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WHERE THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR ME TO EXIST, I WAS LEFT WITHOUT ME:

SEVERE DISORDERS BROUGHT BY NON-RELATIONSHIP, BY NON-LOVE

By Maria João Saraiva,

Member of the Portuguese Association of Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a look at the relational inability of the object (the mother), which in turn generates incapacity in the subject (the child). The absence of a primary quality relationship, or even the existence of something that cannot be described as a relationship, introduces trauma and transforms the subject's potential, emptying it, and possibly leading to severe and profound non-being.

I propose that there is a deeper relational mismatch of consequent trauma and pathology, when the child is "gifted" and the parents are "sub-gifted," indicating a possible link between giftedness and severe mental disorders. The emptiness leads to emptiness, and the non-concavity of the object leads to the subject's emotional abortion and to the prediction of his non-existence; and finally, to the challenges the psychoanalyst must face when working with the gifted subject. One must decipher both an understanding of reality beyond the objective reality of the subject, and his ability to engage in a deep analytic relationship. This is indispensable and necessary for the rebirth and existence of the subject.

Keywords: *trauma, relational inability, emotional incapacity, mother-child relationship, emotional concavity, giftedness*

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My present intervention involves an evolving hypothesis which I would like to share with you today. It includes new ways in which to gather thoughts, reflections and experiences, and also new ways to observe, for us as practitioners.

The external and visible manifestations of autism are those of incapacity. Despite these findings, I advance the hypothesis that a connection may be found between giftedness and certain severe developmental disorders, such as autism, for example. In this paper I offer some possibilities that may inevitably lead towards this proposition and ponder them more thoroughly.

One is born *in* and *from* love. Life originates in the privileged relationship between a mother and her baby, or even earlier, in the relationship between a mother and a father, and how they imagine and create space within their shared love for the baby, who is a part of both of them. The quality of this foundational relationship is vital to the baby's healthy development, for without it, the child cannot come about, can never exist as a complete being. The same way as the child would die of malnourishment without basic nutritional care, the same applies to its psychological state. Without care and without investment at the psychological level, a healthy child cannot exist; it will die from the very start, leaving merely a tenuous trace of life, or even simply its shell. In order for a child to develop healthily, a salutary primary relationship must exist between mother and baby; a relationship where the mother offers unconditional love, where she is in tune and can adapt to her baby's needs. She must present her baby with a nurturing and giving love. Unfortunately, this ideal situation often fails to exist in its purest state. Some children are met with a predominance of love, while others are left psychologically starved. This paper will focus on the latter.

If we imagine a *fully* narcissistic mother, we can easily recognize the impossibility of a baby emotionally existing inside this mother, as a being which is loved for its very own existence. Instead, we have a baby whose mere existence fulfils its mother's objective of self-realisation, which means that it will experience a highly compromised form of existence. This subject is not emotionally bred in oblatory, giving, and expectant love, founded in hope for the loved being that will arrive, and that will develop its own existence. Rather, in the void of this, the subject will be generated only physiologically and perhaps with the prospect of eventually occupying an insignificant and unique space as its parents' narcissistic object.

If a mother is narcissistic, she is convex rather than concave; she has no room for the other unless the other is a provider of something for her own self. The mother will have her baby, but the intentionality with which she has it, given her narcissistic functioning, will be of a 'personal' nature,

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located within a universe of some sort of self-nourishment, not that of love. As a result, in situations such as these, we witness severe relational failures take hold very early on. These relational failures will come to condition and to limit the psychological development of the subject, the child.

Now, let us suppose that a baby is gifted, endowed with a hypersensitivity and a superior capacity of apprehension than is held by the other, and that this baby has a narcissistic mother, completely void of concavity, of internal space, or of a “mental womb,” to use the words of António Coimbra de Matos (1992-2006). In such a situation, what will ensue will not be an encounter, an attuned connection or a relationship of added-value, but the very opposite of this. What develops is dissonance, a non-place, a unilateral, yet inverted relationship in which the mother lacks a welcoming and providing love, and expressing instead a draining and very narcissistic form of love.

It is a given that at such an early age infants simply cannot survive without this primary relationship (Mélega, 2014). If the baby, via its superior capacity, feels and grasps the lethal environment and desert-like aridity that awaits it, the constrained amount of space available for the development of its complete existence (all of which can be identified as clear threats to the child’s healthy future), we will witness the baby’s efforts to ensure self-protection, and establish the relationship so essential to its survival. The challenge facing this baby is: how can I have a mother who takes care of me if she only knows of herself?

In the same manner as a woman without a uterus would never be able to become pregnant, the narcissistic mother, who has no emotional concavity for her child, was never actually pregnant, except with herself and with a motherhood project that is simply a collage of her own needs and requirements. Her child just happened to be a part of her story, which she herself created; a narrative without flexibility or openness to what may arise from the other’s existence; a life story in itself meagre and lacking space, as can be imagined based on the characteristics of those centred on themselves. Such people have no room for others, and are thus unable to grow *with* and *for* the other, except when this other brings benefits for *them*. The absence of a quality relationship introduces trauma and transfigures the subject’s potential by emptying it, leading to severe pathology, to non-being. Hence, the destiny of this baby, this child, this person, can be but merely that of non-existence. If such a mother has a gifted baby, with the just mentioned hypersensitivity and superior capacity of apprehending the places of the other, I suggest that the baby will feel, very early on, its mother’s lack of emotional concavity. It will understand that the only place reserved for it is that of non-existence, *in* or *with* itself as a unique, autonomous being with its very own characteristics. And

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so the baby becomes the provider and “nourisher” of its mother, of her needs and her story – a story where this baby only fits in this role. Nonetheless, it is not possible to even act as a “nourisher” without receiving some basic care. But how can one exist in a non-place, during a phase of life when being cared for and loved is so vital to survival? How can one not wither and die emotionally without a caring object; how can the sap of love be extracted from an arid mother? What relational arrangements will it find to survive without a real relationship that nourishes its potential, without a relationship purposefully directed towards it, but rather a navel-gazing one focused on the object itself? These are some of the questions to be pondered.

I think we can here return to the hypothesis where this child, more gifted than most, finds itself confronted, on the one hand, with the impossibility of becoming who it truly is – for this is simply not feasible at an early stage without love. On the other hand, the child comes to discover an exit, a “resolution” for this problem, by offering its mother the chance of being a caring mother, while simultaneously granting itself the possibility of being cared for, of not dying. Yet this comes at a high price for the child, who must deprive itself of its self, of all it could be, emerging instead as the opposite of what would, in reality, be its true self in development, had the child’s primary object been of better quality. The result is total incapacity, even to communicate or exist, without complete dependence on its object.

Without object-oriented primary love – which does not exist in this case – and without the conditions to develop its full potential, the child – as a result of its deprivation, and of being turned inside out – does not become gifted, or even in the least bit gifted, and ends up creating the illusion of an apparently “good mother” capable of taking care of her child. This is purely because of how incapable the child has become. We could easily suppose that if syntony between this mother and her baby was not even established at the level of the child’s basic needs and capacities, it could hardly come to exist at the level of its less basic, or superior, needs and capacities. Given the unlikely possibility of being cared for, the baby would prompt the conditions for its survival itself.

Let us now consider this: On the one hand, we witness a person we consider “turned inside out,” or showing the inverse of what would be their capabilities; yet on the other hand, we see a child who appears to have achieved the impossible – the creation of a caring mother. The child has bred a caring mother because it needs to be cared for. Obviously, this is a mother who merely dons the label of a dedicated and charitable mother, who may even feel as if she is “carrying her cross” or fulfilling her mission on earth, but, who nonetheless, ends up meeting the basic needs of a baby, of a child –

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namely, the imperative and essential need of being cared for and being able to experience the sensation of “unconditional love”. Only, in this case, it is not love, but rather a gesture of the mother’s own self-love, which responds to complete dependence. However, it is either ‘this,’ which smells love, but it is not love, or it is nothingness.

Given the total incapability of the autistic child, its mother must place her own capacity at the child’s disposal, in order to ensure its survival, even physical. This narcissistic mother consequently becomes the centre of the universe – of this inverted universe.

In short, we may witness a renouncement of the subject’s capacities so that the object can (with convexity, or at least minimum concavity) receive it – as amputated, it will fit. We can also view this as a creative act, in the sense that what did not exist is brought into being – a caring mother. If we return to the example of the womb, imagining a belly that does not grow as the baby grows, we can easily conceive of an internal space that fails to expand because it is restricted, forcing the baby to deform itself or not allow parts of itself to grow so it may fit inside. Only thus, could we imagine a mother whose womb size is adjusted to that of her baby, stimulating syntony, adaptation, common ground, but all false and achieved at a very high price for the baby: a renouncement and abandonment of itself and its potential. But in reality, without this syntony, even if inadequate and only apparent, there is no promise of anything; and at an early age, what is negative is better than nothingness, better than the vacuum that is death.

Let us say that the non-existence this child was destined for may be anticipated by the child itself, because in reality, no love is directed towards it. There exists no dream, no fantasy *for* and *about* it and no predisposition in the mother to place her child before herself, as parental love would assume. Faced with this anticipation, the child will use all means at its disposal to claim its existence. Who will blossom and develop will not necessarily be who the child could have been, but rather, the image of devastation, which the absence of love installs; the reflection of the object’s lack of internal space and capacity to love. The child and its potential were compromised, “sold to the devil” along with its soul, not knowing where the devil that represents the void of love left these goods, nor whether they will one day be retrieved, since no one knows where they are, or even no one bothers searching for them. This child’s mother has become a seemingly perfect mother. She feeds her baby, says hello, calls it by name and takes it to the park or up to the window. Yet here, the choice was hypothetically not hers, but rather induced or made possible by her child’s level of incapacity.

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This child ends up displaying another original inclination, namely, a process of identification with the emptiness of love, with the silence of love's absence carried by its mother – this will be the identification with what is possible. A child with autism is usually lacking the ability for the eye contact, which may signify inability of a relationship with the other. Like mother, like child... In this case, I think *it was a child who offered itself to a mother*. It granted her the chance of being a dedicated mother in the eyes of others, as well as in her own; granted her the dream of being at the very centre of someone's universe and of never being left abandoned or helpless in her own corners of abandonment and helplessness, disclosed and unveiled by her narcissistic functioning – seeing as what exists here is a mother-child relationship that shall never be broken.

The child's potential cannot be stimulated because it has not been provided with the necessary relational conditions to ensure this development. It is interesting to consider that while some children persistently search for alternative sources of nourishment, others appear to already understand how to end their story of slavery, abandonment, and emptiness. This latter group seems to see the intolerable pain of their story extend further and writes its evolution in a different way, renouncing themselves to meet their mother's desires and vacuity, into which they find entry, just barely due to lack of space, but at least with the possibility of being cared for and eliciting a sparkle in the eyes of the object. The mother glows with self-pride, but for brief moments one may dream that this maternal glow stems from pride at her child's progress.

For a mother who is incapable of truly seeing the other, of knowing the other's existence, having a gifted child is a tale of devastation, an impossible tale. Who knows whether there are children who understand this early on, seek to reverse the impossibility of this story by exchanging it for the impossibility of their own existence, renouncing all they could have become.

The feelings of belonging and of being recognised by the other are essential to life. For adults, the notion of being gifted is filled with difficulties. For children, a lack of acceptance and acknowledgement of a legitimate and even loved existence, make life impossible and improbable. The autistic child will not have been given the minimum conditions to ensure its existence. The fundamental relationship of emotional life was never established and does not exist. Yet in the hypothesis I put forth, the child can predict its unbearable future and anticipates this by divesting of its self, of its potential at all levels, to enter into its mother's world, a world where the other does not exist, where there is no genuine dialogue or relationship besides that of self-benefit. It is within this scenario that the child is recognised, although merely as a part of its mother, as one of her projects,

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but still validating an apparent existence where the child has its mother's attention and care. With the child left so incapable, the mother's incapacity transforms into (or gives the impression of) great capability, like a shallow form of "unconditional love," but that is still better than nothing.

The invisible wall that the autistic child builds up between itself and the other, may represent the unspoken visibility of the wall constructed by the impossibility of love, which the child was never provided with, and which denies its existence as a result. It may also represent the visibility of the wall that guaranteed this baby's initial survival. What the child does not know, as it was not given space to develop its potential and capacities, is that later on, relational alternatives of the child's own choosing may arise. However, by then, its wall will have become opaque, windowless, and optionless. This is why the autistic child must be found.

The autistic child needs to be found, dreamt, and loved in such a primordial way (prior to its very own existence), as it is done by parents capable of loving their baby even before it is born. This becomes the challenge for the psychoanalyst / therapist, who must find within themselves the concavity and profound capacity to love. This will help them provide the other with the necessary space for their existence, this will guide them to seek out the person who has not been allowed to exist and prepare them for the infinite amount of time it will take to build ties, bonds of love, bridges, windows and the sky, in a place of opaque and cold walls. The autistic child may present the psychoanalyst with the visible and obvious framework that speaks of the closed silence of isolation, of non-relationship, of the void experienced by the object, in place of love and the welcoming of a new being. The psychoanalyst will have to be the one to create the haven for dreaming and encounter, departing from there on a long and intimate trip together – which, for the autistic child, may be the first and only....

A final word:

I believe the more severe the mother's narcissistic pathology, the more acute and profound her child's pathology is likely to be. In addressing autism, for instance, we may be observing one of the possible limits of this situation. In the case of other pathologies we may also consider the hypothesis that a direct link might exist between a child's giftedness and a mother's under-giftedness, such as depression, for example. Although here, the mother's greater relational capacity means that we do not observe as severe a state of affairs as that discussed in this presentation. We could imagine a palette of possible pathologies where this direct link is identifiable, and where the greater the gap between the child and the mother's respective abilities, expressed as the inversion of what would be

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expected (i.e. more gifted the child – less gifted the mother), the more severe is the resulting pathology. The basis of mental and psychological life is rooted in the quality of the relationship. As such, the poorer the quality or even absence of this relationship, the earlier the problems come to arise, the more critical and profound the pathology will be.

We know that the responsibility to tread the path towards the other, to their encounter, and the responsibility for the tonality and quality of this relationship is clearly held by the object, by the carer. Accordingly, pathology originates in the incapacity or lack of relational quality, of emotional syntony in the object. We find this root cause in the most diversified pathologies. The question that then emerges is: What response does the subject find to resolve or confront the situation at hand, the future and the existence that await it? We may come across non-gifted subjects who receive very little from the object, but who are not aware of the unbearable pain / death that await them, or do not apprehend the aggressiveness and destructiveness that the object's narcissism carries. These subjects receive what is negative and fail to develop as far as they could have. Yet they only become aware, little by little, of what the autistic child may have been able to grasp immediately, anticipating its death, rushing towards it, sparing itself in advance the agony of the paths of intolerable pain leading to that outcome and, simultaneously, generating the conditions for being cared for and watched over, even if only of the child's dead side, the opposite of what it could have been, its emotional "corpse."

The problem at hand is not the fact that the baby is more gifted, but rather the "infra-giftedness" of its primary objects. Clearly, super-giftedness does not cause misalignment, but in the proposed argument, this ability may be thought as being imprinted on the outcome or on the response found for dissonance, for the object's void. Viewed in a different way – we can consider that the depressed person is also gifted, anticipating the future, depriving himself of much, adapting, submitting himself and enhancing the object with a view to making it a little more capable than it really is, or at least reducing the gap between what the subject needs and what the object can give. Being gifted, this subject also foresees the uselessness of a living expression of his feelings of anger and of demands, given that this would lead to the depletion of what scant life conditions remain. The subject has an object with some capacity to love, though with a love too diluted and disinvested for what he needs.

The autistic child, being gifted, predicts its future in store alongside its primary object and denies itself the possibility of everything, anticipating the future in the present. The child's object is entirely incapable of feeling love for the other, of offering the child what it requires for simply being. Consequently, the child foresees its future, which is death, a progressive, excruciating death. What

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remains is mental death, silence and the incommunicability of the non-existence meted to the child. In the case of the autistic child, we may perhaps imagine it entering into the bubble of its mother's sole real "love" – namely, her self-love.

One cannot exist within the place of non-love....

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