

## THE DREAD OF FALLING AND DISSOLVING: FURTHER THOUGHTS

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In his book, *The Love of Beginnings* (1993), Pontalis writes: "I saw a man throw himself, smiling, from the top of the Eiffel Tower. He was wearing big wings. He had summoned journalists and cinematography. His fall was in a straight line. He crashed at the feet of officials in dark suits. I don't know his name. He was called the Bird Man. He had left no chance to chance as regards the preparations for his exploit.

Several times a year, I see in my sleep aeroplanes of considerable size dive in free fall, as if naturally, into the small wood at the end of the garden at Boissy. We have invented words in order to escape from the law of gravity, in order to delay the fatal moment of the fall."

So in this chapter, called 'The fall of bodies', Pontalis hints at the difficulty and fear, characteristic of the human condition, of coming to terms with the dread of falling and death, and of finding words and meaning when faced with such a primary and overwhelming anxiety.

In this paper I would like to search out words and meaning for the dread of falling and dissolving, two concepts so thoroughly developed by Tustin, (1986), that accompanies some of our patients, and each of us at certain moments. I would like to make a journey through clinical material, theoretical thinking, literature and art that will enrich our understanding of Tustin's description of these most primitive anxieties. To this end I would like to turn you into participants in my mode of looking at falling, on the one

hand as a concrete event where the possibility of its happening arouses anxiety that floods the psyche, and on the other hand as a metaphor standing for potential mental collapse, that happens in the absence of inner and outer holding by a meaningful other. In the absence of this holding, or in other words, without the internalization of a holding and containing presence, the self feels scattered and unbounded, abandoned and in danger of falling out of the other's arms and forced to develop various defenses against the flooding anxiety.

In order to befriend the subject, and to illustrate the movement between dread of falling expressed as fear of the concrete event of falling and between fear of falling that appears in its more symbolic expressions, I will allow myself to share with you, in this line of enquiry, some movements on this axis between the concrete and the symbolic in my world. Although there is a known healing force in exposure, I don't mean to make use of it here for those purposes but to hone certain points.

The first stop on the above mentioned axis is a childhood dream that accompanied me for many years in recurring form: in the dream I was pedalling in the air, as if pushing the air downwards, and in this way steadily rising higher and higher above the ground. There wasn't any direct expression in this dream or after it of a fear of falling, rather one of joy at the sensation of rising in the air. It seems to me that this joy expresses the reverse side, the negation of the dread of falling, that is to say it expresses the experience of conquering gravity and being without danger of falling, in the air, far above the ground, the concrete and human one. It is unnecessary to point out that this dream arose against a background of events that awoke an experience of powerlessness and falling away from the holding other. In other words, I want to emphasize how the metaphors in this dream expose the omnipotent and avoidant defense, that enfolds and hides the fear of falling, in its intertwined physical and mental aspects.

The second stop on the axis between concrete and symbolic in the context of my present topic is an event

from my life as an (adult) psychotherapist . In a first session I sat opposite a patient who had arrived at a difficult mental condition before marriage. Danny, who was then 26 and had never had any intimate relation with a woman, suddenly found himself, in a quite passive way, in a relationship with his woman friend that had led in stages, as he experienced it, to a place preparatory to marriage. Danny's world was characterized by a fictitious efficiency and maturity. He was successful as a student, as a soldier and in his profession as an accountant, but apart from these successes, until meeting his wife to be, he lived in great emotional dependence on his parents, a kind of silent and dominated existence, as if without a voice and existence of his own, living frugally in emotional and social poverty. In this initial session he recounted in an unbroken monotone, without facial expression, the evolution of his life. While listening to him I told myself that Danny arrived in a panic attack, even though there wasn't any concrete clinical sign of anxiety . I felt that this panic was that of a man forced all at once to leave a closed psychic retreat that he had built for himself in a life experienced as an abyss that continually swallowed him. I listened tensely for the whole hour trying to catch what could lay behind the story he told, wordy but poor in feeling, and I particularly felt the gap between the magnitude of his collapse and the intense meagerness of his life. As was a frequent habit of mine, I sat with crossed legs and when the time approached to end the hour, I got up to get the diary that was on my desk. Only after I had got up did I realize that one leg had completely gone to sleep without my feeling it, and as I got up and leaned on this leg, the other leg was sprained and so I went sprawling on the floor of the room in front of Danny. During this event and after it, Danny went on with the story of his life, without a break, in a monotone lacking any feeling, as if nothing had happened in front of his eyes. Full of pain, and after some moments of confusion and bewilderment, I told him that I had fallen and that it was now necessary to end the session. We fixed a time, he got up and went and I gathered myself from what turned out to be a bad sprain. In retrospect I saw how on the stage of my body

an intense drama had occurred, that reflected what was in Danny's world a tremendous drama, although not experienced emotionally: a part of me went to sleep completely and collapsed while another part went on functioning, and all this before the eyes of a blind other, emotionally dead, who felt simultaneously, it seems, abandoned and abandoning. In this event there was no explicit sign of the dread of falling, only the fall itself, whose meaning as a reflection of ongoing emotional falling in Danny's life only became clear to me après coup, part of it only years later.

The third and last point I will stop at is the period before preparing this paper. Since that strain, my left leg has a certain sensitivity, making for a liability to fall that I usually have control over. But not so when, a few months ago, I was walking in the street, tripped and fell badly. And so that earlier strain, whose registration/imprintment in my body accompanies me physically and emotionally, expressed itself anew. Only after this second concrete fall a deep fear of falling intensified and a short dream sprang up, some days later. In the dream I was walking in the street with my son, who in the dream was two or three years old. The walk was along a steeply sloping road. Suddenly he fell and rolled down the grass slope and I was afraid that he would be passive, do nothing and go on rolling down into the chasm. I shouted to him to resist the fall, to hold onto the grass, and climb up until I could grasp his hand and pull him up. He began to struggle against the fall, held the grass and gave me his hand. The whole time I was terribly afraid that he might not reach my hand, and meanwhile I remembered that he was actually 16 years old, his adolescent face peeping within me and rivaling with his face as a small child, the two faces alternating, and in the dream I told myself that this fall wasn't possible because he was a big boy. So much for the dream. Of course a lot of interpretations came to mind of this dream, but for now I will highlight just one thought and leave the rest to the reader's imagination and understanding. The emphasis I am choosing now is on the dream as reflecting a mental layer, which emerged following a concrete fall, and as describing a

maternal failure starting with the fact that, on the walk in the street, it was my son who was near the depths, and ending with the fall itself. During the fall, the aspect that fell, be it my son's or a childish part of mine, whether in the past, in the present, or in the future (signified by the appointed time of this paper), is overwhelmed by the dread of falling and sinks into the deep until a motherly voice emerges that is actively enlisted, brings to life the falling part, gathers it and stops the fall.

And now I would leave the personal aspect and 'fall into' theory. First, I want to recall and stress the importance in development of the acquisition of the ability to stand steadily and to move. Development of the self entails a firm connection to the sense of control and development of motor abilities, and the strengthening of these abilities allows every small child increasing independence and power. Winnicott's concept of 'holding', that we use so frequently, describes in its concrete aspect the parents' physical holding of the baby, at a time when his level of maturity doesn't allow him to hold himself erect, and in the absence of the parental holding, the baby would fall. And further, during early development, on the basis of the external parental holding, an inner experience of the supporting object, a kind of mental spinal column (Anzieu, 1989; Weissman, 2006) becomes gradually cemented. This internal perception allows the integration of the experience of standing erect against gravitational force.

The developing motor independence also enables distance from the object, that at first happens on the physical plane, but soon physical distance turns into a movement that allows mental life in the absence of the physical presence of the object. On a wider plane, we recognize the intense pleasure in childhood games involving running, jumping, skipping, climbing, flying through space. And in adulthood we get these pleasures just the same, if in a more sophisticated way, expressed as pleasure on the physical plane, through any physical activity where we conquer gravity, and have good control of our bodies' movements, without having the risk of falling. In this context we can also think of the fascination we have for

complicated circus acts and for any number of films with scenes where characters fly in the air while fighting each other, and for car chases where cars glide over obstacles that in reality no car would succeed in passing over (Katz, 2002). Freud too, in *The interpretation of dreams* (1900), recalls the pleasure that a baby feels when he or she is thrown in the air and caught by an adult, a pleasure that is later on transformed into the wish to fly, alone, without the arms of the waiting other.

In the analytic literature references to falling go through changes as a function of the development of analytic theories. So, in *The interpretation of dreams* (Freud, 1900), Freud refers to falling in a dream as an expression of the seductiveness of sexual wishes, especially when he talks about women, who “fall to”/enjoy sexual seduction. In a more subtle way, in chapter 5 of *The interpretation of dreams*, a dream of Freud’s appears where he tries to climb some stairs, joyously taking three at a time, until he meets a chambermaid coming down, and then suddenly feels stuck to the stairs and unable to move. In this dream then, excitement connected with climbing becomes, according to Freud, an analogue for sexual excitement/arousal, along with its punishment, not quite expressed as falling, but as paralysis of motor ability. Similar to Freud’s paradigm, others (Sharpe, 1951) also relate to falling as an expression of fear of impotence, guilt about sexual expression in general, and about masturbation in particular.

From another direction dreams are described where the dread of falling expresses the fear of loss of mental balance in different variants: loss of control, loss of consciousness, loss of conscience, and in parallel, as expression of the opposite wish, in other words a wish to lose control and to free oneself altogether from demands, prohibitions (Saul & Curtis, 1967; Gutheil, 1951), and from an inner world that is choking and threatening. This reverse wish for omnipotent release sometimes appears in images that are the opposite of falling, (as in my childhood dream), that is in images of gliding or flying. Fascinating in this regard is Winnicott’s (1935) reference to the words ‘gravity’, ‘grave’ and ‘gravitation’, words that are tied

etymologically to matter, seriousness, weight and gravitational force pulling downwards, and in a symbolic way to the force of depression throwing us towards the depths. Winnicott well describes the manic defense which creates phantasies and experiences of omnipotent control, over depressive feelings, that flow from an unbearable inner reality. And so the manic defense creates completely opposite situations: liveliness in place of death; movement in place of frozenness; lightness in place of heaviness, falling and depression. These sensations altogether make one feel as if he/she rose above the world.

The power to fly unaided is the highest victory over the force of gravity, apparently expressing a feeling of the greatest competence, but it is also possible to see in it an expression of the wish to return to the feeling of floating in the womb, where gravity doesn't have any meaning, or in a more symbolic way, the wish to return to a uterine-like experience, without boundaries of time and space, thus denying the passage of time and ageing, a kind of wish to stay forever young, like Peter Pan who flies there freely (Wolf, 1982).

Under the theoretical girder of ego psychology, and later on of theories of the self, the image of falling became an expression of conflict between archaic grandiose wishes and guilt about their existence, guilt that leads to hostility towards the self, an experience of weakness and depletion of self worth that is projected outwards in the image of falling (Saul & Curtis, 1967; Gullestad, 1994). So, for example, in folk stories from the countries of Eastern Europe, different versions (Antoniou, 1996) appear of a professional who tries to build a glorious building, sometimes a gorgeous monastery, and everything he builds during the day crumbles and falls at night. Only when the builder sacrifices a close human, usually a woman, and builds the building around this human's body while she is still alive, that is to say pays the heaviest price for his extremely grandiose wishes, does the building stay on its base and doesn't fall. The danger that lies in the primitive grandiose wish, before transformation and integration have come about, is well illustrated

in the myth of Icarus, whose ability to fly so intoxicated him, until, despite his father's warnings, he got too close to the sun and the wax that stuck his wings to his body melted, with the result that he fell into the sea and drowned. In a fascinating article about the experience of Daedalus (Icarus' father), Tolpin (1974) describes how archaic grandiosity brought Tolstoy to jump at age 9 from a high window, as if he believed he could be above human ability and fly, an experience that ended in a serious fall and loss of consciousness for a day and a half, and Churchill in a similar way, to jump at age 18 from a high place, again thinking that he could fly, an experience ending in having a crushed body for months afterwards. According to this theoretical understanding (Kohut, 1966; Tolpin, 1974), only when the first grandiosity is transformed and integrated into the other parts of the personality does it become an ability to fly not in a concrete sense, but symbolically, intellectually, as the many successes surrounding Tolstoy and Churchill, at a later age, prove.

With the development of Tustin's writings (1981, 1986, 1990) and of object relations theory in general (Klein, 1946; Winnicott, 1949, 1954, a,b, 1962; Bion, 1970), the image of falling takes up more and more space and expresses an emotional interpersonal lay-out where the dominant feelings are that of a failure of holding, falling from the mother's womb, or the analytic womb, or fear of disintegration of the self because of this fall. It seems to me that the image both enfolds within itself a complementary wish, that is a desire to fall into a dependent and passive state, in the arms of the other, without control (Quinodoz, 1997; Spoto, 1976 in Berman, 1997), as in expressions such as 'falling asleep' or 'falling in love' (Waugaman, 1987).

Elsewhere (Schellekes, 2005) I have described how the feeling of vertigo sometimes constitutes a sign of the existence of a fear of falling that is not just on the physical plane. Danielle Quinodoz (1997) describes various types of vertigo that are accompanied by an intense fear of falling and of losing one's physical or



mental balance, each type of vertigo concealing a different constellation of object relations and each warning of the presence of most primitive anxieties. The most primitive type of vertigo that she describes is fusion-related vertigo, that is vertigo that accompanies a condition of merging with the object. In this mental situation the central anxiety is of annihilation/dissolving of the self. There is a complete undifferentiation between self and object, a sort of symbolic equation between the object and the self (Segal, 1957), so that separation from or annihilation of the one is experienced as automatically causing the annihilation of the other, and in case the object distances the psyche feels as if it fell inside itself, leaked away and disappeared completely.

Before I expand my theoretical references to this situation, I want to focus a little on Noah, a patient in his early twenties who came to me in a state of functional collapse, suicidal thoughts and acts of self injury whose danger he wasn't aware of, and with extreme sleep disorder. For many years Noah had fallen asleep with difficulty and slept something like three hours every night. When he began coming to me Noah was staying at home doing nothing, crying for long hours, ceaselessly needing his mother's presence, while she sat beside him stroking his forehead and wiping away his tears in a hopeless attempt to ease his awful distress. I met a man who was young-old, who moved with difficulty, as if every movement of slow and heavy walking was going to glue him onto the ground. His facial expression was frozen and monotone, everything proceeded slowly and heavily. It seemed to me that this heaviness and slowness enhanced an experience of stability and a kind of compensation for what I experienced as a lack of inner feeling of uprightness and inner grasp. Noah's life proceeded between lethally lying in bed and spending long hours in a fitness club that built a very thin lower body and thickened muscles in his upper body, as those of a professional weights lifter. Noah described his life as a series of placard-like events, as if he had passed through the events without them becoming a living series, felt and remembered; he told his life as though

reporting on another man's life, as though he were a sort of dead-alive person. Although he had fine intellectual talents, he could not stand any situation that involved stress. Most of the time he needed the immediate presence of the other, and the gaze of the other was what determined his feeling of himself, but also held him in constant anxiety, because this gaze continued to be outside him, holding and haunting at one and the same time, without him actually sensing or feeling himself, his thoughts, feelings, memories. In the sessions with me his speech was slow, broken, with long pauses, as though lacking in tone, and gradually fading away. Each question of mine would revive him for some moments, he would stick to the contents I had introduced, as if through each question I had poured stuffing essence into him, that stayed there for a couple of minutes, until he would disappear into a deathly silence, his gaze extinguished, as if any memory of vitality had dissolved. Apart from reference to questions or other things I said, there wasn't any content that came from him, and the feeling of death in the room was choking. His existence was only matched to my movements, like the existence that he felt when his mother or his friends were right there beside him. During these times I found myself creating a unique setting where we would schedule at the end of each meeting the time of the next meeting or two (even if the time was the same, as it was most of the time). I felt that the regular a priori fixed time of the setting could have been experienced by Noah as a kind of death, that the setting was liable to become a kind of autistic, mechanical object lacking any liveliness (Tustin, 1986). I felt there was a need, every session, to 'inject' an interaction through which I was fighting to keep him alive, as if by this scheduling I each time demanded his arrival and became for him a more 'live company', in the language of Alvarez (1992); and so I fought over the existence of each meeting and sometimes over every interaction during the sessions themselves. During the hours I often felt that his silence wasn't a live silence, that gives rise to feelings or thoughts, but a dead silence, where without my efforts to capture traces of feeling or thought, they would disappear completely in the abyss of

oblivion. The sense of inner choking was so strong that I wasn't surprised when Noah later told me that he suffered from asthma.

During our meetings, for long periods, I felt that time stood still, that everything was frozen in place, that there wasn't any movement, except times when my eyelids closed as if from tiredness and a terrible heaviness, or during the stirrings of my movement on the chair, that I experienced as something I needed like oxygen at a time of choking. I assume that some of my verbal interventions, in parallel to being intended for Noah and based on my understanding of him, also helped me feel that I was keeping myself alive, amidst the dissolution and evaporation we subsisted in. It soon became clear that in his childhood Noah would go to sleep in the living room at his parents' house, surrounded by noise and human presence, and only so would he go to sleep, and if he moved to his room to sleep he would need the continuous presence, for hours, of one of his parents if he was to fall asleep for a little while. Meanwhile he recounted that when as a child he asked 'what is death?' he was told that death is like sleep, except that we don't wake up from it. It was his way to tell how sleep, since it implies giving up of control, became a situation where he felt as if dissolving into himself, and how wakefulness constituted an ever lasting war over his life, a mighty effort against leaking away.

Over a long period the sessions were characterized by long silences, where the central event was my attempt to move the hands of the clock with my thoughts, without any success. The feeling was not of something empty, but of a terrible frozenness. We sat for hours in this silence, without any content. Sometimes I asked a small question of the sort "where are you?", and then Noah would answer, "Don't know. I am straining to find a thought, any thought" and during this straining I felt that his blood vessels were ready to burst from the strain, and in parallel, that my breathing had become slow and heavy. An attempt to allow a measure of relief from this strain pressured him terribly, because, as I gradually began

to understand, the experience of straining constituted a mental muscle, a holding, a living event, that were needed as a means of survival during those moments. After a number of months Noah began to speak, each time a little more, and the sessions turned into a sequence of silence and speech, being and disappearing, a sequence that in my experience allowed the existence of tolerable intervals, whereby a process of fragmentary thinking began to form. Noah revived when he spoke, as if by speaking to me he could feel alive; every moment that I found any interest or meaning in his words, imparted him meaning that didn't exist before. Mostly he told me, step by step, how he was doing more, how he dared to be active in ways he did not dare before, and gradually his functioning, at least his professional studies, went excellently, despite the terrible anxiety that accompanied him at the outset.

When he began to move a little more, psychically, he recounted a dream:

"I am sleeping on a bed on one of New York's crowded avenues, surrounded by masses of people and buildings. Opposite my bed is a stall selling clothes, where occasionally I try to put on a shirt but every one is stained."

I won't describe all the work done around the dream, but will only emphasize how despite the immediate feeling I had that the imagery of the dream, a homeless person without adequate clothing, described a scene of distress and lack of a protective sheath, Noah described the feeling in the dream as one of happiness. He emphasized how he felt serene and happy amidst the noise and tumult, as if millions of people and buildings wrapped him up and only so could he sleep (like in the tumult of the living room at home).

It seems to me that in this state, fusion with the environment, as appears in Noah's dream, is an attempt to block the experience of a black hole (Tustin, 1986) that threatens to draw him into nullity and annihilation. Adhesion to and fusion with the object create an illusion that the object is part of the self, and

act as defensive activities against the terror of separation, which is equivalent to an experience of mental death. When he was alone, in the absence of any other holding, and in the absence of an internal, holding and organizing 'mental spinal column', Noah stayed awake, alert, tense, and this alertness, like the muscles he developed, created a feeling of hardness like a second skin (Bick,1968), that built an illusion of blocked holes through which he was otherwise in danger of evaporating. These holes do not have a mental representation, but they disseminate the essence of their presence as holes as if they were particles of dust that spread into every level of the mental experience, creating behaviors or feelings that precisely reflect the potential for disappearing into the hole.

This world of intense fusion relations is characterized by lack of three dimensionality and of an internal space needed to process psychic experiences. This is a two-dimensional world in which the main defense is adhesive identification, as is described by Bick(1986), Gaddini (1969), Meltzer (1975), Tustin(1986), Mitrani (1994). Adhesive identification is the result of a failure to internalize the containing function of the parent; this failure causes an inability to grasp the self and the object as having an internal space and qualities typical of a whole object. Actually, in this situation we are not talking of identification in the classical sense, but rather of imitation of the most superficial aspects of the object and of adhesion to the object, as an illusion of being hold that prevents the experience of falling and fragmentation.

In this description of Noah I have chosen to emphasize how his psychic existence is like a leaking self, as if he were made of a hollowed ego skin, to use Anzieu's language(1989), or as if he were a hollowed envelope/ hole in the psyche (Naama Kenan,2006). Noah lived in an environment where his parents' anxiety, especially death anxiety, in particular that of his mother, was extremely high, and created a continuous heavy physical presence of his mother, that flooded his whole existence with anxiety. Even today his parents come to check on his sleep a number of times a night. Since at every moment he is liable

to disappear, at every moment they must be present. This way the physical, flooding presence became a mental absence. Instead of a representation of a regulating and calming first skin (Bick, 1968; Anzieu, 1989), that acts as an enveloping sheath, holding the psyche at the beginning of his development, a perforated sheath was created leaving Noah sucked in and flooded by anxiety. According to Eigen (1996, p.8), a flooding human presence creates a short circuit in a soul that is not well enough equipped, and this short circuit translates into annihilation of thought, feeling and vital energy, and in his words: "The blankness of too much is replaced by the blankness of nothing".

In this condition the sense of stuckness and of being sucked up by a void is prominent, as is reflected in expressions such as quicksand, black hole. It was Tustin (1981, 1986, 1990) and following her Grotstein (1990), Mitrani (1992, 1994), and Eshel (1998), who described the experience of falling into a black hole, into a void, out of existence (Eigen, 1996, p.14). All these expressions describe a flimsy constellation of object relations where the self feels completely unheld and in the absence of an adhesive contact with the object, the person's ability to survive psychically collapses and an experience of fall into abyss occurs. We are not talking here about an emptiness that derives from the primary anxiety which activates the death drive creating terror of destruction and annihilation, as Klein (1946) well describes, but about a primary state of deficit and lack of a holding structure, a condition of emptiness where the anxiety is secondary and derives from the feeling of emptiness. In this state the dominant feeling is more one of dissolving than one of a defense like dissociation or splitting, because these latter defenses still deal with strong feelings that go on and even intensify while the defenses are used (Eigen, 1996, p.43).

Using Noah I emphasized how a flooding presence turns into a death provoking one. I meant to emphasize how in this condition no differentiation exists between the object and the subject, differentiation which is essential to the development of a mental space. This development closely depends on internalizing the

containing object, an internalization that constitutes the primary representation of the experience of three-dimensionality and of an inner space for processing experiences (Bick, 1968,1986; Meltzer, 1975; Grotstein, 1978). In other words I am emphasizing here how meaningful the absence of the object is, as long as it is in a dosage that can be digested, since in the process of this absence buds of thought begin to be created, just as it is described by many writers such as Freud, Bion, Winnicott and Green (Freud,1917; Bion, 1959; Winnicott, 1949, 1951, 1963; Green, 1983).

In other words the internalized presence makes it possible to imagine the object in its absence, through different hallucinatory activities, as if the object were present. The absence gives rise in this context to vitality, creativity and thought, thanks to the 'introjected construction of a framing structure' –structure encadrante-(Green, 1999), that holds the mind in a similar way to how a mother's hands held the baby's body. This structure makes possible that the non-presence of the object will not turn into the non-existence of the subject.

When the absence is too traumatic or goes on for longer than one can bear, it does not generate creativity and thought but loss of meaning and inner death, as Green (1983) well describes when he talks about the absent presence of the dead mother that creates experiences of emptiness, void, non-existence, meaninglessness and frozenness. The experience of a negative presence builds, as Green (1999) puts it well, 'an inner representation of the absence of representation', that negative hallucination that becomes life's central pivot and leads to loss of memory, loss of a sense of self, loss of vitality and contact, and inability to experience human contact even when it is potentially available. In this connection I recall the Israeli film 'Love sick in neighbourhood 3', where the central character cries longingly for Evelyn, his beloved, throughout the film and in an emotional scene near the end, when Evelyn is beside him he goes on painfully calling her name, without seeing her, as if she were not there next to him.

In a fascinating way, Gaddini (1976, 1980) continues the thought of Winnicott (1974) about fear of falling apart and describes his understanding of loss-of-self-anxiety. According to Gaddini, in normal development, the initial formation of a separate sense of self is bound up with an experience of a catastrophic split that occurred when the sense of a total and omnipotent self disappeared. Traces of this split persist in the mind for ever, and every developmental move towards premature separation is immediately absorbed and echoes the initial tear. The more traumatic and painful this initial rupture and experiences of separation were, the more intensified the loss-of-self-anxiety becomes, echoing the catastrophic experience that already happened at the beginning of development, when the sense of the total self was lost. According to Gaddini, loss-of-self-anxiety constitutes a defense, a kind of watchfulness, so that the initial catastrophic experience will not be re-experienced. The deeper the loss-of-self-anxiety, the more the mind enlists every means in its power to get back omnipotent control. And so Noah stands on guard, clinging to parental figures, not sleeping, taut like a spring, walking slowly so that every step glues him heavily to the ground, gathering every bit of himself into his muscles, hardly being able to think, feel, remember.

In these 'adhesive pseudo object relations' (Mitrani, 1996), that are so evident in Noah's life, the central mode of experience is through imitation, as if by imitation the presence of the lost and not yet internalized object is reconstructed (Gaddini, 1969; Green, 1983). The symptomatic mental state that often develops in this situation, whether in a psychosomatic symptom (Gaddini, 1980) or in an experience of inner death, illustrates the existence of an intrusive object, an 'interject' in the language of Bollas (1999), whose penetrating presence breaks the natural sequential process of development, and creates a sense of blocking, hesitancy, emptiness, muteness and mental death.

If we go back to Quinodoz's view of different types of vertigo, that enfold a variety of fears of falling, the fusion-related vertigo emphasizes a mental state, as said before, where the psychic existence of one is



totally dependent on the existence of the other, and the disappearance of the one leads to annihilation of the other. In contrast to this type of vertigo, Quinodoz (1997) describes a feeling of dizziness to do with fear of losing connection with the object, that she calls 'vertigo related to being dropped'. This is anxiety about loss of the object's love. The fear is of loss of continuous contact and connection with the object while the object is experienced as rejecting, disappointing, frustrating, abandoning, aborting; however, we are not talking now about falling that leads to annihilation and fragmentation of the self, but about falling from the arms of the containing other, while the self stays whole. Here the object does not collapse together with the self, they are not fused, but differentiated, even if this differentiation is felt as very painful. Neither the self nor the object is annihilated, and there is no danger of mutual collapse. Certainly in this situation one feels haunted and threatened, but one does not become extinguished or broken up. Actually the anxiety connected to fusion with the object is not put in terms of fear of falling but of anxiety about fading away, fainting, and losing oneself, of losing one's memory and sense of continuity, a feeling of extreme estrangement, inner death, being emptied and dissolved, going as far as loss of psychic existence. In contrast, the fear of falling from the hands of the object and losing its love assumes that the self is sufficiently crystallized and continues to exist while it is falling and thereafter, as Tustin well emphasizes when she differentiates between falling and being spilled or dissolved (Tustin, 1986). In other words, fear of falling from the other's hands takes place when some ability to contain has been internalized, when an inner representation exists, a kind of mental spine that holds and demarcates one's existence and prevents that total falling that leads to the annihilation of the self. A similar thinking to Quinodoz's concept of fear of falling from the hands of the holding other (vertigo related to being dropped) is found in Ferenczi many years earlier in a short article (1914) where he describes situations at the end of an analytic hour where the analysand feels a sort of vertigo (giddiness)

on getting up from the couch. Ferenczi interpreted this phenomenon as a bodily sensation arising at the transition, in time and space, between one's conduct following the pleasure principle and conduct following the reality principle, in Freudian terms, and as expressing a feeling of being torn apart from the analytic holding, in the language of object relations. Similar to this, Winnicott (1949, a,b, 1954) relates to falling from the couch as an analogue of the experience of falling from the analytic lap, which is itself a re-experience of birth and separation trauma, with a concomitant wish to be gathered by the analyst from the depths of falling, a little like the wish I touched on in the dream of my son's fall. In other words, the feeling of dizziness at the end of an analytic session, coupled with fear of falling, functions as a signal coming from the patient's body and warning of the analyst's containment failure. And, retrospectively, we can see in my dream, where my son fell into the depths, a close connection to Noah's treatment, a kind of signal warning me of the experience of holding failure during this therapy.

I would like to illustrate now the dialectic between loss of self anxiety, in its different varieties, and fear of falling, by contemplating some works of art. First I will focus on Francis Bacon who well depicts human figures who are distorted, damaged and hollow, who have lost their contents, lacking definition and boundary. In this way Bacon shows the loss of self anxiety, on the stage of a body that is deformed and losing its humanity (van Alphen, 1992). For example, in the series of pictures called 'Triptych May-June 1973', picture no. 1,

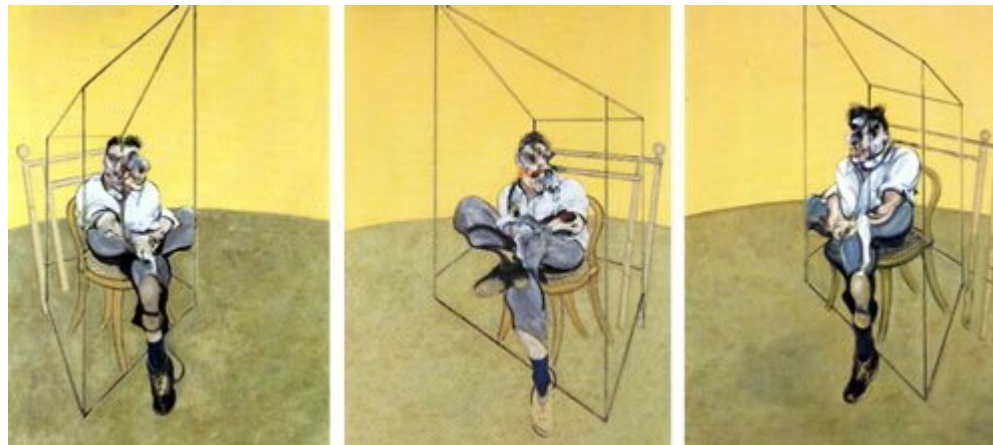


a man is depicted in three different situations. In the left and right hand pictures a man appears emptying his secretions in a basin or in a toilet bowl, his body crumpled and drawing downward. In the middle picture, picture no. 2,



we are witnesses to the peak moment of this emptying out, when the man is poured into his own shadow, when all the contents of his body disappear into the shadow/the black hole, leading to the loss of human

form and identity. The shadow doesn't confirm identity, as is often shown in art (Schellekes, 2006), but stands for loss of identity and the emptying out of self. The difficult drama represented in these pictures is reproduced in the viewer who, through his or her senses, feels acute distress and unease in his own body. Perhaps as a defense, many of Bacon's characters are located in protective frames, as can be illustrated in the picture 'Three Studies of Lucien Freud', 1969, picture no. 3,

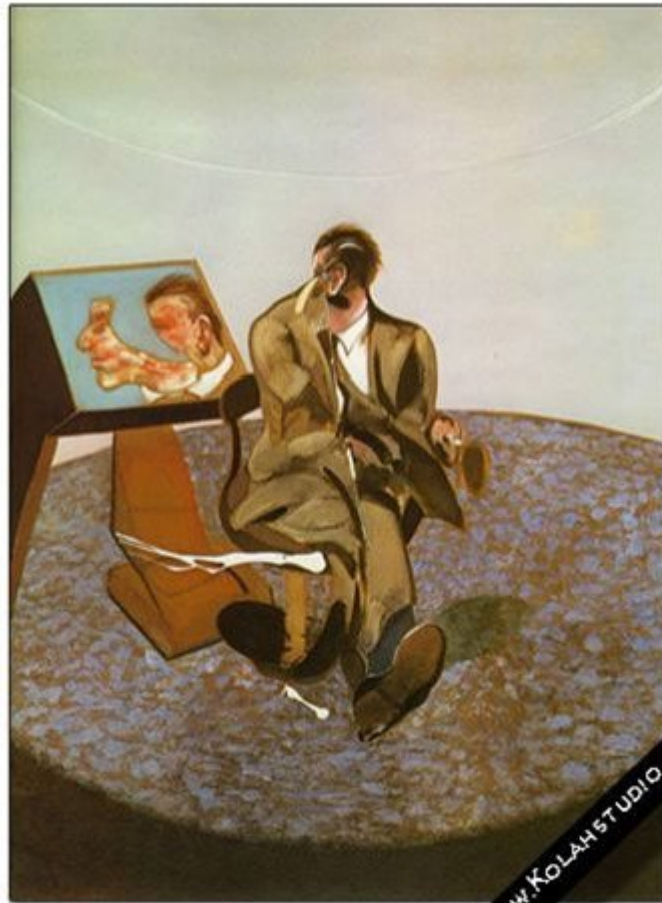


but we can quickly see how this defense is actually a sort of imprisonment, since every character is imprisoned and isolated, and the frame not only fails to protect, but also splits/clefts the subject, again at the level of the body, of the senses. In Bacon's pictures the deformation is nearly always of the head, picture no. 4,



the main site of the senses, and in particular we see it in the split of the sight, that partly turns towards the self and partly towards the viewer, partly expressing the state of being observed and partly that of

observing (van Alphen, 1992). One way or another most of the characters do not have any human contact and hints of a possible contact only emphasize its impossibility. Means such as lights, mirrors, cameras, that are expected to return or reflect the self back to itself , fail to do so and bring the self back to its experience of itself as dissolved or split. So, for example, in 'Portrait of George Dyer in a Mirror, 1967-1968', picture no. 5,



the reflection in the mirror is not of the figure facing the mirror but of the view of the spectator of the picture who sees the missing part of the represented figure. Here we are again witnesses to a cleaving



split, without it being clear whether the split and the deformation are in the mirror, in the view of the character of himself or between the gaze of the spectator and the gaze of the character.

Certainly the large number of mirrors in Bacon's works hints in this connection of the object's non existence and of the exaggerated use of the narcissistic defense, that leads to heightened awareness and watchfulness of the self in an attempt to prevent the self from falling apart.

I have chosen to illustrate another way of showing the fear of dissolving and fading away through some works of Dali's, who was tormented by his preoccupation with the dimension of time, loss of the sense of time and loss of memory. In his famous painting, 'The Persistence of Memory', 1931, picture no. 6,



we are aware of Dalí's struggle to depict time as fluid, soft just as his soft clocks show. He was preoccupied with the constancy and continuity of memory, particularly against the background of a lack of liveliness and humanity, as is amply illustrated by the images in the picture (a lifeless landscape, a desert, a dead bird etc). In another, less known, painting of his, 'The Disintegration of The Persistence of Memory, 1952-1954',

picture no. 7,



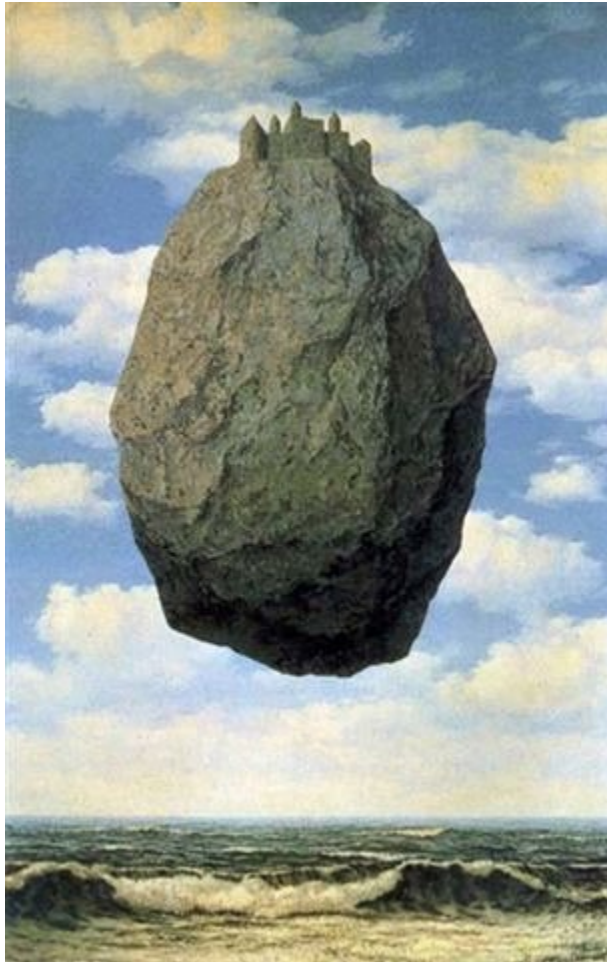
we see a version of the earlier picture, but this time during disintegration. Highlighted in parallel with the experience of fragmentation is the effort to find control over it, that appears, in my opinion, in the background figure drawn as precise squares separated by identical and exact spaces.

As opposed to the preoccupation with dissolution of the self, Magritte presents a series of pictures where the recurrent theme is falling, but without the object losing its identity or wholeness, in accordance with the distinction I tried to make between fear of dissolving of the self and fear of falling. So in the painting

'Golconda', 1953, picture no.8,

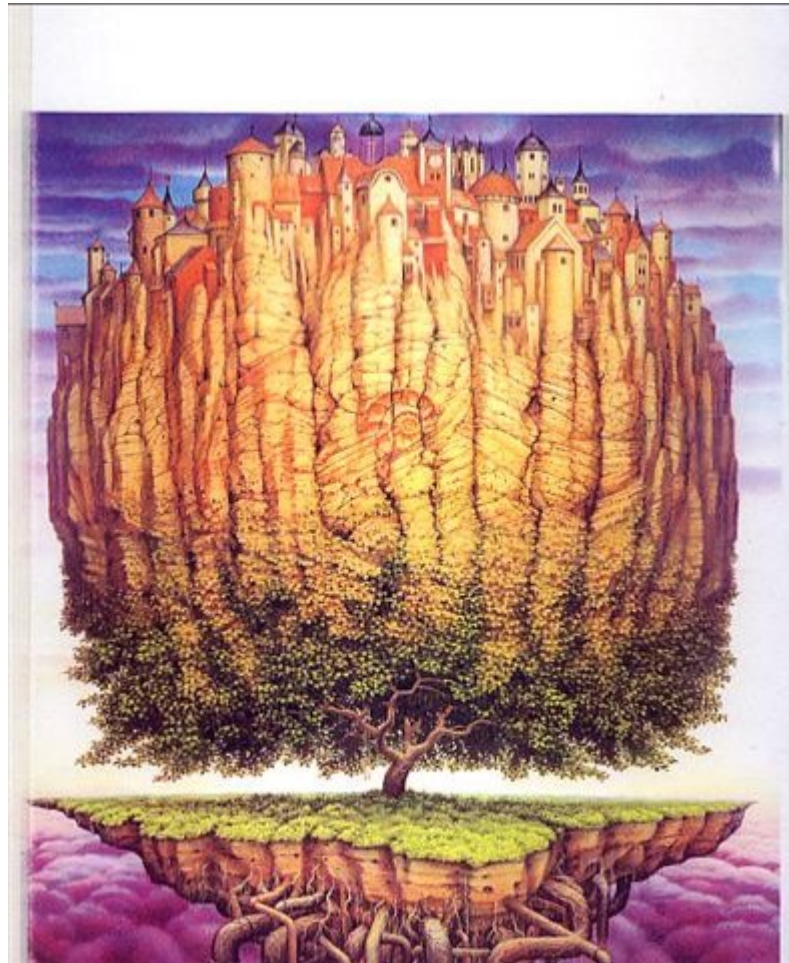


we see numerous Magritte's replicates, sort of doubles of his, that might be falling and might be floating in the air, negating the force of gravity. In his 1959 painting, 'The Castle in the Pyrenees', picture no.9,



we see an extremely hard rock/castle whose very solidity brings doubt as to whether it is floating in air or falling. Here, as well, effort is put into emphasizing the unbreaking solidity of the castle opposite and

against a background of the fluid qualities of the sea and the airiness of the sky. At least on the visual level the castle is highlighted as whole and strong, even if in danger of a serious fall, that if it happens, we can suppose will not lead to the break up of the castle but of everything beneath it. Perhaps it is worthwhile here to remember that Magritte lost his mother at 13 when she killed herself by drowning in the river beside their home, and that according to his report he also saw her body when it was pulled from the river. Loss of contact with the object, or in the language of Quinodoz (1997), fear of falling from the object, continue as a central subject in the work of Magritte, where past trauma is present in nearly every work, whether directly or through refuting the existence of trauma. Inspired by Magritte's painting 'The Castle in the Pyrenees', the contemporary Polish painter Yacek Yerka painted a picture called 'Cowan City' (1993), picture no.10.



In this picture we see a kind of multi-layered and heavy weighing structure, merging with a tree abundant in roots. In this picture we are led, at first glance, to sense that the stability of the structure is evident and

assured, and thus that no danger of it falling exists, but on a second look we can see that the whole structure actually isn't connected to stable ground at all, but floats above the clouds, and so all the means through which we came to experience the firmness of the structure take on an additional, deceptive aspect, because they cannot remove the danger of a potential fall.

Both the dread of being rejected or dropped by the object (and consequently of losing contact with the object) and the dread of annihilation appear in a dramatic way in one of Beckett's short stories, 'The Expelled' (1946), which was written while Beckett lived in France. It is probably the second story written by him in French, after he had expelled himself from his motherland, Ireland, and from his mother tongue, English. The story begins with the narrator's memory of the pain involved in the obsessive counting he used to engage in as a child. He used to count the steps of his house and to get mixed up, never being able to decide whether he should include the sidewalk as the first step or not. As an adult, the storyteller makes a great effort to remember the number of steps, but in vain. As for remembering, Beckett (1946) says: "Memories are killing. So you must not think of certain things, of those that are dear to you, or rather you must think of them, for if you don't there is the danger of finding them, in your mind, little by little. That is to say, you must think of them for a while, a good while, every day several times a day, until they sink forever in the mud. That's an order" [pp. 46–47].

This text illustrates, in my opinion, in the tragic-comic way typical of Beckett, the effort to control the black shadow of the object upon one's soul. According to Beckett, the more the child is absorbed in obsessive counting, the less he will think of the persons who inflict unbearable pain and anxiety on him, or at least, he will have the illusion that he controls their impact on him.

Later in the story, we begin to understand against what exactly such heavy defenses are needed. The child in the story had been thrown away from his house into the street. Although the concrete number of steps



might have been relatively small and the physical fall from them might not have been too painful, it is quite easy to imagine the intensity of the emotional fall when a child is being thrown out of his house by his parents. The immediate comfort the child found was the sound of the door slam that followed his being thrown out. This sound made it clear for him that his parents did not intend to pursue him down into the street with a stick, to beat him in full view of the passersby, but 'just' to expel him into the street. The second consolation was built up in the child's mind by registering the fact that he had been thrown out into the street with his hat, which it had been his duty to wear at all times, so as not to trigger his father's envy of the son's handsome and young head. So this hat, though it had been bought under duress and though it made kids mock him, became for the narrator an item never to part from, not even after his father's death. The hat became inseparable from him, demarcating and defining him. When he is thrown out and falls into the street, the child knows that he has lost the only home he ever had. When he has a final look back at the house from which he has been ejected, he sees his family cleaning his room and spraying it with disinfectant. He starts walking, and here, not incidentally, Beckett (1946) describes in great detail the grammar of the narrator's walking and of his "nether rigidity" (p. 51): the stiffening of his lower limbs and the splaying of his feet wide apart, to the right and left of the line of march, while desperately rolling his bust. In spite of the extreme effort invested so as to control every step and achieve a stable position, his trunk is felt "flabby as an old ragbag" (p. 50), his walk is shaky and he often loses his balance and falls. He remembers how, as a child, he used to keep his feces in his pants for hours, refusing to change or be helped by his mother. According to this description, it seems that the burn felt on the skin and the stink became for this child a vital means of holding and maintaining his self, comparable to the function of smell as a protecting psychic envelope, as described by Anzieu (1989) and Ogden (1989).

Similarly, it seems that his walking in an extremely controlled and rigid bodily posture strives to balance his shaken mental and physical equilibrium. Many times we witness the formation of a secondary skin (Bick, 1968), which is evident when an extreme mental or physical muscularity is defensively developed to contain one's soul, when the parental containing function has not been internalized and a mental column/structure, as previously described, has not been established. Beckett accurately describes how the narrator developed his obsession to control his body through rigid maneuvers so as to hide his internal weakness and the stink of his feces, both being signs of mental leakage through his hollowed body and mind. After the expulsion into the street, the narrator starts walking with his legs spread wide apart so that no one can walk in parallel with him on the sidewalk. He almost runs over a child, which would have pleased him, since he detests children. In Beckett's (1946) language, "I personally would lynch them with the utmost pleasure, I don't say I'd lend a hand, no, I am not a violent man, but I'd encourage the others and stand them drinks when it was done" (p. 52). In his biting words, Beckett describes the narrator's hate that conceals his envy toward children who are, in his opinion, unworthily granted so much happiness and tolerance. Although the narrator does not kill anyone, on his way he falls and brings down with him an old lady (probably a displaced image of his mother), hoping her bones will thus be broken. He is reprimanded by a policeman who says that he should leave room for others while walking on the sidewalk, or otherwise he had better stayed at home. Beckett adds in his typical cynicism: "And that he should attribute to me a home was no small satisfaction" (p. 52). Later on he gets into a cab, searches his memory for an address so as to justify his travel, thinks of buying the cab without the horse, and hires it for one day. So it seems the cab is experienced by him as a sort of protecting space reminiscent of something between a cradle and a home. He invites the cab driver to have lunch with him, to help him find a room to let; they talk about their lives

and do their best to understand, to explain. The warm contact that develops between the cabman and the expelled is especially moving since, in the background, we still breathe the heavy abandonment that fills every corner of the narrator's world. In Beckett's (1946) words, "He had preferred me to a funeral, this was a fact which would endure forever" (p. 57). As he is enveloped by the cab and by this thin layer of human contact, momentarily some warmth and even a capacity to care fill the expelled man's heart. He registers the cabman's worries, offers to help him light the cab lamps, and feels concern for the overworked and tired horse. At the end of the day he is invited to sleep in the driver's home and agrees to do so only if he can sleep in the stables. While there, he hears voices of the cabman and his wife and imagines that they are criticizing him. He gets into the carriage and has the urge to set it on fire but does not do so, gets up and leaves some money as a sign of gratitude, regrets this act, takes the money back, and expels himself back into the street.

Throughout all his writings, Beckett vividly describes the despair and hopelessness that accompany lack of human contact and the never-ending yearning for human contact. The theme of falling that appears so often in his writings represents, in my view, the primary catastrophic fall, the break in child-parent relations. Against this rupture (Keller, 2002), Beckett describes various psychic retreats (Steiner, 1993), internal refuges from human contact, internal places for rest and eventual restoration of hunger for human contact. The schizoid retreat with obvious contiguous-autistic (Ogden, 1989) features becomes the only option available, since human contact is perceived as causing the loss of one's self. In Beckett's (1953) words: "We are alone. We cannot know and cannot be known. Man is the creature that cannot come forth from himself, who knows other only in himself, and who, if he asserts the contrary, lies" (p. 49).

In 'The Expelled', the expelling and falling become simple images symbolizing psychological abortion. The

narrator can rest neither in his home, nor in his body, nor in the human environment in which he lives. The throwing out of the child is a vivid image of being dropped out of the mother's soul and of becoming physically and mentally homeless. It seems that we find here an expression of what Quinodoz called the fear of being dropped, a situation where the storyteller is not annihilated and stays whole. However, one can find many hints in the story that this being dropped from the parental container follows extreme early experiences in which the danger of self-annihilation is expressed mainly through the defenses built against this fear, such as the habit of keeping his excrement as a warming/burning blanket around his body. So it seems that the late fall becomes mingled with a much earlier one in which disintegration and leaking of the self took place. Against both the dread of annihilation and the dread of losing contact with the object, the narrator finds an only solution: retreat from human contact and refuge in the body, which somehow becomes his only shelter. No wonder he refuses to part from his feces; no wonder he develops such a stiff and rigid way of walking, which aims at holding him as if he were made of concrete; no wonder he lives in hate and seclusion. The yearning for human contact does not disappear, and for seconds he feels connected with the cabman. But soon he cannot stand the pain and humiliation of being in need of contact. He rapidly feels criticized by the driver, and this time he expels (drops) himself into the street and into loneliness, into his internal world filled with persecuting object representations.

The main experience aroused by this story and others by Beckett is of a human being imprisoned in a closed space that is aimed to protect, but in which one cannot move and cannot breathe (Meltzer, 1992). Moving away from this space is dangerous to the self that feels haunted by its early objects to such an extent that inertness and feeling at a standstill become the main affective venues. Yet there is no total giving up of human contact, and one keeps oscillating between yearning for contact and fearing its threatening, paralyzing power.

One can say that in Beckett's story, we encounter a gloomy world wherein most of the motion is downward, toward collapse, toward survival through schizoid retreat into loneliness, hate, and disconnection. However, I suggest we remember that although Beckett himself had been deeply marked and haunted by especially severe experiences in his early childhood, he was successful in creating tremendously rich and fascinating writings. One can assume that the act of writing became the very container of the hard contents he wrote about. Moreover, his self-imposed expulsion from his mother tongue was followed, much later in his life, by his 'coming home', by translating his writings, almost all by himself, back into his mother tongue, into English.

I have tried in this paper to start from Tustin's description of most primitive anxieties, those of falling and dissolving, and to play around with her concepts in a way that can expand our clinical and theoretical understanding. I dare to say that my own preoccupation with this subject is an attempt to move on the continuum where, at one pole, in our most frightening moments, we are in danger of falling into the realm of bodily, concrete, wordless, and sometimes meaningless experiences. At the other pole, however, we succeed in using the most dreadful experiences as an incentive for internal reorganization and change—in other words, as a means of overcoming those ruptures that lurk in the corners of the soul.

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