

Splitting of Psychic Bisexuality in Autistic Children

By

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The meticulous application of psychoanalytic technique, together with an outstanding “capacity for reverie”, enabled Frances Tustin to discover the nature of the unconscious fantasy that lies at the heart of autistic functioning and organization: that of an unbridgeable discontinuity between self and object, represented by the “broken button” of her young patient John and by the persecutory feelings of being ripped apart that practically all autistic children express in the course of their psychotherapy. Tustin summarized her findings in her description of the mouth-tongue-nipple-breast discontinuity and the concept of “premature psychological birth” – in other words, the necessity for the child to process an awareness of physical separation from the object, the maternal breast, even though, at that point in development, he or she does not yet possess the mental capacity to symbolize it.

I would like to dedicate this paper to Frances Tustin. I know that she personally had to face up to terrible anxieties that had to be overcome in order for her to throw light on that fundamental level of human experience at which the Self, emerging from its confusion with the Object, begins to establish its basic identity. In a very moving interview I did with her, she talked of certain crucial

moments in her own life, her analysis with Bion and her discovery of the fantasy that lies at the heart of autistic spectrum disorder. The convergence of these three components was in itself striking, and from it a new light seemed to shine forth. As with any discovery in psychoanalysis, hers was made thanks to an alternating movement between her own personal analysis and her work as psychotherapist. To my mind, it is mainly thanks to that approach, which she carried out courageously and in relative isolation, that we now have a deeper understanding of autism and of the way psychotherapy can help children who suffer from it.

I shall therefore take her work as my starting point before going on to suggest some of my own hypotheses concerning the psychotherapeutic treatment of children with autism. Though it is difficult to choose exactly which topic to deal with, I shall focus on that part of her work that involves what I call the “pathology of otherness” and the link between that pathology and primary defects in the integration of psychic bisexuality. In her book *Autistic States in Children*, Tustin (1981 [1992]) makes a clear link between these two fundamental aspects of her discoveries. Let me give two extracts to illustrate my point:

“In rare states of occasional awareness of bodily separateness, there is a soft ‘me’ and a hard ‘not-me’, which threatens to hurt their soft vulnerability. In order to shut out this hard ‘not-me’, ‘me’ and ‘not-me’ are partitioned off from each other and kept rigidly apart...” (op.cit.: 61)

“Gradually, soft sensations become associated with ‘taking-in’, with receptivity, ‘hard’ sensations become associated with ‘entering’ and ‘thrusting’. At some

point, these become associated with the infant's bisexuality. 'Hard' thrusting becomes 'male', and 'soft' receptivity becomes 'female'. When, on the basis of a co-operative suckling experience, the 'hard' entering nipple and tongue are experienced as working together with the 'soft' receptive mouth and breast, then a 'marriage' between 'male' and 'female' elements takes place." (Ibid.: 84)

Thus the combined nipple-breast object is bisexual, the masculine component being represented by the nipple and the feminine one by the breast. If it proves impossible to integrate these two components into a harmonious and co-operative whole, the outcome would seem to be that particular kind of pathology of otherness we call autism: on the one hand the combined object is split into its masculine and feminine components, and on the other there is absolute separation between self, experienced as soft and vulnerable, and not-self, felt to be hard and threatening. It seems to me, however, that we still have to understand how these two dimensions connect together: feminine and masculine on the one hand, and self and not-self on the other. In order to do this, we have to explore the dynamic processes that underpin fantasy representations. This approach seems crucial to me not only from a theoretical point of view but also at the technical level, since only interpretations that have their source in the intimate dynamics of our own minds have any chance of being helpful. As Alvarez (1992) points out, we have to be active in making contact with the more or less closed mental world of our young patients; in order to do this, we must first understand how their minds work and how their internal dynamics tend to bring about this kind of mental closure.

I would like to emphasize the point that, in Frances Tustin's description, the source of autistic anxiety does not lie, as is often stated, in the fact that child and mother are separate, but in what Tustin called "awareness of bodily separateness" (Tustin, 1981 [1992: 11]) – in other words, awareness of a gap between self and object. This gap is not simply geographical as in the experience of separation, it is also temporal, i.e. it causes the self to experience frustration and delay between the arousal of a drive-oriented impulse and subsequent satisfaction. Above all, it is dynamic: the object is neither continuous with the self, nor is it under the self's control. As a result, a gradient of psychic energy is created, just as when a mountain stream takes a sudden downward plunge, accelerating its otherwise moderate descent – in the ensuing waterfall, a considerable amount of energy is liberated. Such a gradient can be overcome only if the child's mind is able to construct some kind of representation and symbolization, thereby enhancing the creation of structurally stable forms within that dynamic system. Frances Tustin's "premature psychological birth" is a traumatic state in which the child is faced with an unbridgeable dynamic gap between self and object; the object, however, is not unresponsive to the self, as a somewhat superficial reading would have us believe – on the contrary, the self is attracted to the object in so powerful a manner that it cannot help being dragged into uncontrollable and destructive undercurrents. I would suggest that autistic defences aim to protect the self against such a fate, but at the cost of a total lack of communication with others – in order to suppress the insurmountable gradient, the object's very existence has to be denied, thereby compromising any

possibility of psychic development, since this too requires a relationship in order to thrive.

Frances Tustin's discoveries are at the opposite end of the spectrum from the deficit hypotheses put forward by cognitivist writers: lack of a theory of mind (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985), deficiencies in perception and expression of emotional communication (Hobson, 1991). There may indeed be a defect somewhere, but it is secondary and not primary – the result of a defensive process aiming not to fill up some insufficiency but to neutralize an overflow: that of drive-oriented energy or of emotional turmoil. We see this overflow at work when, in therapy, the child begins to emerge from the autistic shell that served as a protection against awareness of the outside world – and hence of the pain that being separate entails.

This was the case with Frances Tustin's patient John, who, in the now-famous 360th session (Tustin, 1972 [1995: 15-16]), expressed the fantasy of the "black hole with the nasty prick"; thanks to this fantasy, the therapist was able to grasp the nature of the anxieties against which John was trying to defend himself. Here the overflow was in the form of a "rocket" or a "firework breast", something explosive that shot out of the mouth and breast – in other words in the gap that separated self from object.

"Alan" was an autistic boy I began treating when he was four years old (he is now 16); in his case, the overflow was also expressed as fireworks. That material appeared in a session some two-and-a-half years into the therapy, which at that point was being carried out on a four-times-per-week basis. There had been a

partial interruption of the therapy lasting one year, since I had moved to another part of my country; I was at that time able to offer Alan only two sessions a month, travelling back to my former home town on that basis to continue the treatment. One year before the session I shall now report, Alan's family also moved to the town where I was working in order for the therapy to get back onto a much more sustainable footing. The session took place shortly after the summer vacation, and just before a scheduled session that had had to be cancelled. Some sessions previously, Alan, to my surprise, had asked: "How to you get ready for being born?" I of course understood the question to mean being born psychically. It was only later that I realized that, for a child coming out of autism, that kind of birth was inevitably explosive.

29th September 1993

Alan talked about dodgem cars and a funfair that he called "the pig fair"; his mother had taken him there, telling him there would be dodgems, but there weren't any. He had been very angry about that. He said this over and over again; I finally associated to my absence the next day and to the fact that we had had to cancel the scheduled session – I said that he was no doubt very disappointed that the session was not going to take place and that it made him feel very angry, just like when he saw there were no dodgems. I had the impression that this interpretation evoked claustrophobic anxiety in him – he asked me the time, then at what time the session ended, and he came up to me to check my watch. I said that perhaps he wanted to push inside me like a dodgem could; that way, he wouldn't have to feel separated because of my absence – but then, of course, he might be afraid that he would be imprisoned inside me without ever being able to get out.

At that point, a new kind of material appeared. He sucked up some water straight from the basin that, as usual, I had prepared for him, then spat it all out on the floor, saying that he was making a fireworks display. He did this several times. I interpreted that he felt the session to be like sucking up mummy-X's milk and that he represented this through his sucking up of the water in the basin; I added that he experienced my absence the following day as a bad breast-feed that caused him to feel some very powerful things in his mouth, like exploding fireworks for example.

He then spat out some water several times, saying: "Who have I killed?". He spoke of gunpowder, cannons, cannon-balls – but they were supposed to be quite far away, somewhere outside the therapy room: "Where is the cannon-ball? It's over there," he said. "Where is the gunpowder? It's over there", he added, pointing out of the window to somewhere in the distance. I said he was putting all the dangerous things very far away, so that they might be less of a threat. Alan then spoke of how dirty all that kind of thing could be and how it would have to be cleaned up. I replied that perhaps he was not only very angry about the fact that I was not going to be here for him the following day but also very worried in case his anger might transform the good milk into something dirty that would have to be cleaned up.

Again he mentioned the end of the session. I interpreted that maybe he was feeling something to do with a breast-feed that was coming to a close. He then spoke of his little sister's ears (she was still a baby at this point), saying that they were like little bells and that he wanted to clean them. I replied that his anger probably plugged his own baby-ears, so that, not being able to hear what other people were saying to him, he couldn't communicate with them – maybe that was why they had to be cleaned.

The powerful explosive energy that is liberated when children emerge from their autistic state must be both contained and transformed in order for it to be used in the service of representation and symbolization. The "cluster of sensations" that the "mouth-encircled nipple", as Frances Tustin put it (1981: 132), evokes in the

child has two possible outcomes: either it explodes like a rocket-cum-fireworks display at the end of the feed, i.e. when the infant is obliged to recognize that nipple-breast and mouth are in fact separable, or it is transformed into a trace of the infant's encounter with the object, a trace internalized within the infant's mind as a structurally stable representation that other such experiences in the future will enhance. In fact what I am describing here is quite simply the mysterious process whereby beta-elements are transformed into alpha-elements. By highlighting the idea of stability, I want to emphasize the fact that this process of transformation tends to create stability where before there was turmoil. It replaces the explosive phenomena with a stable representation of the combined nipple-breast object, thereby enabling the infant at each new encounter not only to recognize it as identical to what it was before, but also to assimilate other objects to it when new experiences are made. In this manner, the internal world is enriched and becomes more complex as links are generated between different traces of these encounters. "The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it," wrote Freud [1905d: 222]. To put it another way, no new encounter is possible without there first having been one in which the primary representation of an available and reliable object was created. Thereafter, each new encounter enhances and diversifies this representation, so that – to paraphrase the French poet Alfred de Musset – it is "neither entirely the same nor completely different". The autistic child, on the other hand, does not benefit from such continuity, since even though the encounter with the object may give rise to an ecstatic experience, it always ends up by being explosive and destructive.

As we know, Frances Tustin insisted on the fact that it is important for autistic children to have a regular and predictable setting, and recommended that sessions take place at the same time each day. I would add that it is necessary also for the child to have several sessions per week, especially in the initial stages of the therapy.

How then is turmoil transformed into stability, unpredictable into predictable, sensation into representation, and mere excitation into emotion? Bion suggested that the containing relationship could be a useful model: the raw sensory element – the "β" element – is projected into the container, where it is transformed and then returned to the infant in a form that the mind can digest.

Here again we are dealing with fantasy representations: container, contained, the relationship through which the contained penetrates the container.... And here again we must try to clarify the dynamics that lie beneath these representations. I have referred to the idea of structural stability as underpinning my thinking in this paper, and I shall continue to refer to it in this context; for me, the containing object is the structurally stable part of the dynamic system created by the containing relationship. The concept of structural stability is an integral part of the theory of dynamic systems, and denotes the capacity by which such a system can generate stable forms within itself in spite of the constant movement to which all of its component parts are subjected. One example of structural stability suggested by the French mathematician René Thom (1989) is the drainage system of streams and rivers in the dynamic eco-system of the water cycle in a given region. To put it more clinically, the mother's mind must function in such a way as to represent the

stable part of the dynamic relationship that is set up between her and her infant. I must, however, immediately add that this container does not consist solely of maternal elements; it must also have paternal qualities that are intimately bound up with the maternal ones. On this I am in complete agreement with Frances Tustin when she speaks of the infant's psychic bisexuality. It was in a musical way that Alan showed me the importance of integrating psychic bisexuality in the therapeutic relationship. At the end of each session I would make a sketch of the days of the week, hatching in the days when he had sessions and leaving the others empty, so that he would be able to visualize our forthcoming schedule.

[Drawing #1 here]

Shortly after we began once again to have four sessions a week (after the year-long part-interruption that I mentioned), he copied out my diagram. Before this, he had only scribbled or drawn spiral shapes without any representative content.

[Drawing #2 here]

In November 1993, a few weeks after the session I have just reported, he did a very talented imitation of an organist playing low and high notes – taken together, it was very pleasant-sounding. Alan has a fine ear for music, he is a talented pianist, and in his imitation of organ-playing, I had no difficulty in recognizing a Bach fugue. He drew on the floor a set of organ pipes and explained how, when air passed through them, musical notes came out. I encouraged him to draw them on a sheet of paper, and he agreed.

[Drawing #3 here]

I could then see the resemblance between these pipes and the diagram I drew of what I called “our days”, which little by little were transformed into musical notes. This musical metaphor brought to mind a paper by Suzanne Maiello on “The sound envelope and primal rhythms” (Maiello 2000). Alan seemed to be telling me that the envelope of our sessions needed to have both maternal-feminine tones (the high-pitched notes coming from the organ) and paternal-masculine ones (the low notes) in order to produce a pleasant-sounding melody that would promise him an opening onto psychic birth and onto the world as a whole. This interpretation of high-pitched and low-pitched notes was, as it were, forced on me by Alan himself, who compared the low notes made by musical instruments to the voices of the menfolk in his family and in particular to that of his paternal grandfather.

I would, however, suggest that both Bion’s model of containment and Tustin’s description of infant bisexuality need to be modified slightly. In his model of the containing relationship, Bion used the well-known gender symbols – ♀, the feminine symbol, for the container, and ♂, the masculine one, for the contained – and combined them together thus: ♀♂. In her description of infant bisexuality, Tustin spoke of the relationship between feminine “receptivity” and masculine “penetration”. In my view, there is an even more primitive level in which masculine and feminine elements are not yet in a penetrating / receptive relationship; they are more woven together into an integrated whole in which the masculine elements reinforce the feminine ones. The masculine component is there to buttress the maternal recipient to prevent its being deformed and pulled out of shape or even torn by the sheer intensity of the infant’s projections; in addition, it plays a

mediating role between the infant and the object, just as the nipple comes between the greedy mouth and the breast. At this level, the integration of psychic bisexuality is based on the intricate and complementary functions of nipple and breast. Without attempting to define categories too narrowly, I would say that qualities such as receptivity and flexibility belong to the maternal-feminine side of the container, while those such as consistency and orienting belong to the paternal-masculine one. From the point of view of the mind, these correspond to the mother's maternal and paternal identifications, united in a harmonious relationship. To my way of thinking, it is essential to remember this double polarity; male or female, we all have maternal and paternal objects in our minds in a more or less harmonious relationship. The infant has thus first to process the psychic bisexuality of the container; it is on this that any possibility of integrating psychic bisexuality at the most primitive of levels depends. It was some six-and-a-half years into his therapy that Alan taught me this, as he recalled a memory from his very early childhood in which his grandfather gave support to a weakened maternal container. [Though this screen memory relates to Alan's *paternal* grandfather, he does indeed seem to have played a highly supportive role with respect to Alan's mother, making up for what had hitherto been experienced as a deficit in her psychic reality.]

3rd September 1996

Alan reminded me that some time before I had warned him not to spit at me; in fact, I had once threatened to end the session if he carried on doing so. He asked question after question about what would have happened had I in fact

put an end to that session: would the taxi that brings him here for his sessions have taken him back home? Would he have had to wait in the waiting-room? Then he spoke about the various occasions on which a session had had to be cancelled. After that, he mentioned the fact that, according to legend, church bells fall silent at Easter because everyone is saddened by Jesus' death; but on Easter Sunday they all come back from Rome because Jesus rises from the dead. Then he came close to me and tried to tickle me, telling me about the rotating lamps at the pig fair....

I replied that we felt sad every time we could not meet, like when sessions had to be cancelled or during the holiday period we had just had; maybe this was like feeling sad at Jesus' death. Then we were glad to be back together again, like when church bells begin ringing again on Easter Sunday. I added that perhaps he was trying to get rid of all the sadness by tickling me or in switching on inside me the rotating lamps he had seen at the pig fair.

Then he spoke of things he said were disgusting and not very nice. Once, when saying hello to his aunt Marie-Claire, he had smelled her armpits; his mother had smacked him for that. On another occasion he had demanded a biscuit from another of his aunts, and his mother had reprimanded him for doing so. He spoke of pony droppings, a pony that had diarrhoea; Alan soaked a sheet of paper in water to make balls representing pony droppings and threw them against the wall.

I said that all this reminded me of something his parents had told me. For professional reasons to do with his father, they had lived abroad when Alan was about one year old. He had suffered from chronic diarrhoea that had lasted 11 months, and no doctor had been able to discover the cause. I added that perhaps he was wondering whether I was going to be like a mummy thinking all that was disgusting, or on the contrary a mummy ready to accept everything that came from her little boy. Since he had spoken about bad smells, and especially about odours from armpits, I added that it was very hot in the country they had stayed in abroad, he had perspired a lot and maybe that had made a bad smell (his parents had told me that he had suffered also from a skin infection that had been attributed to excessive perspiration).

Alan went on to tell me about something that had taken place when, according to him, he was about 2½ years old. He was out sailing with Granddad in his boat, and had vomited. His mother smacked him, saying: "Why did you vomit?" Alan told me that the sea was so rough that he had felt sea-sick. He explained that he had noticed a lot of marker buoys indicating places that boats should steer clear of in case they ran aground on the rocks.

I spoke of his desire that I should be like a mummy who was both able to accept whatever came out of him without feeling disgust – diarrhoea, vomit, "not nice" things, etc. – and who had a "grand daddy" figure with her who would be able to navigate properly and prevent the boat breaking up on the rocks.

Alan listened carefully and calmly to me – in fact, I had never seen him so calm before.

I think that this session is a good illustration of how important it is for the maternal container to have the internal support of a paternal object (the "Granddaddy") that makes it solid enough to weather any storms (the boat that did not run aground) and gives it some idea of where it is heading (grandfather's skilful manoeuvres). The death of Jesus probably refers to the mother's depression – while she was expecting Alan, her own mother had died.

There is one very important technical consequence entailed by the bisexual nature of the psychic container. Psychotherapists have to be in contact with their own parental identifications and constantly work over the links between the maternal and paternal objects that inhabit their internal world. The same person has to exemplify these double identifications and the harmonious relationship that exists between them. In other words, it is no use expecting some outside person to inject a so-called paternal element whenever the therapist has seemed to function

as a "pure female element" (to use Winnicott's expression [1966: 173]), or introduce some maternal element whenever "purely paternal" functioning has taken place. If the maternal container is dissociated from the paternal buttress, the self inevitably feels swallowed up and annihilated, and if the paternal elements are dissociated from the maternal container they are experienced as persecutory, like the "nasty prick" mentioned by Frances Tustin's patient.

The autistic process tends to make a very deep and very early split between the elements of psychic bisexuality. Therapists are therefore subjected to splitting projections that tend to dissociate the elements of their own bisexuality, hence the need for meticulous and on-going processing of the counter-transference in order to reintegrate the dispersed elements of their own psychic bisexuality. The active reclaiming function that Alvarez describes in *Live Company* (Alvarez, 1992) seems to me to represent the paternal-masculine aspect of the therapist-as-container's psychic bisexuality, with transference receptivity being the maternal-feminine aspect.

The penetration relationship between masculine and feminine aspects of psychic bisexuality seems to me to constitute a second stage, i.e. after the development of part-objects in the infant's internal world and the formation of early primal-scene fantasies. I see these two levels of psychic bisexuality more in terms of logical rather than chronological priority: containing object level, and part-object level. As soon as integration becomes possible at the first of these levels, the second stage appears, and there follows an oscillation between the two, similar to

that between paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, which Bion located at the shift from part-objects to whole objects.

If, instead of penetration, there is a weaving-together of bisexual elements at this first level, what is the nature of the relationship between container and contained? Alan's psychotherapy, like that of other children with autism, tends to make me think that it is a relatively non-differentiated one, but dominated more by anal than by genital considerations, as Bion himself described:

"I shall state the theory first in terms of a model, as follows : The infant suffers pangs of hunger and fear that it is dying, wracked by guilt and anxiety, and impelled by greed, messes itself and cries. The mother picks it up, feeds it and comfort it, and eventually the infant sleeps."

"Reforming the model to represent the feelings of the infant we have the following version : the infant, filled with painful lumps of faeces, guilt, fears of impending death, chunks of greed, meanness and urine, evacuates these bad objects into the breast that is not there. As it does so the good object turns the no-breast (mouth) into a breast, the faeces and urine into milk, the fears of impending death and anxiety into vitality and confidence, the greed and meanness into feelings of love and generosity and the infant sucks its bad property, now translated into goodness, back again." (Bion 1963: 31)

The vomit Alan splashed all over his grandfather's boat is a fantasy expression to do with projecting the pain he felt into the container, reinforced by all the diarrhoea, "not nice" things and bad smells. One session in particular from the ninth year of the therapy was significant in that it helped me understand the process by which projections are transformed into more digestible elements.

11th February 2000

For the past two sessions, Alan had been singing the military tunes he heard his grandfather sing. He interspersed this with burps, made rude remarks and talked a lot about things that were “not nice”. He caricatured his mother scolding his younger brother for burping into Uncle Gaston’s ear.

When he said that his burps made the same noise as a helicon (a brass band instrument for playing military music), I interpreted this in terms of his wondering whether I would be able to help him transform his burps – along with a whole lot of other things he felt inside – into nice things like his grand-dad’s military music.

He said that when the family lived abroad when he was very young, he used to be afraid of the helicon he heard when the Foreign Legion played their music. He drew soldiers at the Arc de Triomphe playing helicons and trumpets.

[Drawing #4 here]

Then he spoke of the school year starting again in September, when the lifeguards no longer keep watch on the beaches and it becomes more dangerous to go swimming.

I interpreted the beach without lifeguards in terms of a dangerous sea / mother without a father to prevent people drowning, and the helicon in terms of a deep-throated father who could be a bit frightening. I again mentioned his grand-dad’s military music, saying that he no doubt wanted me to be like a mummy with a “Grand daddy” inside who could transform “not nice” things into nice music.

The grandfather figure came more and more into the picture in Alan’s communications during the sessions. Just a few months ago, he drew the following portrait: Grand-dad, proud and impressive in his military uniform, is wearing a black

and red necktie that seems to be coming out of his mouth, representing an indigestible part that Alan still needs to project into a bisexual container in order to be transformed.

[Drawing #5 here]

Alan was obviously identified with his grandfather, who provided him with a powerful masculine image; but we still had work to do to process what was coming out of the grandfather's mouth like a gush of vomit in order to make it digestible.

In recent months, Alan has expressed this in terms of an excess of vibrations. He used to live next to an arsenal, and the end of each day's work was announced by the whine of a siren, always at the same hour of the day. He was frightened by the noise of this siren, which was located near a bridge over a narrow channel coming in from the sea. This description expressed the intense vibrations he had experienced as a child heralding some kind of catastrophe to do with the absence of a bisexual container that could have transformed his cries of distress into a harmonious counterpoint in which paternal low notes and maternal high-pitched ones could have come together. The bridge in Alan's drawings represents the paternal function of linking and mediating (what Resnik (1986: 30*n*; 1990 [1995: 102, 106]) calls "the paternal bridging function"), a guarantee against being swallowed up by a sea / mother that Alan described as threatening and freezing cold; I interpreted this as a representation of his mother's depression when her own mother died near the beginning of the pregnancy. At the same time, the paternal bridge appears weak and is threatening to collapse because of the sheer magnitude of the vibrations caused by the siren – in other words, the sheer

forcefulness of infantile projections reactivated at puberty. However, these dangers can now be represented; they are no longer the “nameless dread” that arises when the infant’s β -elements are projected without there being a container to transform them into α -elements.

I would like to conclude this paper with an extract from one of Alan’s recent sessions, one that took place just before the last summer vacation. That session seems to condense into one complex and intricate relationship the three levels that psychic bisexuality has to integrate: container, part-object and whole-object. When this final level is reached, emotion replaces the excited arousal and bodily vibrations that threatened to disrupt everything that had been constructed up till that point, just like the vibrations of the siren threatened to undermine the bridge – the bridge that linked us together in the transference as well as linking Alan to his internal objects.

27th June 2001

Alan took out the drawings he had done in previous sessions and said they were “morbid”. He looked carefully at one drawing in which people were falling off the bridge because the arsenal siren had made too loud a noise and the resultant vibrations had caused the bridge to collapse.

[Drawing #6 here]

He said it was the director’s fault for switching the siren turbine on too powerfully.

He then drew the bridge again, with people standing on it as the siren began to whine.

[Drawing #7 here]

On this occasion, he drew the siren under the bridge in the shape of a circle with spokes coming out of it to represent the pipes through which the sound came out; he added a long series of exclamation points, as in comic strips, to indicate that the noise was far too loud. The people on the bridge were merely sketched out roughly, and their hearts were placed in their chests – the drawing illustrated the fact that the vibrations of the siren struck them there. Alan said that this made them feel things very powerfully. Then he added that the people were going to fall into the ice-cold sea when the bridge broke up under the impact of the vibrations – it was going to be like the *Titanic* shipwreck in which a thousand people had drowned. He drew someone standing under the bridge on whose leg an enormous rock fell from the bridge. Lower down, he drew another figure who was deafened by the noise of the siren – he illustrated this with a kind of arm reaching out from the siren towards this figure's ear, ending with a starburst that would seem to represent the impact of the siren's vibrations on the ear.

I commented on the powerful emotions he had represented in the drawing – they could make hearts thump and some people were even deafened by them. I spoke also of the excitement he could perhaps feel inside himself now that he was growing into a young man; maybe he could feel his heart thumping too with all these emotions.

On the other side of the sheet of paper, he drew an enormous circular-shaped siren. He said that it looked so big because now we were seeing it close up. To the left of the siren he drew the captain warming up the turbine that triggered the siren. He blamed the captain in no uncertain terms for heating up the turbine too much, hence the siren making such a loud noise with all the disastrous consequences that then ensued.

[Drawing #8 here]

Looking at the circular-shaped siren, I associated to a breast, and I was struck by the contrast between the ice-cold lower part and the over-heated upper part. I linked this to the therapy, reminding Alan that there was just one week left before we broke up for the long summer vacation; I added that he perhaps had the feeling that I was about to let him fall into ice-cold water (the

sea / mother) if the bridge between us collapsed under the impact of over-powerful vibration-emotions.

I thought also of what his mother had told me – she had breast-fed Alan for just three days, then had stopped doing so, much against her own inclinations, on the instructions of her mother-in-law. I said to Alan that the round siren might represent a mummy's breast full of milk and that he had indeed sucked mummy's breast, but only for three days – perhaps he had the feeling that he had been shifted from a warm mummy / breast to an ice-cold mummy who was sad because she had stopped feeding her baby. I added that he was perhaps wondering whether I was about to stop giving him the good breast / food-for-thought that the sessions meant for him and drop him into the ice-cold waters of a sea / mother if ever the bridge between us started to collapse.

Conclusion

Whether we are referring to childhood autism *stricto sensu* or to the autistic enclaves described by Tustin in other pathological syndromes, the psychoanalytic exploration of this pathology leads me to suggest that there is an initial level at which psychic bisexuality becomes integrated, that of the container. Any defect in integration at this level leads to a pathology of otherness, given that one of the essential functions of the container is to enable the construction of a psychic envelope that can differentiate between the inside and the outside of the mind.

The second level of integration of bisexuality is that of part-object relations, necessary for bringing stability to the internal world. There are two kinds of link that support stabilization, the first of which I call the *nipple-link*. Corresponding to what Meltzer (1994: 261 ff.) calls "intimacy", the nipple-link is proximal in nature and creates a relationship between the self and the nourishing maternal object. I call

the second type – distal this time – the *penis-link*. I feel this term to be particularly appropriate since it echoes the relationship between the paternal part-objet and the maternal genitals in an early version of the primal scene. It creates a relationship between self and object that bridges the gap holding them apart, with their differences and their disparities. The differentiation between nipple-link and penis-link enables a complex internal world to be established in a stable fashion. In children who emerge from autism thanks to analysis, I have observed that these two kinds of link are invariably confused; to dispel this confusion requires a great deal of intensive interpretation.

The third level is that of whole-object relations. Integration of bisexuality at this level is the process that leads to the establishment of a clear-cut sexual identity. From the point of view of the mind, we become a man or a woman through identification with the same-sex parent. This should not, however, be looked on as an inflexible identification that excludes any possibility of identifying with the parent of the opposite sex. On the contrary, the very stability of our sex-based identity depends on attaining some degree of equilibrium between both kinds of identification.

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