

The crisis of authority and the contemporary discontent of civilization¹

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I will talk about this question mainly from my practice of applied psychoanalysis in a Centre Psychanalytique de Consultations et de Traitement (CPCT) for adolescents and parents. It is a free care centre in which the analytic discourse prevails. I am one of the people in charge. A CPCT offers a short and free treatment and is a privileged observatory of the discontents in civilization.

The new forms of social ties and relationship to authority generate in teens a discontent characteristic of our time.

Although Freud wrote extensively of parental authority and of the authority of the superego in *Civilization and its Discontents*, authority is not a psychoanalytic concept. It is a two-sided signifier which comes to us from the Latin *auctoritas* and which has two seemingly contradictory meanings.² The first refers to a prohibition; it is the authority which constrains, the power to make oneself obeyed, which we often associate with authoritarianism, even tyranny—and it is this meaning that Freud refers to. The other meaning is on the side of authorization; it is then a question of allowing, of authorizing, that is to say of becoming an author. In Latin, the author (*auctor*) is the instigator, the one who pushes to act,

the one who allows (one) to grow. Taken in this second meaning, then, authority cannot be reduced to what is prohibited. I have divided my presentation into four parts.

1. The decline of the fathers' authority and the discrediting of all forms of authority

All representations of authority are discredited today – education, justice, police, medicine, politics – and are held in contempt to the point that our time appears as that of ‘the Other who does not exist’.³

The ‘crisis of authority’ is not new. Four centuries before our era, Plato wondered about the decadence of Athens and the decline of authority, which at that time rested on the tradition represented by the elders and by the father. The following sentence is attributed to him:

When fathers get used to let the children do what they want,
When the sons no longer heed their words,
When the Masters tremble in front of the students and prefer to flatter them,
When young people finally despise the laws because they no longer see above them the

1 Presented at the Lacan Circle of Australia, May 7th, 2024

2 E. Laurent, ‘Quelles autorités pour quelles punitions?’, *Élucidation*, no. 2, in *Élucidations*, nos. 0 à 7 (Paris: Verdier, 2003), 26.

3 Cf. J.-A. Miller & E. Laurent, *L'orientation lacanienne, L'Autre qui n'existe pas et ses comités d'éthique*, J.-A. Miller's course in the Department of Psychoanalysis, University of Paris VIII, 1996-1997, unpublished.

authority of anything or anyone, then, in all youth and beauty, it is the beginning of tyranny.⁴

International news confirms that the crisis of authority can feed into authoritarian powers. We see in fact that the denunciation by a political leader of the supposed ‘decadence’ of values which would lead to ‘the destruction of families’ can consolidate a dictatorship or, to follow Lacan’s formula in *Television*, bring about a shift ‘from the father to the worst’.⁵

In our civilisation, the decline of the father and what Hannah Arendt did not hesitate to call in 1958 the disappearance of authority are contemporaneous with the end of the Roman Empire.⁶ Arendt notes that in Rome, the authority of the living perpetuated that of the ancestors, based on an immutable tradition, which was subsequently called into question by Christianity. Indeed, Christianity promised a possible redemption of sins, instead of the eternal punishment of the guilty—as well as the hope of another life.⁷

At the beginning of the 19th century, when capitalism was taking off, Balzac wrote that ‘there is no question of laws now, their place has been taken by custom’.⁸ This is one way of expressing the proposition that the promotion of *jouissance* was already affecting father figures who once brought knowledge and uttered the Law. As early as 1938, Lacan noted that, ‘whereas the role of the imago of the father can be grasped in a striking way in the formation of most great men’, we are witnessing its ‘social decline’—a decline that ‘constitutes a psychological crisis’. Suggesting that ‘It may even be that the emergence of psychoanalysis itself is linked to this very crisis’, he postulates that ‘the forms of neurosis dominating the end of the last century’ were ‘intimately linked with the conditions of the family’.⁹ He then adds, ‘Our experience leads us to designate the principal determinant (of the majority of neuroses) in the personality of the father, which is always lacking in

one way or another, whether he be absent or humiliated, divided or a sham’.¹⁰

In 1950, Lacan spoke of ‘a civilization whose ideals are ever more utilitarian’¹¹ and Hannah Arendt notes at the same time that ‘breakdown of all traditional authorities ... has spread to such pre-political areas as child-rearing and education, where authority in the widest sense has always been accepted as a natural necessity’.¹²

2. The authority of fathers and parents today

In the third of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) on ‘The transformations of puberty’ Freud discusses the pubescent child’s effort at ‘detachment from parental authority’.¹³ More than a century later, most adolescents are no longer subject to the ‘paternal authority’ of which Freud spoke. Today, the father is questioned from all sides, at best summoned to earn his spurs, at worst rejected entirely. For J.-A. Miller, the tradition of parental authority ‘has been fractured ... by the combination of the two discourses of science and of capitalism’.¹⁴

As our colleague Laure Naveau has noted, the psychic relations that once defined the family are changing, the Oedipus Complex is far less prevalent in young people today.¹⁵

Today, fathers themselves and the ideals they hold are no longer available to give direction to the adolescent who finds himself without symbolic reference points and without a compass that could serve as an authority for him. He is then at the mercy of loneliness and the agonizing questions of what to do with his body, with his fellow men and with his very existence.

In fact, a father who functions as such—I mean as *Name-of-the-Father*—who is able to bear both prohibition and desire and is capable of being an authority is often lacking. An acute case can be seen in situations of medically assisted procreation

4 Passage said to have been published in the newspaper *La République*, but it seems to be apocryphal.

5 J. Lacan, *Television* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 46. Translation modified.

6 See H. Arendt, ‘[What Is Authority?](#)’ (1958).

7 Arendt, ‘What Is Authority?’, see Part V.

8 H. de Balzac, *Lost Illusions* (Philadelphia: Gebby, 1898), 341.

9 J. Lacan, ‘Les Complexes familiaux dans la formation de l’individu’, *Autres Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 61.

10 Lacan, ‘Complexes’, 61.

11 J. Lacan, ‘A Theoretical Introduction to the Functions of Psychoanalysis in Criminology’, *Écrits* (New York: Norton, 2006), 112.

12 Arendt, ‘Authority’, 1.

13 S. Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality*, vol. 7, Standard Edition (London: Hogarth, 1953), 227.

14 J.-A. Miller, ‘[Presentation of the Theme of the IX Congress of the WAP](#)’.

15 L. Naveau, ‘[Quelle autorité aujourd’hui pour les enfants et les adolescents?](#)’.

(MAP) where, as Dominique Laurent writes, ‘everything can be done in silence between the surrogate mother and the subjects who claim rights regarding the child’.¹⁶ This failure of a paternal function to limit jouissance pushes the adolescent to enjoy more and more, promoting the immediate expression of drives: transgressions, risky behaviours, aggressive or suicidal acts that avoid passing through speech addressed to an Other. The absence of authority, therefore, can have a deadly [*mortifère*] dimension. Speech being thus devalued, its power to alleviate is misunderstood.

Teenagers frequently refuse authority from an adult, be it a parent, a teacher, an educator, or from any Other who might serve as a point of reference. This symbolic deficiency leaves the field open to the imaginary, which can then occupy the entire mental space.

The adolescent who questions the authority of the parent may unconsciously seek an alternative, authentic authority, as in the case of the following vignette from my clinical psychoanalytic work at a centre working with parents and adolescents.

Vignette

‘There’s only the two of us,’ says this divorced mother who came to talk about her relationship with her 13-year-old son who, she says, is ‘in full puberty’. Fabian, who refuses to attend, does not respect her authority. He tells her that she is ‘a suffocating mother’; he responds with insults and blows to the slaps of his mother who claims to be severe and will not let ‘anything pass’. ‘It’s a titanic struggle,’ she says. The sessions with this mother will finally lead her to appeal to his father, until then totally absent from the family scene which had been reduced to the mother-son couple, and whose intervention Fabian had done everything to provoke.

Fabian’s parents say they are overwhelmed; they struggle to find an Other to whom they could have recourse as an authority on whom they could rely.

They do not know how to manage the too-much-jouissance that invades the teenager; they oscillate between tolerance, giving in to the temptation to punish, and resignation. The parents find themselves drawn back into their respective solitude and into the singularity of their subjective position.

Hélène Deutsch, an analysand of Freud’s based in the United States, had already observed that many parents deal with the critical period of adolescence by identifying with their adolescent—‘especially the mothers,’ she wrote, ‘who experience a violent desire to be modern’. These parents, she detailed, ‘renounce their authority and even go so far as to cooperate with their children in their activities of revolt’.¹⁷ Today, this tendency has increased, in my view, giving rise to a new kind of authoritarianism that one can also identify, at least in France, in the policies of the State that encourage what it calls ‘good practices’ of care, which are in fact practices over which it has control.

There is, says Jacques-Alain Miller, ‘coming from society, the desire to tyrannize the adolescent in crisis and to establish a brutal authority over him’.¹⁸

Vignette

*A father comes to talk about his position in relation to his 16-year-old son who, he says, ‘always wants to do whatever he wants’, especially going out at all hours. So, this father decided to lock up his son’s scooter to prevent him from using it. In response, his son cut through the chain. The aggressive act of the father, therefore, triggered a mirrored aggressiveness from the son.’¹⁹ After three sessions, this father decided to no longer force his son to stay at home, wanting instead to be what he calls ‘an amiable, friendly father’ [*un père à l’aimable*] who talks with his son.*

As Laure Naveau rightly pointed out (at the Pont Freudien), ‘The question of authority ... raises the question of speech and of respect for speech at the level of the parents.’

The sessions with this father therefore enabled a passage from act to speech, from authoritarianism

16 Cf. D. Laurent, ‘Parentalité et désir d’enfant à l’heure des PMA [Procréation Médicale Assistée]’, *La Lettre mensuelle*, journal of the Association de la Cause Freudienne and the Centre Psychanalytique de Consultation et de Traitement, no. 259 (2007).

17 H. Deutsch H, *Selected Problems of Adolescence* (Madison CT: International Universities Press, 1970).

18 J.-A. Miller, ‘En direction de l’adolescence’, third study day of the l’Institut de l’Enfant.

19 As Hannah Arendt writes, ‘Authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed!’ ‘Authority’, 2.

towards what Éric Laurent called a ‘contractual, negotiated, responsible paternity ... reduced to the instrument’. This, says Laurent, is ‘a new version of the humiliation of the father’.²⁰ Laurent adds that ‘the more the father of reality is absent from his function, the more the call to the father in heaven insists’.²¹

Vignette

A young man explains that, when he is in the presence of ‘a religious friend who leads a healthy life’, he is fascinated by the ideals of purity and rigor that this person reflects back to him. This friend, he explains, ‘with his religion, knows how to orient himself in life’. The patient who was reduced to anxiety in the face of the decomposition of any paternal image on which he could rely, for a time supports this identification which for him has been authoritative.

As Lacan indicates, ‘When it is a question of covering up anxiety, the ego ideal takes the form of the Almighty’.²²

To conclude, I quote Jacques-Alain Miller who has stated, ‘We are in the phase of leaving the age of the father’.²³ The age of the father gives way to the age of the transgression of the rules.

3. The Symbolic Lack of Authority under Capitalism

The capitalist discourse is omnipresent; it dictates its consumption imperatives which determine previously unseen modes of jouissance. We will see the essential place that this discourse holds with respect to authority for adolescents today.

Let us remember that this variant of the master’s discourse (I refer you to the 2 mathemes which write these discourses) was qualified by Lacan as ‘madly clever’ because it creates an infinite circularity between the subject and the objects of jouissance which never fulfill it.²⁴ These surplus-jouissance objects, which were called *gadgets* in Lacan’s time,

are useless objects; jouissance ‘is what is useless’, Lacan stated in *Encore*. Because no one really believes in ‘a bright tomorrow’ anymore, these gadgets replace the ideals of yesteryear. Rather than helping the subject put his fantasies into action, these objects of surplus jouissance prevent the subject from desiring by putting his fantasies into action; the objects of surplus-jouissance seem more secure than the vagaries of desire, which is always fleeting, in perpetual motion.

The satisfactions that this discourse makes it possible to obtain do without words. Just as they short-circuit a ‘time for understanding’ and a time to question oneself, so they prevent the subject from confronting his or her lack and from confronting the impossible. ‘Nothing is impossible for those who really want it,’ we are told. *If you want, you can. Just do it. Be cool. Be positive* – these are the slogans from which ads are woven. These formulas disseminate imperatives of immediate jouissance and social success, be it in the form of food, drink, clothing, telephones, screens, the list is endless. By increasing inequalities, they also encourage segregation and reinforce the feeling of exclusion, and sometimes of persecution.

This discourse doesn’t want to know anything about the ‘original lack, the structural fault inscribed into the specific being-in-the-world of the subject,’ as Lacan says in *Seminar X, Anxiety*.²⁵ He adds that the capitalist discourse refuses castration and, moreover, that it ‘leaves aside matters of love’.²⁶

Above all, regarding what concerns us for the NLS congress, anxiety arises when the subject, who does not want to know anything about their lack, is confronted with the Other’s desire. In Miller’s words: ‘Freud says that anxiety is linked to the loss of the object, while Lacan says that it emerges when the lack comes to lack, when there are too many objects.’²⁷ Then, the *objet a* arises from a gaze or a demand [*demande*] from the Other. For Lacan, ‘anxiety resides in the subject’s fundamental relationship with ... the desire of the Other’.²⁸

20 E. Laurent, ‘Un nouvel amour pour le père’, *Cause freudienne*, no. 64 (2006), 77.

21 E Laurent, ‘Élucidation’, no. 2 (2002), 26.

22 . Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X, Anxiety, 1962-1963* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 308.

23 J.-A. Miller, back cover, J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI, Desire and Its Interpretation, 1958-1959* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019).

24 ‘[Discourse of Jacques Lacan at the University of Milan](#) on May 12, 1972’.

25 Lacan, *Anxiety*, 136.

26 J. Lacan, *Talking to Brick Walls* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 91.

27 J.-A. Miller, ‘Introduction to the Reading of Jacques Lacan’s *Seminar on Anxiety*’, *Lacanian Ink*, no. 27 (2006), 26.

28 Lacan, *Anxiety*, 279.

The Internet is a potentially infinite source of knowledge. As for social media, it encourages immediate responses that are often marked by disrespect and accompanied by insults that can emanate from adolescents but also, of course, from adults. Owing to a lack of authority, *jouissance* finds no limit. It is a long time since there were any practices of initiation, which all included a limitation on *jouissance* and the bringing into play of a loss that often went as far as ritual mutilation or the inscription of a signifying mark on the body. It should be said that the practice of hazing (officially no longer allowed) is a wild and degrading form of it for the subject, rather than a socially integrating one.

Who is telling the truth?

In the absence of an Other that represents authority, how can we know who is telling the truth about the truth? Social media, which feeds on the misunderstanding that is inherent in language as well as on the confusions [*embrouilles*] of speech that language generates, is often a carrier of hatred: manipulation, harassment, fake news, are propagated there. What Lacan calls the ‘mirage of truth’,²⁹ which is ‘inseparable from the effects of language’,³⁰ sheds light on the success of fake news.

To try to disentangle the true from the false, we now need journalists specialized in fact checking. However, the quest for truth still drives science, as shown, for example, by the frenzy of scientific research to track down the origin of the Covid 19 epidemic; a swarm of publications try to define the truth, that is, what could best detect the cause of a real which is written, namely: ‘18 million deaths in 3 years’.³¹

But who can we believe? Scientists are no longer seen as authorities. Their expertise are questioned and ‘lying truth’, as Lacan called it, has become the rule. On social media and on the Internet, the most delusional theories circulate, and the belief of some people is built on the arrogant certainty of eccentric personalities who claim to be fooled by nothing or nobody.

What is authoritative today?

In our time of ‘liberation of *jouissance*, to use an expression of Miller’s, it is the imperatives of capitalist discourse and the scopic drive that are authoritative and precipitate the adolescent into an addictive spiral, where the latest novelty appears essential.³² The destiny of the object that one appropriates is to be consumed, then thrown away and immediately replaced. Also, the users are then themselves in the position of an object, at the mercy of an Other who controls them and takes advantage of their credulity; their preferences are recorded, their expectations evaluated via algorithms in order to be able to suggest new choices or purchases likely to best satisfy them.

For each of us, the obligation to use screens has a tremendous potential for addiction, the drive solicited being the scopic one.³³ Of all the objects capable of satisfying us, the gaze is the most accessible and the one that least confronts castration, and therefore anxiety, as Lacan showed in his seminar on the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis. Binge watching is a prime example, especially the frenetic consumption of television series or of shorter videos on TikTok, chosen by an algorithm, which follow one another at a frantic pace. The images fascinate and capture the gaze that fills the subject, eventually putting it to sleep. They exert a tyrannical power that puts real encounters at a distance, sometimes even leading to a disconnection of the social bond.

For teenagers, it is also the signifiers that circulate on social media that take the place of authority. In this favourite space for enjoying freedom and ‘being Zen’, these signifiers are often conveyed in an imperative mode by advertisements but also by the ‘friendly advice’ of marketing influencers whose media exposure has become a new ideal for many young people. For example, in France, where wearing the veil is prohibited for women in all public spaces (administrations, hospitals, high schools, etc.), ‘veil influencers’ are very active on social media³⁴ and hundreds of teenage girls on TikTok stage their desire to wear the veil in college or high school, to a musical background of excerpts from rap songs. There are also ‘veil tutorials’ on how to transform a scarf into a

29 J. Lacan, ‘Preface to the English Edition of *Seminar XI*’, *The Lacanian Review*, no. 6 (2018), 25

30 J. Lacan, *Seminar XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969-1970* (New York: Norton, 2007), 70.

31 ‘Origine du SARS-CoV-2: le jeu de piste continue’, *Le Monde Sciences & Médecine* 21 December 2022.

32 J.-A. Miller, ‘Une fantaisie’, *Mental*, no. 15 (2005), 19. See ‘A Fantasy’, *Psychoanalytical Notebooks* 34 (December 2019).

33 J. Lacan, ‘Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*’, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Hogarth Press), 67-78.

34 Samuel Laurent and Sylvie Lecherbonnier, *Le Monde*, 4 October 2022.

veil – and vice versa – and thus discreetly break the law. The disoriented adolescent clings to a radical, transgressive, provocative, noisy, insolent discourse, which appeals to the drive more than to thought [*réflexion*]. But, making the Buzz, is it being authentically authoritative?

These imperatives are relayed by the soft voice of the superego, but which comes to be authoritative. Freud had made the superego a prohibiting principle, precisely through the introjection of parental authority. More generally, he made it the voice of civilization, constituting itself as ‘heir to the Oedipus complex’ through identification with the father.³⁵

For Lacan, beyond this prohibition and beyond the father, the superego embodies ‘the imperative of jouissance’ as he says in *Encore*.³⁶ Today, the superego no longer proceeds from parental authority, as Freud maintained a century ago; rather, it feeds above all on the capitalist discourse which reinforces the small inner voice that whispers *Go on! - Enjoy!—Do not deny yourself anything, Realize your wishes*.³⁷

Civilization promotes transparency as a value and makes the right to be informed a requirement. We expect to be able to see everything and know everything—without delay. This tyranny is exercised unconsciously, and it feeds the superego. It pushes the subject to tell everything about his life, to photograph, film and broadcast non-stop to his supposed ‘friends’. This immodest mode of sharing is doomed to shrink the intimate space, even to reduce it to nothing. It contributes to making the contemporary teenager an anxious subject, ravaged by the jouissance of disclosing himself and of being spied on by the Other.

While desire takes the form of a question (*What does the Other want from me? Che vuoi?*), the voice of the superego is an imperative that involves ‘giving in to one’s desire’,³⁸ as Miller says, for example by conforming to the desire of an Other or of a group. It nourishes guilt and pushes the subject to harm himself.

Vignettes

Sarah is a depressed teenager because she is subject to a cruel superego which pushes her

to always be the best in all areas, without the ego ideal being satisfied by her parents. Indeed, her parents, who are very anxious, expect to be reassured by her and cannot bear her discomfort; they are in what she quite rightly calls ‘a role reversal’.

Nick is a young man who comes to talk about his violent impulses—aggression and self-harm—that arise during arguments with his girlfriend, which are unbearable for him. He cannot bear being denied anything. The voice of his father, who was beaten as a child, is always present, in the form of an overwhelming superego which repeats constantly that ‘you have to fight to be a man’. This metaphor is taken by Nick at face value and, in the absence of a fantasy that could function as a screen, it fuels his inclination towards acting.

Today, it is the jouissance communities that are authoritative. They claim that their specific mode of jouissance should be authoritative and recognized in the Common Law. What J.-A. Miller has pinned down as the saying ‘I am what I say’ asserts itself both in the private space and with official institutions, as if saying ‘I am’ was enough to be.

4. Analytic discourse as a compass

By addressing the analyst, the adolescent encounters an Other who gives him the floor but also limits his speech, and takes into account his singular enunciation by noting the signifiers he uses to express his suffering/jouissance.

More than ideals, the analyst is interested in the formations of the unconscious and in what Miller called the ‘abnormal’ elements in relation to collective reality, which are truth, desire and jouissance.³⁹

Rather than aiming for a normalization of adolescent behaviour— which the socio-educational and medical superego never ceases to tell him – ‘*You have to go out, play sports..., you have to make friends... work for your exams, etc.*’— and without taking into account the originality of each subject, our bet is to allow him to work out a solution based on the symptom which he both suffers from and enjoys. It is

35 S. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, vol. 19, *Standard Edition* (London: Hogarth, 1961), 48.

36 J. Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XX, Encore, 1972-1973* (New York: Norton, 1998), 3.

37 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XVIII, D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant, 1970-1971* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

38 J.-A. Miller, ‘Jouer sa partie’, *La Cause du désir*, no. 105 (2020), 23.

39 J.-A. Miller, ‘Le clivage psychanalyse et psychothérapie’, *Mental*, no. 9 (2001), 12.

by relying on this point of *jouissance*, rather than on seeking to eradicate it, that the analyst will be attentive to the objects in which the teenager invests or the solutions that he invents.

Two vignettes

Joachim, a 20-year-old boy who was beaten as a child gets a tattoo on his arm honouring his recently deceased grandmother, who was ‘a pillar’ to him; by doing so, he can appear kind in her eyes, because she ‘can see that she matters’ to him, he says.

Tom, another young man who has chosen to change gender and is in great difficulty with his identifications, chooses to work with pets ‘because they don’t talk’. This solution allows him, at this moment of his transition journey, to protect himself from the relationship to language and from the desire of the Other as well as from sexuality.

The analyst aims to reduce the tyranny of the superego which pushes the subject to *jouissance* and thereby maintains guilt. The analyst also strives to arouse in the adolescent a desire to know about his singular mode of *jouissance*, for which he can begin to take responsibility. This is how the analyst, or an institution like the CPCT, can be an authority for his patient. By acting as a third party between a teenager and the Other, who is often his mother, the institution acquires authority by allowing *jouissance* to find a limit, given a border.

The philosopher Kojève (whose teaching Lacan followed) wrote that ‘exercising authority and using force are mutually exclusive. To exercise authority, ‘you need to do nothing’⁴⁰

Jacques-Alain Miller discusses authority with reference to the function of the oracle of Delphi. He notes that psychoanalysis ‘knew how to be the refuge against the discourse of science’ and that it ‘knew how to revive the word of the oracles in the age of science’⁴¹

This reference to the oracle indicates that

authority has to do with the word, with discourse, and not with action.⁴² What is authoritative does not depend on given explanations but on a presence and a saying [*un dire*] that can produce ‘an effect of truth’. This oracular mode of saying—this ‘*that’s how it is* [*c’est ainsi*] ... to which interpretation is attached’—proposes, as Miller suggests, ‘to bring language back to the games possible in language’ whose ‘model is the wit, the Witz of which Lacan says that it allows one to pass through the door beyond which there is nothing more to find.’ Authority is also located on the side of the patient who, under transference, can become the author of a saying [*un dire*] that will calm his anxiety, limit his *jouissance* and be authoritative for him.

Vignette

*Alexis, a 16-year-old teenager asks for a consultation because he feels ‘very alone since the lockdowns and a relationship breakup’. The treatment will focus on his difficulty in establishing a relationship with another without being overwhelmed by the anxiety of being abandoned. Having encountered the impossibility of ‘controlling everything’ in his sessions at the CPCT, he tries what he calls ‘taking the time to listen to the other’. This involves refusing to give in to the *jouissance* of always imposing himself. This enunciation will be authoritative for him.*

We see with this vignette that, as Lacan says in Seminar X, anxiety is an ‘intermediate term between *jouissance* and desire’.⁴³ Daniel Roy extends this formulation in his presentation for the congress when he writes that ‘the way of anxiety is also the way of desire’. That is to say, it is by the way of anxiety that a subject can ‘read his discontent in civilization ... as a symptom in its singularity’.

The analyst’s desire, which aims for ‘absolute difference’ (Lacan in Seminar XI), and the absolute singularity of each subject, is what makes the analyst’s interpretations authoritative. Authority is therefore not asserted by the norm but by desire.

40 A. Kojève, *The Notion of Authority* (London: Verso, 2014), 11.

41 J.-A. Miller, L’orientation lacanienne, *Un effort de poésie*, 13 November 2002, unpublished.

42 ‘The oracle embodies the authority of speech as such.’ Miller, *Un effort de poésie*, 13 November 2002.

43 Lacan, *Anxiety*, 175.