PLAYING THE OTHER

On the face of it the question of the Other doesn't seem of burning importance when we come to talk about psychotherapy and what matters in psychotherapy. There is a certain understandable impatience in those who practice psychotherapy when faced with the more philosophical or theoretical aspects of their chosen field: "Why can't we just get on with talking about how to improve our clinical work?" "How can endless reflections about otherness possibly help us in that?"

While I am sympathetic to this impatience, it does seem to me to be worth emphasising that it is crucial for us to reflect deeply on the ideas which lie behind our clinical practice, because those ideas can make an enormous difference to the way we conceive of what we are doing in the consulting room and if we are not fully aware of what those foundational ideas are, then they will dominate our practice all the more powerfully through our unconscious preconceptions and prejudices.

Perhaps the reason why the question of the other is so rarely posed in theoretical discussions around psychotherapy, is paradoxically that the entire field is, and always has been, saturated with it. Every account of the emergence of dynamic psychiatry and psychotherapy in the latter half of the nineteenth century emphasises that doctors at that time were struggling to deal with phenomena of alterity or otherness: multiple personality, for example: the appearance within the psyche of one or more personalities alien to the normal dominant personality. By taking on such conditions, medicine inherited forms of pathological otherness which, in previous periods, had been considered the field of religion (e.g. the phenomenon of possession in which an alien spirit took hold of a person). By contrast dynamic psychiatrists start to view these phenomena as inner, rather than something imported from without. Hence arose the important concept of the 'unconscious' a blanket term which somehow managed to take care of the otherness that seemed unassimilable by the conscious mind. Freud, Janet, Jung and many others seized upon this concept as explanatory of all those powerfully disturbing phenomena which seemed deeply other, but which were now to be acknowledged as part of the human psyche.

Looked at in this way, the whole practice of psychoanalysis evolved as a discipline devoted to engaging with the Other, in its unconscious form. Though attitudes toward this otherness vary in the different schools which originate in psychoanalysis, they all acknowledge the importance of the unconscious, and therefore of the Other. They also, of course, engage with the Other in the sense that the practice of psychotherapy consists in an approach to and a relationship with the other person, the patient.

Having acknowledged this uniformity, we can perhaps go on to distinguish two very different fundamental approaches to otherness as it manifests in psychotherapy. This is where clarity with regard to fundamental ideas and goals starts to become important. As psychotherapists we need to know where we are with regard to these contrasting approaches because they lead in very different directions. It is perhaps because these questions are not often posed in these terms, in terms of otherness and alterity, that confusion with regard to these questions seems to be the prevalent state of affairs.

The contemporary Freudian Jean Laplanche has described the two very different approaches as, on the one hand, the Ptolemaic and on the other, the Copernican (Laplanche, 1999). As you will remember, before Copernicus developed the modern image of the solar system, in which the planets revolve around the sun, the dominant picture was that of Ptolemy, in which the earth was found at the centre of the universe, and around it the planets, including the sun revolved. According to Laplanche, Freud developed a psychology which was radical in much the same way that Copernicus had been, in that, recognising that the conscious ego is no longer master in its own house, he thus decentered it in favour of a dynamic unconscious. Just as Copernicus had revolutionised not only the science of astronomy but the entire cultural perspective of the west by decentering the earth and therefore humanity, so now Freud did the same intrapsychically, with similarly wide-reaching results in terms of how we regard the conscious subject, the ego. However, Laplanche also points out that Freud was not always consistently radical in this Copernican vein, but sometimes fell back into a Ptolemaic attitude, whereby the ego remained central:

> "'Internal foreign body', 'reminiscence': the unconscious as an alien inside me and even one put inside me by an alien. At his most

> prophetic, Freud does not hesitate over formulations which go back to the idea of possession… But on the other side of these Copernican advances… the dominant tendency is always to relativise the discovery and to re-assimilate and re-integrate the alien, so to speak". (ibid. p.65)

Laplanche argues that the tension between these two tendencies (on the one hand a disturbing perception of otherness and on the other a need to domesticate it) accounts for a certain incoherence in some of Freud's central concepts, and has led in the post-Freudian world to on the one hand the development of an Ego-psychology which is definitely Ptolemaic, and on the other a correspondingly Copernican Lacanian psychoanalysis. In my opinion a similar tension may be found in Jung's psychology, though in a very different form.

Otherness seems to be a persistent theme, not only in Jung's psychology but in Jung himself: "Somewhere deep in the background I always knew that I was two persons." (Jung, 1961 p. 61) This quote announces the motif of the other in his autobiography, Memories Dreams Reflections, and the radical alterity of the unconscious psyche (and its consequently transformative potential) is a constant theme throughout Jung's writing. As he describes it in MDR, the 'confrontation with the unconscious', "brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce but which produce themselves and have their own life." (ibid. p.183) This seminal insight coloured his attitude to, for example, dreams, ("One would do well to treat every dream as though it were a totally unknown object" (Jung, 1934 §320)) and psychic complexes (described as "discordant, unassimilated, and antagonistic" (Jung 1931 §925)). In these passages and many others like them Jung makes it clear that he values an attitude of unmediated openness to psychic phenomena, an approach of 'not-knowing', and even that the unsettling and disruptive effect of the Other might be a kind of gift, which helps us avoid becoming muffled and restricted by our own ego-syntonic structures.

Jung constantly draws attention to the autonomy of psychic images, which he says could be described metaphorically as "psychic daimonia". He stresses how important it is to take them seriously: These "forces of the unconscious" are "dangerous antagonists which can… work frightful devastation in the economy of the personality. They are everything one

could wish for or fear in a psychic "opposite"." (Jung 1952, § 1504) Jung is here pointing out that there is a phenomenon of Otherness within the psyche which retains radical alterity, and that the encounter with it is a fact of experience which is not reducible to a metaphysical statement: "Thanks to its autonomy, it forms the counter-position to the subjective ego, since it represents a piece of the objective psyche. It can therefore be designated as a Thou." (Ibid. 1505) Such passages indicate that Jung's concept of the Self is clearly intended to de-centre the ego, and permit the opening up of a space within which meaningful and non-pathological experiences of alterity can be acknowledged and encountered. We might then accurately describe such a psychology as Copernican.

Unfortunately, like Freud, Jung also has his Ptolemaic side. Often when he writes about the Self he seems concerned to emphasise the goal of individuation (literally becoming undivided), by which fragmentation is overcome through the integration of those parts of the personality which, first appearing as Other, later are to become consolidated into a greater whole through the reconciliation of opposites. Here the identification of and isolation of Other, in the form of alien parts of the psyche, become merely steps toward a higher aim: that of arriving at the Self, at which point the Otherness of the psyche will have somehow have become transcended and overcome, all in the name of a healing of our sense of splitness. When Jung is writing in this vein it looks very much as if he sees his psychology as tending toward an erasure of the other.

Some have argued that Jung's Self (capital S) is to be identified with Other (capital O), but such an argument will not hold. As Emmanuel Lévinas (the French philosopher who has most uncompromisingly explored the problem of the other) puts it, our encounter with the face of the other "is an experience in the strongest sense of the term: a contact with a reality that does not fit into any a priori idea, which overflows all of them...." (Lévinas 1987, p. 59) Lévinas maintains that Same and Other can never exist in a union. As Lucy Huskinson describes it:

> "otherwise both Same and Other would be part of a greater totality or whole which would invade and invalidate their separateness. Lévinas therefore says they are paradoxically related as a relation without relation. It is a relation because an encounter does take place; but it is 'without relation' because that encounter does not

> establish any understanding, the Other remains resolutely Other." (Huskinson 2002, p. 445)

Jung's constant emphasis on the goal of individuation as a union of opposites via the transcendent function sounds very much like an attempt to create a totality through the integration of the Other into the self. How can the other retain its sting of otherness if it has been assimilated into a greater whole?

So when we look at Jung's psychology we are faced with two apparently incompatible approaches to the other: on the one hand there is the Ptolemaic Jung of "unity, order, organisation, wholeness, balance, integration, totality, regulation, pattern, centrality and synthesis" (Samuels 1985, p.71) and on the other, the Copernican Jung who constantly reminds us about the sheer alterity of a genuinely unknown unconscious which always meets the ego as an adversary.

Let's try to take this apparent impasse forward by looking at what Jung had to say about the Self. He insists upon the impossibly paradoxical nature of the experience: "Whenever the archetype of the Self predominates, the inevitable psychological consequence is a state of conflict" (Jung 1959, §125). Seen from this perspective, a state of splitness, wherein we fully experience the tension of the opposites is an unavoidable corollary of individuation. When we hold two incompatible truths in consciousness at the same time the consequent inevitable temptation is to break the tension and veer toward one of the two. But, according to Jung, when we talk about Self we are alluding to the experience of maintaining a course between the opposites: acknowledging their pull, but without falling one way or the other. Seen in this way the opposites retain their character as opposites, but are held in the same dynamic tension.

Jung uses the image of the crucifixion as a symbol of this pull of impossible tensions. Imaged as the x this reminds us of Merleau-Ponty's chiasm. Merleau-Ponty uses the term *chiasm* when discussing his idea of 'flesh' which is an attempt to express the intricate and interlaced relationship between lived-body and world. Merleau-Ponty uses a richly textured variety of metaphors to suggest this elusive structure: it is "a gaping wound" "a zero of pressure between two solids" a "hinge", "pivot" or "articulation" (Merleau-Ponty 1968 , pp. 148 & 224) but most often it is the

chiasmus, which derives from the Greek *khiazein* meaning to mark with the letter ⊔. In grammar a chiasmus is defined (in the OED) as "a figure by which the order of words in one of two parallel clauses is inverted in the other." In Christianity, ⊔ is of course the sign of the cross. Significantly, for Merleau-Ponty and Jung, deeper reflection reveals the opposites as somehow implicating each other. For Merleau-Ponty, at the intersection of the chiasmic cross, opposites fold into each other completely reversed or "turned inside out" but it is important to emphasise that this enfoldment is not fusion: the differences do not collapse, but instead the mutual implication of opposites ensures that neither pole dominates the other. Such an enfoldment reminds us of the alchemical 'complexio oppositorum' (literally a folding together of opposites), one of Jung's favoured terms for Self.

With regard to our topic of Self(same) and Other this implies that Jung's Self concept is, at its most evocative, an attempt to suggest an arena wherein a dynamic encounter occurs between ego and other. This arena may be seen as a fissure or wound whereby the very holding apart of those forces felt to be most in conflict provides the capacity to reveal their most intimate intertwining and mutual im-plic-ation, such that the terms "I" and "other" themselves become destabilised. The result is that I experience my-self most fully through and in the other, and vice-versa, and this experience provides the conditions for Jung's stated aim for individuation:

> "In this way there arises a consciousness which is no longer imprisoned in the petty, oversensitive, personal world of the ego, but participates freely in the wider world of objective interests. This widened consciousness is no longer that touchy, egotistical bundle of personal wishes, fears, hopes, and ambitions which always has to be compensated or corrected by unconscious counter-tendencies; instead, it is a function of relationship to the world of objects, bringing the individual into absolute, binding, and indissoluble communion with the world at large." (Jung 1916/1935, para. 275)

When, like Merleau-Ponty we emphasise the embodied nature of our being in the world, not only do we highlight this intricate and intimate intertwining of self and other, we also reveal the importance of *pathos* in

this engagement. Let me explain what I mean by this: The ego likes to paint our existence as one of "action on": I see the other, I approach the other, but this does not do justice to the experience: actually the event of perception does not start with an intentional act of observation. What happens is that my attention is aroused and provoked by what strikes me. It is the frightening or tempting situation which, by attracting or repelling me, incites me to action. Even thinking cannot be said to be truly intentional: ideas occur to me, and thus set in train my thoughts.

As German philosopher Bernard Waldenfels puts it, the essential psychic movement here is one of *pathos*: "the way we are touched, affected, stimulated, surprised and to some extent violated". (Waldenfels 2007, p.74) I may like to believe that "I" am the subject and author of my actions, and indeed the very structure of our language encourages us in this belief, but a truer description would be that there are events that are undergone by me: things happen to me. From this perspective I am less the *subject* of my life than the *patient*. And this is where embodiment is revealed as crucial, for my body is precisely the realm of *what is to do with me without being done by me*. From this perspective, the Self, rather than being reified as an inflated, all-inclusive, whole version of the ego, may instead be characterised as a space of openness within which that Otherness that arouses, provokes, touches, invites, wounds and, in brief, *af-fects,* may manifest, thus making possible the productive chiasmic encounter mentioned above.

Our inevitably ego-oriented bias towards the familiar, the known, the Same means that the Other as revealed through this world of pathos tends to be seen, felt and experienced as unwelcome and therefore manifests primarily through psycho-path-ology, and this has therefore become the primary science through which we study the ways in which soul is touched. As Freud says, "We can catch the unconscious only in pathological material" (Andreas-Salomé 1965, p. 64).

It is an awareness of this pathic nature of psyche which underlies Jung's insistence that the relationship of analyst with patient is one of mutual af-fect: "For two personalities to meet is like two different chemical substances: if there is any combination at all, both are transformed. In any effective psychological treatment the doctor is bound to influence the patient; but this influence can only take place if the patient has a reciprocal

influence on the doctor. You can exert no influence if you are not susceptible to influence." (Jung 1929, para. 163)

To sum up: what I am describing is pathic and chiasmic manner of being in the world in which the strict dualism of object/subject, I and other are profoundly undermined, but without a consequent collapse into fusion: the other is folded into me and I into the other, but both I and other remain distinguishable and held in a dynamic tension. Looked at in this way, when Jung said, "I always knew I was two persons" he was not in fact offering such a split as a problem to be overcome, but was perhaps stating the way it is and must be if we are to fully experience the paradoxical state of Selfhood.

I want to spend the rest of this paper arguing that there is a faculty which, despite recurrent suppression and taboo, has been and remains crucial to our ability to do justice to this paradoxical state: that of *mimesis*.

A few words about this Greek word: *mimesis*. It is often translated as 'imitation', but actually this doesn't begin to convey the richness of the term, which is almost impossible to pin down. It seems to be rooted in an oral tradition and this keeps it close to body-related motions, rhythms, gestures and sounds. In the Greco-Roman tradition mimesis in its earliest forms seems closely related to the god Dionysus, first through enacted ritual then through the development of theatre. It is arguably the crucial trait which separates humans from other animals, and seems to play an important role in the development of human culture, as Aristotle puts it: "First, the instinct of mimesis is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most mimetic of living creatures, and through mimesis learns his earliest lessons [...]" (Aristotle Poet. 4.1448b5).

Historically the notion of mimesis seems to lose its potency when a more logos based, less embodied culture becomes dominant. In the western tradition, it is at around the time of Plato that this seems to occur. What we see is a kind of denigration of mimesis so that it starts to become characterised as mere imitation or copying of the 'appearance' of things. The word mimesis gets translated into Latin as *imitatio*, thus shedding its nuanced multi-dimensionality. Later it gets translated as 'representation'. It would not be too strong to say that mimesis is repressed throughout this

period: the blueprint for this is Plato's: there is truth, then there is appearance, and then mimesis is the copying of that appearance: a long way from truth. From this point on, even those who are in favour of mimesis tend to restrict it to the field of aesthetics.

This negative form becomes fixed and even exacerbated at the time of the enlightenment. So the repression of the mimetic goes back a long way and takes many forms: Plato's banishing of the artists from the republic, the Judaic injunction against graven images, recurrent bursts of iconoclasm in Christianity and Islam, what has been described as the anti-theatrical prejudice. It is a repression which seems to run in parallel with, and indeed is closely related to, the repression of the Dionysian. It is powered by a fear of losing self, in other words becoming contaminated by or deliquescing into the other. When we mimetically play the other it becomes hard to ascertain, especially from without, where we end and the other begins: we become protean, the strict lines which define our boundaries lose definition: is a male actor playing a woman masculine or feminine? What was going on when a boy actor played the girl Rosalind pretending to be a boy pretending to be a girl? Plato was right, if you watch too much of that stuff, or even worse take part in it, it starts to dissolve all your certainties. And the ultimate fear is that of fusion - the loss of ego.

So if this is right then mimesis leads us to lose our ego boundaries, and if this happens we also lose any sense of other as other - because what happens is a kind of merging. And of course that would rule mimesis out as a means of engaging with Other. But I don't think this is an accurate representation of what occurs in mimesis as a conscious faculty. The fear is that mimesis dangerously collapses subject-object dualism, so that we fall into what Jung calls participation mystique. However, I think Adorno is right when he says that mimesis is "an attitude toward reality distinct from the fixated antithesis of subject and object" (Adorno 1997, p.110). In other words, it inhabits an area, not where subject and no object have merged into one, but where that relation is not yet fixed in opposition and separation: where there is still fluidity.

This all sounds rather vague, and perhaps hard to imagine. Let's look at a field in which the concept of Mimesis has in recent years been taken seriously, that of anthropology. In 1993 MIchael Taussig wrote a book called Mimesis and Alterity (Taussig, 1993) in which he applied some of the

insights of Walter Benjamin to his own field, anthropology. For Benjamin mimesis is not a theory but a faculty: an inherent part of the human condition:

"Nature creates similarities. One need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man's. His gift of seeing similarities is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role" (Benjamin 1986, p.333)

Taussig in turn defines the mimetic faculty as "the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other" (Taussig, 1993, p.xii). Mimesis, for Taussig, retains the idea of copying, imitating but also that of 'sensuous contact', in other words an embodied, physical tangible aspect. What he is doing here is to bring together the two classes of primitive sympathetic magic which Frazer distinguishes in The Golden Bough: that of magic of contact and that of magic of similarity or imitation. Taussig says that here both occur together: and in this kind of magic the copy or imitation has the capacity to affect "the original to such a degree that the representation shares in or acquires the properties of the represented" (1993, p.47).

Taussig's ideas have, in turn, been taken up by anthropologist Rane Willerslev, whose field work has been among the Siberian Yukaghir people. (Willerslev, 2007) Willerslev describes the Yukaghir cosmos as being "in effect a hall of mirrors, as various dimensions of reality are conceived as replicas or reflections of others" (ibid. p.11). It is a thus a mimeticised world in which everything is paired with "an almost limitless number of mimetic doubles of itself, which extend in all directions and continually mirror and echo one another." (ibid.) The Yukaghir hunter who seeks to bring an elk into the open does so by mimicking its movements, but as for Yukaghirs animals take on human shapes and live lives analogous to those of humans when in their own lands, there is a strange kind of mutual mimicry going on.

One of the interesting things about this mimicry is that it only needs to be a very rough kind of copying. When the old hunter Spyridon sets out to bag an elk he puts on an elk-hide coat, a hat with protruding ears, and skis

covered with elk skin (so as to sound like an elk in snow), but there the resemblance ends: below the hat his human face is visible, and he holds a loaded gun, which on the whole elks tend not to do. He has not stopped being human, but he has entered a between place, a liminal place: not elk, but also not not elk.

This potent ambiguity of this status, by which he is both similar to and yet quite different from the animal he imitates, is crucial when we look at the psychology of mimesis, because it allows for a state which is neither cut off in difference, nor fused into sameness. Thus although the stress in mimesis is always upon similarity, what Taussig calls sensuous contact, this very concept of similarity always depends for meaning upon its opposite: difference. And it this awareness of difference which enables the imitator's direction of attention, which in its manifest form is all toward the object of imitation, to turn back into self-awareness as imitating subject. And this reflexive turn is very important because it precludes the possibility of fusion or unity with the object.

The reflexive aspect of what is going on here is not in opposition to mimesis, but is built into it, it is part of it. If it were not there, then the hunter would have fused into the elk, lost himself in elkhood, (and this is something which can occur among the Yukaghir, and is looked upon as a disaster) But when that happens we are no longer talking about mimesis but metamorphosis: the difference between copy and original would have gone. So in mimesis we move between identities and exist in a liminal field of 'not me, not not me'. And this tension between same and different, or, as we might describe it, between self and other, is absolutely characteristic of all mimetic activity: it is what allows the actor playing Hamlet, and the child being a train to inhabit their role, without losing themselves in it.

What does mark out the world of the Yukaghir from ours is that it seems to be saturated with this liminality (souls are substance and not substance, people are soul and body, self and reincarnated other, hunters are human and animal, predator and prey) and generally it is this liminal quality that seems to be characteristic of animistic cultures.

But what needs repeated emphasis is that just because the kind of Cartesian mind/body, ego/other separation which we in the west have grown used to is absent, does not mean that this is a world of

undifferentiated participation mystique in which subject, object, self and other are all fused into one.

It seems to me that this complex and sophisticated form of related reflexivity, what Willerslev calls 'depth reflexivity', which is characteristic of mimetic engagement brings us back again to Merleau-Ponty's image of the chiasm. What is occurring is precisely a folding together of I and other within which we maintain both our difference and the intimacy of our sameness. In animism both 'self-involvedness' and 'world-involvedness' are accommodated in a single coherent mode of being-in-the-world: that of mimesis whereby the imitating self can enter into intimate relations with the other, and be transformed by the other, yet not be lost to itself.

But, while for animistic cultures the mimetic may be the acknowledged and customary way of being in the world, the question remains, surely such a style of engagement is no longer available to us in the developed west? Wasn't all that irredeemably lost centuries ago?

Well my answer to that question is NO. Despite all attempts to repress it in western culture, un-thematised and mainly unconscious, it still feels to me like a more convincing way of looking at the way we all live in the world than the split and individualised vision of Descartes, which, incidentally, continues, mostly unacknowledged, to undergird much psychotherapeutic theory. Moreover, the fundamental nature of the mimetic mode of being in the world receives support from several different directions.

Developmental psychology suggests that the very young child has no sense of being different from the world of others, but specifically learns this by mimetically incorporating an other into the self, which then comes to be experienced as both "me" and "not me." There thus emerges a duality or doubling of perspectives, which allows the child to see itself as another would see it from an external vantage—that is, it comes to observe itself reflexively.

But these ideas are also supported by very exciting recent research in the field of neuroscience. In the 90s Italian neuroscientists studying the Macacque monkey brain discovered the existence of what they called mirror neurons, and they went on to confirm that humans too possess these neurons. These neurons provide prima facie evidence that there is,

on a brain level, a direct link between our own brain-body-system and the brain-body-system of other individuals. In other words, when we see someone acting, performing a movement, it is not only the visual part of the brain which is activated, but part of the motor brain i.e. The bit of the brain we normally employ to control and execute similar actions, similar movements, experience similar sensations and similar emotions. So when I see someone kicking a ball, the very part of the brain which would have been activated if I were kicking the ball is activated in my brain, thanks to these mirror neurons.

Clearly this is quite a discovery, and it has implications in all sorts of fields, for example how we account for empathy, how language might have developed, and what is going on when we enjoy art. However, for the purposes of this talk what matters about this discovery is the light it seems to shed upon the intimate relationship between this mirroring mechanism in the brain and the kind of mimetic practice I have been talking about. For one thing, mirror neurons seem to offer neuroscientific support for precisely the kind of intimate intersubjective intertwining which Merleau-Ponty spent his life attempting to suggest is our primordial way of being in the world. If we are already intimately involved, to the extent of our motor-brain becoming activated, just by *looking* at someone smiling, then what a small step it is for us to mirror that smile back to them. The mystery of how neonates, newly born infants, can imitate the facial movements of an adult is solved. One could almost say that I am already engaged in mimesis, long before I actively imitate, simply through my perception of the world. I don't have to cry when I see someone crying, or leap when I see someone leaping in order to be profoundly mimetically involved, deep in my body, with that crying or leaping. This is of course precisely how theatre works: the audience member shares in every action, and every emotion portrayed by every character, but now we know that this profound engagement is occurring on the deep embodied level of mirror neurons firing in the brain. I am of course not suggesting that such an engagement can or should be reduced to brain activity alone; it is nonetheless fascinating to see how the latest research gives weight to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological intuitions.

One of the interesting things about these mirror neurons is that they don't just fire or not fire, they are activated to various degrees. For example, a practiced juggler will have much more activity in his mirror neurons when watching another juggler perform than will a non-juggler. His neurons are, as it were, better trained. So we are more or less attuned to what goes on around us, depending upon how well practiced our mirror neurons are, so that for example, if I have never felt sad my response to seeing sadness in others will be correspondingly blunted, and vice versa. We can see how it is then that our history of pathos, the very woundedness I was talking about earlier, does indeed prepare us for the very nuanced receptiveness we might need as therapists to effectively mirror the woundedness of others, and thus perform a listening which is healing. Hence the archetype of the wounded healer. The more wounded we are, the more affected we are, the greater our potential for mimetic mirroring.

Our mimetic skills depend upon practice as well as theory: our Siberian hunter observes his prey and mimics his prey: he becomes better at mimicking the better he observes, and he becomes better at observing the more he mimics. It is precisely this upward mimetic spiral that the autistic person is excluded from, and it has been suggested that absent or defective mirror neurons might well explain what is failing to occur in the interaction of the autistic child with his environment, so that the kind of mimetic practice which non-autistic children fall into at as we have seen is a very early age, is simply never begun. The autistic child's primary engagement with the other is stalled from the get-go, the other simply remains inexplicably other, precisely because, on a brain level, none of the complex mirroring and counter-mirroring by which we all automatically perform the extraordinary complex task of recognising the other as other, while simultaneously recognising the other in ourself, and thereby making the link which enables at one end of the scale, empathy, and at the other comprehension of the simplest human gestures.

So what does all this add up to? I started by making the point that the phenomenon of the Other is central to the psychoanalytic tradition, but that the great danger is that we prematurely erase it by attempting to assimilate it into sameness: it seemed other, but now that we have got to know it we realise it is actually same, the dark continent of Africa seemed dangerously other, but now that we have colonised it, its just like a warmer

version of home. This makes, I think, the goal of wholeness potentially problematic, even intrapsychically neo-colonialist. I offered Merleau-Ponty's chiasm of flesh as a rich resource for thinking this problem: through this perspective we can begin to see the opposites of self and other as intimately folded into each other, but without melting or fusing into one, like the yin/yang sign or like the effect of marbling. So we are made up fundamentally of a chiasm of self and other and it is this chiasmic aspect which enables a strange knowledge of the other, via, as it were, the other within. This realisation led me to a consideration of mimesis, as a mode of being in the world which plays creatively and consciously on this borderline of self and other. Mimesis is, as it were, the praxis which accompanies Merleau-Ponty's theory of chiasmic flesh. However, our mimetic existence in the world goes far beyond the manifestly mimetic practices of mimicking, imitation, and play-acting. Though theatre offers a wonderful metaphorical model for the way mimesis actually works (first to relate the actor to the other of the role, thereby releasing and creatively outwardly fashioning her own otherness, then to relate the audience to the spectrum of otherness performed before them, releasing and inwardly fashioning their own otherness) the point is that such processes are in fact going on in every area of life, though less manifestly. We see what a more comprehensively enacted culture of mimesis might look like when we look at animistic cultures like that of the Siberian Yukhaghir tribe, where every aspect of life and every relationship is haunted by the mimetic. When we do so the Western emphasis upon absolute dichotomies such as objective/subjective and self/other, far from being the ontological categories they are claimed to be, become relativised and are revealed as culturally and historically conditioned. Even the science which has grown out of western duality seems to be beginning to undermine its own originary assumptions, not only in subatomic physics but in neuroscience: the fundamentally mimetic intertwining of I and you, man and nature begin perhaps to be revealed in discoveries such as that of the mirror neuron.

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