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Reversing Perspective. Static splitting

Time → Timelessness

In a film from many years ago called (in Spain) "Pablo Neruda and the postman", "Neruda" (exiled in Italy) recites a poem, to the ignorant postman, about the sea. Then, the postman tries to convey his impression on listening to it:

Postman. ... I cannot express, I felt as, ... as a boat... rocket in the swinging of these words.

"Neruda". (Silence) as a boat rocket in the swinging of my words? Do you know what you did Mario?

Postman. (alarmed). No, what did I?

"Neruda". You invented a metaphor

.....

Postman (silence). But it is worthless ... because I had no intention to do it.

"Neruda". Intention doesn't matter, because the images..., the images arise spontaneously.

Postman. Then you mean that the whole world with the sea, sky, rain ... can be the metaphor of other things?

Bion's development of Klein theories of infantile mental mechanisms has greatly enlarged our understanding of how concretely the infant experiences his emotional states. From the whole experience of listening to the poem, the postman abstracts a selected fact: an image connected to a very primitive senso-emotion of being rocket in the mother's arms, or even more: being in the matrix, rocket by the mother's movements.

I shall explore, through the concepts of Static splitting and reversed perspective, levels of functioning where the working through of emotion has a negative result. I consider it as a difficulty to link images with affects and sensations, the failure in the transformation of primal sense-emotional elements into *symbols* or *signal affects*, then perceived as concrete objects or bodily sensations. In the therapeutic relationship, this results in a lack of resonance in the patient communication that does not evoke images or thoughts which could allow imagine the patient's emotional experience. The patient does not make a normal use of the analyst as a container and deprives him of projected emotional significance. I relate this with a difficulty to articulate the elements of thought through emotional links.

Freud (1926) established a difference between **automatic anxiety** and **signal anxiety**; the latter has both psychic meaning and a function: stirring up defences to avoid the pain of a traumatic situation of helplessness. In his theory of thinking, Bion reconsiders **automatic anxiety**, through the "nameless dread" and puts it in a relational context between two minds (mother-baby): the maternal "reverie" as a mental container transforms the catastrophic experience of helplessness into a bearable emotion, and affords the means to think and modulate pain. When this relationship fails because of difficulties in one or both

members of the pair, the psychic processing of some emotional experiences is disturbed. These unprocessed emotional experiences stay in the psyche as unmentalized, undigested facts, neither conscious nor unconscious but unreachable due to a lack of transformative systems which would make their observation and understanding possible. They constitute an archaic functioning that penetrates the caesura of time between the primitive preconceptual dimension and the present verbal one.

Bion (1962) describes how the pain caused by the absence of satisfaction can be experienced as a *no-thing*. The emotion awakened by the *no-thing* cannot be differentiated from the absence and is substituted by a *no-emotion* ... this emotion, namely the *no-emotion*, is analogous to "past" and "future" standing in the place where the present was, before time was annihilated. "The area of *nonexistence* is created; however, it doesn't function simply as a static emptiness but as a greedy object that devours meaning and has a pull into the void. In these levels, "space" is not an area within which human relationship might be allowed to develop, and as a result the "notion of time" through the interplay presence↔absence. It is rather the presence of an inhuman and malevolent absence that must be blotted out of awareness at all costs: static splitting and transformation in hallucinosis are at stake. Tustin (1981) extended Bion's idea of "unthinkable absence" in her description of the "black hole": when there is a premature rupture of primary "oneness" into "twoness", the necessary protection of "primary at-one-ment" (primary narcissism) is lost.

I relate the defence of reversed perspective, with difficulties in early development that can prevent the achievement of the normal split of the object. I understand them as silent areas not mentalized that remain as holes in the self. Corominas (1994) describes them as sensuous enclaves not integrated in a meaningful relationship that difficult the therapeutic progress. She relates them with pathological organizations in the adult personality, named by Steiner as psychic retreats (1993).

Bion (1965) describes situations where patients could alter their position in relation to outside objects by changing their viewpoint as a result of splitting of time and space dimensions. He refers to this mechanism as "reversible perspective", a pathological defence directed against the possibility of developing binocular vision and insight, because of the patient's unmentalized pain and, to maintain it, the patient uses a non-violent form of transformation in hallucinosis. The patient's conception of time and space operates in a different dimension to that of the analyst, similar to the Rubin's vase where you can see either a vase or two faces looking at each other, depending upon what you choose as a figure, and what as its background. Bion used the model of *reversible perspective* for situations of insight in which the personality may switch from one point of view to another. It relates with Money-Kyrle's theories about the construction of concepts of form and space, and with what he calls misconception and disorientation.

Reversible perspective, rooted in problems of early development, reproduces a primitive link in the analytical process where there is no differentiation between self and object. When the patient functions at this level, there is a blurring of separation, the

emotional experience of time is frozen in a catastrophe from the past that is always feared in the future. When we address separation anxieties, we meet with a void: the differentiated relationship is what is feared and avoided. The patient is so panic-stricken by potential contact with a persecutory object of "non-existence" (and with that I mean the feeling of being separate) that he cannot think, or is defending himself so strongly against this possibility, that he is difficult to reach. In the countertransference, the analyst can feel in a situation of emptiness, with a sense of nonbeing, trying to find something to hold on to, be it psychoanalytical theory, supervisor, or whatever. Survival itself seems to be what needs to be understood.

Even though it is difficult to communicate with words experiences that largely took place on a non-verbal level and which were sometimes the product of many sessions, I will describe some experiences from the case of one adult and the cases of two children. I am trying to explore models of understanding of the dynamics rooted in silent adhesive functioning without signals of anxiety, a way of achieving emotional anaesthesia. I will consider some play in children as analogous to the use of visual images in the adult for the purposes of ejection and control of a painful emotional experience: "Silent" ways of functioning, void of emotion; there are characters in the play, but no drama.

Dream thoughts (alpha). Deficit and uses.

Like Freud, Bion gives great importance to the visual function as the psychic matrix of elaboration, and points to the centrality of the metabolizing activity we carry out on sensorial and emotional impressions in order to form a visual pictograph or ideogram, as a first step to "shaping" psychic reality. This very primary psychic act of representation precludes the transformation of sense-emotional experiences into thoughts. The capacity to produce images allows the storing up of the units of dream thoughts (notation). However, in order to think, it is necessary to organize them around a *meaning*, Poincaré's selected fact: "the harmonizing and unifying fact 'spatially', and 'the cause' temporally". As a womb for time, the alpha function articulates the elements in a story (narrative or myth): putting thoughts in space-temporal coordinates.

Oedipus, solving the Sphinx riddle, uses the metaphoric level and he can find a selected fact: "the image" of "man" integrated with time passing by (*the animal which walks with four paws at dawn, with two in the midday, and three at the evening*). However, he cannot use this capacity to learn from his experience: he doesn't connect his killing a man in a crossroad with Tebas King's death.

The image can be used for purposes of control and the ejection of unwanted parts of unwanted emotional experience when instead of unfolding in its associations remain captive; it can give rise to something akin to hallucination. The aim is not containing the experience but rather of encircling it, in order to neutralize it (Bion 1992). The image would then be an artificially produced container to hold in, imprison, inoculate the emotional experience the personality feels too feeble to contain without danger of rupture, and so would serve as a vehicle for an evacuatory process.

The difference between impaired alpha function or deficiency in the transformation of beta into alpha elements and the difficulty in using dream thoughts (alpha) to transform them into a narrative, gives way to different pathologies of thinking. The first pathology belongs to the mental functioning of the psychotic part of the personality with "noisy" manifestations (Tabak & col.1999): fragmentation, massive projective identification, attacks on linking and on the ego functions of contact with internal and external reality. In the second one, which is related to the use of symbol, a lack of linking between alpha elements prevents the articulation of thoughts. I consider it as a latent catastrophic anxiety kept at bay by a "silent" unlinking with difficulties of learning from experience. This gives way to a blurring or distortion of relationships that produces an effect in the analyst's mind similar to the attack-on-linking because of a lack of stimuli which would produce images in his own mind that would allow representation of the patient's experience. In my opinion it is rooted in archaic experiences where the working through of emotion has a negative outcome: the area of negative links (-L, -H, -K)

In a description of a patient, Bion (1962) "visualizes" him as a foetus to whom the mother's emotions were communicated but to whom the stimulus for the emotions and their source were unknown. At times, this patient seemed to have a rudimentary idea of what was going on, but no idea of how he felt. Even if describing a different level of functioning in very ill patients, it helped me to recognize some moments with patients who have symbolic capacity but apparently addressed "outwards". This was the case with an adult patient of mine, who spoke about "impressions" she could not associate with anything, or scattered images without connexion. My communication too, was denuded of meaning and served only as a fetish container: these were silent ways of functioning characterized by alpha elements in an isolated state to keep at bay both the psychotic catastrophe and the catastrophic change. In the session, the analyst can feel pressure to force emotions and meaning with the risk of ending up in a minus container contained relationship - (σ ♀) parallel to the patient's one, which strips of meaning his and analyst the communications.

I put the adherence to images in a sensuous way in the area of transformation in hallucinosis. In the domain of hallucinosis, the mental event is transformed into a sense impression and sense impressions in this area have no meaning. In the therapeutic relationship, the analyst words are taken from their sensorial qualities (musical tone) rather than the content of the communication. There is a mute situation against the growth of a sense of separateness because it would be catastrophic. Meaning is lost and there is a state that is independent of the object and far away from the frustration inherent in thoughts, because of their genetic association to the absence or "no-thing" (Bion 1970)

Binocular vision

In "The Imaginary twin", Bion (1950) considers whether psychological development would be bound up with the development of ocular control in the same way that problems of development, linked to oral aggression, coexist with the eruption of teeth. Binocular vision is needed to establish depth perception. From then on, the visual model permeates his work: he uses "binocular vision" as a metaperspective on the interplay and differentiation between the

symbol and the concrete. It provides two *emotional* points of view susceptible to integration through common sense. An object seen as either loved or hated is perceived "monocularly". A sense of truth is achieved with the realisation that the object loved, and the object hated are one and the same. In this case, the symbol would be not only the representation of an absence but also of the relationship absence ↔ presence: *the capacity to consider the object and its absence as two different spaces*. And with that to be able to have a fruitful oscillation between concrete/abstract and object-of-thought/ thought. When this is not possible, the space where the object must be but is not becomes "spacelessness", a black hole. Triangulation locates objects in three-dimensional space. The depressive position linked to the Oedipus complex implies the binocular capacity to differentiate between physical/mental-space, fantasy /perception and hallucination/memory: it is a step from bidimensionality to tridimensionality. However, the fruitful oscillation between all these opposites tolerating the paradox, is what confers the dynamic quality of the true symbolic capacity: the possibility to see things from different perspectives.

In his work with psychotics, moving from listening to the verbal communication to listening to the patient's *ideogrammatic*, or concrete communication, Bion adopted the term "vertex" as an analogy of "binocular vision": a way to explore primitive forms of communication. Vision may be used metaphorically or concretely to make things clear. He refers many times to hallucinations as possible communications in the first mode – a phenomenon he calls transformation in hallucinosis. Hallucinosis is a concept that entails a wide range of phenomena not necessarily associated with the mental disorder: it is a state that is always present, but overlaid by other phenomena, which hide it. The absence of satisfaction is denied by the memory of satisfaction; there is confusion between thoughts and the objects of thought. Shelley's intuitive poetic formulation put this idea into words: "*that state in which ideas may be supposed to assume the force of sensations through the confusion of thought with the object of thought, and the excess of passion animating the creations of imagination*" (quoted by Bion 1965).

From (psycho)dynamics to (psycho)static

... you might just say that "I like what I get" is the same thing as "I get what I like"
(The mad tea party in Alice in Wonderland)

Starting from the analysis of Richard (footnote II ses. 42), Klein describes two polarities in the mechanism of *reversal* which depend on the predominance of loving or destructive feelings. In the first case, *reversal* is related to the normal processes of identification in mental growth that shape the posterior configuration of role-playing. In this case, in my opinion, there is not a total blurring of the difference, subject-object, but can be rather the path of differentiation and empathy, being able to "put oneself in the other's shoes".

Bion (1989) develops the idea of perspective reversal and describes a patient's hidden tendency to become attached to a single perspective from which he "sees" the interpretations and the analysis, behind an apparent agreement with the analyst. This is an active phenomenon, which transforms a dynamic situation into a static one. To maintain it, the patient uses a special non-violent form of transformation in hallucinosis (static and evanescent) to keep

the nameless dread at bay. In this situation, a pathological defence (static splitting) is directed against the possibility of developing binocular vision. Perspective reversal would be the opposite of having reversible perspective. The dynamic quality of the interpretation cannot be tolerated. After the interpretation, there is a pause while the patient carries out a readjustment. The pause may seem indistinguishable from one that another patient will make in order to digest the interpretation he has heard. The silence is not being employed to fully absorb the implications of the interpretation but rather to establish a point of view, not expressed to the analyst, in which the analyst's interpretation, though verbally unchanged and unchallenged, has a meaning other than the one the analyst intended to convey. The patient does not have to disagree with the analyst or experience the Oedipal conflicts. He reverses the perspective. It is a way of maintaining a "circular" time where everything is foreseen and fits into the patient's script.

When describing the mechanism as *static splitting*, Bion made a clear differentiation from the *dynamic splitting* described by Klein. He differentiated it too from "taking action to unburden the psyche of accretions of stimuli" (Freud) or evacuation of beta elements; and clarifies that it is rather that the patient regards the analyst's interpretation as **evidence** that he, the patient, "had evacuated" beta elements, a state of mind more akin to hallucination than delusion. The splitting is arrested in a static "pose action" (Bion 1989), no longer being necessary when *hallucination is substituted for reality*: a static-photograph-like in which all discrimination between background/ foreground, old/new, subject/object, is lost as any idea of movement. I think of it as a primal "chameleonic" defensive functioning. Time is compressed and spaces are obliterated, as is any distinction between subject-object. Every apprehension of psychic distance or symbolic closeness is blurred. Strong emotion is felt in terms of physical sensation rather than sentiment. Bion links static splitting (and the failure to match a preconception with realization) with the destruction of the oedipal preconception. The patient does not fail to solve oedipal problems; he does not even reach the level of having them.

The dynamic mechanism, which reverts into a static image, preserves the individual capacity to apprehend reality while changing its meaning, as it prevents unbearable emotional pain: in other words, the infant's horror of the nameless dread uncontained by the objects. Whether perceived or real, parental abdication of their protective responsibility, can threaten the child's capacity to learn to contain his affects and can bring for the creation of a fetishist artificial container as a substitute for a reliable connection. In this way, fantasized instant union might take the place of genuine intersubjectivity (Banner 2006).

Britton (1998) describes a state characterized by a disavowal (Knowing/not knowing), of inner and outer reality that leads to a state of unreality. This state is at the basis of a 'defensive organization' of the personality "as if" and he relates it with the mechanism of perspective reversal. This organization protects these patients both from their fantasies about their external world and their fantasies about their internal world. In the analytical process, they reverse perspective because they cannot afford to know the reality not only of their internal objects, but also of their external ones which he expects to find devastated or horrifying. They

stay suspended between what they fear in their own minds and what they fear in the world outside. It can be described as being permanently in what Winnicott called a transitional space: the resting *place of illusion* a rest from the constant struggle of distinguishing fact from fantasy, external from psychic reality.

I consider that the main "apparent" feature in this functioning is compliance; there is an inversion of the natural order of desires, the Other's wish is privileged over the wish of the self. However, behind the compliant false self, there is a negative identity that would be the exact opposite of what could be considered as the Other's wish (López-Corvo 2006). I think of it as "dedifferentiation", meaning to remain alienated, because to do the opposite of the other's wishes means the same: to remain "othered".

I relate it with Bion's concept of negative links (-L, -H, -K) as the areas I portrayed at the beginning where the emotion has a negative outcome. Negative love (-L) must not be confused with hate or aggression, rather as the difficulty to evolve to love, and the same with negative hate (-H). Complying is not real love (L) and negativism cannot be considered as hate (H) but a failure to develop these emotions and differentiate them through a true developmental split.

Clinical material

The bottomless well

Trying to achieve mindlessness because of a dread of catastrophe, Christian developed a play that could be qualified as evacuation akin to the transformation in hallucinosis. He emptied of any meaning the representation of a toy family falling forever in a bottomless well: nothing could happen to them, there was no catastrophe, no landing, and no harm. This play appeared during the last session before a weekend, after some two years of analysis (4 sessions a week). I think of it as his first attempt to mentalize something which had impaired his sense of continuity and involvement, because of the uncontained catastrophic experiences. He was trying to dismantle them because of the terrible pain they caused, which induced him to convert the situation into a static one.

My description starts from my actual perspective of things that acquired meaning for me throughout many sessions. I could learn a lot about his strategies of disconnection and feel in my own skin a relationship with an unreachable object. In his way of functioning, the only alternative seemed to be to make a defensive equilibrium through static splitting with reversion of perspective that meant that there was no separateness from the object and as such no real distance (Joseph 1981).

My first impression when I met Christian, holding hands with his mother, was one of a lost and disconnected child, who looked younger than his eight years. I could not catch his eye; I cannot say he avoided me actively out of fear, it seemed that he was neither looking nor seeing. This fleeting impression faded during the first observation when I met a compliant little boy with a sophisticated level of language, who

developed a beautiful story about a little dog which had lost his mother, with a happy end because he found her at end of the session.

1. His favourite toys were a family of furry, two big rabbits and two little ones. He was the little rabbit boy and I was the little rabbit girl, putting me thus in a symmetric and contiguous position. I discovered that all this had a very concrete quality; he insisted he "was" really the little rabbit boy, and when he lost the little rabbit, he said, "I cannot find myself".

2. At the beginning of the session he pushed the box of toys to the edge of the table to empty out its contents: all the toys were spread out on the floor. It made me think about him emptying himself of feelings but saying that to him would be nonsense. I commented that it looked like a catastrophe. He looked at me and smiled. This became a ritual: he announced the catastrophe before emptying the box onto the floor. It was repeated along many sessions. Then he picked up some toys, a toy human family and a rabbit family, taking off the toy people's clothes and changing them around between the figures: masculine/feminine big/small. In posterior sessions he removed their clothes and then started to take off the arms, to change the heads, to separate the bodies at the waist. All my efforts to link this with anger, to find a meaning, were fruitless. He usually ignored my interventions, and I felt as if I were in a chaotic place with no possibility of organizing it in some sort of meaning. It looked like a crystallization of unarticulated experiences.

During the sessions, he often became wrapped up in endless play, his back turned to me. When I managed to reach him, he seemed in a way to confirm my interpretation through the play. However, in general, I had the impression of emptiness. It made me think about what happened with my adult patient, where after an interpretation of something that had happened in our relationship, there was a silence and then she started describing an external situation that seemed a faithful echo of what I had just said but without any emotional connection. That is, as if it were an evacuation, a perceptual transposition of an image into the external reality, in the Christian case an evacuation into the play.

I could feel an emotional void with many meaningless impressions, which could not be felt or thought. At some moments, he wrapped himself in a defensive fantasy based on some story from the TV, which covered the void; what was underneath was the inarticulation of elements of thought put together in a false narrative giving the impression of coherence. I often felt desperate, unable to reach him or make his experience meaningful. At the same time, he was very compliant. He could empty a female rag doll of all "her insides" leaving only the skin: this was our shared, flat, bidimensional experience. I would consider it to be emotional emptiness covered by a layer of false compliance. He reproduced a kind of relationship with an uncontainable object which was necessary to please and to cheer up. At the same time, it made me think about the enuresis as a very primitive wrapping second skin made of warm sensations without meaning. My words could also be false containers for an experience which needed to develop without being covered by a false meaning lent to the patient by the analyst.

3. After some time, at the end of the session he started to create a tidy corner inside the box of toys, where he put two beds that were joined together, one big rabbit with a little one in one bed, another big rabbit and another little one in the other. He made a table with a TV (out of little building pieces) so they would be able to enjoy themselves and not be "bored" when he was out. They became the concrete containers of his solitude in real time.

4. The evacuation of his emotions, with the concretion of his experiences in the characters of his play gave way to a drawing, which had been central during the first years of analysis. He started to draw (in the same way as he suddenly could go to the bathroom), in black, a "bad Pokémon" (a TV character), which attacked and destroyed everything with electric rays. There was also "good Pokémon" inside a half-formed balloon, stuck to the edge of the sheet of paper, as protection against the electric shots. He was playing silently, his back turned to me: then suddenly he started to draw something which I couldn't see properly because it was immediately destroyed by a black "electric ray". It took me a very long time to discover that some of the things which were destroyed were faces showing emotions ("inadvertently", he allowed me to see just a bit): a face in tears, a smiling face, which were rubbed out/crossed out (?) immediately after he had drawn them through the electric ray. What remained in their place was a black hole. I think of it as the beginning of his attempts to shape something very primitive in images, which at the very dawn of emotion were immediately annihilated. There was no more evacuation through the body, the sheet of paper became the concrete container of the emotions he tried to get rid of and to annihilate because of the absence of a mental container. At the same time, this drawing was giving shape to a "malignant space" where the absence of the object was annihilated, as were the emotions which could appear in the space left by the object.

I think of the good Pokémon protector balloon as the defensive fantasy he unfolded in the play with the aim of maintaining things in a static situation, covering up the holes of his emotional experience, filling them with false emotions so as to maintain an illusion of no difference and at-one-ment. Moreover, the archaic Superego, the bad electric Pokémon which annihilates experiences, was also represented. In a moment of transition, when he said the little rabbit, he called Christian after himself was no longer him, he decided to throw away the drawing.

I will now offer a fragment of a session where there is a more direct communication through the child's complaint of physical pain.

He comes into the playroom, complaining. To my comment that something is hurting him today, he answers immediately: "My head, my head hurts, I've got a headache." He takes a little transparent toy out of his pocket: It is Casper the Ghost, you know? he says. He allows me to see how the little rabbit "him" starts fighting the phantom who wants to come into the play-box, trying to throw him out of the box, but he is defeated again and again. I say that ghosts cannot be seen and can frighten people, in the same ways as anger or terrible feelings that one doesn't want to see or cannot think about, and then they can hurt in the head.

He listens to me and shows me in detail how the ghost can pass through the wall of the box. He says, however, that he would need to destroy the wall of the box for me to really see it.

A. You need me to understand how frightening it is when the ghosts become real and go through your head and how difficult it is to fight them once they are inside. You are trying hard to show this to me, you want me to understand and think about it.

P. (He farts) Hallelujah! He makes himself comfortable, lying on the mattress: Do you know what a snowstorm is? (On my comment he can tell me): It's a gust of wind, which raises a lot of snow into the air.

[in Castilian the words fart (un viento) and snowstorm (ventisca) are similar]

A. There can be very cold situations - so cold!! - that one cannot even notice the pain. Everything is confused, foggy and numb. Can I imagine how one can feel in a very cold place, with a whirlwind, in a confused state with things muddled in one's head that make it difficult to think?

P. And a sudden blaze? (eruption) Do you know what a sudden blaze is? A volcano throwing out a lot of fire.

A. It makes me think of situations where you could be so angry and full of rage that you would burst, expelling fire from your mouth, saying a lot of insults. Or you could explode like farting?

P. (He starts hitting his head with the box cover)

A. You told me about your headache, now you are hitting your head. I wonder if you are angry because you don't want the headache. Or is it that you are afraid of me being angry with you, and you are punishing yourself?

P. (He looks at me very seriously, with a tragic expression on his face): I must tell you something very important. I argued with my mother; she got angry because I hadn't done my homework, and that was not true! She said 'Bastard!' and 'Motherfucker!' to me and I called her 'Idiot!' and 'Whore!'.

At the beginning, Christian shows (phantom) the concreteness of his experience. I did not feel the fart as a provocation but rather an expression of relief. Then his communication allows me to have images that I can connect, first with the lack of painful emotion (coldness) and confusion. In this moment I am very careful not to connect the words by similitude. With the "sudden blaze" I dare to connect with farting, but the "hypothesized anger" (which was not there) pulls him back to the concrete. My impression is that when I wrongly mention the fart, hypothesizing anger (that is not there), he feels that I return him back the projection.

In this spiral of transformations, the play mentioned at the beginning appeared, the play which he had engaged in before weekends and long interruptions for some time now. It made me think of a dream image that encircles the unthinkable catastrophe of the absence: it had the shape of a defensive fantasy, reversing perspective, turning it into something that avoids any contact with the reality of need and separation. At the same time, it was a representation of a "black hole" falling from the third dimension of ordinary real space into the zero dimension of infinity. This was transformed progressively into another play where the toy rabbits were fixed to the edge of the table by a long strip of

plasticine (the same edge from which he did empty the contents of the toys box) and were descending slowly under their own weight towards the floor, because of the plasticine flexibility. He put them in competition to see what the winner would be who would slowly "land" without falling because of the string breaking.

Reversal of time into space

The mouth and terror

One of the first drawings done by Simon (6 years old - 4 times a week- panic crisis) was a line of spikes up and down the sheet of paper, with wide, empty spaces between them. On my interrogative comment of what could be it, that looked like teeth, he said it was a shark, and then he drew two scared-scaring eyes in the top part of the page. Scared scaring, I had the impression that to frighten and being frightened were not so differentiated. Then he started to fill the top and bottom spaces, using a black pencil. In the big, empty space in the middle, he put a tiny, open, trembling form, which he coloured in red (I thought of a tiny tongue). In the meanwhile, he asked me if I would write the word 'shark'.

One could imagine that asking for the written word would be a need for containment and for the naming of devouring terrors; in fact, he was an intelligent boy who was very eager to learn things at school. However, I think that his terrors did not even have any form. From my later experiences with him, I can see his communications now as a covering up of a void through cognitive devices and also as manifestation of his compliant behaviour. In fact, I was the one who at the beginning suggested a particular form: teeth. Even his cognitive behaviour was impregnated with omnipotence: after I wrote the name using child-like letters, he put it in capital letters. When I tried to see if he was afraid of sharks, his answer was *he didn't know, he had never seen one*.

The sharp teeth, the big, empty space between them and the tiny tongue suggest an early preverbal area: an empty space, a lack of form belonging to protomental levels that cannot be put into words. Simon looked for a way to cover up the holes inside himself by jumping to the written word, substituting the visual image, which could not be connected to emotions.

We could have made a splendid team, him drawing and me putting the words, as if doing that represented putting a name to his terrors: this was pure fiction. When I did not comply with his demands, even trying to reflect on his interest in learning, I perceived a dumb intolerance on his part: there was no anger or insistence but a split of frustration; he went on writing words, spelling them according to how they sounded, and ignoring me.

In the third year of analysis.

In a session last week before the break for the summer holidays, he discovers a very, very small ball of plasticine on the floor. He makes it clear to me that it does not belong to him and he puts it on the table. When I comment on his thoughts of what is

happening here when he is not here, he suddenly realizes that this is the last week before the summer break and asks when he will be returning.

I comment say that he needs me to remind him that I will be there waiting for him on the first of September.

P. What a long time! That's the whole summer!

He immediately goes to the toilet When he comes back, he looks calm.

Silence

A. It seems that when we spoke about the time when we would not be seeing each other, you felt there were a lot of things inside you that you needed to get rid of. Perhaps it is difficult now to speak about these feelings?

P. (With a disconnected air and in a pseudo adult way) Of course, we can speak about them.

Silence

A. You told me that you felt that it was a long time.

P. Time doesn't matter because here we say good bye (putting one hand in a vertical position), and here we meet again (with the other hand he makes a gesture of putting both hands together)

A. I see! You went to the bathroom and, on coming back, it is as if a month had passed by and we are meeting again. Now I am the one who has to feel that time is important. I have to stay here waiting for you without knowing what this is "something" that disturbs you. This "something" that makes you incapable of paying attention, and then you lose things and you feel sorry because you do not want to lose them (this was communicated to me in the previous session).

P. It seems that you will not know them until next year.

Conclusion

In the psychoanalytic setting, a patient expresses several concurrently operating psychic levels, belonging to "different times". The levels I had been trying to explore are ones where the analyst has a peculiar emotional experience of lack of contact with the patient, and a lack of signs of ordinary conflict. The patient's communication functions at a sensorial level and it can happen that the analyst feels a countertransference at a sensorial level in the form of boring, disconnection, unease because he cannot function properly as a mental container. In these situations he is put into a symmetrical position, and finds difficult to articulate images with emotions which would confer meaning and words are not an adequate means of containing the emotional experience and take a long time to catch hold of it.

Winnicott talked about an endless falling as unthinkable anxiety and Bion as infantile catastrophe: the "black hole" phenomena of falling from the third dimension of ordinary space into the zero dimension of infinity. In his hypothesis of a prelexical language that infants speak and mothers and analysts can intuit, Bion introduces the notion of active containment that consciously and/or unconsciously resorts to languages that were in operation before the acquisition of speech- *the language of sensory images*. He made a

connection (Bion 1962) between countertransference and projective identification when he pointed out that the psychoanalyst may not only play the part of the patient's lost self in the patient's mind, but in his or her own mind too. He then went further: his concept of the analyst as the receptacle and/or container of these projections began to carry the implication that the receptacle could be inadequate, sometimes making the patient project even harder. Grotstein (1981) pointed out that this introduced the concept of deficit in the object long before Kohut. Bion suggested that some projective identification expressed the need to communicate something to someone on a very profound level. He compared (Bion 1965) the analyst's "containment" and "transformation" of the patient's feelings and thoughts to the primitive but powerful pre-verbal communications that take place between mothers and tiny infants: this is how feelings become bearable and thoughts become thinkable. In the analysis, the patient establishes identification with the analytic function as a result of the therapeutic task.

The internal framework that places the emphasis on what Bion called "real" analysis, rather than explaining "about" analysis, offers the patient an early sense of being followed rather than being led, of being under-stood by the analyst rather than having to under-stand the analyst. Steiner (1993) points to the difference between analyst-centred and patient-centred interpretations

Green (1975) postulates that the satisfactory connection of the analyst with his own 'formless states' is what enables him to pick up those of the patient, and that the work of counter-transference which he must perform in order to tolerate them and transform them into 'thinkable' sequences makes up for the patient's inability to do so.

I have been trying to show how difficult is to observe, contain and transform the emotional emptiness lying underneath a play or communication when there is no notion or hope of being contained, and how the transformation of the void can be stopped in the body, evacuated through images or in a play without drama. It is difficult to leave aside the need to lend a false, premature meaning and give enough time to allow the analyst to observe and permit the meaning to evolve (Eskelinen). If not, the analysis can be a false container repeating the experience with the primary objects.

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