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PSYCHOANALYSTS FINDING FORM:

(auto)fictional experiments in contemporary psychoanalysis

In this paper, we will look at two important voices in contemporary psychoanalysis, Didier Anzieu and Christopher Bollas, who from a theoretical perspective have tried to devise new genres to express their thinking. The result of this is hybrid texts that combine autobiography, essay, case study, fiction, comedy and poetry. In their theoretical work, Anzieu and Bollas have examined creativity and processes of thinking, predominantly from the perspective of object-relations psychoanalysis, although both are known as eclectic thinkers, who do not belong to just one school of psychoanalysis.

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1. The Creative Turn in Contemporary Psychoanalysis

A trend in recent psychoanalytic writing is the rise of creative forms of writing. One of the most popular psychoanalytic writers is Irvine D. Yalom, who fictionalizes the psychoanalytic therapy, for instance by staging an encounter between Breuer and Nietzsche. In France Jean-Bernard Pontalis has been steadily working on an essayistic oeuvre since the 1980s and Julia Kristeva published several detective novels/autobiographical *romans à clé*. Bruce Fink recently published a volume of Lacanian detective stories and the psychoanalyst Jacqueline Harpman is one of the most important Francophone Belgian novelists. In this paper, we will look at two important voices in contemporary psychoanalysis, Didier Anzieu and Christopher

Bollas, who from a theoretical perspective have tried to devise new genres to express their thinking. The result of this is hybrid texts that combine autobiography, essay, case study, fiction, comedy and poetry. In their theoretical work, Anzieu and Bollas have examined creativity and processes of thinking, predominantly from the perspective of object-relations psychoanalysis, although both are known as eclectic thinkers, who do not belong to just one school of psychoanalysis.

Our first case is Didier Anzieu, who mixes psychoanalytic theory, autobiography and literary techniques in many of his writings, most notably in *Beckett* (Seuil, 2003), first published as *Beckett et le psychoanalyste* (Archimbaud/Menta, 1992). Often mistaken for a psychoanalytic study of Samuel Beckett, the work is in fact the personal account of Anzieu's lifetime involvement with the work of Beckett and a fictional report of Beckett's analysis with W.G. Bion. Alternatively, the book could be regarded as a kind of 'rewriting' of Beckett and of episodes from his life through the filter of Anzieu's theory of the creation process. A close reading of the text sheds light on the intellectual and institutional climate that was important for the rise and promotion of new 'fictionoid' genres in France.¹

A second case is the creative work of Christopher Bollas, a prolific and innovative British psychoanalyst. Apart from his extensive theoretical oeuvre, Bollas has written a trilogy – *Dark at the End of the Tunnel*, *I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing* and *Mayhem* – and a collection of plays, *Theraplay*. The three volumes – one term to characterize the genre of the texts is the notion of 'conceit', a 17th-century literary genre in which a philosophical problem is examined in a short literary vignette – deal with the subject and the world after 'the Catastrophe' from the perspective of 'the psychoanalyst'. In the humorous, quirky texts, themes like depression, the disintegration of object-relations, life and death, good and evil are addressed in the form of conversations of the psychoanalyst with his immediate social circle. Although Bollas' protagonist remains unnamed and his universe is clearly fictional, as is indicated by the names of the other characters and the odd events, the centrality of psychoanalysis and the theoretical streak of the texts make it tempting to see 'the psychoanalyst' as Bollas himself.

The creative work of Anzieu and Bollas can be regarded as 'autofiction', a relatively recent hybrid genre that combines autobiography, fiction and a theoretical approach, which is a hot topic in contemporary narratology. Both authors are interested in the creative process and in developments in narratology and literary studies. However, this does not entail that they see their own discipline as 'fictional'. On the contrary, fiction and narratological procedures are tools to reach a deeper truth. In this they follow the British psychoanalyst, W.G. Bion, whose idiosyncratic oeuvre is more and more important in contemporary psychoanalysis and in psychoanalytic literary theory. At the end of his life, Bion also turned to autobiography and fiction, especially in his enigmatic trilogy *A Memoir of the Future*, in his search to come to terms with the fragmented and multiple subject and with psychoanalysis as a creative and destructive process. Moreover Bion was also very much aware of the problems facing psychoanalysis as a discipline, i.e., fragmentation and a too rigid theoretical framework. The situation of psychoanalysis anno 2000 is also implicitly addressed by Bollas and Anzieu. In their work, we will see how the search for new forms of writing is motivated by a combination of internal theoretical necessity and the awareness of a general intellectual and social climate that influenced the rise of autofiction in literature.

2. Autofiction and Psychoanalysis

The notion of autofiction has been around for some years now in contemporary literature and literary studies, especially in France. According to Michael Sheringham, it is part of a more general trend in modernism and its aftermath, the meticulous observation of the quotidien. More particularly, the phenomenon is related to the decline of the novel, the rise of hybrid genres and the end of 'the structuralist embargo on subjectivity'. (Sheringham 2006: 3) Likewise, Ruth Cruikshank (2009: 59ff) relates the phenomenon to a sense of crisis in French literature towards the turn of the millennium. The founding father of autofiction is Serge Doubrovsky. He famously introduced the word in the preface of his novel/autofiction *Fils*, in which he hesitates to label his text.

Autobiographie? Non, c'est un privilège réservé aux importants de ce monde, au soir de leur vie, et dans un beau style. Fiction, d'événements et de faits strictement réels; si l'on veut, *autofiction*, d'avoir confié le langage d'une aventure à l'aventure du langage, hors sagesse et hors syntaxe du roman, traditionnel ou nouveau. Rencontres, *films* des mots, allitérations, assonances, dissonances, écriture d'avant ou d'après la littérature, *concrète*, comme on dit en musique. Ou encore, autofriction, patiemment onaniste, qui espère faire maintenant partager son plaisir. (Doubrovsky 1977: 10)

In this quote, the main characteristics of autofiction are present. First, the awareness of creating a new genre, other than the traditional autobiography, novel or *nouveau roman*, is usually expressed in a paratext (like the preface, subtitle or blurb), but it can also occur in the narratives themselves. (Genette 1990: 170) Second, the paradoxical combination of autobiographical and therefore true facts and a fictional outcome. Third, the taste for experiment on the level of language, structure and tone.

In *Fils* psychoanalysis is the structuring theory. Not only is the text structured as a dialogue with his 'psy', it also takes the form of a free association in which linguistic associations and puns are strung together to threads (*films*). Thematically, the classical Oedipus complex – the mother-son (*films*) relation – and other psychoanalytic themes are important in the narrative. In many autofictional endeavours psychoanalysis is more or less explicitly present. It not only offers the theoretical underpinning of 'subject-less', non-intentional, fragmented or fictional subject, but it also provides a creative, experimental method of self-observation that searches an entry to the unconscious via language and linguistic games. Doubrovsky and the poststructuralist authors of his generation are not so much interested in the traditional plot structures of Freudian psychoanalysis and the complexes and patterns it discerned. Rather, they foreground the non-narrative emphasis on wordplay and phenomena like fragmentation, splitting and doubling of the subject.

Doubrovsky, a professor of literature at Columbia, used *Fils* and the notion of autofiction in a debate with Philippe Lejeune, the author of the influential structuralist theory of autobiography, *Le pacte autobiographique*. According to Lejeune, an autobiography is characterized by the identity of

author, narrator and character and by an implicit pact between reader and writer that the author is telling the (subjective) truth. This autobiographical pact obviously excludes the possibility of autofiction, because in Lejeune's view, the autobiographical pact and fiction are mutually exclusive. Still, the literary practice, Doubrovsky and many others following and preceding him (e.g. Marguerite Duras and other *nouveau romanciers*), proves Lejeune wrong by the production of many experimental autobiographical works. In the wake of the popularity of the phenomenon, a number of critical studies appeared, which elaborated, narrowed down or broadened and subdivided the genre into different types. (Colonna 2004, Gasparini 2004, and Jeanelle and Violet 2007, to name but a few). While the discussion whether autofiction is a genre in its own right, a subgenre of autobiography, a dishonest form of autobiography, or the underlying condition of every autobiography has not yet abated, the term is more and more accepted, also outside the borders of francophone studies and of narratology, as a division of 'lifewriting' and of the *autoportrait*. Nowadays, autofiction takes on many forms, combining autobiography, fiction, theory and other media, such as photography, installation, film or graphic art, in order to achieve distance and self-reflection vis-à-vis the subjective writing act.

These insights and practices, as well as the notion of autofiction, have subsequently found their way back into psychoanalysis at the onset of the 21st century. Post-Lacanian psychoanalysts turn to autofiction as an instrument to express the psychoanalytic event and experience, or to stimulate new dimensions of psychoanalytic thinking. In *Le Cabinet d'autofictions* (2000), the editors examine the resemblances between the psychoanalytic cure and the practice of autofiction. Remarkably, they position themselves both against Freud and against the novel. (Harel, Jacques & St-Amant 2000: 8-9) As for Doubrovsky, autofiction is considered a radically new practice of self-observation and *écriture de soi*, and an alternative for the classic case history, auto-analysis and autobiography. The plurality of selves, the interaction of subject and object and the complex fragmentation of time can only be rendered in a hybrid, experimental form of writing. Although the group has borrowed the term 'autofiction' from the theorizations of Doubrovsky, Lejeune, Lecarme and others, its theoretical sources of inspiration and the

examples of its practice are not the narratologically inspired autofictions, but the works of Wilfred Bion and his French successor Didier Anzieu.

3. Anzieu-Beckett- Bion

Didier Anzieu (1923-1999) was a prominent French philosopher, professor of psychology and psychoanalyst who taught at the universities of Strasbourg, la Sorbonne and Nanterre in Paris. (Chabert 1996: 5-22) Although Anzieu was in analysis with Jacques Lacan², he soon severed his ties with Lacan to become one of his most prominent critics. With André Green Anzieu was one of the main connecting figures between the French and the British scenes of psychoanalysis, who introduced the work of Winnicott and Bion in France. Anzieu's interest in Bion can be related to the three main themes in his oeuvre. First, the psychoanalysis of groups, of which Bion was one of the founding fathers. Second, Anzieu's famous notion of 'le moi-peau' or 'the skin-ego', i.e., the physical/psychic envelope of the personality, builds on Bion's concept of 'holding'. The third great interest of Anzieu, creativity and the creative personality, is tributary to object-relations psychoanalysis that focuses on symbolization and thought processes.

Anzieu's *Le corps de l'oeuvre* is a study of different stages of the creation process and of the psychoanalytic personality. *Le corps de l'oeuvre* is by no means a dry, theoretical piece of work. The theory is based on and applied to different creative oeuvres ranging from Henry James, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Jorge Luis Borges, Blaise Pascal to Francis Bacon, including Sigmund Freud and his own work. (Anzieu 1981: 9) In his earlier PhD thesis on Freud's auto-analysis and his work as editor of the work of Pascal, Anzieu became strongly aware of the personal dimension of every theory. The creative transference between critic and his subject is thematized in his work. However, *Le corps de l'oeuvre* cannot be called autofiction. The theory of the creative personality and the process of creation arises in interaction with the examples and does not really question the boundaries of the different discourses.

This has changed in Anzieu's study of Samuel Beckett, in many ways an almost prototypical psychoanalytic autofiction, as is made clear by the recurring references to it in *Le cabinet des autofictions*.³ The text is the autobiographical account of Anzieu's attempts to come to terms with his thirty-year long interest and passion for the work of Beckett that had previously led to several articles. It is an analysis of the complete oeuvre of Beckett and of the destructive creative process that Anzieu himself went through for this assignment. The analyst in the original title of the book, *Beckett et le psychanalyste*, is Anzieu but also his master, Bion, who as a beginning therapist had Beckett as a patient. (1934-1935). The most striking – and in Feldman's terms the wildest, because unfounded – fictional aspect of the book is the detailed imagination of the failed analysis of Beckett and the consequences thereof on Beckett's oeuvre as well as on Bion's theory. This imagination is rendered as a series of intercalated narrations narrated by two fictional homodiegetic narrators, Bion and Beckett, who each give their impression of the psychoanalytic cure.

Beckett and Bion are but a few of the voices heard in the book. On the extradiegetic level, there is the autobiographical I in his writing process and daily routine, then there is the psychoanalyst (Anzieu or Bion), the author addressing the reader, 'cet auteur-ci' (this author - Anzieu) and 'l'auteur-là' (that author - Beckett). Towards the end of the book, Beckett is quoted. Seven chapters with nearly daily journal entries during a period of four months are preceded by a *résumé* that plays on the double – anticipating and retroactive – nature of the summary. The dated entries are interrupted by parts in italics – a procedure also used by Doubrovsky in *Fils* – to indicate corrections and specifications added at a later date.

Avertissement de l'auteur au lecteur. L'ajout qui précède demande explication. Ce livre dont tu commences la lecture et dont j'achève l'écriture est un bracelet à double anneau. Un anneau correspond au premier jet, écrit entre le 18 octobre 1990 et le 15 janvier 1991: c'est la partie du texte imprimée en caractères romains. L'autre anneau, en italiques, est composé de fragments insérés au cours de ma relecture du premier cercle. Tu peux donc lire mon livre de plusieurs façons. Suivre l'ordre où je l'ai écrit, en commençant par le premier anneau, puis revenir au point de départ et parcourir le second. Autre formule: lire le présent livre tel qu'il est présenté achevé, en glissant d'un anneau sur l'autre comme s'il s'agissait d'un bijou monté en bande de Moebius, non pas spatiale mais temporelle, te faisant sans cesse passer du présent au

passé, du passé au présent, d'une lecture originale à une lecture de l'écriture de la relecture.
(Anzieu 2004 : 12)

All these formal characteristics could be called literary or experimental, but they are not salient features of fiction per se. Only in the case of the notes of Bion and Beckett we know that they have been invented, because the narrator points this out.

J'insiste auprès du lecteur pour qu'il considère ces notes comme fictives – d'autant plus fictives qu'elles véhiculent des éléments de réalité – et que me soient épargnées la gloire et la honte de les voir par exemple mises au programme des séminaires de formation psychanalytique, comme s'il s'agissait de textes authentiques de Freud et d'un de ses patients célèbres. J'ai déjà connu cette mésaventure, quand j'ai publié, sous la forme pourtant évidente d'un conte, des récits purement imaginaires de rêves d'Esquimaux, qui m'ont valu une réputation usurpée d'explorateur polaire et à ces pauvres Inuits une réputation injuste de bizarres rêveurs. (Anzieu 2004: 39)

The paradoxical autofictional status of the text is not emphasized in a paratext, but in the book itself. This creates the impression of a reliable narrator that creatively works through his theoretical and emotional impulses and clearly indicates where the fictional aspect of the work is located.

Moreover, because the narrator also identifies his sources, the dominant response to the book is not fictional. Although the text is not based on objective facts and the secondary sources are not used in a critical manner⁴, this is not incompatible with the analytical framework that attaches less importance to objective facts. The analytical truth is located in the quality of the interpretation, which is of course a subjective criterion.

The overall framework provided by Anzieu's theory of the creative personality is organically integrated in his reading of Beckett, and in his intuitive identification with both Beckett and Bion. At first sight this offers very little structure or method to the text as is made explicit in the dialogues with a university colleague, Giraud, an archetypical structuralist. Giraud is said to be the editor of the *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage*, which makes it easy to identify the name as a pseudonym for

either Oswald Ducrot , or Tzvetan Todorov, marking the text on another level as a *roman-à-clef*.

Il prépare l'introduction sous forme d'un parallèle entre langage de la science et science du langage. Il compte conclure qu'une science des sciences est possible mais qu'un langage des langages est impossible. Je croirais entendre un Watt, qui au lieu de servir Mr. Knott, aurait fréquenté l'École Normale Supérieure comme auditeur libre. (Anzieu 2004 : 22)

Anzieu is irritated by Giraud's insistence on method, whereas Anzieu can only fall back on feeling. The personal dimension determines both the interpretation and the structure, and Anzieu sees his own work as a (distorted) mirror or echo of Beckett.⁵

After meeting Giraud, Anzieu will nonetheless impose himself some ground rules for his auto-analysis/encounter with Beckett. These rules are meant to give way to the unconscious and to coincidence, while at the same time keeping the creative process in motion.⁶ Anzieu's reading of Beckett is thus a reaction against the structuralist method, even if it does not manage to escape this completely.

Lecteur à l'Auteur: Comment pouvez-vous prétendre lire en psychanalyste les œuvres de Beckett et nous en proposer une théorie structuraliste?

(...)

Réponse (provisoire) de l'Auteur au Lecteur: Toute création, toute œuvre consiste au déroulement logique d'une structure fonctionnant à l'insu des intéressés et dont la tension inhérente à son déséquilibre interne pousse à ce déroulement. Proféré là une banalité. Toutefois, pour Beckett ce n'est pas la structure fermée d'une histoire qui fonctionne, c'est la structure ouverte d'un récit, homologue à celui produit par la situation psychanalytique même. (Anzieu 2004: 108-109)

The character Giraud and his 'compagne' will return a few times in the narrative as a negative mirror for Anzieu's enterprise. However, the 'real' dialogue makes way for a proliferation of imaginary dialogues and doubles: the notes of Beckett and Bion, the dialogue between author and reader, and between the reader/author Anzieu vis-à-vis Beckett the author. Rather than a structure, the imaginary psychoanalytic dialogue is a code that enables Anzieu to confront Beckett's oeuvre and to shape his own text. This code

entails in fact a double confrontation: with creativity and negativity on the one hand and with psychoanalysis on the other hand.

4. The Creative Process and the Invention of Genre

Gradually, we begin to grasp the extent to which Anzieu's reading of Beckett is determined by his theory of creativity and by his belief in the structure of the psychoanalytic encounter. The model for the creative process is described in *Le corps de l'oeuvre*. The first phase of creativity is always a moment of crisis when the creative subject faces a psychotic core of madness but nonetheless retains the capacity to observe this from a neurotic part of the I. In the concrete case of Beckett, there is a series of crises that determine the evolution of his oeuvre and that obsessively turn around the same core of negativity. The first creative crisis takes place during and immediately after Beckett's failed analysis with Bion. According to Anzieu the encounter fundamentally influenced both authors' later work, because psychoanalysis provided them with a code that enabled them to construct an oeuvre.⁷ Although Beckett experienced the analysis as a failure and was very ironical about it in his letters, Anzieu argues that *Murphy*, *Watt*, *Mercier et Camier* and a number of smaller texts are determined by the framework and the rules of psychoanalysis as a way to work through the material from the first psychotic crisis. After the second major crisis in 1948 after his mother's death, Beckett gets a new vision of his authorship and he chooses French as his writing language. The impossible dialogue of the failed analysis makes way for auto-analysis in *Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, *L'innommable* and *En attendant Godot*.

L'autoanalyse de Beckett:

- respecte un cadre psychanalytique fictif;
- respecte les règles d'associations libres et d'abstinence des actes;
- perlabore après coup le transfert;
- écarte le travail d'interprétation au profit du travail du style;
- produit une décharge cathartique de l'émotion liée aux souvenirs traumatisant; émotion non dite, mais surgissant comme un coup de poing du récit le plus sobre, le plus concis possible, du traumatisme (même technique dans la peinture de Bacon). (Anzieu 2004: 114)

The auto-analysis is terminated in *Comment c'est* (1959-1960) in which Beckett suddenly returns to his mother tongue, English, and to his youthful analysis with Bion, as is evidenced by the names of the characters Pim and Bom.

Beckett's psychic crises (first phase of the creative process) thus constitute the foundation of negativity and fragmentation that is the core of his work (second phase). It is the code of psychoanalysis (third phase) that makes it possible to use this negativity creatively and to transform it into a style (fourth phase), that is discussed in the appendix. The result of the creative process is according to Anzieu not just an oeuvre, but also a genre: 'Vision de la trilogie romanesque qui sera son oeuvre la plus singulière. Création d'un genre romanesque neuf, le *Nouveau Roman*.' (Anzieu 2004: 95) In this awareness of genre we recognize the fifth phase of Anzieu's schema of the creative process, i.e., the impact of the work on the reader. This confrontation is not merely an emotional encounter, but it also has an institutional dimension: a new genre is created. At this point, we can gauge the extent to which Anzieu's book reflects Beckett's oeuvre as a distorted mirror in the sense that it thematizes the different phases of Anzieu's own creative process. The confrontation with Beckett sets off a crisis in Anzieu that is very hard to turn into a creative work. The code that is transformed is not surprisingly psychoanalysis, not in a negative sense, however, as in Beckett's deconstruction of the analysis, but as a reconstruction from the fragments discovered in Beckett's work. In Anzieu's own narrative (as he points out for Beckett) the personal crisis coincides with a vision, the intent to create something new. This desire to create a new (autofictional) genre coincides with a crisis in structuralism, the novel and in psychoanalysis.

This reactive structure is present in *Beckett* in the defining encounters with Anzieu's colleague Giraud on the one hand, and with his editor 'Rivière' (a pseudonym for Eric Adda) on the other hand. Like the structuralist Giraud, the editor plays an important role in the creation of Anzieu's text as the principal not only for the book, but also for the creation of a new genre.

Ce soir, Rivière est pressé et me presse. Il sort d'une réunion d'éditeurs. La psychanalyse ne fait plus florès. Le Nouveau Roman non plus. Il y a là un défi à relever, deux démarches à réunir. Une occasion à renouveler la compréhension psychanalytique de la littérature en intégrant les acquis de la critique textuelle. Je devrais écrire mon essai sur Beckett en lui donnant une composition moderne et en m'y montrant analyste non pas avec ma tête et mes connaissances, mais tel que je travaille concrètement avec mes patients. Freud m'avait-il pas montré l'exemple en associant, dans son ouvrage *princeps*, les récits de ses propres rêves à ceux des malades?

"J'essaierai", lui ai-je promis sur le pas de la porte.

Je n'ai pas dit que j'avais déjà commencé. Je sais maintenant que je continuerai. (Anzieu 2004 : 79)

Here we very clearly see the timeliness of 'autofiction': Anzieu is already writing his book and developing the experimental style and structure, so that the editor's commission comes *après coup*. When the editor has received the first chapter, he responds with a letter that indicates that Anzieu's project has succeeded: the chain of unrest and creativity that had been set in motion by Beckett is continued by Anzieu's text.⁸

Une telle mise-en-abîme entre le texte de Beckett, votre insomnie, votre texte et mon insomnie m'a pour le moins troublé. De même que l'écriture de Beckett s'était insidieusement comme glissée en vous, vous empêchant de trouver le sommeil, de même votre récit s'était-il rappelé à moi, comme le djinn des contes, pour que je le libère et qu'il apporte à la fin l'apaisement et l'endormissement. (Anzieu 2004 : 123)

Beckett reveals the threesome Anzieu – Beckett – Bion as a deformed mirror and ruptured symbiosis. Moreover, the trio Anzieu – Giraud – Rivière tells us something about the psychoanalytic, academic and editorial milieu in France in the 1980-90s. There is a clear attempt to create a new genre, that is highly personal, linked to psychoanalysis and literary criticism, and that is open-ended and experimental. While this genre is not named by Anzieu, it would certainly fit the label of autofiction, as in the example of Dubrovsky. Beckett's oeuvre functions like a spark that ignites a current of creativity that must be kept going. Paradoxically, in this process, Beckett's

highly impersonal and in many respects anti-psychological work transforms into an autofictional one.

It is not a coincidence that psychoanalysis is a good breeding ground for autofictional experiments. Psychoanalysis has the auto-analytic method at hand and it has created a public for them. Although psychoanalysis kept its position in the academic establishment in France longer than in other countries, its struggle with legitimacy, with scientific criteria and especially with internal fragmentation of different agonistic groups and schools has never abated. One reason that helped secure the position of the various analytic schools and groups was their solid organizational structure, their access to publishing houses and institutional circuits and their emphasis on study and creativity. Reading groups, seminars as well as auto-analysis and creative practices flourish in the psychoanalytic community. Precisely this underground dynamic network will be constitutive of the creative work of Christopher Bollas, that shows us other dimensions of psychoanalytic autofiction.

5. Post-Catastrophe Psychoanalysis and la comédie humaine

Christopher Bollas is a British psychoanalyst who studied English literature. In the 1980-90s he became one of the most prolific British psychoanalysts, known by works like *The Shadow of the Object* (1987), *Being a Character* (1993) and *Cracking up* (1995). Bollas is well-versed in different psychoanalytic theories, from Freud, Klein, Winnicott, Lacan to Bion, as well as less well-known contemporaries of Freud. Moreover, he frequently refers to contemporary philosophy and literary theory. Recurring themes in his work are the creative process of unconscious thinking or 'the unthought known', as it occurs in dream thought and free association, and the transformation and constitution of the self as a unique idiom, for which Bollas coins the term 'character'. He examines how this occurs in the transference of the psychoanalytic dialogue in which the patient gradually develops a new psychic structure or 'psychic genera'. The flipside of this process is a breakdown, or total negativity. All of his work consists of a mixture of case studies, cultural analyses and theoretical reflections in a pleasant essayistic

style (the books are usually collections of previously published papers). As for many psychoanalysts, Freud's texts are fixed anchor points for Bollas' thinking and he often selects original, little discussed passages. However, concepts like the unthought known or creativity also reveal his firm roots in the British school. At the same time Bollas also coins original concepts, like 'psychic genera', character, the 'normotic personality' or 'cracking up', that are used in a loose, creative manner. His work not only inspired clinicians, but also contemporary affect theories in literature (e.g. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick)

In 2004 a sudden shift occurred in the work of Bollas. In a short period of time he published four creative works with Free Association Books: *Dark at the End of the Tunnel* (2004), *I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing* (2005), *Mayhem* (2006) and a collection of plays, *Theraplay & Other Plays* (2006). While the plays are reminiscent of the tradition of existentialist and absurd theatre of Pinter or Ionesco, the genre of the first three texts is less clear-cut. Bollas does not use the term autofiction, but there are some significant convergences. The nameless protagonist 'the psychoanalyst' bears many resemblances to Bollas qua profession and age, and most importantly, qua ideas, even though the universe in which he moves is obviously fictional. In *Dark at the End of the Tunnel*, the work we will focus on, the continuity of the theoretical framework is evident in the subtitles, e.g., 'Life as an Object' or 'Being an object, being another'. Moreover, the text begins with a paratext addressing the genre of the text. In the preface different genre indications for the text are suggested: 'a group of essays presented through the conceit of fiction', 'novella' (a short novel) and 'comedy'. The text is presented as a mixture of the essay, characterized by one, authorial voice who voices one's own thinking, of fiction which 'allows one to work with intensities and forces of thought', and finally of comedy which 'allows the writer a greater range of perspectives than other literary forms as it cracks up certainties, poses rather than answers questions and seems truer to life as it is ordinarily lived: as a sometimes coherent experience amidst a great deal that is beyond knowing.' (Bollas 2004, vii-viii) The notion of 'cracking up' refers to Bollas' work on the unconscious and creativity that is a combination of unity and fragmentation. The notion of cracking up that is used here in the sense of questioning certainties, also refers to the way the

mother can transform the child's discomfort into amusement. Moreover, it indicates the fragmentation that occurs when the flow of thought is fragmented into small units in the process of free association, or more severely, when trauma cracks up the surface of life.

Dark at the End of the Tunnel consists of four chapters, narrated by a neutral omniscient narrator. The text begins in medias res, with a patient Goran Will, who rushes to his appointment with his analyst. The omniscient narrator is focalizing on Will's thoughts and lays out the specifics of this somewhat grotesque case. However, by page 3 the focalization has shifted to the main character – a 'comic hero' as he has been called in the preface – the psychoanalyst. In the first pages, one of the defining characteristics of the fictional universe is casually mentioned: a Catastrophe – that brings to mind 9/11, even if the particulars remain mysterious – has affected not only the psychoanalyst but all the inhabitants of this fictional world. After the Catastrophe life itself seems to have changed, to have become an object that has lost its value. As his patients suffer from being treated as objects or from objectifying their lives, the psychoanalyst himself experiences a deep crisis after the Catastrophe. Like a modern-day Socrates he will go on a quest for the meaning of life and death, of humanity and transcendence in psychoanalytic terms. Throughout the book, the psychoanalyst is overtaken by bouts of melancholia and by intense thoughts. Wherever he goes, he raises questions in his confrontation with patients and in his everyday interactions with the world.

The psychoanalyst's universe is where the fiction of this book resides. The first signal of this is in the names of the characters, like Fred Murk, Jaspar Freed, Westin Moorgate, Violette Languishe, Hiram Thringmaster, Craxton Whilewaiter, Val Vacto, Roger Ethycals etc. Likewise, the shops that are part of the psychoanalyst's daily routine are called Snap out if it (photo shop), Hippo (café), Shadows (Bookstore) or Peeping Tome (video store). All these names have both a comic and a symbolic ring to them. In some cases, like Roger Ethycal or Peeping Tome, the symbolism or parody is all too obvious, in other cases, like Val Vacto or Hiram Thringmaster, the meaning is less evident. The odd names of the characters starkly contrast to the psychoanalyst and his wife, who remain nameless. The fictional universe is a grotesque distortion of a familiar contemporary

Western town, reinforced by references to actual events and names mixed with fictional ones. Another way to characterize this, used in *Dark at the End of the Tunnel* (and in other works, e.g., *Cracking Up* and *Mayhem*) is the uncanny. In this post-Catastrophic universe, the familiar has become strange, resulting in an odd mixture of comedy, melancholia and satire.

This setting can also be seen as the manifestation of the psychoanalyst's internal world and the characters as internal objects. Indeed, the main function of the cast of odd, flat characters is that they serve as sparring partners for the psychoanalyst's ideas. Rather than a real plot, the narrative is set off by an event, e.g., an analytic session or an encounter, and sets in motion a train of associations. The psychoanalyst's thinking and reverie evolves around concepts and themes like character as form, life as object or as thing-in-itself, transcendence, evil etc., and it seamlessly flows over into his conversations with people he encounters. This creates a very odd impression of a world dominated by psychoanalysis. Although they add new elements, the conversations never amount to resolutions or answers. They merely raise more questions until they are interrupted by the continuation of the rather uneventful life of the psychoanalyst.

The actual events are routines: meeting patients, going to a café or a bookstore, a dinner party or reading group. This does not mean that the text is devoid of tension. First of all, in the radically dialogical form all kinds of voices are raised. Some are sceptical of psychoanalysis, like the journalist Westin Moorgate or downright critical, like the religious Mrs Stottlemeyer. Ideas are touched and handled as things, from many perspectives, jumping from one to the other, in an associative manner. The interest of the narrative, then, resides in the protagonist's rapid stream of thinking and the way in which we are literally entering into his internal world. Not only do we meet his internal objects as separate entities, we share his pre-occupations and the internal perspective defamiliarizes the setting. This also explains the occurrence of absurd, slightly surrealist events, like crowds that suddenly gather and threaten to turn into chaos, as a result of a conversation of the psychoanalyst.

Although the aporia is never resolved and the subject matter seems to get more serious and darker, the tone of the text remains funny. Towards the end of the book, the Catastrophe becomes more and more prominent in

the narrative. The psychoanalyst examines notions of transcendence and evil and death, both on a personal and on a societal level. These issues cannot be resolved, even if the psychoanalyst seems to find some provisory consolation at the deathbed of his friend Selina Tano, who sees death as 'darkness at the end of the tunnel' (a phrase that echoes Bion's paradoxical phrase 'a beam of intense darkness') in the final scenes in the novel.

He knew that there was very little he could do about it, and he knew that in years to come, being part of national and international evil was going to be deeply disturbing, if not soul-destroying. Yet in Selina's words, he found consolation, because the human mind – or psyche, or soul – could still find in the last moments of an existence a turn of phrase or a form of ending, which caught the spirit of humanity and blessed existence with it.

That might be enough.

Of course, he was not sure. (Bollas 2004: 135)

Like *Beckett, Dark at the End of the Tunnel* is open-ended, although it does go towards an end. In the following books, *I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing* and *Mayhem*, the different layers of the analyst's relational psyche are further elaborated: his private concerns and his interactions with patients, family and friends, the intricate network of psychoanalytic schools and intellectual debates, and the larger scale of national and international politics after the Catastrophe. Especially in *Mayhem*, the events that structure the plot become even more fantastic. An mysterious artistic exhibition, 'A Life', that has been put together from a psychoanalytical perspective, preoccupies the entire nation and the media, against the background of odd sectarian movements like 'the Funeralists', who carry out bizarre funerary rituals in the streets as a new form of therapy.

6. Psychoanalyst in Search of a Reader?

Two established psychoanalysts, Didier Anzieu and Christopher Bollas, turned to experimental forms of creative writing that can be related to the literary phenomenon of autofiction, in order to express psychoanalytic insights in a new way. Both are inspired by Wilfred Bion, who preceded

them with his *Memoir of the Future*. All these texts could be (and have been) regarded as preaching for the converted. The turn to fiction is not motivated by didactic purposes – a way to explain psychoanalysis – but it has epistemological goals. What they want to express cannot be expressed in a conventional form. The use of fiction not only safeguards the author from criticism against speculation and it keeps the thinking and writing itself vital. It is not a coincidence that both authors share a deep interest in the unconscious processes of creativity. Moreover, in both cases, creativity and thinking are seen as relational: creativity is like a flow that passes from one psyche to another. This flow is represented in the dialogical nature of the texts and in the open-endedness of the projects. Both authors seem to want to continue the dialogue after the texts have ended.

There are, however, differences between the two oeuvres. Anzieu remains much closer to autofiction in the narratological sense, in that he sticks to the identity of author, narrator and protagonist as a guarantee of the truth of the work. Because he takes great care to indicate where he uses fiction and how the text can and should be read, he implicitly adheres to an autobiographical pact that underlies the truth of the project, despite the sometimes rather wild speculations. Most importantly, as the title indicates, the project hinges on another author, Beckett, and the text presents itself first and foremost as an analysis of Beckett's oeuvre and/or creative personality. Because of this, the text is more recognizable for a wider audience, that is interested in the work of Anzieu or Beckett or both. At the same time, it is also more vulnerable to criticism from those who like Feldman feel that the fiction undermines the autobiographical pact.

Bollas, by contrast, supplements his oeuvre with creative work that is at first sight a continuation of the kind of writing and thinking he already practiced in his other work. This makes it tempting to equate author, narrator and protagonist, despite the omniscient narration that is typical for fiction. The fictional form allows him to foreground the comic aspect of his 'character' and to do some thought experiments within the freedom offered by a fictional universe that is a recognizable, uncanny distortion of our contemporary Western world. The omnipresence of psychoanalysis in this universe may seem so grotesque and idiosyncratic that it can only interest and fascinate an initiated reading public. However, in my experience with

students, it is precisely the exotic character of the work that fascinates other readers, even when they are not necessarily familiar with psychoanalysis or with Bollas.

Both for Anzieu as for Bollas, the reading public is one of the more intriguing aspects of the work. *Beckett* was reedited in 2003 by Seuil, one of the major French publishing houses. Bollas' creative work is published by Free Association Books, a psychoanalytic press that, like other similar presses, e.g., The Other Press or Karnac, publishes more and more creative work. This turn to fiction is quite remarkable. While psychoanalysis is increasingly marginalized in the university and even in the therapeutic field, it seems to find another niche for itself through creative work. Typical for this creative work is that it is steeped into psychoanalytic theory, but at the same time remains open to other audiences. One of the main points of attraction of this type of work – apart from the literary talent of individual authors – is precisely the way in which psychoanalytic thinking manages to reconcile theoretical reflection with creativity and freedom. While it focuses on the internal world of its autofictional author, it seems less 'onanistic' than some autofictions who focus on the most tedious and scandalous details of their lives. Authors like Bollas and also Anzieu, as well as Pontalis, Kristeva, Fink and other, do try to find a way to record their thinking on issues that touch them but that also exceed the banality of everyday life. These experiments may meet with different success, but they remain laudable attempts to safeguard psychoanalysis as a discipline of thought in the 21st century.

Notes

¹ In 'Postmodernism and the Doctrine of Panfictionality' Marie-Laure Ryan discusses the notion of hybridity and confusion of boundaries between fiction and non-fiction in postmodernism. She uses the term 'fictionoid' to indicate various types of boundary confusion, among which the fictionalisation of non-fictional genres.

² Interestingly Anzieu's mother Marguerite was the subject of one of the first case studies of Lacan, known as 'Aimée'. See Allouch 1994.

³ It is rather odd that several literary critics do not seem to notice the autofictional dimension of the book at all. Ralph Schoolcraft (1993) reviews the book as a psychobiogra-

phy of Beckett. Matthew Feldman is more severe in his assessment and considers Anzieu's book as 'unfounded and slanderous': 'At its most one-sided, psychoanalytic reductionism is merely Cartesian circular logic without an attendant method. Everything is merely a proof or an attempted obfuscation (perhaps subconsciously so) of that proof. (...) Reinforcing this view, it seems clear that the book tells us more about Anzieu than about Beckett.' (Feldman 2006: 82) Interestingly, comparing Beckett's interwar writings (letter and notes...) reveals to Feldman the extent to which Beckett's own work at the time mixes fact and fiction. (Feldman 2006: 84)

⁴ Throughout, the lack of serious research and the dearth of source material to back up Anzieu's speculations is judged very harshly by Feldman, who did try to examine the relation between Beckett and Bion as objectively as possible in his chapter on 'Beckett and psychology'.

⁵ In his analysis of Beckett and in his theory of creativity the mother is central. Here as well, Anzieu sees a mirror to his own relation with his mother. (Anzieu 2004: 31)

⁶ The detailed rules are especially meant to maintain the discipline of writing and to let the unconscious speak, especially by recording dreams and nocturnal thoughts. (Anzieu 2004: 25)

⁷ Earlier Anzieu already wrote an article, 'Beckett et Bion' (in Chabert 1996: 106-120), on this encounter which according to Eric Adda initiated the book. Anzieu suggests that Bion, who was traumatized in the first World War must have been intrigued but also frightened by the Beckett, because he recognized too much of himself and his inner catastrophe in the young author. Beckett would then be a kind of 'imaginary twin' for Bion, one of the first casestudies of Bion in the 1950. Feldman finds no evidence at all, neither in Beckett's papers, nor in Bion's work (including an interview with Bion's widow) to confirm this.

⁸ Adda later recounts his response on the book. 'Vanuit een intuïtie die hij reeds ontwikkeld had in een artikel (in de nasleep van een tweejarige analyse in 1934-1935 in de Tavistock kliniek in Londen met Wilfred Bion, op dat moment een jonge, nog onbekende psychiater-psychoanalyticus, maakt Beckett zijn eerste roman Murphy af), construeert Anzieu in een absolute deconstructie een onclassificeerbaar boek : deels essay, klinische observatie, logboek, pastiche, biografie en autoanalyse. Het boek presenteert zich als een verdediging en een illustratie nu eens van de lectuur, dan weer van de schrijftuur. Het is niet enkel een boek over Beckett, maar ook het dagboek van een analyticus die een boek schrijft over een auteur die hem al ongeveer veertig jaar fascineert. Ik ben in de wolken. De toon, de constructie/deconstructie van het geheel, de creatie die circuleren in deze pagina's en de humor zorgen ervoor dat ik hem schrijf om mijn enthousiasme en mijn grote trots mee te delen waarmee ik zijn tekst zal publiceren. Ik voeg eraan toe dat ik het vervolg met spanning afwacht.' (Adda)

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