, will be decided.

This is how what psychoanalysis calls the object, the object of desire in particular, is determined in the first months of life. It is first and foremost a lack introduced at the heart of the being by the word, as the unrepresentable object of the voice of the Other, that makes a hole in the psychic space and that mobilizes the drive in an impossible quest to satisfy itself within reality. What is introduced by the signifier of the Other remains in the subjective time of the audible, below the space of the perceptible things created by the mother tongue. Inaccessible to perception, its absence articulates itself to presence itself and rips apart any relationship between the child's subjective temporality and the space where he is required to recognize the things that are named by others. His human spirit articulates itself to this absence and this ripping apart, with no barrier against what is at play in his body as a response and a reaction of the drive to his failed quest for the object introduced in his life by the signifier of the Other. The wound of the effraction of his being by the object that comes from the voice of the Other is managed in a singular fashion by the autistic. To protect himself he will go to the point of eliminating the very possibility of reentering into a relation with this voice.

The relationship of the child to the fecal mass takes on a special strategic signification. In the relationship to what his body can produce and expel as an object, at first imperceptible but named as a thing in the space of the mother tongue, the child achieves a certain control over what the signifier of the Other 'introduces' in him. For a time the feces can have the function of representing, in space, the lacking object that is the product of the signifier. The control of the feces, which for the observer is toilet training that inserts the child in the social link, takes on a dimension for the child that is totally different, and much more fundamental. For him it has to do both with managing his relationship with the mental representation, that object fallen from the voice of the Other, and with trying to exert control over, or to escape from, the effect of this thing on his being. His dietary problems and his digestive problems can have a meaning that is completely different from their meaning for medical science.

The child, in quest of a limit to the effect that the signifier of the Other has on his being, experiences the powerlessness of his parents with respect to the cause of his anxiety. No appeal for help seems to be able to provide him relief from this captivation by the audible where the signifier of the Other governs what he can have access to. Above all, an incalculable part of his energy is diverted and torn away, mobilized by the signifier that came from the Other to invest this inaccessible object, stricken from the space of perceptible things, this unnamed object that is excluded from the mother tongue. This energy that ravishes the living being through the surging up of the spirit within the audible is what Freud names the drive, to distinguish it from the instinct that articulates the being into the environmental space structured by the mother tongue. The child experiences this drive, which invests the mental representation of the object of the voice, as a part of his being that is ravished by the voice of the Other. The loss that the child suffers at the hands of the Other returns his anxious search for a limit to the power of the Other, if not to the signifier, to dispose of his life. It introduces a logical question for the child, who will want to know just how much too far the Other will go in disposing of his energy and his life. The relation of the child to the Other takes on a primordial dimension, more determining of his existence than what defines his entrance into the social link.

### ***Language, Oedipus and the Phallus***

The moment comes when the child is inevitably confronted with paternal speech, or with its substitute. This speech is alien to the nomination of things that institutes the space of visual perception, and introduces instead the rules that define the distinctions between the positions in the family, and the possible relations between the members of the small social group. By the mere fact of his presence, in the difference of his position with respect to the child's relationship with the body and the discourse of the mother, the father introduces the fact of language. From the very start the mode of his relationship with both the mother and the child supposes rules. Their entrance into play at the moment when the child can finally free himself from the exclusivity of his relationship to the mother introduces the child into a space ordered by rules and no longer only by the object of the voice and its effects in his body. This situation upsets

the relationship of the child both to the space of conscious perception and to the intimate rhythm of his lived temporality that is imposed by the signifier. The child must make his entrance into the social link, unless like the autistic child he has already renounced it.

This strategic moment is articulated by Freud in what it is customary to call the Oedipal complex. Here again the observation of the child's behavior and the worry that one should intervene to make the behavior conform to both familial expectations and social ideals can distance us from a consideration of what is supposed in the logic of the child's experience, insofar as the adult can rediscover that logic in the course of analysis. In fact, in his experience the child will encounter, in this entrance into language, limits, psychic territories and borders imposed by the very structure of the social link. All human society defines itself by determining in some way what part of the mental representation caused by the audible will determine the conditions of coexistence. One could say that society organizes itself by defining which mental representations will be receivable in society and which will be excluded. One of the characteristics of our epoch is that it is ripped apart by a confrontation of civilizations. Societal choices about values and mental representations have overdetermined the historical development of those societies forced into mutual confrontation by globalization, dividing them to such an extent that the choices are themselves in peril. The ideals, the values, the customs, the norms, and the prohibitions that structure the social link in one society, can be in direct opposition with those that structure another society. The clash between societies is thus founded on radical oppositions derived from the audible, more than on simple economic stakes.

The child in the Oedipal stage suffers the shock of the encounter with language that structures the social link by imposing unjustifiable rules on the space of conscious perception in the mother tongue. These rules, ideals, values, and prohibitions are based on the historical choices that a society makes about the mental representations that result from religious or other beliefs, but are not founded on the perceptual reality that balasts consciousness. Indeed, the social link into which he must enter is structured by the audible, the signifier of the Other, but not by the same signifier of the Other that haunted his spirit and mobilized his energies until now. He is faced with a choice of

mental representations that are determined by his parents and by society, and by the radical rejection of the other representations that are active in him, mobilizing his drives or already invested by them. An important part of his being thus finds itself rejected, censured, and banished from all representation in the social link. He has already experienced the impossibility of finding, in the space of perceptual reality, the object that his desire has sought out ever since the effraction of the audible in him; now, he must confront the censor that banishes it from the social link, where an important share of his quest must evolve. In the limits imposed by the minimal social link into which he enters, the child nonetheless finds balasts and barriers for the anxiety created by the effraction of the audible and the effects produced in him by the signifier of the Other. It falls to him, however, to manage these boundaries introduced by the rules that govern the social link.

In this period of childhood the Oedipal complex is structure of the minimal, but very effective, social link where he must evolve to make himself recognized as a member of society who counts for others and on whom they can count. Generally, observations of this period accent the consequences of love and rivalry governing the child's behavior with respect to his parents. But one can also consider that these behaviors are merely the observable consequences of more fundamental stakes. Through the minimal social link that he must negotiate, the child does not deal directly with the cultural ideals, values and prohibitions, but rather with the parental interpretation of these ideals, values, and prohibitions. The parental interpretations, which can sometimes pervert these values and ideals, are largely influenced by the dissatisfactions of adults. The unsatisfied desires, the censured representations and aspirations, fruitless investments of the drive that inhabit the imaginary of the parents are so many filters that, in the form of superegoic exigencies, confuse themselves with and transform the values and the ideals that are promoted by familial education. The child is unable to distinguish the demands resulting from parental dissatisfaction from the cultural exigencies to which everyone is submitted. What adults identify as the child's love or jealousy or rivalry with respect to his parents would benefit from being considered in the light of his need to be recognized and counted by adults, whose exigencies, words, attitudes, silences, angers, joys, and so

many acts—perceived and interpreted without their knowing—the child must take into account.

At the center of this key historical moment in his quest for a place and a recognition in the social link, what imposes itself on the child for the first time with the identification of rules, limits, and boundaries that seem the same for all, is the need to express his quest for something other than what is offered in the social link. Without his being conscious of it himself, a logical phase imposes itself on him, which is defined by the need to find a place and a form of expression for these representations that inhabit and structure his subjective time, mobilizing his drive and making his existence alien to the social link where he is invited to take his place. He must find the words that will carry his childish quest into the adults' space, with some chance of being rejected beyond the demands that are imposed upon him. This important period in the phallic phase gives the child a chance to risk his singularity in the space of the social link, breaking with the meaning of things that its rules determine through the rupture that the signification of his desires as a child introduces into it. Indeed, the law of the father that supports the censuring of non-receivable representations is also what authorizes the child to try to negotiate his subjective difference by making a breach in the space that ties him to the mother. As the child negotiates, in his relationship with his parents, the difference that makes him a stranger to their demands and their expectations, he will encounter obstacles. These obstacles will be translated in his body through the modality of the symptom. What haunts his unconscious to the point of separating him from others, what cannot be said, will take the form of the symptom in order to express itself despite everything.

Indeed, the analytic experience teaches us that the audible, the mental representation that does not have access to the space of conscious perception, and all the drives that it mobilizes in the body, form the active center of what is at work in the unconscious. They determine the logic of our acts, reactivating what was censored from the social link in childhood, and sustaining the quest for a mode or a form of expression negotiable either in our acts and in the positions we take, or in the symptoms that express the logic of the fantasy where the audible is given visibility. In any case, with or without our participation these pulsional investments of mental

representation and of the censured express themselves in one way or another. This structural fact is translated in the experience of the child and the adolescent by the feeling of estrangement from the values and ideals that society demands and expects from them. They desire something else. The singularity of their interior functioning confirms them in a position of subjective exception with respect to the norm. For them, beginning with Oedipal childhood, this exceptional character of their subjective position finds a signification only in the overstepping of common positions. It is not a matter of transgression for them, despite the scandalous dimension that the reference to a sanction sometimes gives it. The limit that they evaluate and calculate in their own experience of desire and in their passion for what the drive in them invests as mental representation, goes beyond what is receivable in the social space in which they evolve.

The confrontation with disapproval and the sanction it elicits signifies at the beginning of adolescence a blurring of the boundaries that separate it from childhood. It is in adolescence that the will to live and to face up to what the phallus already emblemized in childhood takes shape. The unconscious singularities that justified for the child subject his exceptional position with respect to the ideals and the prohibitions through which others anchored him to the social link founded his refusal to participate or to obey as well as his will to be recognized in his difference. These singularities inevitably lead him beyond the limits considered acceptable within the family or at school. Demanding to be recognized, the child in this singular position refuses to have his breaking of acceptable limits reduced to a simple transgression. He then definitively sets out on a path that will lead him out of childhood. He realizes, sometimes with terror, that the boundaries that separate him from adolescence are within him, inseparable from his desire for something other than what the social link offers. Childhood discovers in itself its own limit when the position of exception where it is placed by the singularities of the unconscious renders insoluble the conflict that opposes him to others in the social link. This moment is the one that strikes the observer who interrogates the child's social and familiar behaviors. For his part, the child knows very well that nothing will be as it was before, when he can no longer shrink back from that question whose response will cast him into the arena of his life completely alone: "Up to what point can I go too far without cutting myself off from others?"

Translated by Daniel Wilson

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<sup>1</sup> The following is the general abstract for the essays by Apollon, Bergeron, and Cantin in this Special Issue: “In the mode of the numerical analysis of partial differential equations in the mathematics of the nineteenth century, the question of the limit takes on, in psychoanalysis today, a historic dimension within the particular field of the clinic of the psychoses. But the interest of this question goes beyond the mere field of the psychoses. More radically, it introduces us to a properly human dimension. In fact, this question of the limit refers us to a subjective experience that confronts the singular being with an impossibility, the stakes of which are perfectly expressed in the more generalizable notion of the border [*frontière*]. In psychoanalysis, the problematic of the limit introduces us to three determinate dimensions. The psychic dimension opens onto questions concerning the autonomy of the psychic structures and their borders. These questions, which divide psychoanalysts, turn around the notion of the possible or impossible passage from one structure to another. A properly clinical dimension, concerning the practices of psychoanalysts, introduces us to the question of the limits of such practices. This question is subverted today by the most recent advances in the psychoanalysis of the psychoses in Quebec. Finally, the ethical dimension, unavoidable today, imposes between the scientist and the politician the stakes of desire, i.e. of the desirable [*le souhaitable*], between the possible and the impossible on the one hand, and between the censured and the receivable on the other hand.”