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LOVE AND DESTRUCTIVITY :

THE METABOLISM OF MENTAL PAIN IN PSYCHIC LIFE.

I - THE ENIGMA OF MENTAL PAIN.

As we know, since FREUD invented it, the psycho- analytical process has become longer and longer, from only lasting a few months in the beginnings of psycho-analysis to more and more years afterwards. It seems to me that it is because we are increasingly able to **perceive** and take into account the **deepness of mental pain**. Experience has shown to me that the end of the psycho-analytical process is often most difficult because the threat of stopping the analytic sessions **reveals** the existence of psychic suffering which had remained much more latent than the separation anxieties and their dutiful interpretation could have shown and resolved. The price of a real **autonomy** of the self, of its capacity to function **by itself**, remains surprisingly high; it seems to be always higher than what was expected. The more the analytic link has been invested and has become important, the more the final separation can appear difficult or even dangerous. As if it could activate the fear of terrible **trauma**, a trauma which would re-activate all the previous and earlier traumas.

I found new possibilities of understanding these deepest forms of mental pain thanks to the work of Esther BICK on the psychic role of the skin and to the studies of Don MELTZER and of Frances TUSTIN on **autism**. In the chapter "Terror, Persecution and Dread" of his book "Sexual States of Mind", D MELTZER had already described as "**terror**" a kind of excessive paranoid anxiety, which is **intolerable** by its very **quality**, and to be differentiated from other forms of persecution which can become intolerable by their intensity. Then, F. TUSTIN succeeded in elucidating the **traumatic** nature of the fundamental anxiety of autistic children, which is the fear of an annihilation of the feeling of being, which she related to the winnicottian description of "going-on being", a feeling of continuity in existence. This anxiety is traumatic for these children could not , for many reasons , be loved enough by their mother and so their consciousness of being separated

from the maternal body was totally intolerable and provoked feelings of endless falling or of being liquified or dissolved. In her last papers, F. TUSTIN insists on the highly pathological aspect of autistic states and definitively refutes the idea of any normal autistic stage of development. Autistic barriers are barriers against the terror of the “ black hole” of **primary depression** and against **nothingness**. These descriptions and concepts allowed me to better understand the mental pain experienced by my patients as resulting from catastrophic anxieties of separation (BION) provoking a fear of psychic annihilation (TUSTIN). I understood that new parts of the self had been born during analysis , particularly new capacities to love; these new capacities were felt to be in danger of dying by the loss of the analytic link invested with the primary function of containing and detoxicating the excessive mental pain. This primary function is precisely what autistic children felt deprived of.

Termination of psycho-analysis is often viewed from the model of weaning in infancy, as a mourning of the analytic link. In this sense, the end of the analysis would be of the same nature as the separation between children and parents when the children have become adult enough... one must add : and when things have been good enough! And, of course, it is far from being always the case ! The lack of a real **autonomy**, replaced by different forms of **pathological dependence**, which could until then have been more or less split off or denied, reveal themselves suddenly in full light and provoke dramas, as is typically the case during adolescence.

In the paper which has been sent to you, I gave an example of an adolescent suicide of a young man, about twenty years old, who had killed himself by defenestration, after a quarrel with his younger sister. The dispute started over something apparently very trivial : the possession of the family bathroom. The young man felt that his sister had been for too long a time in this bathroom and he pounded at the door, claiming it for himself. The noise of the quarrel made the father come and ask his son to keep quiet. Exasperated, the young man shouted : “I won't disturb you any more !” and he jumped out the window, smashing himself to the ground where he was killed. We well know how intolerant narcissistic patients are to frustration, and suicide in adolescents is an extreme example of this. In that case, we can, of course, easily imagine a mental pathology much more severe than it seemed at first sight, both in this young man and in his family. But this is not

quite sure. Rather, I want to point out that **pathology** is, as is **mental health**, something which can or cannot be **revealed**, according to life circumstances.

This example reminded me of the crucial importance of establishing, in psychic life, an internal object such as D. MELTZER described it in “ The Psycho-Analytical Process” under the name of “ **toilet-breast**”, sometimes represented in dreams by a bathroom. This object has a decisive role in the **economics** of psychic life, which are dominated by the degree and the nature of psychic pain, not only in the case of manifest psychic pain like anxiety, but also in **latent** pain. The “toilet-breast” is the part object into which the self can evacuate the **intolerable** excess of psychic pain, especially latent psychic pain, in order to allow the psyche to **survive**. So, such an object must have been internalised as possessing sufficient capacities to receive and to contain the anxieties of primary depression, which threaten the very possibility of psychic life to “ go on”. The establishment of the “toilet-breast” function is quite necessary for psychic growth, and it is accompanied by a splitting of the breast, to protect the “feeding-breast” from contamination and even destruction by the toilet-breast. Such anxieties of destroying the good object are a major part of the anxieties of integration.

The use of “toilet-breast” appears as a projective defense which is part of the **manic defenses**. I have put forward the idea that the manic defenses often seem to be based upon masculine and phallic identifications. If they are not too massive, they are part of the normal mechanisms of psychic growth because they are quite necessary to protect the self from excessive and too dangerous depressive feelings which would prevent any development. In this sense, moderate manic defenses can allow some sufficient and protected **mental space** suitable for the progressive elaboration of depressive affects, which are contained in other parts of the personality, generally in the feminine identifications. So, **psychic bisexuality** is very early, by the means of primary identifications, implicated in the struggle against mental pain. In the above example, it is striking to see the bathroom being the object of a real **struggle for life** between the brother and his sister. In the course of development, integration will often take the form of a better integration of masculine and feminine parts of the personality.

II - THE TRAUMATIC ROLE OF ENVIRONMENT.

The importance given by FREUD to traumatism in the history of the psycho-sexual development of the child has long remained very puzzling to me. If one refers to the "Abriss der Psychoanalyse" of 1938, the evolution of the development of the child is essentially described as a series of traumas in relation to the environment, in very brief summary :

- the trauma of seduction by the mother, "the child's first seducer", followed by
- the trauma of weaning : "so long the child has sucked his mother's breast, he will always remain convinced, after weaning, to have not sucked enough, during too short a time"
- and finally the trauma of the threats of castration, " the strongest trauma of his young existence... whose effects are numerous, incalculable... most of the time, the virility of the child yields under the blow... often, his sexuality is forever jeopardized... at puberty, his sexuality reveals itself hindered, in pieces, disintegrated in contradictory drives. "

This was the case for the boy, central model in the beginning of the analytic theory. For the girl, FREUD summarizes her evolution by stating that, like the boy, she has too suffered the trauma of seduction and that she can only escape a new trauma at the sexual level by submitting herself to the masculine authority !

Such a reconstruction has been made from the analytic exploration of adult unconscious, which first appeared as the tank of the most traumatic memories. It is a **psychopathological view** on development. It is only when I realised more fully the decisive role of the **economics of mental pain** in inter subjective relations, that this way of theorising seemed less enigmatic to me. For instance, I came to understand the **fantasy of seduction** as essentially based on the necessity to project and evacuate one's desires into other people, under the principle that **the one who loves is the one who suffers**. In fact, seduction is the way by excellence of evacuating latent pain and radically preventing it to become manifest, when there is no toilet-breat available. Anyway, the problem was left open to build **real models of development**, distinct from the psychopathological syndromes which had wrongly taken their place for too long.

III - THE NURTURING ROLE OF ENVIRONMENT :

PSYCHIC BIRTH AND THE SENSE OF BEAUTY.

When we begin to speak not only of development, but of the “genesis” of psychic functions as well, we enter the modern period of the evolution of analytic theory. This period has certainly been set forth when W. R. BION, in “Learning from experience”, presented the first analytical theory of the conditions of the birth of the psyche, based on the capacity, for the mother, to receive and contain the first anxieties of the baby. With the idea that the mechanism for this was a “normal” form of projective identification, **mutual** in the child and in the mother, BION gave the first theoretical description of the clinically “good enough” mother of D. WINNICOTT. This was quite **revolutionary**, because it reintroduced in the development the role of the object and of the environment, which had been too massively split off from the theory since the relinquishment by FREUD of his theory of the seduction. It was also the first attempt to apprehend the “normal” mechanisms of development, instead of remaining imprisoned in the claustrum of psychopathology. The idea that the "mechanism" used in early mother-child relations was a "normal" kind of the pathological projective identification first described in 1946 by M. KLEIN, constituted the first theoretical description of the "good enough mother" of WINNICOTT, the pioneer of early interactions.

But even more important is the following step, with the **totally new and original** description by MELTZER of the basic psychic conflict, under the name of “**the aesthetic conflict**”. This is no longer related to the supposedly innate instincts of life and instincts of death, but to the conflict resulting in the libidinal and epistemophilic drives directed toward the “inside” of the mother. MELTZER does not give a very clear and precise definition of the nature of the conflict. He uses poetry rather than theory to evoke the ineffable feeling of it inside the reader by communicating his own “feeling” about it, using juxtaposition of clinical material essentially based on dreams, and literary allusions. He writes : “*The ordinary beautiful devoted mother presents to her ordinary beautiful baby a complex object of overwhelming interest, both sensual and infra-sensual... But **the meaning** of his mother’s behavior, of the appearance and disappearance of the breast and of the light in her eyes, of a face over which emotions pass like the shadows of clouds over the landscape, are **unknown** to him...* ” So, we can understand that the baby’s epistemophilic drives would come into conflict with the investment of the mother as an “

aesthetic object", that is a primary object of love and admiration when the baby discovers the outside world after birth. MELTZER states : "*He (the baby) cannot tell whether she (the mother) is Beatrice or his Belle Dame Sans Merci. This is the aesthetic conflict, which can be most precisely stated in terms of the aesthetic impact of the outside of the "beautiful" mother, available to the senses, and the enigmatic inside which must be construed by creative imagination. Everything in art and literature, every analysis, testifies to its perseverance through life*".

This definition calls for some comments :

1- Enigmatic object and mysterious object :

The primary object described by MELTZER is an **enigmatic** one, as he says explicitly : "*The mother is enigmatic to him (the baby) ; she wears the Gioconda smile most of the time, and the music of her voice keeps shifting from major key. Like "K" (Kafka's, not Bion's), he must wait for decisions from the "castle" of his mother's inner world... For it is the human condition. What man knows the heart of his beloved, or his child, or his analysis and, as well as he knows the heart of his enemy?*"

However, it seems to me that one must differentiate between **enigma** and **mystery**. The French analyst, Jean LAPLANCHE, also speaks now of the first relation to the mother as essentially "enigmatic". In my opinion, an enigma, like the typical one of the riddle of the Sphinx, is always very persecutory because it contains a very big amount of terror in the face of a threat of death which can be analysed as the threat of the psyche being invaded by overwhelming feelings of depression. A typical example of this is, for me, the case of M. KLEIN's young autistic patient, Dick, saying when he saw on her knees the bits of the pencil she had sharpened: "Poor Mrs Klein !" (M. KLEIN, "*The importance of symbol-formation in the development of the Ego*", 1930, in "*Contributions to psycho-Analysis*"). The concept of mystery rather implies a deep **respect**, which can even become a source of religious devotion, for some insufficiently known matters which are for this reason feared, but which nevertheless remain **sources of admiration and love** because of their irrepreceable psychic value, such as the mysteries of life and death and, above all, the mystery of the creation of life. And I think that the first object must be invested as **more mysterious than enigmatic** in order to be introjected as a "good enough" object.

2- Depressive position, paranoid-schizoid position and the sense of a distinct identity :

In this perspective, the emphasis is on LOVE rather than on libido, and on the **primacy of love**, with this very crucial modification in the theory as MELTZER definitively states it : *"The aesthetic conflict and the depressive position become primary in the development and the paranoid-schizoid position secondary"*. I found this conclusion in agreement with my own reflexions about the kleinian positions. I had always been wondering about the definition of the "depressive position" given by M. KLEIN as taking place at "the change from a partial object-relation to the relation to a complete object", when she states : *"Not until the object is loved as a whole can its loss be felt as a whole"* (M. KLEIN, "A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states", 1934, in "Contributions to Psycho-Analysis 1921-1945"). I am now quite sure that, in fact, it is the partial object whose loss is felt as catastrophic because the infantile self invests the partial object as very concretely representing the whole object and this very narcissistic investment has a vital meaning for the existential security of the baby. It seems to me that the weaning significance of the depressive position indicates essentially the acknowledgement of the identities of the baby and of the mother as separate identities and the transition from predominant projective identification to introjective identification, indicating new capacities of psychic growth. So, it can be said that the so-called depressive position is, in fact, a stage of **discovery of the object** in a new dimension : **alterity**. Discovery of the object and **discovery of oneself** are, in reality, one process : to acknowledge the existence and the place of the Other is a fulfillment which must be realised very soon to allow psychic growth. The paranoid-schizoid position indicates intolerable pains and, in fact, the failure of the depressive position to allow this stage of separate individuality. The realisation of the concept of alterity corresponds to the second stage of the birth of psychic life, the first one being the establishment of the basic security of the sense of existence of the baby, which depends on the qualities of reciprocity of the very first interactions between the baby and his environment.

3 - Alterity and reciprocity in primary narcissistic relations :

Reciprocity seems to be a central aspect of what I call the primary narcissistic relation, because I think it is the basis of a normal narcissism defined as the minimal investment of

the self necessary to provide to the baby a sense of existence and continuity, the "going on being" of WINNICOTT.. We know that the baby is usually an aesthetic object for his parents, he has to be the most beautiful baby ever born. MELTZER has put an emphasis on the fact that the beauty of the baby for the mother finds its echo in the beauty of the mother in the soul of the baby (remind the role of Echo in the myth of Narcisse). We also know that reciprocity remains a decisive factor even in adult forms of love.

In case of a lack of reciprocity in early mother-child relations, it becomes very quickly impossible to know from whom this lack of reciprocity came in the beginning : did it come from the parents, from the mother or from the father or from their interaction, or did it come from the baby itself ? In the paper you have received, I quoted the case of a mother who, at the birth of her first daughter, felt accused by the midwives of not looking "well" at her baby. Then, she felt very disappointed about feeding her baby , because she (the baby) did not look at her, and always turned her eyes away from her or from the bottle. In many cases, like in this one , it can be impossible to decide which of the two, mother or child, first considered the other as an "enigmatic" object. I would think that it is the very character of "**early interactions**", in that it becomes quickly impossible to differentiate the role of one from the other, so much the primary investments and identifications have a predominant character of mutuality and reciprocity. Thus, we must speak of interaction as something different from the ordinary concept of object relations. In this sense, I think that it is neither wholly on the side of the child's investment, as admiring as this may be, neither is it wholly his mother's love for him even when contained by the father's love, which makes for successful early object relations, but **their interaction** when this is harmonious enough. The aesthetic feeling described by MELTZER seems to me to be the result of the **beauty of the encounter** between the nascent capacities to love in the baby and in the mother, contained by the father's. Such a wonderful encounter seems quite necessary to **confirm** the baby's being able to "go-on being", because, in more theoretical terms, the mutual investment of the parents' attention and care **weaves a psychic intersubjective substitute** to the containing function of the mother's **body**, lost at birth : the symbolic equivalent of the containing role of the skin, described by Esther BICK.

This accomplishment has a twofold aspect : 1- a defensive and anti-traumatic function (the freudian protective shield) 2- but a libidinal aspect as well, the mutual investment of the object and of the self.

The first one carries what can be called a “ **basic security**” , composed of the trust to be usually sufficiently protected from annihilation anxieties, and which is the first step towards the sense of identity. Of course, it is clear that this security cannot be perfect and will be questioned anyhow at each new step of development, particularly at times when new steps are taken in the direction of identity and the capacity for autonomy. The establishment of the “basis security” in the first months of extra-uterine life is all the more important for the future.

The second and libidinal aspect of a beautiful enough encounter between baby and mother constitutes the **pleasure of being alive**, thanks to the aesthetic investment of the object which permits sufficient self-investment. In this context, the difficulty indicated by MELTZER for the baby to bear the impact of the aesthetic object can be viewed not so much as related to the very intensity of his investment or to the enigmatic character of the inside of the object, but rather to a lack of the necessary and sufficient reciprocity of the mutual investment mother-father-baby. In fact, it is clear that basic security and pleasure to be alive are the two faces, cognitive and affective, of one and only one process of birth of psychic life.

4 - Cognitive and affective development :

Careful observation has revealed the existence of very unexpected capacities or “abilities” in the baby. It becomes clearer that cognitive and affective developments are, in the very beginning of post-natal life, very linked and almost impossible to differentiate. We can think, however, that it is necessary to distinguish the sensual aspects of the relationship with the object, which are neurophysiological and cognitive, from the affective and more or less aesthetic investment of them which will determinate the psychic personality of the subject.

The most beautiful example of the possibility of revival of the sensual and aesthetic aspect of the primal object is certainly, in French literature, the famous memory of the “Madeleine” in “A la recherche du temps perdu” (“In search of lost time”) by Marcel PROUST. Let me remind you how movingly he described the obstinate search for the forgotten memory, whose mnemonic trace had been unexpectedly awakened by the taste of a madeleine dipped in a tea cup : “mais à l’ instant où la gorgée mêlée de miettes de gâteau toucha mon palais, je tressaillis, attentif à ce qui se passait d’ extraordinaire en

moi. Un plaisir délicieux m'avait envahi, isolé, sans la notion de sa cause. Il m'avait aussitôt rendu les vicissitudes de la vie indifférentes, ses désastres inoffensifs, sa brièveté illusoire, de la même façon dont opère l'amour, en me remplissant d'une essence précieuse : ou plutôt, cette essence n'était pas en moi, elle était moi. J'avais cessé de me sentir médiocre, contingent, mortel. D'où avait pu me venir cette puissante joie?"

In English(transl. Moncrief and Kilmartin) “ *But no sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shiver ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An **exquisite pleasure** had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory- this new sensation having **had the effect, which love has, of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was me. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal.** ”*

Is this not a wonderful and lively evocation of what we laboriously try to define in more abstract terms : the memory of the primal interaction which establishes the basic security and the pleasure in being alive, when it is based on mutual love which is : TO BE ABLE TO LOVE AND FEEL BEING LOVED.

Marcel PROUST goes on searching : “*Whence could it have come to me, this **all-powerful joy** ? I sensed that it was connected with the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it **infinitely transcended** those savors, could not, indeed, be of the same nature*”. So, the author makes a very clear differentiation between the sensation itself and the emotional investment of it. This corresponds to the differentiation between cognitive and affective development : but we can see, at the same time, how much these two lines of development have to be integrated enough one with the other, to be able to resist the splitting which occurs when mental pain is intolerable.

5 - Integration and love :

Falling in love implicates new and much deeper capacities of identification to another person, generally of the other sex. These new capacities give to the feelings of reciprocity and alterity considerable presence and strength. The sense of sexual differentiation appears as soon as the second year of life, as observations like these of ROIPHE and GALENSON (“*Infantile Origins of Sexual Identity*”, 1981, Int. Univ. Press, New-York) have

demonstrated. This discovery is often traumatic for the child, because he or she fears to lose too quickly or too totally the relation of narcissistic identification with the parent of the same sex, whereas he or she will still need for a very long time to keep partly and protect this relation, which is necessary to face the unknown of later growth. In my experience, **homosexuality**, latent or manifest, or the fear to become homosexual, are based on this fear, when there is a too deep splitting between masculine and feminine identifications.

Integration of the sense of sexual identity will become urgent at adolescence. The encounter of love becomes at this period the heart of this integration and of a greater maturity of the psychic organisation. The sense of wonder accompanying the first adolescent love can have a very blunt aspect, a "crash", or a somewhat mystical or religious character, because of the feeling of having suddenly access to the mystery of life and of the beauty of life. *"Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear... Did my heart love till now ? For I **never saw true beauty till this night !**"* says ROMEO after he met JULIET for the first time. I think that the wonder of the first love is actually felt as a revelation, but that it is nevertheless based upon the feelings of wonder felt by the child at the very first encounter between his native love and the love of his parents for him and between them.

Feminity is generally linked with **beauty**, owing to the aesthetic investment of the breast and of the mother, the internal mother being also felt as the guarantor of the links of the subject with his **past**. Masculinity is usually associated with **strength**, owing to the protecting and reparating role of the father towards mother and child, the internal father being also felt as a protector against the unknown **future**. So, integration of sexual identity appears, in reference to psychic bisexuality, as the integration of beauty and strength. It gives to the woman the **strength of her beauty** and, to the man, the **beauty of his strength**.

III - HORROR and SPLITTING :

Now, the question is : how are things when environmental conditions are not good enough and the aesthetic aspect of primary love cannot be created ? What are these "unimaginable anxieties" (Winnicott) and these "annihilation anxieties of the sense of

being" (Tustin) made of ? It seems to me that one can say that instead of the creation of the sense of BEAUTY which derives from mutual love, its negative takes place : HORROR, the negative of the admiration and wonder of love.

HORROR has been represented in mythology by the **figure of Medusa**, who had a paralysing and mortal power. Of the three Gorgons, daughters of sea divinities who lived in Far Occident, not far from the Kingdom of the Dead, Medusa was the only one whose glance could kill. She was represented as a monster with a woman head, whose hair was made of snakes, whose enormous and dangerous teeth were protruding from her gaping mouth, and whose face was so **horrid** to see that it **petrified with terror** those who were unlucky enough to meet her. To be able to defeat and kill her, Persée had to use Athena's shield in order to fight her without confronting her glance.

Psychoanalysts like F. PASCHE and P. C. RACAMIER have used the myth of Medusa to illustrate the terror of what they call "**the unrepresentable**", also described as "**the unimaginable**" by WINNICOTT. I would prefer, with Elisabeth ABOUT who has written a book "Rencontres avec Méduse" ("Encounters with Medusa"), to speak of the terror of the "black hole" of primary depression, which indicates the horror felt when faced with the vision of the abortion of the life of the psyche, because this last definition seems to me closer to real emotional experience.

A - The basic psychic pain :

The "horrible" can be related to the first Freudian definition of anxiety, as a result of a "*direct transformation of **unused libido***", unused i. e. uninvested when the conditions of reciprocity and otherness have not been good enough to allow a positive investment to take place. Generally speaking, I believe that the pain of either not having found - or of having found but at crucial moments having prematurely lost - the good enough conditions necessary to allow psychic growth, creates and leaves in the inner Self a **core of despair** more or less secret. In this way, we can say that psychic suffering is fundamentally of a **depressive** nature, at its maximum in primary depression, because it is essentially a result of the impossibility to develop oneself and this provokes a feeling of psychic agony. In the most extreme pathological conditions, such as autism or serious forms of anorexia nervosa,

treatment meets with an **absence of even the concept of development** in the subject.

B - Defense mechanisms against excessive psychic pain : Survival defenses.