PERFORMING AUTISTIC SUBJECTIVITIES. WHAT AUTISM 'IS', WHAT AUTISM 'ISN'T' AND THE SUBJECTS IN BETWEEN. A GENEALOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE AUTISTIC SUBJECT IN THE PSYCHOANALYTIC LITERATURE.

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By Konstantinos Georgiou

Abstract:

In this paper the authors try to provide a constructionist review with regards to the autistic subjectivity. Placing autism in a historical terrain, they use ideas stemming from social constructionism in order to examine the core subject of this paper that is the way autism has been treated in psychoanalytic discourse. The authors examine the evolution of psychoanalytic ideas making inferences on the wider social context surrounding autism and psychoanalysis.[1]

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[1] **Editors Note:**
The psychoanalytic tradition is controversial in autism for a number of reasons, and some readers may find the terminology describing autism offensive from the social model perspective. However I include the article in the spirit of openness and debate which this journal hopes to encourage. (LA)

Performing Autistic Subjectivities. What autism 'is', what autism 'isn't' and the subjects in between. A genealogical exploration of the autistic subject in the psychoanalytic literature.

By Konstantinos Georgiou

'Contraries illuminate what they are not', says Ian Hacking in his introduction to the landmark paper 'Humans, aliens & Autism' published in 2009, (pp. 44). The text is an effort to illuminate the impact of human subjectivity through alien rhetoric. In this paper, I intend to follow a somewhat different trajectory with regards to Hacking's Contraries in the autism phenomenon. In my appropriation of the concept of contraries in the human vocabulary I will add a critical function to this theme. Contraries for me, should not only be viewed as indicating mere boundaries in our subjective worlds, but also as folders of our yet unformulated-formulated discursive worlds (Stern, 2010). Therefore, in order to explore the autistic life and world view, I will also need to focus between the edges of this world, in order to suspend the existing binaries and outline the interplay amidst neighboring ideas. This view that in my mind is associated with Winnicott's transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 1971; Phillips, 2007), or Benjamin's transcendence of 'doer-done' relations will inform my efforts to sketch the psychoanalytic paradigm in the subjective phenomenon of autism spectrum disorders (Benjamin, 2004) in therapy. My perspective that shares a material discursive methodological attitude in relation to the therapeutic 'reality', will take psychoanalytic language as constructive of autism, one that gives life to specific subject positions, relational scenarios and life schemata. Moreover, in terms of its historical dimensions this function of language could be seen as an unfolding of old meanings into new ones, creating hybrid discourses and alternative metaphors of autistic ways of being and relating, to the influence of our cultural and social networks.

The main controversy in autism and its developing dialectics.

Taking a historical look at Autism Spectrum Disorders the desire of many scientists to discover the unique cause of autism dominated the history of the condition throughout the 20th century, giving life to what could be called a fixed subjectivity of autism. Endorsed by the epistemological and ontological positions of modernism and using mainly a pragmatic theoretical understanding of health/pathology, autism was sent to our 'imaginary laboratories' (Feinstein, 2010; Nadesan, 2005; Silverman, 2012; Waterhouse, 2013). Against all odds, autism, a disorder of the social and the relational was taken away from the social and the relational (Alvarez, 1992). This way, autism engineering began planting the seeds of understanding surrounding the autistic population, offering new systems of meaning that could categorize, classify, theorize and remediate individuals. The appearance of autism thus, as a material condition was to change rapidly because of the accumulation and the production of new knowledge.

The first organized forms of knowledge production, attempted to theorize autism along the nature Vs nurture duality, postulating about an already existing debate in psychology (Kenny, 2013). On the one hand popular psychiatric and psychological discourses described autism in terms of its biological and neuro-cognitive profile, while on the other hand psychoanalysis emphasized environmental and mainly the maternal influences in the unfolding personality of the individual (Crown, 2009; Simpson, 2008; Nadesan, 2005). Such was the race

between the dominant psychoanalytic regime, the newly developed post-Kraepelian diagnostic psychiatry and the rising paradigm of cognitive psychology at that time that these disciplines became almost impenetrable to its positions (Berrios, 1996).

From the perspective of psychiatry and psychology new conceptual grounds began to appear publicly. The most influential of these new descriptions has been the triad of symptoms that Kanner first introduced in 1943 (Kanner, 1943), followed by refinements by Wing and Gould in 1979 (Wing & Gould, 1979). These authors like others, organized the behavioural symptoms of the child along three functional levels. The child's social impairments, the difficulties in verbal and non verbal aspects of communication and further the lack of imagination, play and repetitiveness of behaviors became both the physicians and the public's checklist in autism identification (ibid.). While these were the overt signs of a newly formed syndrome, soon explanatory accounts would make their appearance in scientific literature, and in medical and psychological handbooks. Knowledge production became widespread and new forms of social organization and public policy developed as an answer to these newly shown events. All these transformations could be located within identifiable cultural events that ultimately led to the 'discovery' of autism as a complex social-individual phenomenon.

'Finding' autism in the 20th century.

Although our scope here is not to provide an exhaustive description of the social conditions that enabled the identification of autism as a psychiatric disorder, we strongly envisage that such an attempt will provide the wider landscape for our subject matter. Our efforts to identify the factors that allowed autism to appear in the psychiatric lexicon will pull us towards a series of historical, cultural and political events that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Altogether, it seems that autism's turbulent ontology could be linked to wider social transformations that mainly resulted from the prevalence of modernist aesthetic imagination regarding individuality and selfhood (Mcdonagh, 2008; Murray, 2008).

Several components have been identified in such a constuctionist framework. Majia Holmer Nadesan, made an extensive inquiry in the historical conditions that precipitated autism (Nadesan, 2005). According to Nadesan, autism could be thought as a 'niche' disorder that means a disorder that was engineered within historically unique political and representational practices. Two aspects stand out in her comprehensive account in our opinion. This is the emergence and dominance of psychiatry and psychology as a form of social practice that ultimately altered our views about normality-pathology with regards to childhood and the ontology of early life. The interaction between these newly established psy-disciplines and public institutions fostered new ways of representation, identification and remediation of childhood (Nadesan, 2008). This view that draws on Foucaldian mentality, builds on the assumption that state authority through new forms of social oppression, enabled psychiatry and psychology to function almost hegemonicaly in the process of forming our ideas about childhood.

In general, the new perception of childhood followed a series of global transformations that took place on the public and the individual sphere, and gave birth to a new set of institutional practices that could envision new forms of social order. One such cluster of transformations that evidently altered early life, was the establishment of compulsory education and the mental hygiene movement that resulted in early identification of so called dysfunctional patterns in childhood (DeMause, 1974). Within this constellation of events, psychiatry seemed to be moving from a Kraepelian organic view of disease to a more psycho-biological one that was based on psychoanalytic views of mental health. In this vein, childhood mental health was seen as a precursor of later good mental life. This view motivated psychiatric explorations in children that took place in

Adolf Meyer's clinic in John's Hopkins Hospital in the United States. Of course, Meyer was not only to become a pioneer in psychiatric interventions with children, but also Leo Kanner's mentor (Feinstein, 2010). It could be therefore claimed that through this series of events it became possible for psychiatry to pay attention to the unique phenomenology of autism (Berrios, 1996; Nadesan, 2005).

The social construction of autism is also favored by other keynote speakers in the broad field of disability studies (Osteen, 2008). The philosopher Ian Hacking for example uses the notion of transient mental illness when he speaks of autism (Hacking, 1998). Hacking locates similarities between autism, schizophrenia, hysteria and claims that these disorders appear under certain social conditions. His account, is a demonstration of the interaction between culture and biology, or else the interaction between ideas and material bodies. In general the core of Hacking's theory lie on the fact that through a process of bio-looping, classificatory systems such as autism can be affected by environmental practices and social attitudes. In this way autism could be seen as a having a biological component, but the autistic lives are formed within a matrix of complex social dynamics (McDonagh, 2008, Nadesan, 2008; Hacking, 1999). This account has been mildly criticized for maintaining a restrictive dualism between individual and social realities, but in our view its moderate constuctionism could sound more compatible with the way so called 'mental disease' has been theorized in our culture.

Further efforts to bridge autism with the wider context, appear in McDonagh's account's about modernism and autism (McDonagh, 2008). McDonagh (ibid), positions his theory next to the ideas developed by Nadesan. He suggests that the popularization of modernity in art and literature offered a new paradigm for subjectivity that emphasized egocentricity and eccentricity. In order to set up this argument this writer quotes from many art-works that characterize modernity. His goal is to show that Kanner and later Asperger developed their autistic classification using the same descriptive images that were concurrently used by writers like Virginia Wolf, James Joyce, or Sarter (ibid). The modern protagonist claims McDonagh is represented in terms of his isolation, his extreme egoism, aloneness and an idiosyncratic use of language. This way, there is a widespread distribution of ideas about the modern self that overall expresses an 'autistic' aesthetic that pertains subjectivity. In an object relations language this might resemble an internal relationship to an uninteresting object in Alvarez's words. Perhaps the common feature of these individuals is that even though they sound as if talking at someone, in fact they rarely talk to someone (Alvarez, 1998; Alvarez, 1999).

Glastonbury announced a general 'autistic dynamic' in art (Osteen, 2008). Glastonbury writes about art in the 20th century and specifically deploys her argumentation on popular individuals like Beckett, Wittgenstein and Georges Perec. There is a close fit she claimed between forms of art that de-emphasized human interaction and focus instead on the attenuation and barrenness of the human being in the world. The social dynamics that many works of art reproduced had to do with an emphasis on sameness, intersubjective blindness or as Glastonbury eloquently put it 'with the minimalist sight of an attenuated self' (Glastonbury, 1997, pp. 39).

But if this autistic dynamic occupied art and literature, the question that seems reasonable to explore at this moment is what were the implications of this sort of imagination for the sciences of the mind and especially psychoanalysis? It follows that what we suggest here is not the explication of some mechanism underlying this movement, but the fluid reconstruction of the psychoanalytic thinking around autism and its appearance.

Autism and the trauma of the detached infant.

The identification of and theorization about autism in the 20th century followed a series of global transformations in the public sphere. Issues of pathology and the philosophical soil of disciplines such as

psychoanalysis were not to remain unchanged in a constantly changing world. Psychoanalytic views about autism gradually abandoned their previous taken for granted unitary and mechanistic structures, becoming more fluid and contextual. It seemed that in a way they became more sensitive in their constantly changing social matrices. My effort thus will be to show the course of these ideas that in my opinion might have started as a decontextualized self-referential approach, but were later fertilized by 'alien' (with regards to psychoanalysis) discourses, giving life to hybrid systems of meaning.

The beginning of autism in psychoanalytic history could be located in a paper written by Melanie Klein in 1930 (Klein, 1930). Klein, published a paper about a 4 year old boy whose clinical presentation seemed to match the phenomenology of autism that Kanner described some 13 years later. The child, Dick, was described in terms of his flattened affectivity, the absence of emotional linkages with the environment and the lack of any play and communicative gestures. Hobson's interpretation of, Klein's paper organized her thinking around four basic constructs that could be thought as four basic explanatory categories: 1) The issue of aetiology; 2) The applicability of the psychoanalytic technique with seemingly unrelated children; 3) The issue of constitutional incapacities against defensive withdrawal; and, 4) The role of cognitive, social and motivational difficulties in relation to this condition seemed to be central in the development of her reasoning (Hobson, 1990, Hobson, 2011). Overall, her theoretical explanations tried to establish causal relationships between the child's lack of symbolic abilities, the lack of affective relationships with persons in the environment and the difficulty to establish any purposeful engagement with objects in the world.

Klein proposed a link between the child's developmental inhibitions, the "sadistic and aggressive attacks on the mother's body" and the resulting anxiety caused by the fear of the mother's retaliation towards him (Houzel, 2009). Her main focus in this article as the title indicates, was to show the significance of symbol formation for development. Implicitly however this article succeeded in providing a series of arguments for Klein's followers in the study of autism and the use of play as a form of treatment (Hobson, 2011). By introducing the notion of autism in this way Klein unwittingly saturated and formed later attempts to theorize and treat autism under the psychoanalytic contour (Tustin, 1988).

One such discussion and appropriation of Kleinian ideas in the later years came from Rodrigue. Following Klein, Rodrigue implied that autism is a reaction to the external environment. (Rodrigue, 1955; Rodrigue, 1956). It is a compensatory move where the child tries to preserve his omnipotent phantasies over the object. In this respect, autism is represented as a defense against the frustration caused from the environment (Nadesan, 2011). In his 1955 paper, Rodrigue introduced the idea of an object relation of an idealized type and provided phenomenological descriptions to support this argument (Rodrigue, 1955). In the same fashion, he designated autistic ritualistic behavior as meaningful in an idiosyncratic realm. Drawing from theories of the symbolic, he made a crucial distinction between the autistic states where symbols are not communicated as such, having an isolated atomic quality and another one that relied less in excessive projective functioning and could be though as more representational of external reality. It is our opinion that even though Rodriguez's account succeeds in putting autism in its psychoanalytic theoretical garment, it critically loses its strength due to its orientation towards linear etiologic explanations in terms of autistic symptomatology.

A moderate Kleinian transformation could also be found in Ogden's autistic contiguous position. Ogden, although working with adults and strongly influenced by Bion's and Klein's theoretical understanding proposed an interesting concept that linked to an autistic dynamic in human development (Houzel, 2009). His autistic contiguous position, appeared intermediate to Klein's dichotomized dialectics between a paranoid-schizoid and a depressive position in mental life. This form of organization was seen as a pattern of meaning

generation that responds to the most elemental anxieties and fears of the individual. As an addition to the Kleinian theory of positioning, this formulation overtly borrowed from Tustin's ideas about autism. What characterized experience in this mode was the rupture of the sensory apparatus, with a concomitant imprisonment in the bodily sensations that prevented from developing any symbolic activity. It is worth stating that psychopathology in Ogden would result from a lack of a dialectic fluidity between the three positions and not due to a fixation in one of them (Ogden, 1992).

Ogden, particularly emphasized the difference between the autistic contiguous position and pathological autism. According to him, in autism 'proper' the individual inhabited a completely asymbolic realm, whereas in the autistic position its sensory units could be taken as symbols to be. This way, autism proper could be linked to a complete self-engendered state, were its sensory experiences are embedded in a strictly idiosyncratic non-communicative way (ibid). Ogden's thinking with regards to autistic contiguous position is distinguished fromautism proper in many ways, but this doesn't annul the fact that in many instances the descriptions of anxieties and defensive modes resemble the way autism has been thought about in the work of others. Of course, the fact that Ogden borrows from Winnicott, Meltzer and Tustin makes his work a definite source of imagination not only for working with adult populations, but also for the theoretical exploration of autism in childhood (Mitrani, 2008).

The 'Turn' to Individual Experience.

It could be argued that the dominant views around infancy, child development and the popularization of ideas about individuality and personality development functioned as the habitat for mapping the dynamics of the autistic mind. Indeed, psychoanalysis in its early days oscillated between a rather individualist paradigm to the study of development in infancy and its pathology, and an alternative one that would discharge the infant into his being in the world. From Freudian epigenetic and stage based theories (Gay, 1998), to the Kleinian positioning sequels (Likierman, 2001), Mahlerian developmental phases (Palombo et al., 2009), Anna Freudian developmental lines (Edgcumbe, 2000), attachment theories and the Winnicottian dependency spectrum (Kenny, 2013, Palombo et al., 2009) the psychoanalytic infant strived to attain its individuality through a process of maturation that centered on the notions of separation, individuation and autonomy. The individual mind was the single and most important organizing feature of psychoanalytic formulations, but also the most significant element of those early writings and autism has not been an exception (Kenny, 2013).

The 'turn' to individuality, is evident in the work of Margaret Mahler that could be considered as a broad developmental theory that contains also a specific explanation for autism. Mahler, as one of the most influential psychoanalysts, tried to theorize the autistic mind on the basis of its development towards autonomy and individuality (Palombo et al., 2009). The autistic infant, according to Mahler, failed to endure the process of individuation that followed an initial phase of symbiotic union with the mother. Following, Freud's epigenetic notions, her theories were an effort to examine the autistic mind in a framework of selective intersubjectivism similar to that of Spitz and others (Kenny, 2013). However, Mahler was very careful in navigating among the autistic phenotypes. Indeed although she seemed to imply that autism had to do with the faulty development of the separation procedure she carefully distinguished several autistic phenotypes (Mahler, 1958). What seemed important for her, was not only the infant's constitutional vulnerabilities but its derivatives in the infants developing personality (Hobson, 1990; Hobson, 2011). For Mahler, as for other theorists, the mothering principle was placed in the center of infant development since it was through the mother's ministrations that the child could progress towards health and autonomy. Similarly, the autistic child, not being able to use the

'beaconing of emotional orientation' of the mother was left devoid of opportunities to progress naturally. It was as if the baby was thrown alone into the bathwater, to quote Bell's poignant metaphor (Bell, 2009).

Mahler, generally described what she thought was the child's innate tendency to individuate and separate from the mother. Her initial thesis was that normally the child progressed within two phases of union and dependency with the mother. In the first phase that was named normal autistic phase the infant was considered to be lacking an awareness of the external environment, while only being able to appreciate sensation states belonging to his material existence. It was up to the mother's ministrations towards her infant, to travel him towards a second more differentiated phase that she called 'normal symbiotic phase (Mahler et al., 2000). She gave particular emphasis in the characteristics of this process that she described from an illusionment-disillusionment prism. Characteristically, Mahler believed that in the 'normal autistic phase' the child was lacking an awareness of the external environment, while only being able to appreciate sensation states that belong to his material existence. Through his proprioception, she claimed and his tactile awareness the infant gradually managed to acquire a rudimentary ego and a core sense of identity for later use. This is beautifully exemplified when Mahler states that: 'the infants' sensation states serve as the crystallization point for the feeling-self around which our sense of identity will become established' (Mahler, 1968, pp. 1).

Although Mahler's separation-individuation theory has been heavily criticized both by positivist accounts and psychoanalytic thinkers (Stern, 1985), there are current revisions of this work that provide theoretical support, to the annihilation of the Mahlerian theories. In the latest edition of the well known book 'the psychological birth of the human infant' Fred Pine offers a re-conceptualization of the old theory (Mahler et al., 2000). The concept of 'merger experiences' is cast about the old theories so that it explains what happens between mother and infant in a series of challenging situations. The new line of thinking brings a focus on situations where both mother and infant lose their ability to 'hold' aspects of a certain reality and therefore merge into a symbiotic union with blurred individual boundaries (Pine, 1980). In our opinion, the authors implicitly form a connection between the ability of the interlocutors to regulate emotion-states and the tendency to blur boundaries that is to merge with each other. The preface of the new edition could also be seen a re-examination of old ideas in a philosophically enriched basis. In adopting therefore this sort of mentality the author, first focuses on individual differences in the developmental lines, second argues for the situatedeness and contextuality of development and third provides a reworking of the phase notion as an 'Affectively intense place in life' (Mahler et al., 2000; pp. xii). In our awareness there has been little interest for contemporary writers or researchers to delve into these new theoretical developments raising important questions about the current state of psychoanalytic thinking in infantile life (Gergely, 2000).

Of course, the core of these ideas is not new to psychoanalytic and developmental circles. They consistently provide a change in the ontology of the human subject (Burman, 2008). They represent the kind of experience that could be thought as pre-verbal or infantile and has been explored diversely through new vocabularies. What might be common in these approaches is the insistence on explaining normal and pathologic individual development within an intersubjective logic. In these terms, the core arguments center around the mother's ability to contain infantile experience (Bion, 1962), to provide the adaptive functioning and the necessary holding environment (Winnicott, 1986) to reflect on the infant's mental experience through mentalization in order to regulate infants distress and to foster secure attachments (Fonagy et. al., 2003), to attune affectively towards the infant through an appreciation of the child's vitality contours (Stern, 1998; Stern, 2010) etcetera.

Autism as-a–defense expanded.

Following Mahler's developmental assumptions and at the same time more independent psychoanalytic views, others have tried to stay true to the autism-as-defense discourse. For example, Tustin drawing mostly from the object relations theories rejected the idea of a normal autistic phase, while maintaining a manifold attention towards separateness and what could be similarly called the other than me experience (Tustin, 1988a). Tustin, (1991) said that it was the intensity of the not-me experience, or the amplification of perceptual events, that would make the child resort to an autistic refuge, an autistic shell. She named this as auto-generated encapsulation to the process of becoming hidden in a world dominated by un-real objects. These objects that had nothing to do with the real animated objects of Kleinian theories, functioned as omnipotent tools at the hands of the autistic child (Tustin, 1992; Olin, 1989). Their purpose according to Tustin, was to maintain the child's illusion of adhesiveness with the object of satisfaction and provide complete protection from unbearable terror. Further, these autistic objects and autistic shapes referred to sensory generated patterns of experience that were devoid of any communication towards the external world (Tustin, 1980; Tustin, 1989).

Donna Spencley, Tustins biographer emphasized her great insistent in trying to enter the non-verbal world of the autistic child through a psychoanalytically colored language (Spencley, 1995). For example, in her Book Autistic Barriers in neurotic Patients, Tustin (1986), discussed the case of Daisy a young post autistic 7 year old girl. She emphasized the use of idiosyncratic language and therefore tried to capture the subjective meaning of words and actions. She explained that the therapist not only needed to be careful not to impose any sophisticated meaning to the child's dramas but he further needed to be in a position to discriminate between thoughts proper, that is thoughts that belong to a thinker and thoughts without a thinker or 'protothoughts' (ibid; pp. 177). It appears to us that in this fashion, Tustin attempted to address the question of autistic thinking and the role of sensation dominated states over thinking, that later appeared in the work of the next generation of analysts like Reid, Rhode and Alvarez (Alvarez & Reid, 1999).

Tustin, occasionally questioned the qualitative aspects of the autistic subjectivity and did this through rich phenomenological descriptions. Her effort was not to fit the child in the theoretical dimensions of psychoanalysis but to examine the rich analytic experience through creative theorization (Tustin, 1991). She appeared willing to travel a historical journey with her children that would allow her to examine the first steps in the mis-dance between the baby and its environment. What has been lost in Tustin's view was the corporeal continuity that the child needed in order to protect himself from the environmental intrusions (Isaacs, 1989; Hobson, 2011). In response, what has been left after this catastrophe was a 'black hole with a nasty prick' (Tustin, 1980, pp. 30). Against this painful reality the child needed to resort to mechanistic behavioral patterns, similar to Kanner's stereotypic behaviours. Tustin showed that the motivation behind these shapes and objects that ware called autistic was the child's effort to protect him from having born prematurely psychologically. In Tustin's discourse this could be seen as a self engendered encapsulation into a shell of hard sensations that absorbs all signs of vitality in the developing personality. The child in these terms could be described as having developed an 'allergy' to others (Spencley, 1995).

In a similar line of thinking, Meltzer elaborated on object-relations to account for his version of autistic personality. Meltzer et. al. (1975), was careful when considering the causative factors in autism suggesting two categories of autistic states of mind. He called the first part autism proper and described it as constitutional and genetic in nature. The second part however, was thoroughly portrayed as a derivative of autism proper and therefore was called post-autistic. Meltzer described this part of the personality in terms of its dynamic, sensorial, economic and personality features. He saw it, as a state of mind that developed out of a passive collapse of the child's mental apparatus that led to a suspension of the normal functions of attention.

In a poetic metaphor, Meltzer thought that it was the unbearable impact of the object's beauty that gave life to the catastrophic defense mode he called dismantling (Meltzer & Williams, 2008).

Following the dismantling of the self, attention was directed towards the most stimulating aspect of the environment, leaving the child in an obsessional mental state (Williams, 2010; Meltzer & Williams, 2008). The obsessionality of the character according to Meltzer, was nurtured by an omnipotent phantasy towards the awareness of separation with the maternal object. There were detrimental implications for the child's ability to identify, explore and develop a sense of the other person as a three dimensional object, following this kind of denial of psychic differentiation. In dynamic terms this meant that the child could no longer use projective identification in order to be helped by the auxiliary object. This gave life not only to a need for assistance in the child's communication, but also a need for substituting the child in terms of his ego functioning. Meltzer (1975), described the therapists functioning in these terms '*not only as a servant, or surrogate but as a prime mover in the situation*' (pp. 21). This architecture towards experiencing fits well with Bion's descriptions of thinking in psychotic personalities and with Alvarez's autistic links, where experience is made rigid or flaccid through mechanical ways of understanding and relating. (Bion 1962, Alvarez, 2012).

A potential way forward.

Some of the most influential ideas in the psychoanalytic approach to autism have kept the enigma surrounding autism, alive in the 20th century. This is probably indicative not only of the potential of psychoanalytic therapists to creatively engage with this topic, but also of the need to understand the autistic condition from a multiplicity of perspectives, including aspects of the child's 'internal' life. Current developments and cross-fertilisations between different disciplines indicate the need to understand the clinical reality of complex conditions such as autism, on the basis of what is called a "multiple causality" approach (Alvarez, 1992). For example, Hobson (1991), although belonging to the organicist camp, proposes an approach that distances itself from the traditional cognitive theories of autism and proposes an affect-oriented explanation. According to Hobson's (1993) *Affective Interaction Theory*, (which in a sense moves quite close to the psychoanalytic perspective, especially, the object relations approach), autistic individuals are born with an inability to respond emotionally to others or, in other words, they are born with a biologically-based impairment of affective contact that ultimately hinders their ability to participate in the affective life of others and so to develop their knowledge of persons as persons.

Recently, Hobson also gives further a relational touch to this idea, by stating that it is the failure to engage in the self-in-relation-to-other experience that might underlie the clinical phenotype of autism (Hobson, 2010). [2] The development of autistic pathways according to Hobson sounds similar to other's suggested by Alvarez (1992) in her modified object relations theory. In Alvarez, the autistic withdrawal is not considered linear, but derives from the child's relational embeddedness. In other words, the individual's developing self is manufactured through the interplay of emotionally defective other-that-me relations that create configurations of the self that we call autistic (Hobson, 2010). The importance of such a thinking line lies on the fact that by bringing attention to the relational practices of the self-among-others, allows a distance from the traditional dichotomous views of autistic symptomatology.

In this way and fuelled by the public's growing awareness, a number of contemporary clinicians have attempted to approach the issue of autism by highlighting similar perspectives (Crown, 2009). For example, a

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[2] **Editors Note:**
Although 'relational', Hobson's model is still a normative deficit model of autistic relationality. This has been challenged by Milton (2012), although this theory is not psychoanalytic in nature. (LA)

series of articles have been hosted in the *Journal of Infant Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy* regarding the applicability and usefulness of psychoanalytic technique with individuals with autism and their families (Drucker, 2009). Overall, this comprehensive publication offers an approach where issues of aetiology are not seen as primary in understanding the autistic condition. Autism is elaborated through a series of interesting clinical presentations and is examined through a developmentally relational perspective. This means that authors discussing autism adopt mostly a Winnicottian model of individual development. What is central, then, both on the clinical and the theoretical level, is the role of the environment as facilitating the developmental process, especially, the role of the mother as the person that perceives the child's signals and responds to them with a consistent manner. This role is further discussed in relation to 'deviant' development and the struggles of the suffering child, the parents and the siblings of autistic individuals seem to encounter.

Talking developmentally in psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

How can psychoanalysis integrate the evolutions of recent developmental science in order to become more discernible in the field, without at the same time loosing those characteristics that constitute its very core? One possible answer to this question could come through the work of the Tavistock clinic and, especially, in the work and writings of Anne Alvarez, Susan Reid, Trudy Klauber and others. One of the most important aspects of the Tavistock approach is that it condenses the historical and empirical evolutions of developmental science of the last 30 years while providing a very close and systematic elaboration of the conceptual foundations of psychoanalysis in relation to autism spectrum disorders (Alvarez, 1992).

Alvarez's thinking can be situated in the space where neurological vs environmental causal explanations of autism might not be seen as antagonistic and thus mutually exclusive. Although she avoids discussing issues of etiology as many other psychoanalytic thinkers, especially, those endorsing object-relational perspectives, she bases her findings on research accounts that focus on multiple causation for the development of autism, on the role of emotional interaction with the primary caregivers and how this interaction contributes to the ability of the individual to "become alive". Therefore, she concludes that autism may start with an organic deficit, but the autistic path and the 'retreat to autism' is not strictly due to the biologic deficits, but emerges secondarily in the context of a dysfunctional interactional template (Alvarez, 1992). In this way, Alvarez is in line with all major recent cognitive psychology accounts of development in autism, since they all reject a simplistic linear relationship between initial deficits at the biological level and the later cognitive phenotypes, but she is certainly less concerned with mechanisms at the cognitive level. Moreover, she emphasizes the dynamics of the relational framework as a level of analysis that cannot be directly reduced to cognitive terms, while focusing on the transformational potentialities inherent in relationships.

Alvarez worked for several years in the Tavistock clinic with a wide population of autistic individuals and provided us with rich descriptions of her intersubjective experience of her psychoanalytically-informed encounters with autistic children. A major theme of her theoretical approach to autism is the role of counter-transference in the work with autistic individuals. More specifically, she speaks of the need to construct a new version of counter-transference that doesn't correspond to the traditional views of the concept. Therefore, she introduces the idea of using her own counter-transference as a window into her clients' experience without arguing that this is what counter-transference is all about (Alvarez, 1996). Indeed, Alvarez offers long descriptions of her inner experiences with her autistic patients in her papers. She describes her subjective reactions as having to do with a dichotomy of life, that is to say, with a sense of being and not being alive. This relates to the contrasting ideas, feelings and mental states that she seems to experience during her meetings with autistic patients. Furthermore, she describes the intersubjective experience of the patient's

mental state as oscillating between a sense of "minimal-life", complete emptiness and nothingness, to a sense of urgency and life, a "being alive" sense. This, translated into therapeutic language, means that in relating with children that occupy such mental states, one does not need to identify with them. On the contrary, one can use this kind of knowing in order to actively seek engagement and life within them.

It is therefore quite clear that for Alvarez the vibrations of emotional nature that occur inside her through the child's projections, provide a sense of the patient's internal reality, a sense of the architecture of his internal object relations. Of course, although the idea of objects relations in autistic individuals is rejected by many as controversial and problematic, Alvarez refuses to see the child as "object-less" and describes him/her as relating to a dead object. It is therefore a matter of the therapist as a "live-company", to engage the child in such a way, that "reclamation" from these unrelated states of being can become possible. Therefore, in this process of beaconing the child into live engagement the therapist's subjectivity becomes crucial. The therapist is seen as a person that needs to be sensitive to weak, delayed or highly immature signals of life that need to be amplified in order to set the foundations for aliveness in the autistic child and its surroundings (Alvarez & Reid, 1999). This way Alvarez elaborates on previous therapeutic techniques that generically reside in the therapist's effort to mobilize the child's suspended attention in order to re-establish the transference relationship (Meltzer, 1975). Her approach is not consisted in blind repetitions of the past technicalities and an orthodox way of approaching the 'truth' of the mind. On the contrary, as Judith Edwards puts it in her introduction into the work of Anne Alvarez 'Always forthright, often controversial, never dull, possessing a mind large enough to encompass paradox, Alvarez has an ensured place in the history of developing ideas about the creation and evolution of minds' (Edwards, 2001).

Conclusion

Our desire to represent autism in the history of psychoanalysis took place as a reference to past attempts to theorize how the autistic person and their therapist, experience their world. We conceived this text as an effort to expel autism into its vivid future rather than to freeze it into the deadness of its past. The result could be criticized for living outside of it, descriptions belonging to alternative voices on this spectrum, such as the Francophone, or less popular accounts produced in other parts of the world, whilst emphasizing the most hegemonic voices of psychoanalysis. This of course, is already a future challenge towards a more integrative, plural and democratic understanding of autism in our expanding versions of it. In this vein, we could imagine our future attempts to examine autism in its psychoanalytic and wordly contexts, as embodying the kind of mentality articulated by Milan Kundera that is '*thought that wanders off in a sweet lazy liberty*' (as cited in Alvarez, 1991, pp.390). This is a project that needs to be invested with moderate ambition, because the sands are shifting already beneath the epistemological surface. This is mainly because navigating among alternatives is not like filling shopping baskets from different theoretical traditions in some vast marketplace. Conversely, it involves a painstaking process of trying to synthesize the paradox and facing the devastating likelihood of not making it. The exit from this apparently unwanted position to paraphrase Stephen's Frosh suggestion, is to embrace ambiguity, this is the only way forward (Frosh, 2007).

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