

**“THE PERMANENT EARTHQUAKE”:
SOME NOTES ON THE TREATMENT OF A YOUNG BOY**

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade I have become interested in the treatment of children diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorders. Francis Tustin has, through her writings, provided inspiration in furthering my work with such children. Her compassion and creativity are evident when she writes (Tustin, 1992):

As therapists, we have to establish ourselves as alive human beings who, by establishing co-operative enterprises with the psychotic child, can help him to regulate and pattern such feelings because we are in touch with these elemental depths both in ourselves and in him. As he feels taken care of by people who can withstand his domineering, monopolizing attacks, he will feel potential rivals are similarly kept in order. As he begins to feel less open to attack, the use of autistic objects will diminish. His openings will become places where fulfilling connections can be made instead of being places which need to be blocked against the entry of inimical substances. He will begin to realize that they are places where healing influences can come in (p. 148).

Here I describe my work with a boy I call Eric. Eric's treatment, beginning at the age of eight, is the story of the movement from the agony of consciousness to the expanding awareness of consciousness. I explore, primarily through the presentation of clinical material, the theme of attention and its role in the transformation of Eric's "sense of identity." I use the term with Meltzer's model in mind to suggest the psychic experience of a "centre of gravity" fluctuating over time.

Aldous Huxely writes:

For what am I but a colony of souls, of whom now one and now another gets hold of the communal consciousness. And what I call "myself" is the net product of the activity of many selves, the harmony, or discord (whichever the case may be) of a number of contrapuntal personalities.

Through several vignettes I will attempt to portray the arc of the treatment, showing some of the openings in Eric's experience that allowed for "fulfilling connections" to evolve. I hope to show how the impact of discovering the externality of another and sharing attention can gradually become the source of healing influence that allowed Eric to move from a very narrow and constricted experience to a much wider awareness, becoming in touch, even, with a colony of souls within himself.

HISTORY

Eric is the first born child of Carol and Martin. He has one sister four years younger. In my initial meetings with Eric's parents, Carol describes a history of mental illness in her family of origin and says that Martin's family has a history of severe depression. She says that her pregnancy was uncomplicated but that at birth she nearly bled to death after Eric was delivered. The medical information I gathered regarding this traumatic event is incomplete. It seems that

Eric had a twin who died sometime during the pregnancy and this fact complicated the delivery of the placenta. Carol's medical recovery took several weeks. As a result of this traumatic complication she was separated from Eric for the first three or four days of his life.

Carol described Eric as an extraordinarily beautiful baby even though she says that "he never made eye contact directly". She says that he was hypersensitive and averse to sounds and touch from the very beginning. Unfortunately, I do not have detailed notes regarding his breast feeding experiences, only that he was breast fed. As Eric began to crawl and walk he was often very clumsy and banged into things. Eric began talking early and Carol says that he loved words but by the age of three his speech began to dry up. Carol reports that she had Eric evaluated by a local program and ultimately he began sensory integration treatment involving physical therapy and some speech and language therapy at around the age of five. Carol believes these treatments have helped enormously with Eric's coordination and secondarily with his confidence. She also credits modifications in his diet, like eliminating wheat and dairy products, as having favorable impact upon his mood. Eric's communication, however, remains sparse and his tactile sensitivity and pickiness about food continue to persist.

At four months old Eric developed a high fever (105 degrees) and was hospitalized for several days. He was diagnosed with a bladder infection. Carol says that she stayed with him at the hospital and he would calm only if she held him. She recalls the episode as torturous and believes that Eric was never the same after this experience. She believes that Eric might have died and wonders if this might have permanently affected his personality.

Early in my work with Eric his mother provided a report from a recent neuropsychological exam. I quote from the report:

Eric is...a boy with a long history of developmental and motor delays and significant behavior difficulties. Behavior concerns include poor impulse control, irritability, aggression, explosive anger outbursts, obsessive qualities and impaired social skills. School adjustment problems appeared as early as Kindergarten. Eric is currently home schooled. Diagnostic considerations include sensory integration disorder, ADHD, depression, affective and disruptive problems, Asperger's Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder.

From the report's summary:

Comprehensive neuropsychological examination describes a child whose test taking behavior suggested significant ADHD features (ie, impulsivity, short attention span, distractibility, restlessness, impatience, hyperactivity, low frustration tolerance). Most striking, however, were his very high levels of intensity and over-focus.

I recommended that Eric be seen four times per week. This recommendation seemed overwhelming to both parents for financial, practical, and emotional reasons. A schedule of twice weekly sessions was agreed upon and this schedule was maintained (with a brief phase of three sessions per week) until the end of treatment (over five years).

EARLY SESSIONS

My playroom is a rather large space. Among the toys to be chosen from are blocks, Legos, a dollhouse and several family figures, a small sand tray with a large number of animals, soldiers, dinosaurs, trees, cars and other various objects, puppets, soft balls, and art supplies including colored pencils, crayons, pens, string, scissors, tape, and glue. While most of the toys are shared, each child receives their own box of personal art supplies. This is my modification of the classic Kleinian play situation.

In our first meeting Eric came into my consulting room, walked to my window and without looking at me gazed outside for awhile. He kept his back to me. I don't remember what I said but in any case he didn't respond. I noticed that he held his fingers and moved them rapidly together in odd twisting tangling motions. He occasionally jerked a little bit like he had experienced a jolt of electricity. In a few minutes he went and crouched between the end of my couch and the wall. I had the intuition not to try to speak to him so I sat down on the floor across the room from him where he could keep an eye on me. Mostly he didn't look at me.

My approach, following Tustin, involves noticing, differentiating, and tracking the different kinds of attention that emerge in the child's behavior and communication. I also try to register my own experiences of kinds of attention in my counter-transference. My initial emotional experience, aside from anxiety, was of intense curiosity. I also felt, somewhat bizarrely, an intuition that I might fall in love with this strange little boy. When eventually Eric decided to move out into the middle of the room I simply described to him that his curiosity must now be stronger than the feeling that he didn't really know who I was or what I was going to do. He seemed to tolerate this description. I then said something else about what he might be feeling. He briefly looked at me, laughed in an odd explosive *ha!*, then he rolled on his back pulling his legs over his head. Then he picked his nose and ate the contents as he rocked back and forth.

I sensed that there was a provocative element in Eric's behavior. There seemed to be an enormous complexity in him that nonetheless was hard to observe and gain access to. Tustin's differentiation of the entangled confusional child from the encapsulated child (Tustin, 1986) has helped me to think about this complexity. She writes:

Schizophrenic-type children (or confusional entangled children, as I call them) are very open and tell us about their strange misconceptions quite clearly. The encapsulated

autistic children are very different in that they are closed up and secretive. It is difficult to feel sure about what one has inferred... p. 40

Tustin also points out that while confusional entangled children know some degree of bodily separateness and seek objects, encapsulated children seek sensations through the creation of autistic shapes and autistic hard objects. She also notes that projective identification operates in the confusional entangled child while it is felt not to operate in the encapsulated child. I felt that Eric might have elements of both encapsulating and entangling processes operating simultaneously. The implications of this seemed to become clearer over time. There were times when I felt contact with Eric might be more possible, while, at other times he felt more shut off to me and I felt more shut out.

One day, Eric came into the session and aimlessly roamed around the room. He stopped at the bookcase and ran his fingers up and down the spines of the books on the shelf. I imagined that this was not a purely sensory dominated activity, that Eric might be thinking something as he touched the books though he seemed very far away. After awhile I said “it seems you have a worried look on your face”. Without looking at me he shrugged. I said “maybe it is hard to find words to describe a worried feeling”. He shrugged again. After awhile I said, “Maybe you prefer not to try to speak for some reason”. Eric was quiet but then suddenly said “I’m always worried about something at the back of my mind”.

The way Eric said the phrase “the back of my mind” stimulated a strong reaction. In my reverie, the back of Eric’s mind looked like an actual place where things continuously were happening. I wondered out loud if he could tell me more about what was going on in the back of his mind. He said “did you know that when I walk down the street I always look seven paces ahead in every direction”? I can’t really describe how odd this communication sounded. It was

not really addressed to me, but more to the world at large. It is hard to describe how Eric's words had an almost palpable texture. He then demonstrated, turning his head a little bit with each step, as if his head were a camera mounted on a moving robot body. I was surprised by this vivid performance. It did not, however, feel like play. Eric seemed to be showing (me) something he was very serious about. I wondered why he felt he must be so "vigilant"? Eric said he liked the sound of the word "vigilant". I realized he probably didn't know what this word meant. I encouraged him to tell me more about what it is that he is looking for when he looks seven paces ahead. He said simply "I don't know".

Upon reflection I can now see a pattern in these early sessions. There were moments of moving toward and moments of turning away. There was an oscillation between emerging and retreating, between contact and caution, between communication and isolation, between curiosity and escape into that which is always already known. Inspired by Tustin, Alvarez (1992), and Scabbio (personal communication) I developed a strategy of trying to catch the moments when Eric would come out and express himself to try to help him tolerate and extend the experience of sharing experience with me. This took a lot of patience, guess work, and attention and the first shared experiences lasted only briefly. However, with time these moments of meeting became gradually extended and elaborated. Noticing the fleeting signals of curiosity and initiative were key, I think, in helping Eric make contact and tolerate emotional experience. These were the first steps toward what Tustin has called "becoming rooted". She writes (1992):

*Clinical work which is informed by the **infantile transference** indicates that the constellation of nipple and tongue working rhythmically together with mouth and breast sets the feeling of rootedness in train. As well as demonstrating the situation to us, the infantile transference enables the 'unrooted' (or 'uprooted')*

patient to become rooted. This basic sense of being rooted [in relationship, my addition] sets the scene for the development of a sense of identity, security, and self confidence. (p. 32).

I felt strongly that Eric wanted to communicate while at the same time being deeply ambivalent about how to do so. This is precisely the point at which paying attention to attention becomes so important. Becoming rooted, in Tustin's sense, involves the capacity for sharing experience, for making contact with the mind of another, and through this contact beginning to sense the possibilities opened by such shared experience with a live minded subject.

BECOMING ROOTED

For the first several months Eric used verbal language only sporadically. He was clearly capable of speaking coherently, yet, for some reason he did not. He often communicated through action and the use of his body. He would come into the consulting room and flop on the couch and begin rocking back and forth. Sometimes he banged his head on the back of the couch and even laughed in an eerie way. I never felt that he was only trying to shut me out by doing this. I felt he was trying to evoke something in me, though often I was very confused by what kind of message he might be trying to send.

At other times he would crawl between the couch and wall or into the middle of the room onto the small carpet there. He would become lost in the carpet's design and sometimes curl into a fetal position and trace the pattern's design with his finger. I hypothesized to myself that though sensation dominated these actions were object related. In other words, I felt Eric had an intention to communicate something behind his action, that he was seeking an audience, so to speak. I felt, in fact, that Eric was trying to "make a scene". Noticing this scene-making activity seemed important if I was to help Eric learn to share his experience. As important as the content

of the scene might become, the first step was to notice a scene trying to be made, that he was using his body as a vehicle of communication. I felt Eric wanted someone to witness the scene he was making, and perhaps to describe it, though not necessarily to become a part of it.

One day, while lying on the carpet like a little baby, Eric said that he was beginning to see pictures in the carpet. I asked him what kind of pictures he saw? He said in an agitated way “I don’t want to have to jump into the fire to burn up my feelings”. I waited but he didn’t say more. I said that I thought I understood what a dilemma it was to feel one’s feelings are so intense that they will burn you up, or that you have to burn them away as the only way to deal with them. He became calm and relaxed for a period. Then suddenly he closed his eyes, grimaced, stuck out his tongue, and made claws with his hands and shrieked. Since I had no idea what this meant I said to him “I wonder what that was?” He said “A surprise!” I said “I wonder if those feelings came from somewhere in you and surprised you, or, if you were trying to surprise me?” He said quickly “both!”

In another session Eric was laying on the floor and he began to move his arm and hand in a smooth wave like motion. I asked Eric if he had any thoughts while he was moving his hand and arm or if he just liked the feeling of the motion. He said that he had thoughts but that he didn’t want to tell them now. I said that that was okay with me. Later, I said I had a feeling he was interested in the smoothness of the motion and talking about it probably felt like getting in the way of feeling the smoothness. Eric sat up and was quiet for a long time. He seemed to be “elsewhere”. Then he said “may I ask you a question?” I said “yes”. He said “why is this room so beautiful? I have never been in such a beautiful place as here.” I was stunned by this. I asked him what in particular gave him the sense of something being beautiful. Eric replied “everything”. I observed that the beauty seemed connected to feeling free now from too many

worries. I said that maybe being together made him feel open to something new that might feel beautiful. Looking back I think Eric was experiencing the dawning of awareness of being in a now-here moment of relationship that felt awesome and mysterious. This certainly was how it felt to me, noticing the impact of my own emotional state.

Some months into our work Eric came to a session in a state of acute distress. He exploded through the doorway screaming and charging at me. He smashed into me and began hitting and kicking me. I had no idea why. All I could do in the moment was literally push him away but he charged at me again and again. I simply repeated over and over to him, “I’m not going to hurt you and I’m not going to let you hurt me”. Eric was screaming “I’m going to kill you. Let me out of here. You’re going to die if you don’t let me go home now!” He lived out this ferocious tantrum through much of the session. His physical intensity had a powerful impact. I found it hard to think. I felt disoriented, a little bit frightened, and also very angry. When I could organize my thoughts it was in a narrow and concrete way. I thought about literally protecting Eric. I remembered how early in my training while working with psychotic children I had had to sometimes physically restrain a child by wrapping him up in my arms and legs and sitting on the padded floor while he bashed his head against my chest. I did not want to try this with Eric. I felt it would infuriate him further, and frighten him. He was in a frenzy, and I could think of no context for his distress.

I continued to tolerate Eric’s repeated physical attacks and to search for words to say to him. I began to become calmer and less worried. Eric finally exhausted himself. Then he became suddenly very frightened and cowering. It was a profound and rapid transformation. He seemed to have literally collapsed inside. I was able to tell him with deep emotional conviction that I recognized that he was afraid I wanted to “get him back” for his rages at me. I let him know,

again, that though I did not know why he was so enraged, I wanted to learn, and that I would not hurt him. I was glad this much could be put into words and shared with some clarity. By the end of the session Eric had calmed significantly as if a storm had passed.

Now I think that his outburst signaled the emergence of what might be called the “lost child”, that part of his personality frantically seeking a containing mind with alpha function and reverie. Surviving his primal storm was the beginning of showing him an actual separate caring other who could survive and think in a time of desperate distress. I think of Bion’s work on projective identification as form of communication, and about the importance of being, interpersonally, what I call a projective identification welcoming object that over time the child can learn to trust and to internalize. Without this as a starting point it seems impossible to grow an “apparatus for thinking” and to learn from experience. Though I could not offer Eric a great deal of insight into his storm, I could live through it with him in a live minded way. I could extend to him my willingness to get-to-know the storm experience and bring the energy of the storm into the field of my own embodied attention.

Not long after this session Eric became interested in the sand tray. He selected a small figure of a boy. He did not speak. He took the boy and buried him in the sand. Then he dug him up. Then he buried him again. Then he dug him up and had him walk along the top of the sand, then, suddenly the boy was buried again. I don’t know if I can convey the intensity, economy, and emotional condensation of this evolving scene. To me this was a powerful story beginning to take form. I asked Eric if there might be any kind of story to go along with what he was showing me. Eric said flatly “no”. At this moment I did not seem to appreciate how hard stories were for Eric to make with words. It was an achievement for him to narrate a story, however rudimentary, through action.

I wondered if the little character he had chosen had a name. “Boy”, said Eric. I asked where Boy was. Eric said “in the sand”. I said to Eric that as I watched boy I had a very strong feeling that was hard to put into words. I said the feeling felt like a mixture of worry and fear and sadness all mixed up and confused. At this Eric looked at me and said “It’s a permanent earthquake. It never stops shaking”. I *felt* his words at the level of sensation as he spoke them. It was a kind of turning point for me. I began to wonder inside myself how it could be possible to make a life if that life involves living through a permanent earthquake. At the same time, I felt there was something wonderful and hopeful about Eric’s mind, something powerfully affirming in his ability to create such a dramatic personal symbol.

DEEP REVERIE

Bion’s concept of reverie involves the mother’s capacity to use her own intuition, imagination, attention, conscious and unconscious memories of her own experience as a child, and her innate creativity to help sponsor the transformation of her infant’s distress into comfort. Mother’s reverie offers potential meaning where before there was none. While working with autistic and psychotic children, as well as with some psychotic adults, I have noticed the influence of this crucial factor in the establishment of a viable psychotherapeutic process. I would say that some treatments evolve or fail according to what I would call the analyst’s capacity for “deep reverie”. By deep reverie I mean the capacity to open up emotionally to situations that may be extraordinary in comparison to my own actual life circumstances and experiences. Some patients seem to require much more of this elusive self analytic capacity than others. I will have more to say this afternoon about what I think some of the elements of deep reverie might be based on my work with children. For now, I will mention only that I return

again and again to the helpful encouragement to turn my attention inward, to “listen to myself listening to the other” (Grotstein).

For several weeks I had some pussy willows that a colleague had given me in a vase on the small table near my couch. One day Eric walked up to them and seemed to become lost in curiosity. Silently he reached out and touched one. He said “it’s very hard”. I agreed. Then he peeled the shell away and stroked the soft grey bud inside. He said “it’s so soft”. I was very moved by this and said nothing. He said “I want to let them all out and set them free” and he started peeling the shells away and leaving the husks on the table while stroking the soft insides. I then felt, with a great deal of emotion, what I wanted to say to Eric. I said to him, “I think you are fascinated by discovering the softness of the pussy willows because there is a soft part of you that you want to be free.” I paused to see if he was listening and he seemed to be. I said “In order to free that soft part you need to know that I will protect it, and you, and not damage it. I know how hard it is to believe that there can be enough protection for you to risk getting to know your soft part of yourself here with me.” Eric did not say anything but he gazed for a long time directly into my eyes to the point where I almost began to cry. Such moments of emotional sharing became more frequent throughout our work. To me this was an instance of deep reverie. Now I recognize how utterly literal such feelings of hardness and softness are for children like Eric. What sounds like a metaphor is in fact a description of an experience as it is felt, somewhere on the border between sensation and image. Words like softness, hardness, and protection describe actual sensual and concrete experiences on the way to becoming stable true symbols as the child opens to becoming rooted in the containing atmosphere of an emerging shared relationship where reverie is available and can be realized.

One day Eric began playing a game with the small fountain in my office. He touched the water gurgling from the spout and then the smoothness of the flat rocks in the fountain bed. Then he went to the plug in the wall and pulled it out. The water stopped. He put the plug back in the socket and the water resumed flowing. He played this game of in and out, on and off, stopping and starting for several minutes. I said that he was trying to figure out how experiences get interrupted. He said "I'm invisible". I said he thought I was angry with him for pulling the plug in and out. He said "you are my brother, the elephant. I'm invisible and you have to find me. I had to leave because the invisible infant "A" is coming". I wasn't sure I heard him right and he told me again "invisible infant "A" is coming". Then he asked to play with the sand tray and took the sand from the tray and covered the play table making a storm of sand that spread across the floor and onto the furniture. I was not very happy about this mess but I also felt I could not interrupt something important happening. Eric said that he could come back now because he had a "special detector" that allowed him to know that the "invisible infant A" was now gone. There was nothing silly about this play. There was an atmosphere of suspense, as well as something hard to describe, perhaps the words "mysterious" or "solemn" come close. He told me that it was "invisible infant A" who had made the mess with the sand. Perhaps this play with plug going in and out and connected with the water's flow or its absence can be understood as the emerging capacity for projecting and introjecting. Could one imagine that Eric was discovering in his relationship to me an object with a space inside to welcome his projective identifications?

In the sessions that followed Eric's material became very rich and seemed to spill out with enormous speed and seemingly endless transformations. It was impossible for me to register, reflect upon, and reply to all the variations in his play. He began drawing chaotic explosive messes with black and blue and red and brown crayons. These developed over weeks

into maze like galaxy pictures. One day I decided, spontaneously, to make up a game to help Eric find more words for his drawings. I said “I have an idea. Let’s pretend that you are a scientist (he had given me ample data to know that he imagined him self a future scientist) and I am a reporter. I am here to report upon these pictures and to learn more about them. Eric said he liked the idea. He told me to get a pad of paper and to take notes. Reporters, he said, have to take notes.

Eric told me about a creature from outer space called a “B-l-o-b-o-e”. I will read to you from the report that Eric dictated to me:

The Bloboe has a fiery mouth; it is very very large; one mouth is always open; there is another mouth that is closed most of the time; The Bloeboe is an alien and looks like a rolling pin; it has a very strange mind; its mind is woven together; --I asked by what, but this is not known. The Bloboe is very strong and has large muscles. It eats lighted matches. The fire burns out when he or she dies. Female bloboes are very rare. Girls have different patterns. They have shorter mouth fire. Their home is in the core of Mars.

The emergence of the messy baby part of himself, and his evocative name “invisible infant A” as well as his attempts to sort out feelings like galaxies and boy and girl confusions marked a watershed in this period of our work. Eric began explicitly wondering about things like “minds” and this development was exciting to both of us. The process of becoming rooted seemed now to allow not only more shared attention but the emergence of reciprocal play. One might understand that certain possibilities had emerged because of the new existence of many different kinds of mouths. The open mouth represents sensuousness and the capacity for primary cooperation. The closed mouth represents autosensuousness and the fiery mouth perhaps represents many things, including anticipated pain around taking in, pain around giving and

taking, and also a confusing fiery part object where the masculine is seen as vastly exaggerated in power in comparison to the feminine.

One day Eric began his session by wordlessly sorting through the large box of plastic play figures. He selected, for the first time, a small brightly colored cloth butterfly. He studied the butterfly for a long time, presumably because the intricate pattern of its cloth wings attracted him. Then he looked at me and still without speaking got up and made the butterfly move around the room, softly landing on different things, the pillow on the couch, the arm of the chair, the lid of a small ceramic pot. Then he came near me and made the butterfly move around my head and face and ultimately land on the back of my hand. Eric looked at me with an anxious kind of expectancy, as if silently asking “is this alright?” Then he smiled. I smiled back at him. He told me how happy he was to find the butterfly in the toy box and wondered why I had never put it there before. I said he had never seen it before. He insisted that I had just put it in the toy box today and I said, no, that I thought it was not the toys that were different, but Eric himself, and in particular the difference was in the sorts of things he was now noticing and also wanting to share with others, including me.

Following this session the butterfly became a regular character in Eric’s play for several meetings. In a particularly dramatic sequence, the butterfly was attacked by soldiers who were sent to shoot it. The soldiers, I learned, were at war, and deaf from so much fighting, and would not stop until they killed the butterfly. They had no reason to kill the butterfly except that it flown by accident into the war. The butterfly, Eric told me, had an invisible language, and no one knew how to translate it. He said that someone had to make a soldier trap to save the butterfly. He then said that some of the soldiers might go on the butterfly’s side. He said that if they could build a time machine they could go back to the time when the butterfly could talk. He said that if

they did go back in time other soldiers would be waiting when they got there to put them in prison for trying to help the butterfly. I did not attempt to interpret this material but allowed it to continue to unfold by asking questions and learning as much as I could about the story of the butterfly, the soldiers, the time machine, and other characters that subsequently emerged. The thing I want to draw attention to, beside the obviously very interesting content of the material, is the now shared attention, the feeling of playing and being together, of cooperating and communicating that was emerging as Eric narrated this world to me, and even included my participation in its evolution.

One of the most important developments in Eric's play, some years into our work, was the evolution of an imaginary group called "The Young Animal Society" or The Yaz group. This group included characters like Lion Cub, King Pig, The Gator Brothers, The Little Lamb, The Snake, and several others. The adventures of the Yaz group unfolded over more than a year and Eric increasingly used these characters to explicitly think about and work through some of his own confusions and concerns.

For example, the earliest members of the Yaz group were The Gator Brothers. These small green plastic alligators both had very large teeth. The Gator Brothers came to represent Eric's impulsive aggressiveness which he began to work with and think about through the mastery of an imaginary toy called "the chomp machine". The problem for the Gator brothers was that before we (Eric and I) invented the chomp machine they used to chomp on each other. This, not surprisingly, seemed to mirror the behavior between Eric and his little sister and at a deeper level, perhaps, the undifferentiated predator-prey anxiety that Tustin has so brilliantly described. As the Gator brothers played out their wild uncontrollable need to chomp on the always strong enough chomp machine Eric began to discover a way of thinking about his own

impulsiveness that could be mastered and eventually we could link this back to his explosive session early in our work together.

Many characters evolved through our co-created play world. King Pig, a complex and passionate creature, came to represent the greedy, bossy, have-it-my-way-now part of Eric that he could increasingly own, confront, question, and manage. Lion Cub came to represent the grandiose but also ambitious, curious, willing to strive aspect of Eric. The Little Lamb represented the small vulnerable part of himself that was often in danger of falling victim to what Eric ingeniously named “brain-jacking”. Brain-jacking is that process where you fear the feeling of being controlled by others. While I took up in the transference Eric’s fear of my influence he assured me that I was not a brain-jacker. He described in compelling ways the evidence that he felt existed for different ways his mother and father, however, used brain-jacking on him. In his play it was The Snake, who, like King Pig, came to represent how intelligence can be captured and exploited by cruel quasi-malignant states of mind. King Pig and The Snake were the ultimate experts in brain-jacking. No one could reform them. But the Yaz group as a whole could contain them and protect a communal space where more charitable relationships could develop.

I cannot produce here the detailed play sequences that demonstrate, I believe, the growth of an “apparatus for thinking” and the significant self reflectiveness that Eric began to consolidate through his play. It was a relief to me to see how much pleasure he now took in playing. Toward the end of our work together Eric began to make what he called “mind-maps”, complicated maze like drawings that graphically illustrated some of the problems he felt were in his own mind. He felt by drawing these mind maps we could better see what he was feeling and in this way I could help him more with how to tolerate and work with his concerns. Evidence of his capacity for reflectiveness translated into his daily life and was given by his mother in one of

our last parent meetings. She told me how she had picked Eric up from the Learning Center that he was attending several days a week. She told him that they could not go straight home, as he would have expected, because she needed to run an urgent errand first. She told me she could see how angry this made Eric because he clenched his jaw and his fists and turned away from her to stare out the window. She was able to say to him that she thought he was very upset about not being able to go home right away but that it would only be a few extra minutes. She said that Eric had turned back to her and said “You’re right Mom, I’d like to kill you right now. But I’ll get over it.” Carol, to her credit, had learned over the years not to take Eric’s words so concretely and was able to appreciate now how new it was for him to speak to her directly about the intensity of his feelings, rather than acting them out. In this way, though still intense, she could share more of Eric’s experience, and Eric could gradually begin to picture her experience in ways he had never before been able to.

THE FATE OF ATTENTION

I now want to place Eric’s treatment, for the sake of discussion, within the larger context of the theme of attention. Attention is a complex phenomenon. It is generally understood as a capacity with varying qualities that allows one to focus on important aspects of the environment. From a psychoanalytic point of view, Meltzer, following Freud, has highlighted the importance of being able to direct attention inward. Meltzer (1992) writes: “...attention is the tiller by which we steer the organ of consciousness about in the teeming world of psychic qualities.” (p. 29) I will rely here primarily on Tustin’s descriptions of the use of attention to describe “the fate of attention”.

How attention as a capacity develops is deeply linked to what Tustin has described as “primary sensuousness”. Tustin (1992) writes:

*Psychotherapeutic work with autistic states in children indicates that the flux of sensations which constitute the infant's primary sense of being has two main head-streams. There is **sensuousness**, which is directed towards the body of other human beings who are experienced as responsive and alive; and there is **auto-sensuousness**, which is directed towards the subject's own body, or parts of other bodies experienced as if they were parts of the subject's body. ...infant observation suggests that in normal development, from the beginning of life, **consciousness** [emphasis added] of the very young infant flits, in a flexible way, between these two states. But trouble is in store if auto-sensuousness becomes over-reactive and over-developed. Such abnormal over-reactive auto-sensuous developments mean that primary sensuousness is **distracted away from becoming focused on succouring, nurturant figures** [emphasis added], and thus from developing relationships with them. (p. 28).*

Attention and therefore consciousness are organized and deployed according to sensuous and auto-sensuous trends. Drawing on Tustin's formulation of the differences between sensuousness and auto-sensuousness I suggest that Eric experienced differing qualities of what I shall call *now-here experiences*. Primary sensuousness and auto-sensuousness represent two quite different forms of now-here experience. It is not the absence of attention we must be concerned with, but the form that attention takes and the use to which is being put. Therefore, it behooves the therapist to differentiate and describe these two different forms of now-here focus.

Primary sensuousness, according to Tustin, is a relational experience that sponsors the development of primary cooperation. The model for primary cooperation is the good-enough feed between mother and infant. In this scenario the child's capacity to be now-here involves an

emotional experience shared with an actual external other. In particular, this passionate relationship is characterized by the capacity to share attention. Tustin (1986) has written beautifully about “the importance of the early suckling experience”. She writes:

*This is where relationship begins. Clinical work indicates that the **sensation** of the nipple-in-mouth (or teat of the bottle experienced in terms of an inbuilt gestalt of the breast) is the focus for the development of the psyche. Associated with the mother’s encircling arms, her shining eyes, and **the mutual concentration of their attention** [emphasis added], it becomes the core of the self. It becomes associated with regulation, with bearing the suspense of waiting, with tolerating human limitations, with boundaries and with the sorting out of sensations. The way in which the “breast” is given and the way in which it is taken leaves a mark for good or ill on the developing psyche. This will be affected by the child’s responses and by the quality of the mother’s relationship to the infant’s father, and by the circumstances of the parent’s own infancy.*

*In normal development, the heightened degree of responsiveness and the **especial quality of attention** [emphasis added] of both the suckling mother and her infant partake of the sublime, and even of the ‘mystical’. It is a physically based psychic experience. This empathic communion is the earliest form of communication. It fosters the growth of the psyche. (p. 29).*

In contrast auto-sensuousness, when decoupled from experiences of primary sensuousness, generates ever more isolating and idiosyncratic now-here experience. In an auto-sensuous scenario attention is used to create autistic shapes and objects that block out awareness of the not-me world or to entangle and confuse the developing self with the other.

Tustin (1986) writes:

*It is important to realize that, since the child's body seems fused with 'autistic objects', these have scarcely reached the status of an 'object' in the usual sense of the term. The child's **attention** [emphasis added] becomes so riveted upon these hard, object-like clusters of sensations that they prevent the normal use of actual objects, distinguished as objects which are separate from the body. They also prevent the development of relationships with people, who —by contrast with autistic objects, which are always available —seem unreliable (p. 128).*

When primary cooperation and communication are established in the first days and weeks of infancy, a background presence of primary identification (Grotstein) allows for a flexible mobile form of attention to evolve. This proto-attention, as Tustin says, flits back and forth between self sensation and exploration of the other. The premature awareness of two-ness, as may be true in Eric's case, can create a traumatic hole or wound and the proto-attention of the infant becomes swept up in the creation of barrier type defenses linked to omnipotence as a survival function (Symington, 1985). The fate of attention in this scenario may evolve into over-reliance on such defenses as adhesive equation and adhesive identification as well as the development of pseudo object relations so cogently described by Mitrani (1996).

I believe that Eric's capacity to share attention was obstructed in the earliest weeks and months of his life. Tustin described the use of attention to create autistic shapes and objects through the manipulation of sensations. This creates a form of rigid captured attention used as a barrier to the awareness of the not-me world or to entangle the self with the other. While Eric's functioning was not completely dominated by autosenous phenomenon, he seemed to be a boy who struggled terribly with being unrooted and repeatedly turned toward entangling auto-sensuousness as a mode of coping with what he perceived to be the threat of unbearable

experience. The disability of Eric's attentional system contributed the development of idiosyncratic modes of behaving, miscarriages of motivation in Tustin's language, as ways of trying to organize and manage his increasingly difficult to regulate experience.

Through our work together Eric gradually began to discover the capacity to reclaim attention and to develop shared attention. His capacity to share experience and use my mind gradually helped establish a "humanizing process" and to evolve a viable apparatus for thinking. The achievement of shared attention allows for the discovery and transformation of emotional experience. Shared attention is a vital element at the heart of Tustin's notion of the therapeutic action of psychotherapy. Tustin writes:

As the child begins to feel held in our awareness by our thought, care, and concern for him, he begins to hold experiences in his own mind as thoughts, memories, and imaginations. The undue use of autistic objects begins to wane. As Dr. Bion has pointed out, the mother mediates sanity to the nursling as well as nourishing milk. By their sensible attention and behavior, therapists can convey such sanity also. The feeling-tone of the therapeutic session is of especial importance to the psychotic child. (p. 123).

The now-here experiences of attention that I seeking to differentiate are not transitional experiences as described by Winnicott. The discovery of transitional space, according to Winnicott, is linked to creativity, spontaneity, and to the freedom to explore experiences of emotional intensity against a background of supportive illusion (Winnicott, 1990). In transitional space, subject and object are neither acknowledged as separate nor fused and confused. They occupy an intermediate space, a space Winnicott called a paradox. The subjective experience of transitional relating has a distinct quality and texture as well as an atmosphere of play and shared

attention. The now-here states that I am interested to describe are the preconditions for play (primary cooperation) or else profound obstructions to play and transitional relating (isolating auto-sensuousness).

Another important domain of now-here experience that I do not explore in this essay involves the complex phenomenology of the geography of fantasy and confusions of life space as described by Meltzer (1975). Intrusive identification is an important phenomenon that is beyond the scope of this communication but certainly is of enormous interest regarding another dimension of my work with Eric, particularly in regard to the theme of “brain-jacking” which emerged several years into treatment.

The case material I have presented, I hope, demonstrates the spirit of Tustin’s approach. Working to describe different forms of experience generated by differing uses of attention allows the analyst to better appreciate and even imaginatively enter the child’s world in order to lend words to the textures and qualities of isolating experiences. Gradually, through expanding observation and deepening reverie, the fortunate analyst may be able to help woo the child into contact with the transformational possibilities of a shared attention, one that expands tolerance for play, surprise, and psychic evolution.

Tustin writes: (1992):

Fortunately, there is always a part of the child, however miniscule, which wants to grow up properly and can listen to us and use our words for the purposes of growth, and for freedom from the rigidity and artificiality of his autistic encumbrances. (p. 166)

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