

*Autistic Syntax as an Inverse
Use of the Psychic Organ Point*

by
Dr. Dana Amir, PhD
(Haifa, Israel)

Abstract

This paper deals with autistic syntax and its expressions both in the fully fledged autistic structure and in the autistic zones of another personality structures. The musical notion of the *organ point* serves as a point of departure in an attempt to describe how autistic syntax transforms what was meant to constitute the substrate for linguistic polyphony into a one-dimensional, repetitive score, devoid of emotional volume. Autistic syntax denies the recognition of the human characteristics of both self and other, turning the other into an autistic object which blocks, with his or her concrete presence, the hole created by his or her own absence as a psychological subject. The resulting discourse either imprints its forms on the other's language or rubs against its surface, but never creates a living dialogue. Within the autistic discourse, repetitiveness replaces cross-fertilization, thereby annihilating the ability to create or to allow anything new. The paper concludes with a discussion of Tustin's notion of "the function of the cross" within the therapeutic process and its communicative expressions in language.

Thinking Autism

Not so long ago I was traveling on a train. Behind me sat a boy of about seventeen. As soon as he started speaking I realized that he must be somewhere on the autistic spectrum. It was not because of *what* he said, at this point. It was the music of his speech, or to be precise: the absence of music. He was making one phone call after another, each consisting of the same text which he seemed to have worked hard to learn by heart. "How are you? How was it at work today? You sound a bit tired. When are we meeting?" This is how it went, again and again, in a metallic, flat tone. Then the train came to a halt and there was an announcement that there would be a few minutes' delay. The boy got up, stood in the aisle between the seats and addressed me with huge anxiety. He wanted to know whether "a few minutes" meant five minutes or perhaps ten – and if it meant ten, then could it also extend into twenty? The more concrete I tried to be in my explanations, the more anxious he grew. "So if you are saying that it might not exactly be ten minutes, then may it be eighteen? And if it could be eighteen or seventeen, then perhaps it could be fifteen minutes, too?" And then – this was the turning point for me – he said: "So nothing can be for sure." This is where I replied: "Don't worry. You'll see everything will come back." My words managed to calm him down until the train started moving again. He repeated them again and again, always with the same intonation, without adjusting to the first person: "**you**'ll see everything will come back, you'll see everything will come back" - until the engines started up again and the electricity came on.

With hindsight I understood that his huge anxiety was connected with the fact that something in the repetitive, calming envelope had cracked. He probably took this train quite frequently and gained a sense of security and comfort from the regular announcements (which I noticed the he was reciting along whenever they were broadcast), from the fixed time schedule, from the fact that everything was known in advance. When this unexpected breakdown occurred the whole time schedule crashed, and worse, along with it crashed the text of the usual announcement whose regularity was so soothing. The one thing, at this stage, that could ease his anxiety was a promise that "everything will come back", that is, order was going to be restored. For this boy, repetition acted like a pacemaker, a steady monitor which he needed in order to make sure he was alive. Clearly, what was at work here was a double mechanism: While repetition functioned as a pacemaker, keeping his life safe, it simultaneously kept him from liveliness; while it ensured steadiness, it would never allow neither growth nor transformation.

Autistic states are marked by the absence of an internal metronome or an internal pacemaker. When

there is no such a pacemaker any upset is experienced as life threatening, a fall into an abyss from which there is no return. But what is the nature of this abyss? Autism, argues Tustin (1981) consists of a massive "not knowing" and "not hearing" which are the result of the traumatic and premature recognition of the infant's separateness from the mother. In her book *The Protective Shell in Children and Adults* (1990) she writes about the child's delusional creation of a shell around him or herself through the idiosyncratic use of physical sensations, to the point of reaching a state of autistic encapsulation. Though encapsulation suggests a sense of shell-like protection, the autistic child has no such experience whatsoever. The physical motions s/he uses in order to create the shell around him or herself are random, fragmented and temporary and do not add up to an ongoing sense of being enveloped. The first differentiations in regular early development are between "comfortable" and "uncomfortable", "pleasant" and "unpleasant". Soft is pleasant. Hard is unpleasant and uncomfortable. A sense of "soft" becomes gradually associated with "taking in" and acceptance. Sensations of "hard" are tied up with invasion and forced entry. At a certain point these sensations become associated with the baby's bisexuality. While harsh penetration becomes "male", soft enfolding becomes "female". When during breastfeeding, the hard nipple and the soft mouth which takes it in collaborate, what occurs is a "marriage" between female and male principles. If, by contrast, no integration between hard and soft occurs, and the child becomes locked up in the hard for the sake of protecting the soft which remains inaccessible, a situation arises in which the male and female principles rather than cross fertilize, clash with one another or become mutually alienated. This is the autistic condition.

One main feature of autism is the absence of any sense of place and time. An autistic child has no sense of what is "between" two objects – whether these objects are feelings or things – or of what must be "crossed" in order to get to know them (Hamilton, 1992). Hence transitional objects or acts are absent in autistic development. Even a simple act like thumb sucking, which can be observed as early as within the womb, requires a moment of suspension – until the thumb reaches the mouth. Unlike the tongue, the thumb is not inside the mouth to begin with. It must cover a distance, a movement that also extends over time, in order to get there. It is exactly this suspension that the autistic child cannot bear, since it compels recognition of separateness and of distance, and requires an ability to endure frustration.

For autistic children, hard autistic objects or soft confusional objects (Tustin, 1990) replace transitional objects and acts. The autistic delusion is that the hard things "block the hole" which has come into being as a result of premature separation and that they prevent hostile materials from entering or leaving through it. The confusional objects, in contrast, stop the bleeding and absorb the seepage of

fluids. These pathological objects have a survival value because they keep the threat of death at a safe distance and compensate the child for what s/he believes s/he has lost. But since they are put to an idiosyncratic and compulsive use, the objects form an obstacle to psychological development. One notable feature of autistic objects is that they are used in a manner that does not coincide with their original function. The children use them in idiosyncratic ways. From a practical point of view, the child uses the object in a meaningless way, but from his or her own point of view it plays a crucial role in defending them. Not only does the child use these things without any relation to their intended function, but there is no imagination in the way she or he handles them either. This is because imaginative play always involves an "as-if" quality and a certain awareness of the physical separateness of the object. But the autistic child's use of the object is ritualistic, rigid and intense, and lacks the "as if" quality as well as the quality of separateness. In this sense, Tustin argues, autistic objects resemble fetishistic rather than transitional objects. No fantasy seems to attach to them, and if there is, it must be a raw type of fantasy, one which is very close to physical sensation. Due to this paucity of fantasy the use of the autistic objects remains repetitive and uniform. The objects remain static in the sense that they lack the unlimited qualities that lead to the development of new associative networks as happens in imaginative play. Another typical feature of autistic objects is that they lack distinctiveness. A similar object (creating the same feeling in the hand) can always replace a lost one. The autistic child's use of objects does not take into account their symbolic meaning or their practical functions. It focuses on the sensual element of their form only, namely their outline and the sensation it affords. In the same vein, we can say that on encountering two words with the same phonology, the autistic child will not be able to differentiate between their meanings. The same goes for rhymes. They "touch" the ears and the eyes in similar ways, they make the same feeling inside the mouth, and therefore they are experienced as identical. So the autistic child's tendency to repeat words or to create endless chains of rhyming words is not a type of word or rhyme play. Rhyme and wordplay are evolved forms of expression which a person uses when s/he has a sense of physical separateness from other objects. The autistic child, however, has no ability for verbal play. His or her use of words is identical to the use of autistic objects. For the autistic child, objects are not the substitute for the missing person but the person him or herself, or part of them, since they yield the sensation the autistic child is yearning for. In the same way words are not a substitute or symbol but the thing itself. Words don't hold meaning, argues Tustin: they are a shape inside the mouth, a sense of something on the lips, an imprint left on the tongue's surface.

The word "yearning" is not actually adequate to describe the autistic child's relation to the object. The autistic object serves to avoid the need to yearn for satisfaction or to bear frustration. That is why the

autistic child needs that object, but never really yearns for it. Providing immediate satisfaction, the autistic object will not allow for any lingering between expectation and fulfillment. This lingering, if the person is able to stand the tension it generates, is what brings about the ability to engage in symbolic actions like fantasies, memories and thoughts. While the autistic child, who avoids this lingering, survives physically – his or her psychological-cognitive development will remain extremely limited.

Derek Ricks' research on the development of psychotic language (1975), cited by Tustin herself, shows that those children never displayed the universal sounds of babbling which are typical of normal language development. By skipping crucial early stages of play, like the stage of normal babbling in infancy, or that of thumb sucking when the baby creates a simulacrum of the breast, the child actually loses the critical creative work of developing anticipatory fantasies which serve as a necessary bridge to reality (Winnicott, 1958). Instead of the ability to imagine what is physically absent, the child uses autistic objects to separate between him or herself and reality in a way that blocks the possibility to share this reality with others. Alvarez (1980) discussed, in this context, the way in which autistic children transform living words into dead ones which serve to block communication.

When sensibility and sensuality are directed at objects instead of human beings – rather than becoming regulating and adjusting – it becomes stereotypical and excessive. This is why where in normal development thumb sucking arouses a rich life of fantasy and imagination, in the autistic child the thumb becomes the whole of experience and the absolute goal. I will return to this in the context of the autistic inverse use of the psychic "*organ point*".

Because autistic objects are rigid and lifeless, they are likely to crack beyond repair under pressure. Unlike living people, who can heal and change, their rigidity makes autistic objects irreparably vulnerable. This irreparable fissure is the source of the primary despair of the autistic child as well as of his or her rigidity in the face of change.

Living in a world of inanimate objects, the autistic child has no sense of recovery as a vital and spontaneous process. Unfamiliar with the existence of living creatures he or she is unaware of the natural processes whereby damaged tissue may heal without manipulative intervention. Such a child has no grasp of the natural processes that go on independently of him or herself. Understanding the notion of recovery does not merely release the child from the responsibility of having to mend the crack, it also opens an entire repertoire of human gestures such as forgiveness, understanding and empathy. This extends the concrete and narrow repertoire of retaliatory as well as reparative acts. This

extension introduces the possibility of hope and compassion. As a result the child stops oscillating between states of vegetative unconsciousness and states of torturous hyper-sensitivity.

Tustin (1981) argues that as much as the notion of interiority develops – namely an element that is invisible and cannot be touched but which can hold things together and connect between them – a concept of *mind* evolves which is related to imperceptible events like thoughts, fantasies, imagination and memories. In primitive states, the mind is experienced as a real container that prevents things from falling apart. Autistic children never develop a sense that their mind can hold things together. Their excellent memory is in fact a *dèj-à-vu* experience: whenever a formation occurs that is reminiscent of another, earlier and significant one – the experience is of a situation happening anew.

Donald Meltzer (1975) speaks in this context about autistic children's difficulty in attaining a three-dimensional experience of the object which is required for creating the function of containing. To feel that the object is a container with the capacity to hold pain we must experience it as three-dimensional. At the same time, in order to internalize it, we must also perceive ourselves as three dimensional. Within two-dimensional relations the object is experienced as inseparable from its sensory features. Autistic children actually cling to their objects. They touch the people around them continuously and inappropriately since in their experience people exist or are present only through contact with their external surfaces. Adhesive identification, namely the defensive clinging to the object, serves to lessen the anxiety of breakdown. Autistic children don't experience themselves as three-dimensional just as they don't experience others as such. Their self, too, is experienced only in terms of its external features and not as having an interior. Neither the object nor the self are experienced as having a space that may contain pain. As there is no interior it is both impossible to internalize objects as well as to think them. This is the reason why the autistic child can easily and mechanically repeat sentences – without understanding them or containing their meaning.

In his chapter on the *autistic-contiguous position*, Thomas Ogden (1989) writes that the attempt of patients who are in this developmental position to create a *sensory floor* may express itself in physical activities that create a muscular demarcation, or else in autistic forms of self-soothing behaviors like humming, foot tapping, hair twiddling or earlobe fondling, etc. Their trying to "adhere" to the surface of another person is an attempt to revive their own surface or to create a temporary illusion that their own surface is intact. By adopting facial expressions, gestures or intonations of the other, they are trying to stick parts of the other's surface to their own, unstable one. The act of imitation is an attempt to restore the foundation which is necessary for any self experience. Since in the autistic-contiguous

mode the experience of being penetrated is equal to being perforated and torn, imitation is the one non-harmful option since it allows the other's influence to be carried on the external surface rather than being internalized.

In the light of what I have said so far, I would like to address the specific features of autistic syntax, both intrapersonal and interpersonal. The musical notion of an *organ point* will serve as my point of departure in explicating how autistic syntax transforms what was supposed to function as a substrate for linguistic polyphony into a one-dimensional, repetitive score that is void of feeling. Within autistic syntax, The human characteristics of both self and other are denied, turning the other into an autistic object which blocks, with his or her concrete presence, the hole created by his or her own absence as a psychological subject. The resulting discourse is one that either imprints its forms on the other's language or rubs against it as against a surface, but never creates a living dialogue. Within the autistic discourse repetitiveness replaces cross-fertilization, thereby annihilating the ability to create or to allow anything "new" as such.

Autistic Syntax as an Inverse Use of the Psychic Organ Point

In tonal music, the notion of "an organ point" refers to a sustained tone, namely a stable fixed beat which appears typically in the bass. The organ point usually begins as one of the musical chord tones, but unlike the other tones which change incessantly, it continues playing, creating inevitably a dissonance with other chords where it sounds "foreign". Organ points have a strong tonal effect, "pulling" the harmony back to its roots (Barrows, 2000; Frank, 2000). This is, in fact, the groundwork from which the musical tissue evolves: the sustained tone creates a kind of *baseline*, a *backbone* or *center of gravity* that allows the generation of the polyphonic texture.

The autistic condition could be described as one within which the organ point is dissociated from the musical piece itself. Here the strong tonality of the organ point does not pull the harmony back to its roots, but severs the former from the latter, thus changing its status from foundation to center, from constituting the background to being a dominant, exclusive presence.

In her paper "The Hollowed Envelope" Naama Keinan refines the discussion of Andre Green's (1988) notion of *negative hallucination* in a manner that may further elucidate the autistic use of the psychic organ point. The crux of Green's theory, claims Keinan, is the moment in which the infantile subject becomes able to negate the mother's presence so as to turn her into a background screen onto which his or her own representations may be projected. The negative hallucination, hence, is a framing structure, the white screen necessary for representations to appear. For this framing structure to evolve, the mother must be fully present, thus to allow the infant to erase her and to create the representation of her erasure. But a mother who is emotionally absent will not enable such an erasure. In that case, instead of a void as a framework, a terrorizing void emerges which entails an ongoing need for concrete sensory adhesion. In other words, when the normal process of erasure is not feasible, then in lieu of the negative hallucination, of the "white" as a screen or as a frame for thoughts, what occurs is a partial, and sometimes complete, annihilation of thinking as such. Bion (1965), in a similar context, distinguishes between "nothing" and "no-thing". The "no-thing" plays the same role as the negative hallucination which generates the framing structure within which an image can emerge. Symbolization and thinking rely on the "no-thing" since the absence of the object invites *reverie*. "Nothing", by contrast, is a psychic area marked by emptiness and cessation, an area that can neither allow nor bear representation.

The inverse use of psychic organ point is actually a similar phenomenon, in which what was meant to be the framing structure refuses to be erased, to fade and take the status of background. In autistic

states, the absence of an integrated and stable psychic organ point prevents the creation of a polyphonic flow, thereby reducing the entire "psychic music" into a one dimensional score. Instead of affording a base for flexibility and renewal – the sustained organ point becomes a dominant, exclusive content. Let us get back to actual music for a moment: since the unchanging tone of the organ point is foreign to the various chords which it joins as part of the musical piece, each time it "interferes" with a chord the sensation yielded by the chord becomes less clear and distinct. This is actually part of the ambivalent magic of organ points – the magic on account of which they simultaneously "pull" the harmony towards its roots while also engaging in a game of "familiarity" and "strangeness" with it. Returning to the autistic state in this context, one could say that because the "harmonic root" in the autistic state is weak and unstable to begin with, any deviation from or intervention in its harmony is experienced as destructive. The autistic condition lacks sufficient capacity to preserve the inner harmony and resonance, a capacity which would make the temporary dissonance bearable. Instead, what characterizes the autistic use of the psychic organ point is that it causes it to dominate the entire harmonic and melodic flow. The autistic state actually erases harmony, keeping the organ point as a single-beat score which allows neither revival nor flexibility, and which holds out an illusion of stability by means of repetition. What is hereby expropriated from the psyche is the music. In this sense, autistic experience can be seen as an *inverted use of the organ point* of the psyche's polyphony. This kind of use removes the polyphony from the psychic music, turning it into a texture that lacks both volume and meaning.

The function of the psychic organ point in the autistic state is reminiscent of obsessive-compulsive thinking: a repetition that is void of emotional meaning, which has become a mechanical mode of surviving. Leaving the psychic organ point as the only text, and in that way evacuating polyphony from music, is similar to leaving repetition as the only psychic activity and in that way empty that psyche of reach creativity and life.

This evacuation takes many forms within autistic language. In order to understand them, the various components of that language must first be mapped. Tustin often spoke about the autistic child's difficulty in integrating the hard and the soft. In the present context, we can regard the rules of syntax as the "hard" part of language, since they represent the rigid and unchanging rules of speech. Similarly, we can consider feelings, humor, irony, musical intonation and everything that fills this syntax with singular meaning, as the "soft" parts of this language.

Since in the autistic condition there is a strong split between the "hard" and the "soft" parts, and no way

of linking between them – the zones of "autistic language" are ones in which language generates syntactically accurate but emotionally barren discourse. Although the contents of this discourse may lend themselves to understanding, it neither reaches the "soft tissues" of the other nor opens up so that the other may penetrate the soft tissues of the speaker him or herself. The encapsulated child's lack of language is an extreme mode of staying within the soft internal tissue without making contact with the outside. This releases symbiotic fixation from the need to meet reality and from the flexible motion that contact with reality by its very nature requires. The autistic child locks out the "not-me" by creating a world in which the other plays no part and has no significance.

For autistic children, language is a form of auto-sensuousness in the same way as words serve as autistic objects and autistic shapes. They can lean or rub themselves against them, but they cannot use them in order to communicate. This is why autistic children prefer consonants, which are felt more clearly in the mouth. Similarly they will be attracted by rigid forms of rhyme, due to the identical, repeated and invariable sounds it makes in the mouth, offering them a rigid "surface" against which they can lean or rub themselves. The difficulty to perceive time and space, as well as the inability to perceive the other as a whole subject, prevent the creation of a language that can bridge gaps of time, space and otherness. Autistic language, much like post-traumatic language, exists outside space and time, abolishing otherness and thus erasing the gaps that are a crucial condition for the urge to create language.

Much like they hide their tongue in their mouth and their excrement in their rectal sphincter, autistic children hide words inside their mouth or deposit emotion within the word which closes tightly around it until it is no longer accessible. Words are locked within their syntax or non-syntax. To the same extent, meaning is locked inside the word with no way out. Unlike in functional language where meaning is hidden in the word or stored by it, here, rather, it is "held" in the word as in a fist. Indeed, autistic children refuse to release their words much like they refuse to release the grip of their fist. Even before refusing to enter a conversation with an-other, they refuse to engage in conversation with themselves as an-other, namely to acknowledge the fact that things have an external objective existence and thus may be open to symbolization and representation.

The autistic relation to words much resembles the special use of autistic objects. It is not only non-conventional, but also devoid of meaning. Autistic children add the word to themselves as though it were a hard "piece", thus treating it as a concrete object; not as a signifier of a live part of the body – but as an artificial body part. This is the reason for words' immobility as well as their repetitive and

rigid use, which yields no new associative movement. Autistic language does not allow one to linger "within" or "with" something, nor does it afford a "place" to be in.

How does autistic syntax express itself within interpersonal relationship? What is an "autistic dyad"?

The notion of an "autistic dyad" does not only refer to an original dyad between mother and infant. An autistic dyad is actually what emerges between the autistic encapsulations of two people. It may also occur between partners, between siblings or between patient and therapist. In this kind of dyad both partners are erased as subjects. Not only does the interpersonal syntax within the autistic dyad deny representation, but the dyad itself may come to supplant representation, and hence representational language, by allowing one person to use the other as a barrier against both the external and the internal world. This is a dyadic language which is founded on the compulsive sealing of surfaces, not on the creation of meaning, not even idiosyncratic meaning (unlike in psychotic language), and therefore creates two – rather than three-dimensionality.

Having expropriated the other's subjectivity, one uses that other, or parts of the other's presence, as though it were something by means of which she or he can fill holes. The lack of perception of the other's human features, in fact, is so serious that the other him or herself can be made to serve as the thing that fills the hole opened up due to his or her own absence. And so the other in this dyad can simultaneously be the missing person, the hole that opens up as a result of his or her absence, and the object that fills that hole, without this mechanical chain of events leaving any psychic trace. Alina Schellekes, in her paper "The Dread of Falling and Dissolving" (2008), writes that the fusion of the person with autistic encapsulations with the environment creates an illusion of the object being part of the self and serves as a defense against separation which is tantamount to a sense of psychological death. In the same context, Keinan (2007) writes that the "twin object" may at times yield an experience of "reproduction" within which the subject feels safe. This type of relationship of dense fusion, as Bick (1986), Gaddina (1969), Meltzer (1975), Tustin (1986) and Mitrani (1994) described it, is typically bereft of a sense of three-dimensionality and of the presence of an internal space for mental processing. In this situation there is no gap between subject and object – the gap that is crucial for the development of mental space.

The deep refusal that marks the autistic dyad is the refusal of the new. The only way to survive, for both partners, is by means of repetition. This repetition maintains the sense of friction between the surfaces – and as such, the sense of being – while avoiding the possibility of its leading to any new experience and to the creation of an other or otherness. Friction, within autistic dyads, replaces

penetration much like repetition comes instead of the possibility of fertilization. In this type of dyad one partner serves as the other's organ point. Because of the rigidity and dominating quality of the autistic organ point, the autistic dyad cannot transform into a polyphonic one and remains two dimensional, a dyad of two organ points that each generates a static and parallel melodic line rather than intertwining to create a chord or a rich and vital musical texture.

When Naomi, a young woman, begins psychotherapy, what strikes me most is her bizarre response to my words. She relates to them in a sensual way – not verbally or symbolically. She rubs against them, she tastes and chews them but does not "think" about them. This turns our entire discourse into an uncanny one, like a walk through unknown terrain in which the usual rules of reality or even those of inner reality do not obtain. She does not anticipate what I am saying as a listener but like an animal waiting to pounce on her prey. She closely follows the motions of my lips, the sound of my words; she sniffs the intervals between them, "swallows" or "laps up" what I say in the most concrete sense of these terms: as though they were food, sweets, a bitter pill. She never adds anything of her own. Instead, she repeats what I say with my exact intonation. Her eagerness to hear my words does not seem related to what they actually mean but rather to the very contact they enable her with me. It seems connected with the simple physical fact that I am talking to her, that my lingual surface is there, stable enough to let her rest her own lingual surface against it.

I feel as though I am walking through a swamp, a dense, sticky space in which words stretch sideways, become kneadable, bounce, are thrown back and forth – but never create discourse. At times I feel as an object myself, which Naomi, unbeknownst to herself, is throwing back and forth. Between sessions she sends me repetitive, meaningless text messages, as if she were using me to fill up the hole which I myself created by being absent. All this comes with a strange sense that whatever happens between us does not happen "here", that is, in a breathing, vivid present.

On her 12th birthday Naomi lay down on a train track, waiting quietly for the train to come and simply "take her away from there". She cannot say anything about this except that this "there" was not pain, or loneliness or anything else with a name, a form or a content. *"There" is the region which is not "here"*. Naomi's autistic psyche is "there" in the sense that it is a zone of exclusion from which Naomi herself, too, is banned. "There" is a zone of neither life nor death, neither past nor future, and hence not a living present either. "There" is what will never be "here". It is an outside zone, from which both psyche and body have been evacuated. In this sense, *the autistic existence cannot be described as "psycho-soma": it is a capsule which is neither "psyche" nor "soma", a region which denies any possibility for*

assimilation. In the autistic language, indeed, words don't constitute an experience of the psyche as they don't constitute an experience of the body. Autistic verbal language does not constitute a representation of the physical or the sensory but instead *turns into a barren form of sensuality, or rather a type of sensuality that is expropriated from the senses*.

The "Reclamation" of Psychic Polyphony

Tustin (1981) frequently mentions the moment of therapeutic shift as expressed in the autistic child's ability to draw *a cross* or to make a cross-shaped move (either in the form of a body movement or by means of an act). Crossing means connection; it means entrance into and exit from; it means two lines in motion that create a joint texture, one which includes a point of contact but also leaves intact the singular direction of each line. The cross indicates the stage at which an ability to integrate the hard and the soft, the inside and the outside, begins to form. Until they arrive at this stage, autistic children have no sense of their interior and all they can do is relate to surfaces. Thus, for example, they experience the front part and the back part of their body as separate and distinct. Being able to join them depends on the critical creation of a notion of interiority, the space that *connects* between those parts.

In language too we can think of the movement of "crossing" as an encounter between two, oppositely directed lines, or between one thing and its opposite. A sentence like "X is both hard and soft" is, in this sense, a "cross sentence". Parallel lines, which Tustin describes as characterizing autistic drawings, are infinite since they never intersect. In language, parallel lines can be manifest in using words without conjunctions, or in stating something without concomitant awareness of its possible opposite: there is only "Soft, soft, soft" or "Hard, hard, hard", without any qualification, dilution or intermixing. Since the recognition of opposites has a potential of putting a limit – but also a potential of creating a link – a "cross sentence" would be any sentence in which something that was only "either or" becomes "both and". And to revert to the earlier musical context: Polyphony is *a musical form of crossing*: it is the transition between parallel musical lines to musical lines that cross.

What, then, is "crossing" within the interpersonal syntax? In the interpersonal discourse or syntax, *crossing* would be any encounter that involves recognition of difference and separation; any interaction that is not a kind of friction with the other's external surface but a dialog with his or her interior, in a way that relies on the recognition of such an interiority as well as on the recognition that such an interiority is always singular: *an –"other" in its very essence*. It is the ability to acknowledge the other's singularity that transforms the discourse with him or her from being a friction-less motion of parallel lines to a crossing that includes an encounter with the other; not with an-other featuring as a silent

surface lacking any spontaneous movement of his or her own, but with an-other as a body with substance, real and alive.

Alvarez (1992) believes in the therapist's emotionally active parts facing the emotional lifelessness of the patient. She does not recommend concrete deeds but emotional ones, namely adding an emotional sound track to the detached, mechanical and lifeless acts of the autistic patient. In working with states of autistic syntax, it is the aim of the therapeutic intervention to create within the therapeutic relations moments of emotional "crossing", moments that actually constitute a polyphonic texture – initially within the relations between patient and therapist and subsequently also within the patient's relations with him or herself. The critical therapeutic transition will be from using interpersonal discourse as a means *against* development – to using it as a lever for change; from using the psychic organ point *against* psychic polyphony – to using it as a foundation for a polyphony of relationships as well as of the internal world.

During the long years of therapy with Naomi, the "crossing point" which I could identify was reached when she was able to tell me that she hated the color of my shirt even though it suited me. This moment involved not only her recognition of my separateness (she can hate something that I love) but also the crossing of her sensual surface experience (green is a bad color) with a recognition that this experience does not constitute a universally valid truth (green may be a bad color for her shirt but a good one for mine). Not only had crossing occurred between the experience of "I" and that of "not-I", but something vital in the *here and now* was formed as a result.

Bollas (1987) suggests a beautiful distinction by which the self, rather than being a stable structure, is a kind of *interior grammar*, a regulatory process which he calls *the unthought known*. What he points out is not any unconscious content but rather an unconscious structure, namely a collection of regulatory processes which together constitute the essential pattern that characterizes each and every individual. Thus, we can consider *autistic encapsulations* (Tustin, 1990), *black holes* (Eshel, 1998; Grotstein, 1990) and *hollowed envelopes* (Keinan, 2007) as regions devoid of an *interior grammar* or a unifying and regulatory interior syntax.

This absence of a regulatory syntax is filled with a *psychic organ point* which, instead of a vital regulatory process, generates a *mold* whose function is to supply an illusion that the diverse parts of the self are held together without a sense of ownership and subjecthood. Naomi's therapeutic process, like in all autistic encapsulation zones, was a process of restoring the subject to the object, putting life into the lifeless. It was the process whereby the psychic language (individual as well as interpersonal) was transformed from a fixed mold into a live content, from a *wall* into a *place*, from what blocks speech and thinking to what enables the experience of *being here* and *being within*.

References

- Alvarez, A. (1980). Two Regenerative Situations in Autism: Reclamation and Becoming Vertebrate. *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*, vol. 4, no. 3.
- Alvarez, A. (1992). *Live Company: Psychotherapy with Autistic, Borderline, Deprived and Abused Children*. London:Routledge.
- Amir, D. (2010). The Split between Voice and Meaning: The Dual Function of Psychotic Syntax. *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, 19: 1, 34 — 42
- Barrows, P. (2000). The Use of Stories as Autistic Objects. Lecture given in *The 4th Annual International Frances Tustin Memorial Prize*.
- Benward & Saker (2003). *Music in Theory and Practice*, Vol. I, p.99. Seventh Edition
- Bick, E. (1968). The Experience of the Skin in Early Object Relations. *Int.l J. Psychoanal.*, 49:484-486.
- Bick, E. (1986). Further Considerations on the Function of the Skin in Early Object Relations. *British J. Psychoth.* 2(4): 292-301.
- Bion, W.R. (1965) *Transformation*. London: Hineman
- Bollas, C. (1987). *The Shadow of the Object. Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press. London: Free Association Books.
- Eshel, O. (1998). Black Holes, Deadness and Existing Analytically. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 79:1115-1130.
- Frank, Robert J. (2000). *Non-Chord Tones, Theory on the Web*. Southern Methodist University.
- Gaddini, E. (1969). On Imitation. *Int. J. Psychoanal.*, 50:475-484.
- Green,A.(1988).The Primordial Mind and the Work of the Negative. *Int.J Psycho anal.*, 79. 649-665
- Grotstein, J. S. (1990). Nothingness, Meaninglessness, Chaos and the 'Black Hole:
The Importance of Nothingness, Meaninglessness and Chaos in Psychoanalysis. *Contemp. Psychoanal.*, 26: 257-290.

- Hamilton, V. (1992). The Protective Shell in Children and Adults. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 73:173-176
- Keinan, N. (2007). The Hollowed Envelope – The Therapeutic Work with 'Holes' in the Psyche. Lecture given at the Psychoanalytic Israeli Society.
- Meltzer, D., Bremner, J., Hoxter, S., Weddel, D., Wittenberg, I. (1975). *Explorations in Autism*. Pertshire, UK: Clunie Press.
- Meltzer, D. (1992). *The Claustrium – An Investigation of Claustrophobic Phenomena*. Pertshire, UK: Clunie Press.
- Mitrani, J. (1992). On the Survival Function of Autistic Maneuvers in Adult Patients. *Int. J. Psychoanal.*, 73(2): 549-560.
- Mitrani, J. (1994). On Adhesive-Pseudo-Object Relations: part I-theory. *Contemp. Psychoanal.*, 30(2):348-366.
- Ogden, T. (1989). The Autistic-Contiguous Position. In *The Primitive Edge of Experience*. Northvale, N. J.: Jason Aronson.
- Ricks, D. (1975). Vocal Communication in Pre-Verbal, Normal and Autistic children. In N.O'Connor (ed.), *Language, Cognitive Defects and Retardation*, London, Butterworths.
- Schellekes, A. (2008). The Dread of Falling and Dissolving: Further Thoughts. Lecture given in The 12th Annual International Frances Tustin Memorial Prize.
- Tustin, F. (1981). *Autistic States in Children*. London: Routledge&Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Tustin, F. (1986). *Autistic Barriers in Neurotic Patients*. London: Karnac Books.
- Tustin, F. (1990). *The Protective Shell in Children and Adults*. London: Karnac Books.
- Winnicott, D.W. (1958). Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena. In *Collected Papers. Through Pediatrics to Psychoanalysis*. London: Tavistok Publications.

