***Autisme, j’accuse!* : Life-writing, autism, and politics in the work of Hugo Horiot**

**Abstract**

Autism has generated a great deal of controversy, culturally, intellectually and politically. The context for this in recent years in France is unusual and has been the site of strong antagonism. These debates are political in terms of policy implications and disagreements along political lines but also entail the politics of knowledge, and the question of who has the right to speak for whom. Competing groups – parents, ‘experts’, and autistic adults have different claims to validity as knowledge-bearers. This epistemological validity is vital to creating wider public understanding and determining policy directions. Autism life-writing is a new phenomenon in French and contributes to this set of debates. In order to illuminate this further, this article will offer an account of the first best-selling memoir by an autistic individual in France. The book, *L’Empereur, c’est moi*, is by Hugo Horiot, and was published in 2013, at the height of the ‘autism battle’ in the French public sphere.

**Keywords**

Autism in France; Hugo Horiot; life-writing; disability; neurodiversity; politics of knowledge.

**Introduction: the context for autism life writing in France**

At the beginning of April 2018, Emmanuel Macron announced a new five year plan for autism policy. The *Stratégie Nationale pour l’autisme 2018-22* would devote the sum of 340 million Euros to autism related initiatives. The five ‘flagship commitments’ which appear on the government website provide a snapshot of a key political moment for this area of policy in France. This outline of objectives seems, at first glance, to be simply a matter of priority setting and identifying gaps in provision. Significant emphasis is placed on improving rates of early diagnostic intervention, in particular for children under two years old. The need for educational inclusion for autistic children is stressed. The need to aim higher in terms of the social inclusion of autistic adults through their participation in the workforce is laid out, a relatively new policy emphasis, due in part to the report commissioned from the autistic writer, Josef Schovanec, and submitted a year earlier as part of the process of drawing up the strategy (Schovanec, 2017). Strikingly, however, commitments are also made to developing the knowledge base behind policy formation, in order to ‘remettre la science au coeur de la politique publique de l’autisme’. The idea of ‘delay’ is centrally placed, with the need to ‘rattraper notre retard’ in terms of *scolarisation*. Finally, the expertise of parents is endorsed and the need to connect this to the politics of research and policy in this area stated.

These commitments testify to the controversial nature of autism related policy in France over the last six years in particular, and are the distillation of competing claims from different constituencies. The neutral sounding ‘scientific’ commitment, in particular, represents a renewed challenge to the place of psychoanalysis in relation to child psychiatry which has been contested in recent years (Orchard, 2013). This *Stratégie nationale* is, in fact, the fourth *Plan Autisme* launched since the *Loi handicap* of 2005, as well as the 2012 *Année de Grande Cause nationale*. This document, however, gives unprecedented prominence to the idea of admitting a comparatively weak position in relation to international expectations and standards, notably in terms of the lack of trained professionals to carry out the clinical work of diagnosis; and in terms of the failure to include around 80% of children diagnosed with autism in full-time mainstream education (Philip, 2014). The funding aims to target increased training of appropriate staff to undertake this, as well as for school learning support.

Amongst the first to criticise this policy initiative was Hugo Horiot, a writer and actor who is himself autistic, and who published his third book in March 2018, *Autisme, j’accuse!* State provision was finally being moved in the right direction, he argued, but the level of funding was catastrophically inadequate, and failed to register the scale of the problems (Horiot in Nau, 2018). Horiot came to prominence with his memoir, *L’Empereur, c’est moi*, first published in 2013 which is an account of his early childhood up to the age of sixteen, written when in his early thirties. This was followed by a second memoir, *Carnet d’un Imposteur*, published three years later in 2016. Over the period since his first book, Horiot has become a well-known voice in French mainstream and social media, particularly in the last few years, has been regularly invited on to broadcasts to speak about autism-related matters, and has built a profile as an autism rights advocate, policy commentator and campaigner. Hugo Horiot welcomed the admission of delay in terms of inclusion – educational, work-based, and lifelong for autistic adult and children. Given the extent of the problems however, he argued, the promised resourcing could not match the ambition (Horiot, 2018). The emphasis on new configurations in research was also welcome but vague. If this were to remain unclarified, or if it were to become focused mostly on genetic causes, this would be unhelpful, or indeed could focus on the aim of ‘eradication’, as the autistic blogger and writer, Julie Dachez warned in her response to the strategy (Dachez, 2018).

The recourse to international policy expectations, the place acceded to parents’ voices, and the emphasis on a different type of knowledge formation underpinning policy are all products of the politicisation of debates between and amongst certain groups. The issues here are not simply concerned with funding but are about questions of fundamental approach, and of who has the right to speak for whom. The polarisation of this debate in what was called the *bataille de l’autisme* (Laurent, 2012) followed on from the report published in March 2012 by the *Haute autorité de santé* (HAS) which took issue with the use of psychoanalytic techniques in autism care in France, and which recommended instead the use of behavioural and educational methods for autistic children. In this ‘guerre des pratiques’ (Favereau, 2016), the idea of linear progress, of evolution towards a better approach and deviation from this as retrograde and a delay, was anathema to psychiatrists and psychoanalysts (Aflalo, 2012; Laurent, 2012). Educational types of ‘therapies’ or interventions were viewed by the latter camp as ‘anglo-saxon’ expansionism founded on an uncritical espousal of behaviourism through the intensive educational interventions developed in the US, such as the TEACCH method.

**Who has the right to speak for whom: autism voices**

Parent associations, that is to say, associations formed by parents of young autistic children, had increasingly organised to express their frustration with, and hostility towards, state provision and its huge lack of inclusion – of their voices, and of their children. This was the culmination of a long and desperate struggle for recognition and of demands for provision based on ‘éducation’ rather than ‘soin’, as has been researched over a long period by Brigitte Chamak, and more recently by some other social scientists (Chamak, 2014, 2010, 2009, 2008; Rattaz, 2014; Philip, 2012, 2014; Méadel, 2006). The documentary made by Sophie Robert in 2011, *Le Mur où la psychanalyse à l’épreuve de l’autisme*, staged this conflict between parents and ‘experts’, by means of the ironic juxtaposition of interviews with families in ordinary domestic settings intercalated with interviews with psychotherapists and analysts, physically and institutionally aloof from the families and refusing all dialogue with them, in their sumptuous offices, or august clinics (Robert, 2011). This polemical staging and the presentation of the analysts resulted in the film’s being subject to legal action and banned for several years until 2014 (Vincent, 2014).

The ‘autism battle’ has become political, involving politicians and government agencies directly, but is crucially a conflict in the politics of knowledge, over classification, of disease versus disability; and consequently over treatment or provision (Hochmann, 2012; Favereau, 2018). If the 2018 governmental ‘strategy’ endorses almost wholly the claims of the family groups, what is still far less prominent is the voice of autistic people themselves within this. Aside from Schovanec’s 2017 contribution, the changes in formulation are still largely aimed at the parent groups and their political backers. The idea that parents are themselves in fact ‘experts’ and can contribute to knowledge in this area (Silverman, 2011), is a controversial claim, contested as the cynical attempt to expect them to conduct untrained and unpaid ‘therapy’ or ‘training’ of their children, on the one hand, and as supplanting the voices of autistic adults, traditionally invisible to policy in this area, on the other (Chamak, 2008, Rios, 2018). The idea of epistemic injustice has come to the fore recently in relation to mental health service users who are the subjects of clinical discourse which reduces the credibility of their testimony (Crichton et al, 2017). For the Canadian Critical Mad Studies scholar, Maria Liegghio, this represents a kind of *epistemic violence* precisely in terms of the validity of knowledge:

“[Epistemic violence] is a very denial of a person’s legitimacy as a knower – their knowledge and their ways of knowing – that renders that person out of existence, unable to be heard and to have their interest count.” (Liegghio, 2013, 122).

What she terms a ‘denial of being’ (123), applies similarly to the subjects of the French ‘autism battle’, both children and adults. This is where life writing comes to the fore as a contribution to the politics of knowledge, placing the perspectives of autistic people at the centre of knowledge formation.

In an account now central to autism studies, the philosopher Ian Hacking explored the significance of autism narrative and how it had, and would continue to have, a constitutive effect on ‘ways of being’ for autistic people (Hacking, 2009). The boom in autism writing which Hacking writes about has been very noticeable in the Anglophone world over the last fifteen to twenty years, with well-known memoirs such as those of Daniel Tammett (2007), Lianne Holliday Willey (1999), and Donna Williams (1993), but far less so in France. There have been a few parent memoirs there, though again very few compared to the publishing explosion of that period in English. Horiot’s memoir of 2013, *L’Empereur, c’est moi*, was a very new phenomenon, therefore, and an immediate bestseller, translated in to multiple languages. From this, he has gained a platform and a position to speak from, in both traditional and social media forums. His interventions have been increasingly political but this stems not from a turn to advocacy separate from the process of producing his memoir, so much as from the process of politicisation which the memoir constructs.

The controversy over autism in France in recent years is highly specific. However, disagreements over diagnosis and classification remain widespread. Autism is a ‘descriptive classification without explanatory power’ as the psychiatrist Sami Timimi has argued (Timimi and McCabe, 2016). Alarmist media hype of an ‘epidemic’ (Eyal, 2010) competes with accounts dismissing it as a fad. Both contribute to a ‘cultural anxiety over what autism is and what responses should be to it’ (Ryskamp, 2017). Even the history of its emergence as a diagnostic category is now subject to historical excavation and critical re-examination (Sheffer, 2018). That autism life writing has or may have an epistemological role to play, as Hacking has elaborated, means that the stakes are particularly high in the context in which Horiot’s work appeared. As Dani Ryskamp has argued:

‘"autism" has existed as a diagnosis for sixty years, its operation – the kinds of stories we tell about autism and the people who have it, the limitations we place on them as a result of the label – are only beginning to be interrogated, evaluated, or complicated. The work of non-autistic authors writing *about* autism continues to dominate both the academic and the popular discourse, and elements of non-autistic storytelling, such as claims that autistic writers lack "theory of mind" or an "inner world," continue to hamper the ability of a non-autistic audience to attend to autistic constructions of identity.’ (Ryskamp, 2017).

Tropes of aliens and outsiders abound in popular understandings of what is unproblematically construed as ‘the autistic mind’, rendering the project of autistic life writing reductively exoticised (Cascio, 2018; McGeer, 2009).

**Autism life writing and the work of Hugo Horiot**

Disability life writing in general has been viewed with a degree of suspicion by disability studies scholars. The risk of producing a memoir which ‘can inadvertently reify the overcoming script so prevalent in fictional portrayals of disability’ has been examined with caution by the American disability studies critic, G. Thomas Couser (Couser, 2009, 35). The tendency to chronological recounting with inbuilt uplift towards an end point of cure or transcendence is widespread in commercially successful published memoirs. The life is packaged as individual struggle with an upbeat ‘message’ which is inherently depoliticising. Equally common are the figures of the ‘supercrip’, and, particularly with regard to physical disability, the use of the Gothic to ‘evoke fear, dread, and revulsion’ (Couser, 2009, 42). Couser, however, develops an account of the possibilities of the ‘counterdiscursive memoir’ which is written from the ‘inside of experience in ways that are self-consciously political and challenge conventional meanings ascribed to disability’ (Ferri, 2011). Beth Ferri examines Couser’s argument, arguing that work which ‘talks back’ to both the social and medical models of disability, can become ‘an intervention in the politics of knowing as well as the politics of representation’ (Ferri, 2011, 2279). Quite apart from complicating and disallowing the social and cultural operations of stigma and stereotype, she writes, this work documents the development of the author’s ‘politically engaged and affirming disabled identity’. The political aspect of life-writing can operate by what Couser terms its ‘emancipatory potential’, drawing attention to unjust systems of oppression, (Couser, 168). As a counter-narrative, it works against concealment and shame, disavows negative perceptions, accepts disability as difference connected to the political, and marks the entry into politicised awareness. In this way, it can be a ‘coming-out’ narrative (Couser, 167-9). From being ‘unable to be heard’, the work of autism life-writing can thus be that of giving a voice, in general terms, whilst also charting an evolution which is political.

Horiot’s account does not, at first, appear to fit this counter-model. First of all, *L’Empereur, c’est moi* is very unusual in its focus on childhood, and in particular the very early years of childhood, from four to eight years of age, and in its focus on violence and anger, directed at himself and others. The memoir is produced as a series of brief vignettes written in the present tense which avoid traditional stages and markers of child development. The medical model of autism constructs it as a series of deviations from, or delays in relation to such markers which can be charted precisely. Nikolas Rose has examined how these so-called norms have

‘become not only what both the average person and the medical professional consider ideal, but also what is considered natural. A child whose development falls outside this narrow trajectory is thus considered unnatural, along with every other child whose development varies in this way, regardless of whether or not they have anything else in common’ [Ogburn, 2017, 276; Rose, 2006).

The brief fragments, rather than chapters, of the narration of *L’Empereur, c’est moi* do follow a loosely chronological timespan from home to nursery school to school but the episodes neither correspond to these markers nor set out to deviate from them. The opening section, ‘Des chiffres et des lettres dans les étoiles’, references the long-running French tv show in its title but in order to broach the narrator’s ability to count and know the alphabet. He can count fast, all day long, without stopping, and he knows how to make words from letters having drawn both on his bedroom wall with his mother (Horiot, 2013, 13-14). This is not a reassuring marker of ‘ability’, however, but part of communicating who he is at this moment in time. He begins:

‘Je m’appelle Julien. Julien Hugo Sylvestre Horiot, mais on m’appelle Julien. J’ai quatre ans. Je suis très sage. Trop sage. Quand quelque chose ne me plaît pas, je me mets en colère. Trop en colère. Je crie. Je crie, mais sans paroles.

Je ne parle pas.’ (13).

He only speaks, he adds, to his ‘pire ennemi: Julien […] quand je suis seul avec lui. Je le hais. Je vais le tuer.’ (14). The segment ends and the next takes up the mention of his interest in how things turn, and the train of thought he enjoys in relation to this; the next turns to the tractor at his house; the next to his fascination with pipes, in particular the bathroom pipes, where he can be quiet and listen. From there he states his wish to return inside his mother’s belly, and his plan to eat almost nothing to achieve this (23-5). A visit to the child psychiatrist, in the ‘Vert carrelage brillant’ fragment, is conveyed by the organisation of sensory impressions, of surfaces and textures, and the counterposition of his boredom with the encounter to what has interested him in the visit – the model car and helicopter toys seen downstairs in a shop window (27). There is a privileging of detail in the recounting of his early years but crucially with no attempt to explain. His loathing of the *jardin d’enfants* is juxtaposed with his love of a red telephone he is given, while his fear of defecation, and the health problems he encounters as a result, is juxtaposed with the birth of his little sister.

In the next section, ‘Des cendres et des ruines’, he returns to his constructed alter ego, Julien, berating him for sucking him down in to the black earth. Aged six, he decides to ‘kill’ him, to cut his throat, announcing Julien’s death to his mother:

‘Il est enterré dans la terre noire.

Il n’était pas très intéressant.

Je veux un autre nom’ (69).

She suggests one of his middle names, and he chooses Hugo. Having done this, in the section “How I died at the age of six”, he can proclaim himself Emperor of himself and keep his ‘haunting’ by Julien at bay, through the language of power and violence. A death-struggle has been staged and he can now enter the outside world. The shock-tactics of this staging, and avoidance of narrative realism, are drawn on recurringly throughout the memoir. As Alice Hall has argued, this “strip[ping] away [of] the reassurance of any claim to realism” acts to “remind the reader continuously of the danger of treating the voice of ‘I-writing’ in unmediated, straightforward ways, a particular risk in disability life-writing” (Hall, 2015, 143). Here, the symbolic violence of the Julien-Hugo relationship relies on a Gothic mode: even dead, Julien will always be a part of me, he says, ‘il me suivra jusqu’au bout, jamais rassasié’ (70). The narrator speaks to ‘Julien’: ‘tu m’aspires à mon tour dans la terre noire’ (84). But this is not in order to provoke revulsion or disgust in the reader, as other uses of the Gothic have done (Couser, 2009). Horiot the narrator can then proclaim himself ‘emperor’ of his own kingdom (71). He does not explain the transition to speaking but evokes the violence of the experience. He shouted inside since

‘chaque parole, chaque syllable qui sort de ma bouche représente un effort surhumain, car c’est un compromis que moi, Hugo, je dois faire avec les autres

Chaque mot, chaque son qui sort de mes entrailles sera une abdication. Chaque pas vers les autres m’éloignera de mon royaume.’(72).

The compromise of speaking, and depending on those he cannot trust, the others, means that ‘chaque mot me tue’ (72). The alter ego of Julien continues to resurface, linked to episodes of depression at times, at others to ‘Hugo’s obsessional need for control’. He continues to stage this at intervals through the memoir, until a final dialogue between the two. Here, strikingly, he comments on both in the third person, as a now adult narratorial voice looking back (151-2).

The child Hugo goes to school, a highly unusual event for an autistic French child in 1989. He is no longer the observer of the outside world, perceived in terms of surfaces, sensory impact, and fascination or threat. Now he is subject to it. There he finds inscribed the triad of Reason-Strength-Power, in his satirical reworking of the civic pieties of the Republican school institution: Liberty-Equality-Fraternity (91). He becomes a creature consumed by hatred, of teachers, bullies and school itself, where fear is the subject best taught, and he becomes ‘walled off’ in suffering – or nearly, so he recounts. His chosen metaphors are military, from the Second World War: of resistance, collaboration with the ‘enemy’ i.e. the school as a whole, children and teachers, during the period he writes of as ‘Les Années Noires’. By allowing himself to be called Julien at school, he can be ‘not there’, letting everyone speak to ‘a dead boy’ (125). He tries to fight back by deploying ‘le langage soutenu’, putting himself above others, then he tries ‘politics’ by standing for election to the school council. He sets about studying politicians in the 1995 Presidential Elections to learn how to fake and dissimulate (121-4). But as he comments, in the first retrospective adult commentary directly on his child self:

‘À ce moment de ma vie, je maîtrise la communication mais je n’ai plus du tout d’ouverture’ (125).

He is taken out of school, ‘à deux doigts de rejoinder Julien dans la terre noire, enfermé à jamais’ (125). Later on, through discovering theatre, he finds a means to experiment with distancing himself whilst expressing himself. This is a project he goes on to explore more fully in his second memoir, *Carnet d’un imposteur*, published in 2016.

For Horiot, writing is resistance – to institutions. Firstly, his own resistance to the institution of school which is rigid, hostile, and exclusive. Secondly, the resistance of his family to the clinical institution of child psychiatry founded on psychoanalytic models which viewed autism as infantile psychosis, a rare disease or disorder. The period he writes about from the early 1980s onwards lacked the networking, information-sharing, and increasingly, politicisation, of parent associations in France since it was pre-internet. Henri-Jacques Stiker, who wrote his *Corps infirmes et sociétés: essais d’anthropologie historique* in 1982, a ground-breaking study whose influence has still not fully been felt, stated in the *Avant-Propos* that his project was one of indictment, in which apolitical neutrality had no place. He launched the book with a burst of outrage about the clinical experience ofbetween the parents of autistic children at that time:

‘Quand des parents d’enfants autistes se présentent à des psychiatres frottés de psychanalyse, installés dans leur institutions médicales, ils n’ont nul besoin, en première instance, de se voir jeter au visage les bribes de théories discutées : comme s’ils devaient illustrer un cadre conceptuel, qui ne fait, au surplus, que mal camoufler l’ignorance, et la misère affective, de ces practiciens’ (Stiker, 1982, 2).

Horiot’s own account culminates in an elliptical attack on psychoanalysis in the section ‘Cannibale toi-même’:

‘Serviettes glacées […] la fête peut commencer […]

Un enfant sans paroles fera l’affaire’. (149).

Here he is referencing the controversial practice of ‘le packing’, that is to say the ‘therapy’ of wrapping autistic children in frozen sheets. Psychoanalysis is also disavowed throughout the book metaphorically. The reference here is Bruno Bettelheim’s very influential book of 1967 *The Empty Fortress: Infantile Autism and the Birth of the Self*. Bettelheim’s idea of autism as emptiness or lack is one that has remained prevalent in autism memoirs by parents in English, long after his book ceased to be taken seriously by American clinicians. Autism continues to be ‘conceived in cultural terms as the loss of a person or the loss of soul’ in these types of accounts (Grinker 2015, 347). Horiot redeploys the fortress metaphor, emphasizing that he is building fortifications against the outside world out of the concrete, tangible need to protect himself. He has to defend himself from social oppression of various kinds. If he is ‘emmuré’, it is not for clinical reasons. Bettelheim is a shorthand for Horiot, and, in recent years, for the parent associations hostile to the influence of psychoanalysis in child psychiatry. The name is used metonymically to signal the entire history of pathologisation of families, and of mother-blaming in particular, derived from psychogenic theories of so-called child psychosis. The suffering this entailed, and to which Stiker bears witness in his 1982 opening statement, has been documented in two rare memoirs produced at that time by Paule Giron (1978) and Francine Frédet (1979). Françoise Lefèvre, Horiot’s mother, wrote her own accounts in the early 1990s, in novelised form, in *Le Petit Prince Cannibale* (1990), and as a memoir of ‘le quotidien de l’autisme’ in *Surtout ne me dessine pas un mouton* (1995). Her refusal to accept the official verdict and her son’s attendance at a *hôpital de jour* rather than going to school was extremely unusual. As she writes in her brief afterword to *L’Empereur, c’est moi*, in the 1980s, she resisted the label ‘autism’ because of the catastrophic implications for them all.

Horiot does not use the term autism in this book. However, he has done so increasingly since, first of all as a reappropriation and a response to the way the memoir and his identity were packaged. The account was awarded the *Prix Paroles des Patients*, a prize founded by *Leem, Les entreprises de médicament*, for a *témoignage de patients-écrivains*. In subsequent commentaries and interviews, Horiot has expressed his discomfort at the designation of ‘illness’ for autism, rather than difference, and taken on the identity of autism. His account was packaged by the publisher and in media commentary as a miracle-story, the child who did not speak then ‘escaped’ to become an actor. Very rapidly, a standard media response was to disallow his ‘autistic credentials’, to award him exceptional super-crip status, as can be seen for example in the *Mille et Une Vies* strand interview of 2016 (Horiot, 2018, 134). His own process of politicisation has seen him move to ‘coming out’, in Couser’s sense (2009) and to his affirming a neurodiverse identity. His first memoir, as ‘act of self-inscription’ (Hall, 2015, 132), acted as the means to enable him to move beyond an understanding of autism as a period that was now over. He has since distanced himself very sharply from the commodification of the disability memoir overcoming script. *L’Empereur, c’est moi* has been turned in to a play, which he has performed. In the interviews accompanying these performances and festivals, Horiot corrects continuing references to ‘disease’ by journalists, insisting on autism as a way of being. At the same time, he has become a high-profile campaigner in renowned test cases linked to autism in France such as *l’affaire Rachel*, a case which rested on the epistemological ground for diagnosis of a putatively autistic mother whose children, some of whom were also possibly autistic, and who had been removed from her care. This was charted by her lawyer and Horiot’s friend, Sophie Janois (Horiot, 2015; Janois, 2018). He also campaigned to make autism a very high profile part of the 2017 Presidential Election campaign and stood himself.

In both his second short memoir, *Carnet d’un imposteur* of 2016, and his *Autisme, j’accuse!* of 2018, he returns to some of the same terrain as before but with a more overt political stance. In *Carnet*, written in even shorter bursts and vignettes, he explores how the creative dissimulation and channelled ‘imposture’ of theatre function as a release from the masking of difference he was forced to perform previously. In the ‘Masque’ section, he says that ‘j’avance masqué’ (41): his social adaptation relies entirely on distance. Resisting the ‘therapy’ of a psychoanalytic approach left him ‘integrated’ but defenceless in the school institution (2016, 134). The formal aspect of theatre was his therapy instead. The style here is more essayistic and a little less direct in its engagement of the reader but still in strong contrast to the straightforwardly informational purpose and style of Julie Dachez’ *bande dessinée* of 2016, *La différence invisible*. The key idea of the neurodiversity movement is of a focus on rights and recognition (Runswick-Cole, 2014), and a move away from therapy, let alone cure, or extirpation of a ‘disease’ (McGuire, 2016; Woods et al, 2016, O’Dell et al, 2016). This has been dismissed by critics from the French psychiatric establishment as mere ‘communautarisme’ (Hochmann, 2016) but is starting to attain a higher profile in blogs and websites such as those of Horiot and Dachez and from there, is beginning to gain a wider currency.

**Conclusions**

Horiot’s work has succeeded in developing a much greater public awareness of autism in France from the point of view of an autistic person. Rather than the clinical establishment owning this discursive territory, or a ‘battle’ over traditions and approaches between parents and experts, this kind of autism life writing opens the possibility of a politics of knowledge which engages fully with neurodiversity and with the right to reclaim the highly charged debates of recent years in France from the inside of that experience. Autistic narrative has been constructed as of value for its illustration of the ‘beautiful otherness of the autistic mind’ (Happé and Frith, 2009): singular, exoticised and commodified. His work resists this and resists offering up a straightforward account or ‘explanation’. In his writing of a former self in an earlier period he sets up a trajectory which has led him to produce an account that is ‘counterdiscursive’ in Couser’s sense, resisting the triumph of overcoming, charting his own suffering, but framing it politically, within an institutional and political indictment of the state in its oversight of the clinic and schooling: *Autisme, j’accuse!* In so doing, it plays a crucial role in the ongoing debates around the politics of autism in France.

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