

**The Pull to fusion: an exploration of observed links between autism and
hoarding**

H.F. Neame

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Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies

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Abstract

This study is a contribution to using a psychoanalytic understanding to elucidate hoarding behaviours. My thesis explores whether ideas relevant to autism can be used to explain extreme hoarding.

The existing psychoanalytic understandings of the autistic manoeuvres are applied to data from a TV program on hoarding. This thesis has mainly used Tustin's approach to autism based on Kleinian theories of primary envy, of the infant's most primitive anxieties and of the symbolisation process.

It is here argued that the very early trauma, understood by psychoanalytic writers to be linked to unbearable experiences of separateness, appears to also reside at the core of hoarding behaviours. The extreme hoarding observed would denote the existence of an 'autistic retreat' or 'cyst' (as described by Key writers such as Sydney Klein and Judith Mitrani), protecting the individual from unbearable fears of pain and disintegration (as described by key writers such as Sydney Klein and Mitrani).

Clinical features of autism, were operationalised and used to examine the data from the TV program for these features. This was a single case study, my approach being largely subjective, exploring how a clinical eye could be used to bring insight and meaning to the phenomena observed.

Each of the two processes, autism and hoarding shed light on each other. This furthers our understanding of traumatic experiences of loss and of the symbolisation process.

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I. Introduction

This thesis posits the hypothesis that psychic phenomena that are understood to be linked to autistic modes of functioning also prevail at the core of hoarding behaviours. It does not argue that hoarding is solely a result of autistic modes of functioning, or that hoarding behaviours only highlight autistic modes of functioning. It claims that autistic modes of functioning can be considered to be manifest within the extreme hoarding process, whilst existing alongside other, more integrated psychic processes (some of which may be schizophrenic, psychotic or anal in nature). This thesis will also highlight that there exist significant differences between pathological forms of autistic functioning and hoarding behaviours.

Freud's (1908) understanding of hoarding behaviours did not take into account the struggles with symbolisation and representation that this current paper argues are associated with these behaviours. Symbolism has been linked to very early psychic processes and to struggles with experiences of separation and fusion (Klein 1930; Segal 1957). In this thesis, these early experiences will be examined through the lens of observed hoarding behaviours.

I will argue that the exploration of extreme hoarding processes in relation to these very early psychic mechanisms can not only further the current understanding of the hoarding process itself but potentially also that of symbolic and creative processes.

There is a notable lack of clinical psychoanalytic work on the phenomena of hoarding. Although some writers use the terms obsessional behaviour, anal symptoms, etc., to refer to hoarding, no substantial body of clinical work in this area exists. Perhaps, above all, this thesis points to the need and value of more clinical and extra-clinical research in this area.

An exploration and comparison of the potential underlying psychodynamics that operate at the core of each of these two processes (autism and hoarding) may also lead to the development of

appropriate psychological therapies for hoarding behaviours, or other forms of help (community involvement or activities, perhaps) if these are found to be more helpful.

Throughout her writings, Tustin describes autistic modes of functioning as being precipitated by the trauma linked to very early separation/fusion experiences. I explore the hypothesis that many of the core characteristics that psychoanalytic writers, such as Tustin, have described as inherent to autistic modes of functioning appear also to find reflection in the hoarding process.

I have used a Kleinian framework and Kleinian concepts to develop a psychoanalytic understanding of the potential links that may exist between autism and hoarding behaviours. Although I am aware that this approach may limit the understandings gained, I also appreciate that the scope of the thesis is limited by this research opportunity.

My interest in undertaking an exploration of the potential links between hoarding and autism was triggered when I saw a reality TV programme on an extreme hoarding process. Richard, on whom the programme focusses and who is described as an extreme hoarder, appears to be in his late thirties. We are told that he had lived with his parents his whole life and is still living in the family home that they shared when his parents were alive. He is single and does not appear to have been in a relationship of his own.

My experience as an observer of an extreme hoarding process

When watching Richard's hoarding behaviours, I had the impression that they highlighted a deeply sensory form of patterning, involving repetition and ritual. Richard appeared to me to be somehow attempting to conflate himself with his objects, this experience leading me to become very aware of the nature of the boundaries between him and the objects with which he had surrounded himself.

Whether my attention to boundaries was due to my awareness that all these hoarded objects appeared to be very nearly collapsing on top of him, or because I was taken aback by the surprising

way in which I felt Richard was managing his own bodily boundaries in relation to his hoard, I am not sure.

I felt that, through the repetitive behaviours that appeared to be core to his hoarding, Richard seemed to be attempting to manage something; as though these repeated behaviours had a meaningful function, a definite aim, which was also an attempt to express or resolve something of fundamental importance. I also gained the impression that there was some sort of an attempt by Richard to maintain an experience of continuity and self-protection.

Having previously come across Tustin's writings on autism, I must have had her clinical case studies somewhere in my head when I viewed the programme, as I noted that there was something going on in the extreme hoarding process that reflected her understanding and descriptions of autistic modes of functioning, which she linked to the experience of separation/fusion trauma.

I wanted to explore whether the phenomena I perceived taking place in the hoarding process might actually find reflection in Tustin's descriptions of her own observations of autistic forms of functioning. I wondered if there could be observable links, as well as obvious differences, between autistic features and the extreme hoarding behaviours that I was witnessing.

Tustin (1991, 1992) argued that autistic processes are the result of a traumatic experience of separation, or the prospect of it: autistic shapes and objects are set in train in order to avoid the experience of separateness; their purpose is to deny the existence of the 'not-me' through attempts to bring about an experience of being merged and at one with what is external to the self.

My research process probes the idea that, like autistic modes of functioning, hoarding may also communicate something about the trauma linked to separation/fusion struggles. On that premise I set out to investigate whether there may be patterns of similar observable phenomena, as well as potential differences, inherent to both of these processes.

I explored Tustin's writings, juxtaposing them with data gathered from my own observations of a hoarding process. The links I perceived between autistic forms of functioning and hoarding behaviours were further analysed by repeatedly re-comparing new data collected from the TV programme with Tustin's writings, as well as with writings on autism including those by Meltzer (1975) and Mitrani (1994, 1995).

I was aware that the phenomena taking place in the extreme hoarding process that I was witnessing had a difference in quality from those described by Tustin as taking place in autism. Whilst there appeared to be something going on that strongly reflected Tustin's descriptions, parts of the hoarding process were also very different from anything she had described.

In my conclusion to this thesis, I contend that the hoarding process is an attempt to bring about a creative process. This idea, which is not a central part of my research, was fuelled by my exploring the meaning behind snippets of poetry that popped into my mind whilst I was watching the TV programme. This spontaneous experience of free-association had the effect of increasing my curiosity vis-à-vis the hypothesis I was trying to explore, forming a sounding board for my attempts to shed some light on the nature of the psychic struggles potentially so concretely represented by the extreme hoarding process.

The data collection process itself proved to be quite messy: full of rough edges and confusions, backtracking and revealing moments. I read Tustin's writings in parallel with my own hunches, free-associations and feelings; the whole extended procedure allowing further ideas and insights gradually to develop and take shape.

The methodologies I used involved an operationalising of the core characteristics of autistic forms of functioning (following mainly Tustin, but also the writings of Meltzer, Bick and Mitrani), which I applied to data (video footage) from the TV programme on hoarding. My aim was to find which of the criteria of autism described in psychoanalytic writings – notably in Tustin's writings – may or may not be observed to be taking place in the hoarding process.

My results show that seven out of the 12 core characteristics of autism that I refer to are reflected in some way in the extreme hoarding process. There were also some significant differences between the two processes. The approach I have taken in this study is very much a clinical one.

My clinical training and its influence on the research process

In 2004, as a trainee psychoanalytic psychotherapist, I had a clinical placement at Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust, in the Secondary Care Psychological Therapies team. I worked mainly with patients presenting with borderline personality disorders and had psychoanalytic supervision for the duration of this placement.

Another part of my clinical training took place at Stepping Stones in Bromley, which was part of Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, where I worked with female survivors of sexual abuse. The psychoanalytic supervision I received there encouraged me to focus on my own countertransference as well as on the patient's transference. Whilst completing my psychotherapy training, I also worked as a play therapist with the organisation Place2Be, in a primary school setting in Rochester, Kent, over one academic year.

In my current private clinical practice work, I rely on the use of my own countertransference, allowing myself to be in the moment, experiencing a flow of impressions.

Having completed my training and run my own private clinical practice for a number of years, I undertook a year's training on the psychodynamics of trauma at the Tavistock Centre in London in 2015. I was, at the time, offering therapy to a young woman who had survived protracted childhood sexual abuse. The sessions we had together were marked by her visual hallucinations and her physical somatisations, which I myself experienced as suddenly and violently intruding into and 'rupturing' our therapeutic space (this situation perhaps mirroring something about what this patient had experienced as a child at the hands of her abuser). During these sessions I was often left with a sense of the looming presence of a tyrannical, invasive 'other', an experience that was

paradoxically also marked by a meaningless absent presence and a physical and emotional distance between the two of us. Often the interactions that we had together would lead to my experiencing sharp feelings of humiliation, bewilderment, guilt and anger. Supervision helped me make sense of these as countertransference experiences, elicited in my attempts to bear witness and stay alongside my patient as she attempted to grapple with the dilemmas inherent in 'knowing' her own traumatic experiences of intimacy and abuse. During our sessions together I often felt as though we were both battling with her psychic realities (often with different aims and not always on the same side). At the end of our sessions, just as she would be on the point of leaving the room, I would often suddenly feel terribly used, or useless and despised. We circled these horrors and terrors many, many times, our attempts to grapple with them again and again often leaving me feeling stalemated and trapped. I understand that our sessions together were reflective of many such sessions with patients, in which my own countertransference experiences served as some sort of witnessing presence that could be used to help me develop more insight into the patient's often overwhelming, unthinkable struggles and dilemmas, as well as allowing a more in-depth awareness and exploration of the patient-therapist relationship and my own anxieties.

I believe that my ongoing use of countertransference, coupled with the guidance and insight that my own supervision continuously affords me, are faithful companions in my personal development and growth as a psychotherapist, as well as in my increased understanding of the psychic horrors and battles inherent in those traumatic experiences that disrupt the processes of integration, memorisation and the movement towards mourning. My psychoanalytic training has taught me the value of making use of my own countertransference in order to gain some sense of what, for the patient, may be unknowable experiences.

When approaching this thesis, I was interested in seeing how a clinical eye can be used for research purposes. I undertook a professional doctorate for this purpose. The manner in which I engaged with the data was initially from the position of a television viewer intrigued by what she saw in a TV

programme. However, I believe, I must already have brought my clinical experience and my use of countertransference into the viewing experience: most probably by listening to and observing things with what is sometimes called a 'third ear', allowing myself to go with the flow of what I was seeing, hearing and experiencing, and letting images and thoughts come to mind, whilst allowing my curiosity and interest to lead me in my thoughts and feelings.

When I work with patients, I do not immediately try to explain, understand or give meaning to what I am experiencing during our interactions and in the therapeutic space that we share. I simply attempt to acknowledge things from a wide-angled view, holding both the information communicated and my own impressions in mind and allowing myself to free-associate. I must have been doing a version of this as I viewed the TV programme, for, as I watched, snippets of Baudelaire's poem '*Correspondances*' came to mind, as well as vivid images reflecting another one of his poems: '*L'Invitation au Voyage*'.

I didn't really pay these impressions much attention at the time, as I was just fascinated by the programme – being quite pulled into the shock value of what I was seeing – but I discovered that these words and images that seemed just to pop into my mind would make a lot of sense to me later on. I also had the sense of partaking in a deeply sensuous experience of envelopment, almost a sense of merger, when watching Richard demonstrate to the camera crew how he moved about within his hoard.

Psychoanalytic literature describes the sensory functions prevalent in autistic modes of functioning. Notably, Tustin (1981, 1994) uses the terms 'sensation-dominated shapes and objects' to describe the use of these sensory patternings by autistic subjects, in their attempts to block out awareness of their own separateness (see 'Literature Review'). Although I was not aware of thinking about these writings, I believe I was experiencing something of these sensory experiences of merger whilst watching the TV programme on hoarding.

These impressions were just some of the many I gained whilst watching the programme – perhaps due to the use I make of my own countertransference when working with patients, which often helps me to gain insight and understanding.

At some later stage during the TV programme, my sense that some sort of boundary difficulty was taking place between Richard and his hoarded objects developed into perceiving potential links between what I was observing and Tustin's descriptions of attempts by autistic subjects to fuse with their objects and the external world.

As my curiosity and enthusiasm to explore these thoughts and feelings became stronger and stronger, I decided to apply to undertake a professional doctorate and began looking for a supervisor with whom to work. I looked at various university websites and came across a description of Bob Hinshelwood; I asked him if he would supervise my research.

I started re-reading Tustin, whilst simultaneously searching for particular works of art that that might help me make more sense of my impressions and ideas, as I felt that some artworks may also communicate the psychic struggles that I believed I could observe taking place in the hoarding process.

As the experiences that I was trying to understand and give meaning to still felt ungraspable and unformed in my own mind, I initially found myself struggling to find words and descriptions for them. As I persevered in my attempts to describe my own confused impressions they gradually took on more meaning, slowly becoming more defined.

A multitude of repeated observations and comparisons between processes followed, as I became more able to give words to and communicate my own impressions of what I was observing.

I had a few notebooks where I would jot things down, whether they were passages from books about autism that I had read, links to art or images and ideas that I had, or thoughts that would pop up in relation to my musings on separation/fusion issues. I never actually looked back at what I had

written in these notebooks; they were essentially places that I was using for some sort of containment and processing: somewhere I could jot down the multitude of impressions and ideas that I had. I describe my clinical approach to the data further in the Methodology chapter of this thesis, on pages 93–97. In the following section I describe how observing the hoarding process brought me to think about whether separation/fusion struggles may also be communicated through certain works of art.

Do works of art also communicate experiences of separation/fusion trauma?

An intriguing question that I could not resist exploring (but that I also could not truly address in this thesis due to lack of available space and time) was whether the traumatic experience of separation/fusion that appears to find reflection in hoarding may also be communicated through works of art. I looked at artwork by the sculptor Kurt Schwitters and the poems of Charles Baudelaire, and gained a sense that many of the core features of autism that have been ascribed to traumatic experiences of separation/fusion struggles also appeared to be expressed through these aesthetic works; I describe my findings on pages 128-131.

Exploring these artworks brought me to think about notions of maternal reverie, of containment and transformation (Bion 1956, 1962) and of creativity. I wondered if the extreme hoarding process I observed may represent some unconscious aim to bring about a transformation of psychic trauma. Observing the manner in which Richard is ensconced within his hoard brought to mind the notion of a womb. The womb is potentially a transformative, creative space; a space where new life (and experience) can incubate. The mother's mind (Bion 1956, 1962), like the womb, is a space where integration brings about growth and transformation. This in turn led me to think about the hoarding process as potentially being an omnipotent attempt to try to bring about a sort of containing 'maternal reverie' (Bion 1956, 1962).

Using this imagery, I hypothesised that the hoarding process could be perceived as reflecting an attempt to 'dream into being' a holding and transformative containing presence. The unconscious

aim perhaps being to bring about a psychic integration of the subject's unmentalised terrors, triggered by trauma linked to separation/fusion struggles. (In this sense this study understands that hoarded objects are, amongst other things, a concrete manifestation of psychic contents as well as an attempt to create a containing presence.)

Tustin (1991) remarked that the containing medium of art allows for the processing and the means to 'tolerate, objectivise and depict the black hole catastrophe of sudden and alarming awareness of separateness' (Tustin 1991: 587). Could the hoarding process be an attempt to bring about a concrete sort of containment? Could it be an attempt to parody the creative act, the maternal reverie?

Meltzer et al. (1982: 193) remarked on the importance of 'using or misusing a container-representation' – a process that they argue allows the subject 'to find his way back to "honest thought"' (Meltzer et al. 1982: 193):

...for clearly the decision to use or misuse this container is crucial for his finding his way back to the couch-breast of honest thought. As with Mario the bringing together of these two containers, toilet-breast and feeding-breast, is crucial to the establishment of trust in the maternal object. (Meltzer et al. 1986: 193)

Could the hoarding process also be an attempt to 'use or misuse a container-representation' (Meltzer et al. 1982)? Unfortunately, rather than bringing about the creative, transformative experience that accompanies the containment of a 'maternal reverie', my investigation contends that the hoarding process appears to have brought into existence something that is more reflective of Meltzer's descriptions of a 'claustrum' (Meltzer et al. 1982).

On pages 128-133, following Tustin's (1991) – see above - understanding of the containing medium provided by art for the processing of traumatic experiences of separateness, I briefly explore the notion of whether separation/fusion struggles may also be being expressed through works of art, by exploring two very different forms of artwork.

I now wish to describe the literature review process as I have undertaken it for this thesis.

II. Literature Review

Introduction and summary of the literary search strategy used

I used psychoanalytic texts and case studies on autism in order to carry out my literature review, focussing mainly on Tustin's work (1972, 1983, 1984, 1990, 1991). She is one of the most important psychoanalytic authorities on autism, alongside Alvarez and Mitrani (see later), and her work allowed me to gain an understanding and a sense of the nature of the unrepresented 'states of being' inherent in autistic modes of functioning. I felt drawn to her framework of ideas, which emphasise the central importance of bodily sensations for autistic children and their use of sensory, self-protective strategies. I also explored writings by Meltzer (1975), Bick (1968), Alvarez (1992), Mitrani (2011), Charles (2001), Klein (1980) and Bisagni (2009), amongst others.

When conducting my literature review on hoarding I put a number of different terms into the PEP Web search engine that I thought would bring up something on hoarding behaviours, such as 'obsessional neurosis', 'Diogenes syndrome', 'anal processes', 'anality', 'messy syndrome', 'collecting' and 'hoarding'. I found that, although there existed quite a few studies from a psychiatric or a psychological perspective on hoarding, there appeared to be a lack of studies offering a psychodynamic exploration into the psychic functioning of hoarders, or providing what potential meanings subjects' hoarding behaviours may have on them. Although I discovered that many psychoanalytic writings provided in-depth discussions on the phenomenon of obsessional neurosis, few delved specifically into hoarding behaviours. I found two psychoanalytic writings that directly talked about clinical case studies with hoarders.

I also explored writings on common collecting behaviours (notably by Muensterberger 1994, Akhtar 2003 and Subkowski 2006), which allowed me to develop my own thoughts about the potential psychodynamics of hoarding.

These facts made me realise that:

- Psychoanalytic research on hoarding needs to be undertaken, as it could bring specific forms of insight that current types of observation (in clinical psychology and psychiatry) may not be able to provide.
- Notions of object-relations and separation in relation to autism and hoarding need to be explored.
- The potential links between autism and hoarding need to be explored.

In conducting my literature review I explored what the previous research carried out on both autism and hoarding could bring to the current study.

II.A. Psychoanalytic literature on hoarding

The DSM and hoarding

When beginning to explore what understandings and research had been written about hoarding, I discovered that from a psychiatric point of view DSM-5 considers hoarding to be a separate diagnostic category. This was of interest, as I had expected it to be included in the obsessional compulsive disorders category. However, I was also aware that DSM-5 as a medical and taxonomic approach is very different from a psychoanalytic approach, and as I am writing a professional doctorate in psychoanalytic psychotherapy I do not wish to engage in an in-depth discussion about DSM-5. I shall, however, highlight that Vanheule (2017) sustains a critique of the scientific status of DSM-5's classificatory system, underlining the poor construct validity of its disorder categories with reference to studies by Spitzer and Fliess (1974), amongst others. Vanheule (2017) also describes the alternative offered by psychoanalytic clinical case formulations of symptoms, arguing that a

psychoanalytic case formulation approach to diagnosis – where symptoms form the basis of diagnosis (as opposed to syndromes or disease entities) – can be reliable and valid if a series of checks and balances is integrated into the diagnosis and formulation process. Within a psychoanalytic framework, these would include reflexivity on the part of the researcher, examining assumptions and biases, acknowledging the impact of institutional settings on decision-making, taking session notes, using a clinical diary, utilising supervision, undergoing personal therapy, and continually engaging with the researcher’s psychoanalytic knowledge and the theoretical psychoanalytic framework. Vanheule (2017) argues that a detailed context-specific case formulation based on the singular qualities of the individual’s symptoms, such as is used for a psychoanalytic framework in clinical research, would provide the basis for increased reliability and validity in clinical case formulation. Such a function-orientated diagnosis, which implies an understanding of an underlying cause rather than merely a collection of surface features (symptoms), would, Vanheule (2017) contends, be more useful than the pathologising, reductionist biological perspective provided by the DSM, as it understands symptoms as being markers of distress with a unique history and meaning.

Although hoarding behaviours have received attention from a number of psychoanalytic writers who have tended to use other terms for them – such as obsessional behaviour, anal symptoms, and Diogenes syndrome – I have struggled to find more than a handful of clinical psychoanalytic papers exploring the hoarding process. Hence, although collecting behaviours have been explored by a number of psychoanalytic writers, and obsessional neurosis is discussed by many writers, there appears to be a dearth of existing psychoanalytic clinical research on the subject of hoarding. The next section will explore some of the main understandings regarding collecting behaviours, and, following on from that, existing writings that link to hoarding will be discussed.

II.A.i. Collecting behaviours

Collecting behaviours and anal eroticism

Freud (1905) linked collecting and accumulation of monies to the anal stage of psycho-sexual development. During this developmental phase, the child gains mastery and control over his bowels and bladder. Freud (1905) proposed that positive and negative experiences during this stage would go on to determine an individual's future relationship with material objects.

Hence, the development of collecting behaviours, as well as hoarding and other types of obsessive-compulsive behaviours, was linked by Freud (1905) to anal-retentive processes. Freud (1905) offered an analysis of the hoarder of money, whom he described as possessing the three attributes of an anal character: orderliness, parsimony and obstinacy.

I find it interesting that Freud did not write about his own passion for collecting. Subkowski (2006) comments on the fact that Freud was a passionate collector of Roman, Greek and Egyptian antiquities, owning almost 3,000 pieces by 1933. A letter to Wilhelm Fliess (an otolaryngologist who was to develop a strong friendship and an extensive correspondence with Freud that played an important part in the development of psychoanalysis) briefly outlines that 'every collector is a substitute for a Don Juan Tenorio' (Freud 1895: 110). From this it can be surmised that Freud (1895) perceived collecting behaviours to be a form of compulsive substitute mechanism.

Since Freud (1905), other psychoanalysts (notably Menninger 1942, Fenichel 1946, and Storr 1983) have made the link between collecting behaviours and anal eroticism. According to Fenichel (1946), 'collecting mania' (hoarding), as well as 'prodigality', is linked to 'the attitude towards faeces' (Fenichel 1946: 283) – both the fear of losing faeces and the pleasure of retaining them being displaced onto the hoarded object and acted out through these objects.

Anna Freud (1965) claimed that, during the anal phase of development, bodily products become precious gifts that are then given up as a sign of love to the mother. She contended that the child's

curiosity towards the inside of his own body and his pleasure in retention and in hoarding, as well as in dominating and destroying, are part of this developmental phase.

II.A.ii Hoarding behaviours

Freud's (1908) paper 'Character and Anal Erotism' was followed by subsequent papers (1913, 1916, 1918) where he also explores his ideas on anal characteristics. Jones (1918) and Abraham (1921) provide clinical descriptions of the anal character, of which hoarding is described as being potentially one of the symptoms.

...all sorts of broken objects in the attics, under the pretext that they might need them later. Their pleasure in having a mass of material stored up entirely corresponds to pleasure in the retention of faeces. These persons collect bits of paper, old envelopes, worn-out pens and similar things and cannot get rid of these. (1923: 386)

...they are disinclined to throw away worn-out, worthless objects. (1923: 387)

In a footnote (1920) to *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud proposed the existence of the psycho-sexual developmental phase he called the 'anal' stage, in which anal eroticism and the sadistic drives are dominant.

He noted:

In the case of some character traits it has even been possible to trace a connection with particular erotogenic components. Thus, obstinacy, thrift and orderliness arise from an exploitation of anal eroticism. (Freud 1905: 239; footnote added in 1920)

Freud (1905) linked the collecting and accumulations of monies to the anal stage of psycho-sexual development, proposing that the child's emotional experiences during this stage will determine his future relationship with material objects, and that this stage of development constitutes the fixation point or regression level that is a feature of obsessional neurosis.

Obsessional neurosis is described by Freud (1895) as being characterised by compulsive phenomena, involving ruminations, compulsions to carry out certain actions, and rituals that are attempts to

manage obsessive thoughts and actions. Freud (1895) argued that obsessional neuroses derive from unconscious conflicts of a sexual and emotional nature. In 1920, he highlighted the core role of anal eroticism in obsessional neurosis as well as that of the conflict between love and hate (ambivalence).

Ferenczi (1952: 319) explores obsessional neurosis and whether, and to 'what extent, individual experience favours the transformation of anal-erotic interest into interest in money'. He notes Freud's assertion that 'there exists an intimate association between the strongly marked erogenicity of the anal zone in childhood and the character trait of miserliness that develops later' (Ferenczi 1952: 320). He argues that obsessional neurosis and hysteria are

characterised on the one hand by a regression of the sexual hunger to earlier stages of development (auto-erotism, Oedipusism), and on the other hand in their mechanisms by a relapse of the reality-sense to the stage of magic gestures and or of magic thoughts (omnipotence). (Ferenczi 1952: 237)

...The excrements thus held back are really the first 'savings' of the growing being, and as such remain in a constant, unconscious inter-relationship with every bodily activity or mental striving that has anything to do with collecting, hoarding and saving. (Ferenczi 1952: 238)

Many of the 30 psychoanalytic papers I found on PEP Web that focussed on describing obsessional neurosis often mentioned hoarding without exploring it in any detail. I will now describe a few of these, as well as a couple of papers that do go into hoarding itself in more detail.

J Stern's (1999) paper on obsessional neurosis explores Freud's and Abraham's discussions on the anal character in relation to his work in a medical setting with patients who had problems relating to their colons, rectums and anuses. Arnaud (2003: 31) explored the notion of money as a signifier and mentioned hoarding very briefly, noting 'the miser's act of hoarding can be construed as primarily aiming to restore to the monetary symbol its value as object, even to the point of fetishizing it'.

Camps and Le Bigot (2019) adhere to a Freudian understanding of hoarding as an expression of the anal character in their description of a clinical case of Diogenes syndrome (hoarding disorder), which, they contend, primarily affects the elderly. (The term Diogenes syndrome derives from the 4th

century BC Greek philosopher, Diogenes of Sinope, who lived by choice in great poverty: sleeping in a large earthenware jar in order, apparently, to reduce his needs to the strict minimum and free himself from feelings of dependency on others. He was referred to as 'Diogenes the dog' due to his scandalous behaviours, by which he aimed to denounce the hypocrisy of social conventions and the Hellenistic values of his time.) Camps and Le Bigot (2019) argue that the increased loss of loved ones as one ages, exposes elderly subjects to narcissistic injuries. They point out that Chebili (1998) also mentions that pathological grief is a factor in the history of subjects suffering from extreme hoarding behaviours. They contend that Diogenes syndrome reveals an atypical form of obsessional neurosis that expresses a regression of the libido and a fixation at the anal state – anal eroticism, as described by Freud (1908, 1917). Camps and Le Bigot (2019) argue that their case study of a hoarder highlights the distinction that Abraham (1924) made between two ways in which anal eroticism is expressed, depending on whether pleasure is associated with evacuation or retention (it is either destructive or possessive). The subject of Camps and Le Bigot's case study (2019) had organised her hoard in a manner that ensured nothing was allowed to move; the accumulations of objects and the pleasure associated with storing them allowed her to express her need for control – that is, for retention.

Adlam and Scanlon (2009) proposed that Diogenes syndrome is an informal term used for extreme hoarding behaviours. Their article focusses on the notion of homelessness and social exclusion, describing the hoarding habits of homeless and unhoused people

...perhaps living in hostels in rooms piled high with newspaper, or pushing trolleys full of their belongings around the streets at night, exhibit this particular symptom. It expresses dangerousness and chaos. But it is also a communication highly suggestive of multiple layers of interpretation and understanding. (Adlam & Scanlon 2009: 25)

Castel (2012) proposed that hoarded objects serve to maintain and preserve buried pleasures, being relics of past pleasures involving 'objectives, projects, or even mummified dreams for which the thing ultimately becomes a sarcophagus' (2012: 516).

There appears from the above to be a standard view of hoarding in the psychoanalytic literature that stems from Freud's (1920) view on anal eroticism. I wondered whether this view was then substantiated by further clinical work on extreme hoarding behaviours.

Pre-Oedipal/pre-anal processes at the root of collecting behaviours

Although Freud himself did not write about non-pathological forms of acquisitional behaviours (collecting), these have been subsequently explored by Menninger (1942), Weiner (1966), Gedo (1992) and Muensterberger (1994), amongst others, and described as behaviours that have become integrated into what have been judged to be successful life narratives. Hence, collecting would point to a process of sublimation rather than symptom formation, as in hoarding.

Muensterberger (1994), whilst focussing on behaviours that are seen as non-pathological, underlines his understanding that the emotions linked to collecting behaviours are pre-Oedipal in nature and that collecting objects functions as an effective tool for managing or controlling fears and insecurities:

The collector, not unlike the religious believer, assigns power and value to these objects because their presence and possession seem to have a modifying – usually pleasure-giving – function in the owner's mental state. (Muensterberger 1994: 9)

He remarks that the collector may be actively attempting to defend himself against the fear of loss and separation by displacing his relationship needs onto an inanimate object – the object of the collection always being charged with magical thinking:

Collectors' feelings towards their objects echo emotions that have their roots in old affective experiences of oneness, in sensations of wish-fulfilment and relief from the anxiety and frustrations which come with the experience of separate existence. (Muensterberger 1994: p15)

Muensterberger (1994) described the feelings of mastery and protection that can be provided by the sense of holding and possessing substitute objects. He argued that collecting behaviours provide a

quasi-magical experience of fulfilment and relief from the anxiety and frustrations that come with the experience of separate existence.

In highlighting the pre-Oedipal roots of collecting behaviours, Muensterberger (1994) remarks that early childhood experiences may give rise to a tendency to perform special activities aimed at reducing the threatening danger of re-experiencing trauma; collecting thus provides a feeling of safety for the child. He makes reference to Winnicott's (1953) understanding of the use of transitional objects, contending that, like transitional objects for the child, collected objects provide a feeling of safety for the adult.

Abraham (1923) remarked that hoarding is linked to pre-anal processes, describing the unconscious analogy made between money and libido and its relationship with objects of collections, and suggesting that buying objects that have only a monetary value and passing quickly from one object to another would be a 'symbolic gratification of a repressed desire – that of transferring the libido in rapid succession to an unlimited number of objects' (1923: 301). Hence, Abraham (1923) perceived hoarding behaviours (i.e. an accumulation of random, unrelated objects) as resulting from a process of oral introjection taking place just before the anal-retentive stage is reached. Abraham (1917) argued that hoarding behaviours are characterised by the strength of the sadistic element of the very first anal-expulsive phase in the obsessional character: the subject's sadism having become more or less paralysed due to his feeling being overwhelmed by his own ambivalence towards the mother.

Arieti (1974) (who was the only psychoanalytic writer I could find who expressly made the link between hoarding behaviour and autism – see below) refuted the Freudian notion that anal eroticism is linked to the extreme forms of hoarding. He described the hoarding habits of severely schizophrenic hospitalised patients as follows.

In the orthodox psychoanalytic literature, the habit of collecting is interpreted as an expression of the anal character. Abraham and Jones have described the same hoarding habit in neurotics presenting anal traits. In these cases, however, the habit occurs in a much

less accentuated and bizarre form than I have observed in the preterminal stage of schizophrenia... I shall not refrain from calling this habit anal, if the use of such a word is for the sake of common understanding. However, in my opinion, this habit has nothing to do with the anus or with sexual pleasure. I am inclined to think instead that it is a primitive or archaic habit that is found at a certain level of mental integration. (Arieti 1974: 419)

Arieti (1974: 419) proposed that these extreme hoarding habits could be interpreted in accordance with Fairbairn's theories of object-relations, noting that to his own knowledge 'this connection has not been made in the psychoanalytic literature':

The regressed patient has lost so many object relations that he is now in the position of making the last effort to maintain some of these relations, no matter how concrete, inadequate and inappropriate they are. The useless objects that the patient collects are very useful to him: they represent the last vestiges of his object relations; they replace the important relations he once had; they maintain some ties with the external world. By collecting and controlling real objects, the patient sees some correspondence between external and internal objects, correspondence that is very defective in interpersonal objects. (Arieti 1974: 419)

He describes how patients

...collect these objects in their pockets, in bags or boxes, in their stockings or socks and not infrequently in their shoes. Female patients very often hide them in their bosom or in other parts of their body. Many carry the entire collection with them always as if it were an important part of their person. Others collect the objects under their beds, pillows, or in other relatively hidden spaces. Some patients put paper and other objects wherever they can find a hole. One patient had made a hole in the lining of a mattress and had put into it an enormous quantity of toilet paper and other trash. (Arieti 1974: 417)

Arieti also remarked that, if and when these patients become even more regressed, they would

...start to use the cavities of their own bodies as deposits for the hoarded material. Male patients frequently deposit small objects in their external auditory canals or in their nasal cavities; female patients resort to their vaginas. (Arieti 1974: 417)

Following the theories of Anzieu (1983, Chebili (1998) proposed that, in the face of narcissistic injury, the 'skin-ego' deteriorates and loses its capacity to act as a container among subjects with extreme hoarding disorder. The objects that hoarders accumulate would 'stitch up' this skin-ego. Through filling up all the available space in the home – whilst reinforcing the boundaries between the outside world and the inside of the subject's dwelling (preventing intrusions from the external world) – the

home itself, a metaphor for the body envelope, would recover its permeability. Chebili (1998) argued that the hoarder's accumulations have a narcissistic sealing function, describing this function as being of vital to the subject's sense of surviving.

I reviewed (Neame 2017) Winters' book *The Hoarding Impulse* (2015), in which she proposes to explore hoarding behaviours from a depth psychology perspective. Winters declared that she agrees with the professional consensus that hoarding behaviours highlight the existence of some form of psychological trauma, linked to regression and disintegration anxiety. Avoiding the mourning process, the hoarder is described as identifying instead with certain objects: 'People who hoard often try to mitigate or avoid suffering through accumulating objects, keeping it external in the form of things' (Winters 2015: 13). Winters did not, however, develop this understanding.

Winters (2015) argued for the morality of 're-purposing' the object – a position she claimed is legitimately being made by the hoarder himself – proposing that hoarding may be a lifestyle choice and not a result of pathology. In my review of Winters' book, I pointed out that I do not concur with this understanding of hoarding, as it does not appear that the subject has a choice in carrying out his hoarding compulsion, or any insight as to why he feels unable to throw anything away.

The above are the main psychoanalytic writings on hoarding that I have found in my literature quest. I add my voice to that of other authors, including Winters (2015) and Camps and Bigot (2019), who have commented on the lack of studies providing a real opportunity to understand the psychic functioning of hoarders from an unconscious, psychodynamic perspective, as well as the meaning that extreme hoarding may bear for those who are in its grip.

In the following section I will explore Subkowski's (2006) understandings regarding the distinguishing features between collecting behaviours and hoarding: these descriptions being the main ones I have come across that attempt to explore this difference in any depth.

II.A. ii. Differences between hoarding and collecting

Hoarding behaviours appear to be understood as taking place at the extreme end of the collecting spectrum. A more advanced stage of development in dealing with inanimate objects, in contrast to the hoarder, is indicated by processes that involve the serial accumulation of identical or similar objects; this accumulation of objects that have something in common is described by Baudrillard (1968: 22) as forming the basis of collecting behaviours. In the following sections I will explore the differences that certain psychoanalytic writers have drawn between collecting behaviours and hoarding.

As mentioned above, Subkowski (2006: 387) focussed on the phenomenon of 'collecting', arguing that it expresses a yearning for 'completeness and for a world that will become perfectly shaped by way of the collection':

By fusing with the ideal object of collection, an attempt can be made to suspend the separation from the early self-object. Behind the variety of objects collected, one can assume the search for the lost ideal object, the One, the mother. The unconscious aim here is to define and secure one's own 'ego' via concrete possessions and to delineate oneself from others. (Subkowski 2006: 387)

He proposes that the fixations and psychic structures that create the regressive basis of collecting behaviours differ between collectors: 'no single psychodynamic approach to understanding can account for all and any individual collecting' (Subkowski 2006: 389). He distinguishes between more and less integrated forms of collecting, arguing that the latter are characterised by addictive and compulsive behaviours arising from 'the paranoid-schizoid position, in which the part objects of collection are functionalized and charged in a projective identificatory manner in order to be controlled in the external world' (Subkowski 2006: 3910).

Here, the subject:

...attempts in vain to achieve inner psychic integration, structuralisation and order, by way of an external order(ing) and control over, as well as manipulation of, the collected objects. The integrated form of collection, in contrast, results from the depressive position and attempts to repair the lost and damaged object on a symbolic level and to make reparation for one's own destructive impulses. (Subkowski 2006: 392)

Subkowski describes more highly integrated forms of collecting, such as some art collections, as showing signs of sublimation: 'In this mode of collecting, oral, anal and genital drives are being desexualised, stripped of aggression and discharged by being displaced on to the collected objects.' (Subkowski 2006: 391). These much more integrated forms of collecting result from the depressive position and the subject's attempts to repair the lost and damaged object on a symbolic level and to make reparation for his own destructive impulses. These types of collection are then, in themselves, considered as giving rise to 'a new work of the creative ego, which can also have a communicative relational function. As a rule, these forms of collection also have a trauma of loss at their origin' (Subkowski 2006: 391).

Subkowski calls hoarding 'the messy syndrome', following Felton's (1983) writings, and argues that it is not linked to collecting behaviours but is characterised by 'the strength of the sadistic element of the first anal-expulsive phase, which has become more or less paralysed due to ambivalence at the level of the drives' (Subkowski 2006: 393). Although a collector may not always find it easy to throw out the objects in his collection, Subkowski (2006) argues that this is due to his fear that they may perhaps accrue in value, whereas the hoarder's inability to throw away a useless object is understood as being a consequence of the fact that doing so would be experienced by the subject as representing an aggressive act.

A person experiencing the messy syndrome cannot and must not give up or dispose of the objects. The ego-syntonic freedom to decide whether to keep or throw away objects is largely suspended, if though, on a conscious level, this even seems nonsensical to the person involved. (Subkowski 2006: 393)

Whereas the collector's passion is ego-syntonic and integrated into the subject's social and professional life, being 'no way experienced as nonsensical and strange' (Subkowski 2006: 393), the hoarder is described as an eccentric recluse 'living exclusively in the world of the objects of his desire... avoiding any and all dangerous human relationships' (Subkowski 2006: 389). However,

Subkowski noted that ego-syntonic collecting behaviours could degenerate into ‘messy syndrome’ (hoarding) over the course of time – in certain cases, becoming ‘a regressive trash-accumulation syndrome or an obsessional illness’ (Subkowski 2006: 393).

Hence, although he argues that hoarding forms a separate nosology to collecting and cannot be linked to it, he then contends that collecting behaviours can ‘degenerate’ into hoarding (Subkowski 2006).

Muensterberger’s (1994) writings focused exclusively on the dynamics of collecting behaviours, which he argued have pre-Oedipal roots: collecting being an attempt to manage feelings of loss and separation that aims at avoiding having to re-experience the trauma of loss and separation. He also believes that the collectors’ objects are charged with magical thinking (this particular understanding of collected objects being experienced as some sort of protection, reflecting the arguments put forward by Tustin in relation to the way autistic objects are experienced as having pseudo-protective powers (see page 40 of this thesis). Subkowski (2006) criticised Muensterberger’s (1994) understanding that collecting behaviours could be explained by exclusively pre-Oedipal processes, arguing that this is too limited a view as it cannot be applied to every form of collecting.

II.A. iv. A lack of psychoanalytic literature on hoarding

Camps and Le Bigot (2019) note the dearth of studies which would enable an understanding of the psychic functioning of people with hoarding disorder. They note that several non-psychoanalytic, psychiatric case studies have shown that hoarding difficulties may be associated with obsessive compulsive disorders (see Grignon et al. 1999), whilst pointing out that still other psychiatric writings have contested this association and have underscored the absence of obsession (see Devinós-Hodbert et al. 2001), attempting to transform this syndrome into an independent diagnostic entity in its own right by making it nosologically distinct.

As observed above, there is indeed a great deal written about obsessional neurosis in the psychoanalytic literature that considers hoarding to be one of its possible characteristics, yet few studies have provided an opportunity to understand the psychic functioning of people with hoarding difficulties and to determine what these symptoms mean for the subject. I have found even fewer writings that mention any potential links between autism and hoarding. This thesis therefore takes the opportunity to look in greater detail with a psychoanalytic eye at hoarding behaviour.

This raises a number of questions regarding this lack of clinical work on hoarding:

- It must be rather difficult to approach people with this difficulty, as they may often accept care only under coercion. Could this explain the fact that it is mostly psychiatric literature that appears to be exploring the phenomenon of hoarding?
- Could it be that the prevalent psychoanalytical discourse on hoarding, initially set by Freud, was something that psychoanalysts were perhaps loath to re-explore and challenge? Perhaps an understanding of hoarding behaviour that extended or rejected Freud's own understanding of its anal-retentive origins (as opposed by Arieti (1974)) may have been felt by psychoanalysts to be a risky enterprise: it may have been too challenging to risk being perceived as wishing to debunk Freud's position, with Freud perhaps having been seen as holding not only an intellectual but also a moral authority over the psychoanalytic world.
- Could there therefore have existed a resistance on behalf of psychoanalytic writers to further explore and extend the current thinking and research into hoarding behaviours? A statement by Tustin (1994) in her paper 'The perpetuation of an error' comes to mind in relation to a potential resistance to come up with other explanations or ideas:

Dr. Gillette (1992) concluded his letter by saying that 'the resistance to discussing new ideas that conflict with what are believed to be Freud's views is a significant obstacle to scientific progress in psychoanalysis'. In spite of our gratitude to Freud, without whose work we would not exist, a blind unquestioning loyalty to him can be an obstacle... One lesson that we can learn from this error is that our loyalty should be to understanding rather than to personalities. The cult of personality is rampant in psychoanalysis. One reason for this is that our work is so anxiety-provoking that we feel the need to cling tenaciously to those people who have shed light on a dark

scene. Naturally, we are grateful to them, but this can lead to prejudice and sterile controversy. Our thinking will get 'stuck'. (Tustin 1994: 5)

The above are just speculative questions that this thesis will not attempt to find answers to, but they may assist in considering such answers. In the following section I describe the only psychoanalytic writings I have found that link hoarding and autism.

Hence, throughout the existing psychoanalytic literature, hoarding behaviours appear to have been linked to anal retention as well as to oral greed processes, and are described as arising from the paranoid-schizoid position. Winters' (2015) and Camps and Le Bigot (2019) have underlined the lack of research on hoarding from any other than a psychiatric point of view, as well as the need for more research and a more expansive view on hoarding. This thesis contends that the mainstream understanding that oral greed and anal-retentive processes lie at the core of hoarding is too narrow, Arieti's observations, as described below, open up the prevailing understanding into one that perceives the existence of much more primitive psychic mechanisms at play.

II.A.v. Arieti and the link between hoarding and autism

Arieti (1974) was the only psychoanalytic writer I could find who expressly made the link between hoarding and autism. He described observing the hoarding habits of severely schizophrenic hospitalised patients: 'The practice of collecting a more or less large number of objects, generally of limited size and generally of no practical use' (1974: 416). The patients in question 'do not collect these things with the purpose of using them, but just for the sake of collecting them' (Arieti 1974: 416).

Arieti also remarked that, if and when these patients become even more regressed, they would

...start to use the cavities of their own bodies as deposits for the hoarded material. Male patients frequently deposit small objects in their external auditory canals or in their nasal cavities; female patients resort to their vaginas. (Arieti 1974: 417)

He described his sense that his patients appear to wish to merge with their hoarded objects:

'The patient seems almost to have a desire to incorporate them, to make them part of his own person, and puts them in his mouth, nostrils, vagina, anus, and so on' (Arieti 1974: 419).

Writing that hoarding behaviours are not mentioned in the psychoanalytic literature of the time, he noted:

Textbooks of psychiatry do not mention this habit, which is common in advanced schizophrenia, only occasional instances being reported in the literature. Abraham (1923) and Jones (1938) having described the same hoarding habit in neurotics presenting anal traits. (Arieti 1974: 417)

Arieti argued against the received understanding that hoarding behaviours are linked to anal processes, proposing instead that both these behaviours are linked to archaic, primary process cognitions: 'Like the primitive man, the patient tries to counterbalance the transmutability of the inner reality by plunging into external reality; that is, by collecting and possessing' (Arieti 1974: 419).

I shall not refrain from calling this habit anal, if the use of such a word is for the sake of common understanding. However, in my opinion, this habit has nothing to do with the anus or with sexual pleasure. I am inclined to think instead that it is a primitive or archaic habit that is found at a certain level of mental integration. The child's ability to retain faeces, in spite of the urge to defecate, may require a level of mental integration that corresponds to the level of the hoarding habit. (Arieti 1974: 419)

Instead, he argued that hoarding processes can be understood in relation to Fairbairn's object-relations theory, and noted that existing psychoanalytic literature had not made this connection:

The hoarding habit of the regressed schizophrenic can be interpreted in accordance with Fairbairn's theories of object-relations. To my knowledge this connection has not been made in the psychoanalytic literature.

The regressed patient has lost so many object relations that he is now in the position of making the last effort to maintain some of these relations, no matter how concrete, inadequate, and inappropriate they are. The useless objects that the patient collects are very useful to him: They represent the last vestiges of his object-relations; they replace the important relations he once had; they maintain some ties with the external world. By counterbalancing transmutability, they permit the maintenance of some enduring inner objects. By collecting and controlling real objects, the patient sees some correspondence between external and internal objects, correspondence that is very defective in his interpersonal objects. (Arieti 1974: 419)

Arieti briefly pointed out the fact that Kanner (1944) had described 'a similar preoccupation with inanimate objects in children suffering from infantile autism' (Arieti 1974: 419). This sentence is the only psychoanalytic reference that I was able to find that actually makes a direct link between hoarding behaviours and autistic forms of functioning. To my astonishment, I have found no other direct links made between these two processes in the psychoanalytic literature.

Conclusion

Hence, whereas collecting behaviours are not perceived as being pathological, but as integrated into a normal way of life, as being 'ego-syntonic' (Subkowski 2006), hoarding is seen as nonsensical and strange: a regressive degeneration of collecting behaviours over a period of time; an 'obsessional illness' (Subkowski 2006).

From the above writings, this thesis contends that, whereas collecting behaviours appear to be understood as being linked to libidinal conflicts, extreme hoarding may highlight much earlier structural difficulties linked to the very formation of the ego. This understanding provides the grounds for the exploration of hoarding taken by this thesis.

Following this literature review of the psychoanalytic understanding of hoarding, the next section brings us to an exploration of the nature of autism.

II.B. Literature review of the core features of autism

The NHS website (www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/) proposes that autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is the name given to a range of similar conditions that affect the sufferer's ability to communicate and interact with others, as well as covering their interests and behaviours. There does not appear to be a cure for those on the autistic spectrum; help for sufferers is, instead, provided through occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, educational support and a number of other interventions.

In this section I will highlight some of the main writers who have contributed to a psychoanalytic understanding of autism. I felt drawn to Tustin's vivid descriptions and understandings of the sensory features at the core of autistic modes of functioning when trying to comprehend what meanings may lie behind the phenomena I observed taking place in the extreme hoarding process, and have mainly focussed on her writings. I have also, however, explored and included other psychoanalytic authorities who have written in the Tustin tradition. At the end of this section is a table listing some of the core features of autism highlighted by these writers.

II.B.i. Key psychoanalytic writers

Frances Tustin

- Autism: a severe reaction to very early separation trauma
- Sensory use of objects
- Fusion/adhesive equation (encapsulation) and enveloping activities
- Avoidance of the experience of separation/compulsive attachment to objects
- Lack of representational ability
- Multi-modal sensory experiences
- Rumination
- Ritualistic quality and intense perseverative preoccupation with objects
- Stereotyped activities
- Avoidance of biting
- Difficulties in relating to others and denial of shared realities

Bick and Meltzer

- Second-skin formations/encapsulations
- Dismantlement and control of the object

- Manic omnipotent denial
- Lack of 'theory of mind'

Anne Alvarez

- Lack of verbal communication
- Alienation and Interactional difficulties

Judith Mitrani and Sydney Klein

- Autistic cysts / capsules
- Two- and three-dimensional states of object awareness
- Adhesive equation
- Adhesive pseudo-object-relating

Francesco Bisagni

- Lack of reciprocity of rhythmic interplay
- Encapsulated psychic spaces: Adhesive identification, dismantling and two-dimensional psychic functioning

Marilyn Charles

- Autistic objects: prototypes for creative processes

I will now highlight the understandings offered by some key psychoanalytic writers who have studied and written about autism. This is not an exclusive list, as I have chosen writers who come from a

mainly British object-relations tradition and who use a Kleinian understanding of psychic development. I am aware that other schools of psychoanalysis, such as followers of Anna Freud or of Donald Winnicott, have also explored autism. I am interested in exploring the links between autism and hoarding from a Kleinian perspective, as Klein and her followers pioneered the understanding of, and exploration into, mental health difficulties.

Klein (1930) underlined the pivotal roles that anxiety and aggression, experienced in the first object-relationship, play in symbol development. She remarked on this in a case study of a child (Dick) whom she described at the time of writing as being psychotic. In this case study she argued that anxiety can both aid and paralyse symbolic development. Dick would, today, be diagnosed as autistic, but the term 'autism' had not yet come into use at the time of Klein's 1930 paper.

Kanner (1943) was the very first mental health professional to differentiate autistic states from those attributed to mental disorder. Although not in fact a psychoanalyst, he was the first child psychiatrist in the United States. He used the term 'autism' to describe his observations of children who demonstrated, amongst other things, intense self-absorption and an extremely reduced capacity for social interaction and communication. Therefore, although he was not a psychoanalytic writer, this thesis has included him due to his having been the first person to have used the term 'autism' and identified certain ways of functioning as autistic.

Kanner realised that such children do not distinguish between live people and inanimate objects; – they treat both in the same way. (Tustin 1990: 17)

Tustin wrote many texts (1969, 1972, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1994), all of which I have studied, and I will pick out those ideas that are of the greatest significance to this thesis.

Especially meaningful to me and helpful in my exploration of what may be going on in the extreme hoarding process that I witnessed in the documentary was her 1984 article 'Autistic Shapes', which explores the personal, idiosyncratic processes brought about by autistic children in their attempts to try to protect themselves against any awareness of separateness. Her images of the sensory self-

enveloping activities carried out in the child's attempts to plug the gap between the me and the not-me were described as follows: 'in this state of imitative fusion, everything becomes experienced as me' (Tustin 1981: 53). Her writings provided simultaneously fascinating and heart-rending portraits of these children's desperate strivings for self-preservation. Her 1983 article 'Thoughts on autism with special reference to a paper by Melanie Klein' also enabled me to understand that Klein's (1930) writings on what she believed were psychotic experiences actually anticipated Kanner's (1943) diagnosis of autistic forms of functioning. Tustin (1983) realised the need for a more precise, psychoanalytical differential diagnosis for the various types of childhood 'psychosis'. In 1930, Klein had talked about a child patient (Dick), stating: 'In Dick there was a complete and apparently constitutional incapacity of the ego to tolerate anxiety... After a feeble beginning, symbol-formation in this child had come to a standstill' (Klein 1930: 29). She described Dick's indifference to most objects and playthings around him; the way he did not appear to be able to grasp their purpose or their meaning. The key point Klein (1930) made about Dick was that the fearful aggression that he experienced was so strong, or his ego was so weak, that instead of moving to substitute objects distant from the ones towards which he felt aggressive, the aggression followed immediately to the new substitute. Dick was therefore unable to settle on any object or to create proper symbols as substitutes that allowed some distance from the primary aggression. Klein (1930) was contending that, without symbols, no intellectual development was possible. Tustin (1983) understood that, even in the 1980s, Klein's writings from the 1930s and 1940s were still far ahead of orthodox psychiatric opinion, as she was aware that children labelled as being psychotic could respond to and be helped through psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Tustin's 1990 book *The Protective Shell in Children and Adults* describes these protective shells as being anaesthetising and tranquilising – the child creating an experience of a shell-like encapsulation by pressing against a hard object, a wall, or against the hard part of another person, allowing them to feel 'fused and equated with the hard sensations thus engendered' (Tustin 1990: 17). Tustin's vivid observations again enriched my own explorations, throwing light on and bringing awareness to my attempts to understand what potential

protective measures and methods of self-preservation may be being played out through the extreme hoarding process that I observed, as well as what potential meanings these behaviours may be an expression of. I felt the hoarder's behaviours, like the autistic child's self-enveloping use of sensory shapes and objects, could allow the hoarder to gain some sense of being protected through an experience of sensory and psychic fusion with his objects: an attempt, amongst other things, to avoid primitive anxieties linked to loss and separation. Tustin's various written works illuminate one another and bring a deep insight to the overwhelming experiences that lie at the heart of autistic forms of functioning.

Tustin was the first psychoanalyst to emphasise the central importance of the body for autistic children. A very senior authority on autism, her writings are often initially referred to by those seeking an understanding of autism, at least in the context of the British field of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Her case studies vividly describe the sensuous, self-protective bodily based manoeuvres and strategies used by the autistic children she worked with, as well as the way in which actions that might have appeared symbolic are actually purely aimed at generating sensations that give these children a sense of going on existing. Tustin's writings richly portray the prevalence and the central role played by sensory modes of functioning in autism; her insights open up a way of understanding those unrepresented and unmentalised states of being.

Frances Tustin

- **Autism: A severe reaction to very early separation trauma**

Although in her initial writings Tustin (1981, 1986) proposed the existence of a very early normal autistic stage of development, she would later (1993) revise this understanding, instead declaring autism to be the result of a severe reaction to trauma:

I have come to realise that autism – the freezing of ongoing psychological development, the retraction of interest in people, the addiction to inanimate objects – is a reaction that is specific to the pain of a particular trauma. ...I have developed the view that autism is a reaction to an infantile trauma associated with unbearably

painful awareness of bodily separateness from the suckling mother. (Tustin 1993: 35)

Tustin argued that the following ways of functioning are core to autism.

- **A sensory use of objects**

Tustin (1981, 1984) emphasised the sensory nature of autistic modes of functioning through her use of the terms 'sensation-dominated shapes and objects', 'sensation-dominated delusions' and 'protective shells'.

She described the activities of autistic children as mostly a-symbolic:

They do not play, dream, fantasise or imagine to any appreciable extent. It is progress when, in treatment, such a child has visual hallucinations. (The 'shapes' may be a kind of tactile hallucination.) ...Imagination is completely lacking. Speech is either absent or crippled by echolalia. Their emotional life is similarly muted. ...They live in a wordless world dominated by self-induced, amorphous, unclassified, concocted 'shapes'. (Tustin 1984: 281)

Importantly, autistic objects are not used for the actual purpose for which they are intended, but purely to provide sensory experiences for the subject: 'To the child these auto-sensuous hard objects are not experienced as objects as we know them, but as the sensations they engender' (Tustin 1983: 125). These objects replace the need for connection with others: 'By means of these sensation objects, he feels completely self-sufficient and without the need for other people' (Tustin 1983: 125). Both ever-present and sensation-dominated, the objects stimulate entrancing body sensations and keep the child stuck at a primitive level of over-concretised mental functioning. Tustin (1984) described how they are used in a perseverative way that prevents any external experiences from the real world from getting through to the subject.

I am now going to list a number of sensory and other activities that have been understood by Tustin as being used by autistic subjects in their attempts to protect themselves against their anxieties.

- **Fusion/adhesive equation (encapsulation) and self-enveloping activities**

Tustin's (1986) writings describe how autistic children manage their terrors of spilling away or falling forever by creating the feeling of 'adhering to the surface of hard objects' (Tustin 1986: 127). These sensory feelings provide the child with an experience of bodily continuity and safety, as he equates himself with the surface of the object, thus providing him with a sense of bodily definition:

By pressing against a hard wall, or against the hard part of a person as an inanimate object, or by turning their hard back on people they feel fused and equated with the hard sensations thus engendered. This is adhesive equation. (Tustin 1990: 17)

Tustin (1981) uses the term 'adhesive equation' in order to describe the autistic child's experience of fusion with the 'not-me' – sensory shapes and objects are used to block out the awareness of any existing gap between the 'me' and the 'not-me', occluding any sense of separateness and otherness and enabling the subject to avoid any feelings of loss or lack:

Autistic children carry hard objects around with them, with which they feel equated in a two-dimensional way. This is not identification; they have taken over the hardness of the object to become equated with it. These 'objects' are not differentiated from the subject's own body and are used not in terms of their objective functions, but in terms of the hard sensations they engender. (Tustin 1990: 17)

Tustin (1990) also uses the term 'autistic encapsulation' to describe the same process, whereby the experience of fusion with the external world is continuously reinforced through the sensory use of external objects. (A number of other psychoanalytic writers, including Klein (1980) and Mitrani (1992), describe these forms of encapsulation as lying at the core of various neuroticisms, acting like cysts, impenetrable to the flow of experience. This is further developed in the section on autistic forms of encapsulation.)

Other people become used by the subject as if the individual concerned were 'an organ or a limb of the child's own body, instead of being recognised as a separate being' (Tustin 1981: 226). This denial of the other's separate existence is vividly outlined by Tustin in her description of how an autistic child 'stood on the therapist's feet as if to use them as part of his body' (Tustin 1981: 199).

When she sensed that one of her own patients was attempting to merge with her, she said to him:

You are behaving as if there were no walls, no boundaries to the room nor to me. I think you wish we flowed into each other and that we needn't trouble to attend to what each other said and did, because we were rippling (vibrating) with each other and so were part of each other. (Tustin 1981: 201)

Describing these attempts to deny experiencing the boundaries between what is self and what is other, Tustin writes:

An autistic child seems to lack a sense of himself as a separate person. He does not seem clear about the difference between himself and the world of objects around him. For example, when Jimmy fell and bumped his knee on the ground, he would kiss the spot on the ground where he had bumped his knee to make it better as if he were not sure which was his knee and which was the ground. (Tustin 1980: 4)

A variety of self-enveloping activities is used by such children in their attempts to plug the gap between me and not-me. Tustin (1981) described how one of her patients would 'plaster the walls and furniture with his bodily substances, mucus, faeces and spit. Gradually, as treatment proceeded, this changed to enveloping them with Plasticine' (Tustin 1981: 69).

Objects in the outside world may initially appear to be 'attended to' and hence recognised as being separate entities, but on closer observation it becomes apparent that they are purely being used to elicit sensory experiences for the child:

They are actually experienced as an extension of bodily activity and in terms of the sensuous experience they provide, particularly the sensuous experience of touch. Overdeveloped auto-sensuousness (or autism) characterises a state in which experience is not differentiated or objectivised to any appreciable extent. (Tustin 1981: 38)

Hence, Tustin described her impressions of children who behave as though they are fused with the outside world, who experience outside objects as though they are a prolongation of their own bodily sensations or movements: 'In this state of imitative fusion, everything becomes experienced as me' (Tustin 1981: 53). Tustin (1971) uses the term 'protective shell' to describe the experience of fusion brought about by these sensory manoeuvres: 'It is a particular mode of sheltering but a disastrous one in that it almost completely halts psychological development' (Tustin 1990: 18).

This fusion or encapsulation acts as a refuge from unbearable, seemingly life-threatening experiences, autistic children having encased themselves in their own sensation dominated strait-jacket. They feel wrapped around, encapsulated by their own hard bodily sensations, which constitute the illusion of an auto-generated protective shell. (Tustin 1971: 41)

- **Avoidance of the experience of separation or loss/compulsive attachment to objects**

These attempts at fusion with external objects aim at avoiding having to re-experience a sense of loss or separateness from the other. Not only objects, but also people, become used as though they are parts of the child's own body: 'I reminded him how he had misused me, trying to feel that I was a mechanical extra bit to his body – a vending machine as he had called me' (Tustin 1981: 215). 'The Dinky cars were autistic objects which shut out any sense of missing Martin or myself' (Tustin 1981: 114).

These psychic mechanisms lie behind the autistic subject's compulsive attachment to objects:

When I first saw Peter, he was coming towards the cottage in which I live, carrying an enormous key-ring on which there were one hundred keys of varying shapes and sizes. The parents told me that he would not be parted from the keys, and carried them everywhere. ... His stiff little body was bent over to one side with the weight of the keys. (Tustin 1981: 212)

- **Lack of representative ability**

This compulsive attachment to objects, which is an attempt to block out awareness of loss or separation from the other, is linked to the autistic subject's lack of ability for object representation: 'These objects are not experienced by him as substitutes for longed-for people. For him, they are that person because they give him the sensations he desires' (Tustin 1980: 29).

In this state of imitative fusion with objects in the outside world, everything is experienced in terms of me, there is scarcely any differentiation between what is me and what is not me. Cupboards and chests of drawers are equated with stomachs, openings in things are equated with mouths. (Tustin 1983: 123)

- **Multi-modal sensory experiences**

The following section briefly describes Tustin's (1981) understanding of how autistic subjects do not always clearly differentiate between different sensory modalities: 'thus seeing and hearing are often experienced by the child in a tactile way as being touched by the object' (Tustin 1980: p28).

This confusion of sensory experiences creates multi-modal environments:

Such a child lives mostly in terms of the outlines of shapes and the sensations aroused by touching, or seeming to touch, surface contours. Touch seems to be the predominant mode of experiences. In seeing, his eyes are felt to sweep around the contours of objects. These then become fused with bodily parts whose shape is felt to be analogous. Hearing is also a tactile experience. The shapes of sounds seem to touch the child, who then tries to block them. (Tustin 1981: 53)

Tustin highlights the manner in which this lack of differentiation between sensory modalities leads them to become merged and interchangeable:

As his treatment proceeded David brought evidence of misconceptions which arose from imprecise, tactile apprehension of the shapes of words. For example, an Aston Martin Dinky car was felt to have in it the essence of the village where he lived which was called Martin. An Austin car was felt to have in it the essence of Tustin. ... As he emerged from his autism, David was able to tell me that he had felt that the words Tustin and Austin must be the same because they were the same shape when they 'touched' his ears or eyes. (Tustin 1981: 27)

- **Rumination**

Tustin (1972) used the term 'rumination' for the repetitive, unbroken sensory manner with which autistic shapes and objects are used: 'His use of the shapes was a kind of rumination in which he chewed the cud on the known and the familiar' (1972: 160), highlighting that this ruminatory process is an attempt to avoid experiencing any sense of emptiness or nothingness. She describes how one of her patients continuously moved objects around, in an 'autistic vicious circle of endless repetition, with no possibility of change' (1981: 203).

He started to move some of the animals back from the top to the bottom. I commented that it looked as if things went round and round with no changes taking place. The same animals came down as went up. (Tustin 1981: 203)

- **Ritualistic quality and intense perseverative preoccupation with objects**

Autistic objects are described as having a 'bizarre, ritualistic quality and the child as having a rigidly intense preoccupation with them which is not part of fantasy play' (Tustin 1981: 112). The objects are not used in the manner for which they were intended, but in an 'extremely canalised and ritualised manner':

They may have no fantasy whatever associated with them, or they may be associated with extremely crude fantasies which are very close to bodily sensation... they are sensation-dominated objects... they are static and do not have the open-ended qualities which would lead to the development of new networks of association. (Tustin 1980: 27–28)

Autistic objects are seen as providing a form of pseudo-protection for the subject, as though they are a sort of scaffold, fundamental to the autistic child's sense of survival:

Peter did not use the keys to open cupboards or doors. He just carried them around. From a realistic point of view, they were used in a way which was useless and meaningless: from the child's point of view it became obvious that they were absolutely essential. (Tustin 1980: 27)

Recounting a therapy session with David, another autistic child, Tustin (1981) underlines this pseudo-protective quality of autistic objects. She remarks that they are also experienced as being fused with the child's own body:

At the beginning of treatment an autistic ten-year-old boy called David used to bring a Dinky car to every session. This car was clasped so tightly in the hollow of his hand that it left a deep impression when he took it out. In working with him, it became clear that the Dinky car was felt to have magical properties to protect him from danger. As such, it was like a talisman or amulet. The difference between David's car and a talisman was that he felt that by pressing it hard into the hollow of his hand, it became a hard, extra bit to his body. Even if he placed it on the table, the deeply imprinted sensation remained, so that it was as if the car were still a part of his body to keep him safe. (Tustin 1981: 111)

- **Stereotyped activities**

Auto-sensual behaviours exhibited by autistic children are seen as being ubiquitous and part of something called 'stereotyped activities': ritualised, rhythmic patterns of movement that are

perseverative and rigid. These activities include rocking, spinning and banging actions made with the children's own bodies and are entrenched, repetitive, sensation-engendering and 'are more primitive than masturbation in that they are not associated with fantasies' (Tustin 1981: 112).

Brought about by a kind of auto-generated hypnosis, they are understood to make the child feel safe and comfortable:

These auto-generated, auto-sensual protective reactions appear in external behaviour as what are usually called 'stereotypes' (rocking, hand flapping, finger flicking, twirling, object twirling, toe walking, etc.). Such stereotypes are a ubiquitous feature of autistic children's overt behaviour. (Tustin 1981: 19)

Tustin (1981) emphasises the pivotal role these manoeuvres occupy in autistic modes of functioning:

Unusual patterns of movement are often shown by autistic children. Many of them have odd rituals or mannerisms such as rocking backwards and forwards on a chair. I have seen one child who tipped the whole chair backwards and forwards as he rocked vigorously, the legs making a rhythmic clatter to and fro. Spinning is another mannerism. Other children will spin an object round and round... Sometimes the mannerisms of movement and the object go together. For instance, one boy had a bootlace that he waved about in the air from time to time, and another child had a piece of mirror that she liked because it was shiny, reflecting the light into her eyes; but she appeared not to notice her reflection in it. I saw a little boy who had a tin box, not to put things in, but to wave about in the air to tap his fingers on, and to point to, and to show people with great excitement and repeatedly. The boy who banged hand and fist together had a stage when he held an old metal toy in the closed fist while doing this; he called it his 'shrieking toy'. (Tustin 1981: 5-6)

- **Avoidance of biting**

Early difficulties in sucking, as well as the refusal to bite things up or to eat solid food, are believed to be a characteristic of all autistic children: 'When the time came for him to have solid food he refused to bite it up and absolutely rejected everything that was not the consistency of pap' (Tustin 1983: 223).

These descriptions appear to reflect something of Klein's (1930, 1946, 1957) understanding of the infant's terrors regarding its own sadistic attacks against the mother's good objects, which she says form the core of the epistemophilic instinct (as described by Klein (1923, 1930)).

Indeed, Tustin (1990) claimed that, in severe autistic modes of functioning, the epistemophilic instinct is absent. She (1990) remarked that it is only once separation from the other becomes tolerated that the autistic subject begins to gain an awareness of his epistemophilic instinct.

John, one of Tustin's child patients, is described as being gradually able to develop an awareness of others. Tustin (1990) pointed out that, as this awareness grew, John also developed a curiosity and an interest in the inside of his mother's tummy, and a desire to own the phantasied objects within it: 'bright shiny things inside' (1990: 194), 'snaking into the mummy' (1990: 195).

John's growing desire to possess these phantasied internal objects is remarked on by Tustin: 'He wanted to pull out my private things with his eyes, with his mouth, with his hands' (Tustin 1990: 195).

- **Difficulties in relating to others and denial of shared realities**

A lack of affect, a difficulty in relating to others, and indifference to the presence or absence of others characterises extreme autistic modes of functioning. The extremely autistic subject is unable to create any form of social interaction: 'They can only react to people in terms of the sensations they engender' (Tustin 1986: 54).

Tustin (1983) suggested that, apart from primitive emotions of rage and terror, autistic children fail to show the emotions linked with sociability such as those that are perceived in neurotic or schizophrenic children. She understands autism as provoking an omnipotent denial of both external and psychic reality: 'a massive not knowing and "not hearing" provoked by a traumatic awareness of bodily separateness' (Tustin 1981: 11).

However, Tustin (1983, 1991) observed that, as bodily separateness begins to be tolerated (as can be brought about through therapeutic treatment), all the social emotions of love, hatred, envy and jealousy then arise, often bringing about tantrums of rage and terror, indicating a turning point in the treatment of these patients.

Summary of the main features of autism described by Tustin

The list below summarises some of the main features of autistic modes of functioning according to Tustin's writings where the subject's sensory use of objects is linked to the following phenomena:

- A severe reaction to very early separation trauma
- Sensory use of objects

- Fusion/adhesive equation (encapsulation) and enveloping activities
- Avoidance of the experience of separation/compulsive attachment to objects
- Lack of representational ability
- Multi-modal sensory experiences
- Rumination
- Rituals and a perseverative preoccupation with objects
- Stereotyped activities
- Avoidance of biting
- Difficulties in relating to others and denial of shared realities

Esther Bick and Donald Meltzer

- **Second skin formations/encapsulations**

Bick (1968) described her understanding of how the infant comes to be aware of a sense of being held together through sensory stimulation on the skin's surface. She highlighted states in which this experience does not take place and where the infant is then left with feelings of unintegration and an inability to develop a sense of possessing an internal space. Bick (1968) used the terms 'adhesive identification' and 'second-skin formations' to describe the psychic defences put in place by the infant in its earliest attempts to manage these traumatic experiences of unintegration.

Using the term 'second skin', Bick describes the subject's attempt to fuse with or to gain a sense of being encapsulated within external objects when experiencing a lack of psychic containment. This

use of a second skin comes about due to the infant's attempts at self-containment. By so doing, the infant is attempting to block out his own need for dependence on external objects and on relationships.

Bick (1968) remarked on the fact that, although this encapsulating manoeuvre initially brings about a sense of containment for the infant, it becomes equated with an experience of imprisonment. She described her understanding of the autistic person's attempts to fuse with the external world: as a result of these psychic manoeuvres linked to adhesive identification processes, external objects are used in a way that allows the subject to avoid perceiving them as existing as separate and in their own space; they are reduced to things that are just meant to be absorbed, exploited and manipulated, all with the aim of trying to ensure the individual's survival. Hinshelwood (1991) pointed out that Bick's writings and work produced new ideas about the earliest moments of life and about the cases where things go wrong, as in autism, due to a lack of a sense of internal space.

- **Dismantlement and control of the object**

Bick worked with Meltzer in exploring autistic states of awareness and it was this joint collaboration that brought about the notions of second-skin formations and dismantlement, and of the phantasy of attempting to stick to an external object rather than project into it. Meltzer (1975: 13) highlighted that autistic patients demonstrate 'a failure to develop and utilise their introjective capacities as a means of establishing identity and for coping with separation from external objects'. He used the term 'dismantling' in order to describe the autistic subject's failure to form concepts of internal space, contending that autism brings about an impairment of temporal concepts, and that attempts at omnipotence of control, alongside the use of mindlessness, lie at the heart of autistic processes:

We find that autism is a type of developmental retardation which overtakes children of high intelligence, gentle disposition and high emotional sensitivity, when confronted in the first year of life with depressive states in the mothering person. The severe impairment of contact by the mother catapults the child into severe depressive anxieties at a time when they are correspondingly deprived of the services of a receptive figure to share this deluge of mental pain and thereby modify its impact. There is an attempt to deal with anxiety by phantasies of omnipotent control of their objects. They employ a special type of splitting

process, in which they dismantle their ego into its separate perceptual capabilities of seeing, touching, hearing, smelling, etc., and thereby reduce their object from one of 'common sense' (Bion), to a multiplicity of uni-sensual events in which animate and inanimate become indistinguishable. (Meltzer 1975: 203)

In his book 'Explorations in autism: A Psycho-analytical Study' Meltzer (1975) argued that autism is 'the most primitive of all the obsessional disorders which involve the separation and omnipotent control over objects, both internal and external', observing that complete possession of the object, or at least of a segment of the object, was felt by their patient, Piffie, as 'an urgent necessity' (Meltzer 1975: 176) for preserving both his own life and the life of the object. Meltzer (1975) claimed that, for Piffie, obsessional defences were primarily used for purposes of protection. Whereas in obsessive compulsive disorders, defences are put in place in order to protect against feelings of hatred/destructiveness/anger, Meltzer (1975) contended that in autistic functioning their purpose is even more primitive and mindless.

Manic omnipotent denial

Underlining how psychic dismantlement is linked to what Meltzer terms the 'manic omnipotent denial' at the core of the autistic child's attempts to manage his pain of loss, he wrote:

His good object was therefore irretrievable and beyond internal symbolic recall... this utter loss could only intensify his grief and despair. With no other resources open to him his only recourse now was to manic omnipotent denial, frequently accompanied by the projection of rage and despair and a restless searching, until another concrete object was found to suck, to stroke, to look at or feel. (Meltzer 1975: 51)

Lack of 'theory of mind'

Meltzer (1975) pointed out that autistic subjects struggled to build a map of their own minds and of the minds of others (theory of mind), and proposes that, in instances where this map might exist, the awareness of the existence of others as actual partners in dialogue (as external objects and as

having both an outside and an inside and with whom the subject may identify in a way that is not primary) is constantly under threat.

Anne Alvarez

Alvarez's (1992) work draws on Tustin's work in various respects, particularly on her understandings of the sensory functions of autistic shapes and objects and on the subject's attempts to fuse with the other. Alvarez (1992) also further developed Tustin's (1990) understandings of the autistic child's extreme isolation and alienation when exploring why traditional psychoanalytic ideas regarding autism, such as the emphasis on an intentional motivation in relation to defences against anxiety, resistance and withdrawal, may have their limitations in bringing help and insight to autistic experiences.

Her own clinical work with autistic patients (such as Robbie) led Alvarez to suggest that they were 'more undrawn than withdrawn' (1992: 158), whilst pointing out that psychoanalysis ought to make less use of defensive models and explanatory interpretations in its attempts to understand autistic experiences, but instead place more emphasis on notions of deficit and on careful description and containment of the subject. She (1993) proposed methods of working with autistic patients that aimed at bringing about a greater experience of emotional contact and of mentalisation.

- **Lack of verbal communication**

In her case studies, Alvarez (1992) described the autistic child's lack of ability to communicate verbally:

He had been for many years unable to speak in any coherent or narrative manner, thoughts or images simply passed through his head slowly, like fishes, often with little connection between them. (Alvarez 1992: 45)

She also argued that words can be used by autistic patients in a repetitive, ritualistic manner, which drains them of any meaning and movement, reducing them to merely another sensory object used to comfort the child and block out the not-me:

Gradually it became clear that he had begun to stick to this previously lively metaphor in the same cloying rigid way as he had with so many physical objects and rituals in the past. (Alvarez 1992: 46)

Alienation and Interactional difficulties

Alvarez (1992) noted the difficulties inherent in interacting and relating to others that lie at the core of autism. She had a sense that one of her patients, Robbie, an autistic 13-year-old boy whose alienation was extreme, 'clearly felt abandoned by me' (Alvarez 1992: 21):

He seemed to have virtually nothing, not even the most pathological of the mental mechanisms of defence, to fall back on in times of stress.... In later years, when he could get sufficiently outside and away from such feelings to find words for them, he could describe the sensation of having been 'down a dark well', and of having 'fallen down, down into the evening, like the rain'. (Alvarez 1992: 20–21)

She understood just how out of reach these patients were to any normal forms of interaction or communication:

It is difficult to convey the dreadful feeling I often had of how far he had fallen or drifted. My attempts to show him that I understood how abandoned he felt, which might have helped a more mildly or even a more deliberately withdrawn patient, were useless. I was too far away. (Alvarez 1992: 21)

Alvarez's sensitive approach in her work with autistic children, and her personal belief that continued psychoanalytic understanding and exploration could bring hope and relief to the sufferers of autism, underpinned her writings:

In almost every person with autism, there are also non-autistic elements. When there is the wish and the will to use these elements to reduce the autistic habits of mind and to come more into the world of human relationships and interests, then we think we are able to assist this passage. (Alvarez 1992: 160)

Sydney Klein and Judith Mitrani

- **Autistic cysts/capsules**

Sydney Klein (1980) was the first psychoanalytic writer to describe patients who, although appearing to benefit from analysis, remained somehow untouched by it in some profound way, due to autistic forms of encapsulation that kept them cut off from both the analyst and the rest of their own personalities. He argued that within these autistic 'cysts' exist 'unbearable fears of pain and of death, disintegration or breakdown' (Klein 1980: 200) that remain walled off from treatment. He noted that such experiences are 'strikingly similar to those observed in so-called autistic children (Klein 1980: 400). He advocated that autistic children have seen their development arrested through fear at their own destructive impulses.

Mitrani (2001) also drew on Tustin's work, whilst extending it in her descriptions of working with neurotic, borderline and psychotic adults for whom 'unmentalized happenings have been silently encapsulated through the use of secretive auto-sensual manoeuvres related to autistic objects and shapes' (Mitrani 2001: 21). She argues that these psychic capsules create obstacles 'to ongoing emotional and intellectual development' (Mitrani 2001: 21). Her writings draw on both Tustin's as well as Sydney Klein's (1980) understanding of the manner in which autistic cysts have walled off unbearable feelings, suggesting that there exist ways 'in which it may be possible to detect and to modify these in a transference-centered analysis' (Mitrani 2001: 21). Her work places less emphasis on the descriptions of embodied, sensory experiences than Tustin's engages us with, instead extending and applying Tustin's findings: detailing her own analytic work with these 'ordinary patients', where two- and three-dimensional states of object awareness help discriminate autistic states from those more truly object-related ones.

- **Two- and three-dimensional states of object awareness**

Mitrani (2001) differentiated between those patients who have access to object-related states of awareness, patients for whom awareness of separation can be tolerated, and autistic patients for whom 'normal flickering states of awareness of otherness are unable to be endured' (Mitrani 2001:

25). She highlights the need to distinguish between these states of two-dimensional awareness related to the 'threat of unintegration' (Mitrani 1992: 550) found in autism proper, and those more organised experiences where three-dimensional states of awareness predominate and involve 'anxieties of a paranoid-schizoid or depressive nature' (Mitrani 1992: 550). She links her own understandings and descriptions to Sydney Klein's understanding of autistic forms of encapsulation: 'walled off, cystic areas of the mind' (Klein 1980: 400).

- **Adhesive equation**

Mitrani (2001) understood that 'in the autistic state, the patient employs adhesive equation to block out the painful and life-threatening awareness of "two-ness", reacting to any awareness of separateness with either total obliviousness or complete collapse' (Mitrani 2001: 25).

Autistic subjects lack the sense of an internal space and have only an awareness of the sensation of being at one with the external object: subject and object are hence experienced by the autistic individual as being 'equated and contiguous' (Mitrani 1994: 360).

- **Adhesive pseudo-object-relating**

Mitrani (1994) coined the term 'pseudo object-relationship' to describe a form of object-relating that is actually a form of pre-symbolic autosensuality, where there is an attempt to fuse with the outer object and where 'untransformed and unmentalised experiences can become rigidified and hypertrophied as fortified protections against awareness of these primeval experiential states of terror related to bodily/emotional separateness' (Mitrani 1994: 357). She proposes that this mode of pseudo-object-relating may exist on a dual track alongside normal object-relations, noting that if it becomes used as the main mode of functioning it obstructs the development of normal object-relations.

Francesco Bisagni

- **Lack of reciprocity and of rhythmic interplay**

Francesco Bisagni's (2009) writings come from a different theoretical base than that adhered to by the other psychoanalysts whose approaches I have included in this thesis; nevertheless, the importance of his particular understandings on autism has led me to include him in this thesis. Bisagni (2009) understood that autism is linked to the subject's difficulties in undergoing sequences of de-integration and re-integration of the self: this integration struggle leading to a fracture in the rhythmic subject-object interplay. He argued that an interchange of reciprocity between infant and caregiver is fundamental for the development of secure object-relationships and for the symbolisation process to proceed: 'The rhythm of the presence and absence of the object has been related to different levels of representation of the absent objects and to the birth of the capacity for symbolic functioning' (Bisagni 2009: 689).

- **Encapsulated psychic spaces: Adhesive identification, dismantling and two-dimensional psychic functioning**

In cases where reciprocity between infant and caregiver does not take place, the caregiver cannot be used as a secure base and the child is left trapped in an encapsulated psychic space that forecloses any form of meaningful exchange. Bisagni (2012) reflects on Mitrani's (2007) descriptions of 'adhesive identification' that are, in turn, linked both to the phenomena of dismantling described by Meltzer (1975) and to what Bisagni (2012) calls the 'two-dimensional psychic functioning' that lies at the core of the autistic experience. Bisagni (2012) described the profoundly autistic subject's lack of representational ability, where absence is denied through an extreme fragmentation of representation and distress, and the object is reduced to its mere surface (Bisagni 2012: 680).

Marilyn Charles

- **Autistic objects: Prototypes for creative processes**

Charles (2001) explored the more creative and normative aspects of what Tustin called 'autistic' or 'auto-sensuous' shapes. She suggested that these patterned experiences could become 'prototypes

for the creative process' (Charles 2001: 239): the interpersonal rhythms and meanings that come into being through the earliest empathic attunements between infant and caretaker. She placed emphasis on the importance of adequate holding or containment in enabling the development of the subject's symbolic capacity. Charles claimed that the phenomena Tustin called 'autistic shapes' are in fact 'idiosyncratic symbols' that 'allow for the elaboration of a sense of continuity (meaning) in the presence of the other' (Charles 2001: 249).

Charles (2001) contends that, whereas 'consensual symbols' become tools for reciprocal forms of communication between self and other, 'idiosyncratic symbols' become tools used for the defensive exclusion of the other.

Hence, Charles (2001) opened up the notion of the creative aspects of those sensory autistic forms of functioning described by Tustin as autistic shapes and objects. Describing the way patterned sensory experiences are elaborated in the creation of poetry, painting and other forms of artwork, she reflected on the way creative endeavours 'bear the imprint of patterns being continually elaborated in repeated attempts at self-soothing, communication and working through' (Charles 2001: 250). In her understanding that these sensory processes lie at the root of creativity, Charles' (2001) writings take us beyond an exploration that focuses purely on autistic modes of functioning, leaving us intrigued about the phenomena that may lie at the heart of the creative process itself.

Conclusion

Each of the above writers has furthered the distinctive, central contributions that Tustin brought to the exploration of autism. Where Alvarez extended Tustin's understanding of both the extreme alienation experienced by autistic children and of the more sensory, embodied form of functioning inherent to autism, Charles' (2001) writings explored the notion that these sensory patternings may find themselves at the core of more developed, creative endeavours. Mitrani (2001), Meltzer (1975)

and Bisagni (2012) developed the notions of dimensionality of experience, describing the similarities and differences between two- and three-dimensional forms of object-relating. Sydney Klein's (1980) significant legacy was to postulate that, even in so-called normal children and adults, there exist 'autistic islands' that co-exist with more developed forms of psychic functioning.

Most of these writers (apart from Mitrani (2001) and Sydney Klein (1980), who both wrote about working with more integrated patients) described their experiences of those patients who typically lacked any capacity for relating, who avoided eye contact, and who had no speech and so made use of echolalia. The patients they wrote about lacked the capacity for imaginative, symbolic play, resorting instead to stereotyped, ritualistic behaviours.

I will not be contributing to the debate about what autism may be, as I am, instead, exploring here the potential links between some of the core features of autism and certain features that I observed taking place in an extreme hoarding process.

Summary of some of the features that British object-relations theory describes as being core to observations of autism

The following is a table summarising some of the core features of autism that all autistic people are described as having. This is not an exhaustive list but one that highlights some of the main modes of autistic forms of functioning as described by British object-relations theory, and notably by Tustin.

Some core features of autism as described by British object-relations theory
1. Sensory use of objects
2. Fusion/adhesive equation and enveloping activities
3. Avoidance of the experience of separation/compulsive attachment to objects

4. Lack of representational ability
5. Multi-modal sensory experiences
6. Rumination
7. Rituals and perseverative preoccupation with objects/mastery and control of objects
8. Stereotyped activities
9. Avoidance of biting
10. Difficulties in relating to others and denial of both external and internal psychic realities

II.C. Literature that links autism and hoarding

Arieti

As mentioned above, Arieti's are the only psychoanalytic writings found in this investigation that mention a potential link between autism and hoarding behaviours. He (1974) argued that many more archaic psychic processes than those linked to the anal development phase are at stake in hoarding behaviours, briefly remarking on the fact that Kanner (1944) 'described a similar preoccupation with inanimate objects in children suffering from infantile autism' (Arieti 1974: 419). This is the one and only reference Arieti makes to the potential links between autism and hoarding in his writing. Arieti's (1974) are hence the only psychoanalytic writings I found that actually make a link between hoarding behaviours and autistic forms of functioning, however briefly.

A clinical paper by Pertusa et al.

The non-psychoanalytic paper by Pertusa et al. (2012) also makes a link between autism and hoarding, and proposes:

This is the first study considering the relationship between autistic traits, theory of mind and hoarding behaviour from a bidirectional perspective in several well-defined groups of individuals with HD [hoarding disorder], ASD, OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder], AD [anxiety disorder] and nonclinical controls. (Pertusa et al. 2012: 211)

They described their methodology as follows:

Two hundred and twenty-one participants in five groups (HD, ASD, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety disorders (AD), and healthy controls (HC) were administered measures of autistic traits (Autism-Spectrum Quotient), theory of mind (eyes test-revised), and hoarding severity (saving inventory-revised; SI-R). (Pertusa et al. 2012: 210)

Pertusa et al. (2012) argued that their results indicated that individuals with hoarding disorder (HD) do not show more autistic traits or poorer theory-of-mind abilities than individuals with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) or other anxiety disorders (ADs). They proposed that their findings 'reinforce the idea that HD (Hoarding disorder) is an independent nosological entity, and are therefore highly relevant for the current DSM-5 process' (Pertusa et al. 2012: 217). This contention contrasts with both Klein's and Tustin's understandings, where the co-existence of normal/neurotic personalities and autistic areas/aspects is not deemed incompatible.

Pertusa et al. (2012) described their results as reflecting the fact that individuals with ASD would show more severe hoarding symptoms when compared to individuals with OCD or AD:

Whereas the presence of autistic traits in individuals with HD seems to be largely related to the presence of comorbid OCD, the presence of hoarding symptoms in individuals with ASD is unrelated to the presence of comorbid OCD. Further research is needed to better describe the phenomenology of hoarding in ASD and to ascertain whether higher hoarding scores in ASD are due to the 'special interests' domain or, alternatively, whether HD is a comorbid (independent) condition in people with ASD. (Pertusa et al. 2012: 217)

The clinical study concludes both that 'individuals with hoarding disorder do not seem to show more autistic traits than individuals with obsessive compulsive or anxiety disorders' (Pertusa et al. 2012: 217), whilst also arguing that they found higher hoarding scores in individuals who have been diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder.

Whilst these findings do not concur with my own (i.e. that autistic traits appear to be prevalent at the core of hoarding behaviours), this may be due, at least in part, to the fact that their clinical study looked at autism and hoarding from a non-dynamic point of view. It did not explore whether the sensory activities core to autistic modes of functioning (which this study focuses on) were also observable in hoarding; instead, it appears to have looked exclusively at notions of theory of mind, social deficits and eye test scores. Here, Pertusa et al.'s (2012) understandings also contrast with Sydney Klein's and Tustin's understandings, where the co-existence of normal/neurotic personalities and autistic aspects is not deemed incompatible. However it does point out, as my own study does, that more research is required in order to establish whether there actually do exist links between the conditions of hoarding and autism.

Conclusion: A lack of existing studies linking hoarding with autism in psychoanalytic literature

The first intriguing finding of this thesis has been the discovery of how little has been written about any potential link between hoarding and autism. In my attempts to find psychoanalytic literature linking hoarding with autism, I put the term 'autism and hoarding' into my search criteria. Fifteen hits came up. Although both the words 'hoarding' and 'autism' were present in a number of papers (see, for example, Bollas 1974, Curtis 2007, Feldman 1994; Meltzer 1973, the authors of these papers do not actually make explicit links between these two processes).

I found this to be both an astonishing and an interesting phenomenon in its own right. It brought up numerous questions, some of which I described in the 'Literature Review' section of this paper. There is hence a lack of clinical research or of writings on either hoarding behaviours or on the potential links between hoarding and autism in the psychoanalytic literature (as described on pages 53-54). Arieti's (1974) were the only psychoanalytic writings explicitly making the link between hoarding behaviours and autism.

II.D. Literature review overview

When looking at the psychoanalytic literature on autism, I focussed on the point of view of British object-relations theory, drawing mainly on the writings of Tustin and those writers who further developed her conclusions. I found a lot of information. In contrast to this wealth of information on autism, I found a dire lack of clinical research on hoarding behaviours. As described above, some writers use other terms such as obsessional behaviour, obsessional neurosis, anal symptoms, and Diogenes syndrome to talk about hoarding behaviours. When I tried to find previous clinical psychoanalytic papers on hoarding behaviours, I came across a lot of theory on obsessional neurosis that included the word 'hoarding' from time to time, but no detailed clinical studies that focussed on exploring hoarding behaviours as an obsessional neurosis, nor any other psychoanalytical clinical explorations of hoarding. Perhaps this lack of exploratory literature is due to the fact that the distress and incapacitation brought about by hoarding behaviours has been less appreciated in the past, whereas today there is much more media coverage of hoarding difficulties.

Those psychoanalytic papers on hoarding that I did find emphasised, for the most part, the links between hoarding behaviours and anal eroticism (Menninger 1942; Fenichel 1946; Storr 1983). As per the results of this literature review, it would appear that hoarding behaviours could benefit from a greater focus by the psychoanalytic community.

Abraham (1923) suggested a different perspective on hoarding behaviours through his contention that hoarding is linked to pre-anal processes and oral introjection taking place just before the anal-retentive stage is reached. Arieti (1974) echoes Abraham's (1923) understanding that hoarding behaviours are not linked to anal processes, arguing instead that Fairbairn's (1952) object-relations theory helps shed light on the dynamics of hoarding. Arieti (1974) also highlights his own discovery of a lack of psychoanalytic writing on hoarding behaviour. Writing from a Jungian perspective, Winters (2015), in her introduction, also underlines the dearth of any sort of psychoanalytic writings on hoarding: 'There is no current literature on the condition of hoarding from a depth psychological perspective' (Winters 2015: xiv).

Other psychoanalytic writers such as Muensterberger (1994) and Subkowski (2006) have focussed on non-pathological forms of collecting rather than on hoarding. Muensterberger (1994) emphasised his belief in the purely pre-Oedipal origins of collecting behaviours, whereas Subkowski (2006) considered this to be too limited an understanding

Arieti (1974) appears to be the only psychoanalytic writer who makes an explicit link between autism and hoarding, noting that Kanner (1944) described how some of his autistic patients appeared to have a preoccupation with hoarding objects. Hence, Kanner (1944) may have actually been the world's first mental health practitioner to perceive the existence of a link between hoarding and autism, although he did not explore this link any further. I found only one other study – the clinical, non-psychoanalytic study by Pertusa et al. (2012) – that explored and highlighted the potential links between hoarding and autistic spectrum disorder.

Hence, not much is known about the potential links between hoarding and autism. Perhaps this is due to the fact that, in the last few years, autistic forms of functioning are just beginning to be better researched and understood, whilst simultaneously there is a newly burgeoning greater awareness, thanks to media coverage, of the prevalence and impact of hoarding behaviours.

My own wish to explore the possibility of existing links between hoarding behaviours and autism in this thesis may therefore be of some use in opening up this field of research. However, more psychoanalytic research from a clinical point of view on the potential links is indicated. Observations of other hoarders could be undertaken and psychoanalytic research projects engaged with, where key features of autism, as described throughout psychoanalytic literature, would be kept in mind whilst exploring hoarding behaviours.

II.D.i. Literature that links creativity and the trauma of separation/fusion struggles

The following section extends my exploration of the literature of hoarding and autism and the observed links between them by briefly exploring the notion of creativity in relation to the features of autism and to the phenomena I observed taking place in the extreme hoarding process described in the 'Introduction' section of this thesis. I reiterate that this exploration into the potential links between creative processes, autism and hoarding is not the central part of my thesis and I will not develop this section in depth. This exploration is, however, of importance as it may help to extend our thinking about, as well as help to investigate, the potential implications of fusion/separation processes in other fields of study.

In this particular section, I briefly look at psychoanalytic literature that explores the notion that traumatic experiences of separation/fusion may also be found at the root of, and be communicated through, the medium of aesthetic work. As noted above (on page 51 of this thesis), Charles (2001) highlighted her own understanding that the auto-sensuous shapes of autism form the prototypes for the creative process. Rose's (1987) writings reflect this understanding by proposing that the creative process itself contributes to the working through of separation/fusion issues, involving an initial fusing of the subject and object and then a re-separation and a new division: this being part of an ongoing attempt by the subject to master the trauma inherent in separation/fusion struggles. Rose (1987) contends that it is the individual's efforts for restitution that give birth to the work of art.

Rose's (1987) descriptions of the sensory aspect of painted artwork is reflected in descriptions of the predominance of rhythmical, kinaesthetic experiences in autism (which I have also observed taking place in the extreme hoarding process):

Many painters describe using their kinaesthetic reactions to the figure on the canvas as one indicator of whether or not the painting is progressing and balancing well. They feel it in their own muscles, tendons and joints, as well as seeing it with an educated eye. Some even giving priority to the body's judgement when what is seen on canvas contradicts what the body tells of the painting. The awareness of one's own muscular tensions and bodily rhythms giving direct, immediate physical experience of oneself from within. (Rose 1987: 135)

Efforts by the subject to avoid awareness of separation through attempting to create an experience of being fused with the object (also described as being the central feature of autistic forms of functioning) are described by Rose (1987) as being re-enacted through the aesthetic experience.

Rose (1987) suggested that the aesthetic experience requires a partial merging with the art object, in order for a re-emerging with perception and thought to occur. The artist is described as reliving the primitive experiences of testing reality by repeated fusions and separations. Rose (1987) contended that artistic creation communicates the struggle between surrender to fusion and the push towards separation and autonomy: 'The establishment of the earliest sense of reality and the separation of the self from the mother are crucial to the psychology of art and the creative imagination' (1987: 18).

He argued that art is the only medium through which content organised according to primary processes also has communicative and logical properties:

The aesthetic experience brings about a type of mastery that is characterised by the inner reintegration of feelings with thought and perception. As such it tends to overcome various splits, repressed memories, isolated feeling and denied precepts. It counteracts denial and, through sensuous forms, reunites perception with affect... thus tending to restore wholeness. (Rose 1987: 211–212)

Oremland (1997) also wrote about how the artist re-enacts separation/fusion struggles through his making of his artwork, noting that the move towards separation can often be observed taking place in reverse in the development of the art object:

The sculptor inhales, eats and is covered by the dust becoming one physically and psychologically as the stone becomes sculpture; similarly, with paint and painter, as the paint becomes the painting. (Oremland 1997: 91)

Fairbairn (1938) argued that, if art provides a channel of expression for sadistic phantasies, it is equally reasonable to believe that it also provides a channel of expression for phantasies of restitution: 'The principle of restitution is the governing principle in art' (1938: 297). He proposed

that, when artwork is relatively undeveloped, we are in a position to trace the origin or 'art-symbolism':

It would be possible to envisage a form of art consisting simply in the embodiment of such restitutive phantasies in an attempt to relieve the anxiety engendered by destructive phantasies regarding love-objects. The simpler and more primitive forms of art lend themselves to interpretation in this sense. (Fairbairn 1938: 301)

Hence, the above writers understood that the very early traumatic experiences of separation/fusion (described by psychoanalytic literature as being core to autistic modes of functioning) are also re-enacted and communicated through artistic creation: the artist attempting to resolve these issues and the emotions that lie at their core (envy, destructiveness, anxiety) through his artwork. I will explore this further in the 'Discussion' section of this thesis, when I introduce the work of Baudelaire and Schwitters.

II.D. ii. Aims and research questions

The aim of this research process was to explore whether psychic phenomena linked to the trauma of separation/fusion struggles that are described as being core to autism could also be inherent in an extreme hoarding process. Whereas Freud (1905) claimed that hoarding was to do with anal eroticism, this study set out to explore the fact that this may not necessarily be the whole picture.

My speculation when undertaking this research study was that hoarding reflects something about separation/fusion trauma and that there exist similarities between certain features of autism and certain events going on in an extreme hoarding process.

This hunch came about from my observation that an extreme hoarding process appeared to reflect similar features to those described by a number of psychoanalytic writers as being core to autistic forms of functioning. Watching an extreme hoarding process taking place on a television programme led me to speculate whether hoarding difficulties may have at their root the same primitive anxieties that are understood to lie at the core of autistic modes of functioning: the consequence of traumatic separation/fusion struggles.

When I started to explore and develop this possibility, I found that it appeared to allow for a new piece of understanding, as the psychodynamics of hoarding did not seem to have been explored in clinical detail.

Here are some questions that I found myself writing down in response to my initial hypothesis:

- Which core features of autism, both in the form of surface symptoms and psychic processes, appear to find reflection in an extreme hoarding process and which features do not?
- What psychic processes may be going on in extreme hoarding, such that they would give rise to the phenomena that could be observed taking place?
- If similarities are observed between some of the phenomena taking place in an extreme hoarding process and some of the core features attributed to autism, could this mean that extreme hoarding behaviours and autism share similar psychic processes?
- What psychoanalytical explanations could help in understanding the similarities and the differences in the phenomena observed taking place in an extreme hoarding process and those described as taking place in autistic modes of functioning?
- As the extreme hoarding process differs in many ways from descriptions of pathological states of autism, can the hoarding process itself be understood as resulting from an autistic form of encapsulation?
- If certain autistic features appear to be reflected in some manner in an extreme hoarding process, could they also be communicated through works of art? If so, could these autistic modes of functioning – notably the use of autistic shapes and objects – be, as argued by Charles (2001), prototypes for creative forms, lying at the core of the creative process itself?

Although this last point was not my main research exploration, part of the importance of my results is that they extend into other fields of study, including aesthetics. In the 'Literature Review' section, I described how the potential insight brought about by the observed links between autism and hoarding could be furthered by exploring how some writers (Rose 1987; Oremland 1997) argue that works of art may also highlight the psychic trauma inherent in separation/fusion struggles. I have included my explorations into this in the following section, as doing so allows me to demonstrate the potential links existing between autistic features, hoarding and creative works of art.

III. Conceptual Definitions

III.A. Core psychoanalytic concepts: Constitutional envy

The following section describes the psychic mechanisms understood to take place in the very early stages of psychic development. I will discuss them in order to bring understanding to my explorations of the phenomena that I have observed taking place in the extreme hoarding process. It is also necessary to situate the psychoanalytic ideas on autism within the wider psychoanalytic context. There are indeed many conceptual models existing in psychoanalysis, but I have chosen to focus on a classical Kleinian model, since Klein and her followers were pioneers in the understanding of severe mental disorders.

Klein's (1957) concept of constitutional envy is core to the Kleinian school of psychoanalytic thought. I posit that her understanding of the central role played by constitutional envy in psychic development is of fundamental importance in bringing understanding to the similarities I have observed between the core characteristics of autistic modes of functioning and some of the phenomena taking place in the extreme hoarding process that I explore in this thesis.

Feldman (1994) noted that, although the importance of the concept of envy had been stressed since Freud,

it was only with Melanie Klein's concept of 'constitutional envy' (1957) that envy became a core concept in psychoanalysis ... Klein herself thought that no psychoanalysis could be considered complete without the unearthing and working through of the deep roots of envy, its spoiling and destructive quality, in order to render it less deleterious. (Feldman 1994: 218)

Klein (1957) described the central role played by envy and greed in the infant's earliest object-relations and in the setting up of psychic defences that aim at managing aggressive fantasies and persecutory anxieties. She proposed that the prototypical envied object is the breast. The infant

experiences the breast as possessing everything he desires and it can be felt to be keeping an unlimited 'flow of milk and love for its own gratification' (Klein 1957: 183).

Whereas feelings of envy were believed by Klein to be ubiquitous and part of normal experience, if they become overwhelming, they can then become the major contributor to the development of very rigid, damaging psychic defences. Overwhelming feelings of envy affect the infant's ability to build up the sense of being able to rely on a good mother/breast (or 'good object'), as the breast is then felt to have deliberately kept for itself the gratifying experience of which the infant feels deprived: 'This feeling adds to his sense of grievance and hate, resulting in a disturbed relationship with the mother' (Klein 1957: 183).

Excessive feelings of envy spoil the infant's experience of the mother's goodness, and Klein describes how they compound the infant's sadistic, hateful attacks on the breast, which is then experienced as having been damaged and as having lost its reassuring, nurturing value: 'It has become bad by being bitten up and poisoned by urine and faeces' (Klein 1957: 186).

Excessive envy increases the intensity of such attacks and their duration, and thus makes it more difficult for the infant to regain the lost good object; whereas sadistic attacks on the breast that are less determined by envy pass more quickly and therefore do not, in the infant's mind, so strongly and lastingly destroy the goodness of the object: the breast that returns and can be enjoyed is felt as evidence that it is not injured and that it is still good. (Klein 1957: 186)

Feldman (1994) remarked that this does not just happen in early infancy, but that, throughout life, everyday experiences can activate this very early experience of envy. They argued that the strength of the frustration and hate aroused by overwhelming feelings of envy and the manner in which the individual manages these feelings varies considerably.

Most importantly for the questions that this thesis seeks to explore, envy is understood as being related to the question of when and how the subject develops a knowledge of himself as a separate being. Abraham (1927), Freud (1937), Riviere (1936) and Rosenfeld (1987), among others, have all hinted at the relation of envy to undifferentiated states of experiencing.

III.A.i. Projective identification and envy

Klein (1946) understood that projective identification is used from birth by the infant in its attempts to protect itself against terrifying early anxieties. She noted that, although projective identification processes are a part of normal development, an over-use of them is brought into play when experiences of anxiety become overwhelming for the infant. Recourse is made to excessive use of projective identification mechanisms in an effort to avoid psychic pain; this process itself leads to a denial of separateness between self and object.

Klein (1946) argued that projective identification mechanisms are a normal part of psychic development. Experiences that are subject to excessive projective identification processes form the basis of what Klein (1946) called an aggressive object-relation, impinging on the infant's ability to experience the mother as a separate individual, as well as on its ability to form a right relation to reality.

Projective identification mechanisms, when resorted to excessively, are hence damaging to the ego and were understood by Klein (1946) to form the basis of schizophrenic illnesses.

Klein (1957) described the influences of envy and greed on the infant's earliest object-relations and the psychic defences that get set up to manage the persecutory anxieties resulting from the infant's own aggressive impulses. Overwhelming feelings of envy were understood by Klein (1957) to be the major contributors to the development of these rigid defences and to the development of pathological projective identification processes.

She remarked that the infant's relation to the good and the bad objects would imply both the phantasied introjection of the object, as well as projections into the object. This forms an interaction between external and internal objects and situations. Klein (1946) described the infant's earliest phantasies and feelings as being omnipotent in nature, the taking in of good objects and expelling

things into external objects being experienced as real, and leading to changes in the infant's own sense of self.

Hinshelwood (1991) noted that Klein (1946) understood that this sense of omnipotency influences the development of primitive defence mechanisms, these defences in turn breaking down the boundaries between self and other, in order to avoid the experiences of separateness and envy.

Klein (1930) understood that symbol formation is dependent on the manner in which the subject manages its own envy and its use of projective identification mechanisms. A description of this process is elaborated in the following paragraph.

III.A. ii. Early anxieties and symbol formation

Klein (1946) contended that the infant's earliest defence mechanisms were psychotic and omnipotent in nature, lying at the core of his unconscious phantasies regarding his own internal contents, his mother's internal contents and of the phantasies regarding the external world. These early defences are understood by Klein (1946) also to affect how the infant's phantasies develop.

She remarked that some of these defences affect and determine the way the infant will attempt to relate to the external world; the infant's manner of relating, in turn, influencing the processes of projection, introjection, denial, splitting, identification, etc. Hence, these early defences affect psychic development and, notably, symbol formation.

In her paper that explores symbol formation, Klein (1930: 24) proposed that, during the earliest stages of mental development, the infant's aim is to 'possess himself of the contents of the mother's body and to destroy her by means of every weapon which sadism can command'. The child expects to find within the mother an accumulation of part-objects: '(a) the father's penis, (b) excrement and (c) children and these things it equates with edible substances' (Klein 1930: 24).

It is these early phantasies that contribute to the development of symbol formation, the anxieties aroused in the infant by its own envious, greedy feelings towards the contents of the mother's body,

driving him to equate these phantasied objects with other things; these other things, in turn, become objects of anxiety. Klein (1930) described the way the infant is impelled constantly to make new equations, persecutory anxiety causing a compulsive search for ever-new substitute objects with which to have conflict-free relationships, as the infant attempts to avoid this circle of anxiety. Klein (1930: 220) affirmed that it is these envious phantasied attacks and the anxiety they cause that 'form the basis of his (the infant's) interest in the new objects and the basis of symbolism'.

However, when the infant's attempts to use mechanisms of defence against his own sadism are premature and exaggerated, the establishment of a 'right relation' to reality becomes threatened (Klein 1930). In these situations, the infant's whole process of creating symbolic relations to the objects that he sees as representing the mother's body (and, hence, outer reality) becomes interrupted.

Klein (1930) asserted that the overwhelming anxieties experienced during this developmental period drive the ego to develop extremely rigid defence mechanisms. When overly rigid, these mechanisms form the basis for the development of psychotic disorders, occluding symbolic development.

Through the use of projective identification processes, the infant attempts on one hand to introject parts of the mother's body, whilst on the other hand projecting parts of himself into her. Expelling bad parts of himself into the mother leads the infant to phantasise that he has injured her through his attempts to control and possess her. Good parts of the infant's self are also expelled in this way.

If projective processes go on excessively, these good parts that have been expelled into the mother are then actually felt to have become lost inside her. The ego is then experienced as having become impoverished and dependent on the external object. Simultaneously, the infant feels he has lost parts of himself inside the mother. This can bring about an experience of merging with the mother and the infant fearing he may not be able to retrieve himself. In this situation, introjection is also experienced as being terribly dangerous: the infant phantasises that the mother, into whom he feels he has projected his own destructive feelings, will retaliate by intruding into *him* and damaging *him*.

The infant then feels that he needs to resort to omnipotent phantasies of merger with the mother; this is an attempt to avoid the experience of separateness from the her and the accompanying feelings of envy, dependence and terror that she will retaliate against him.

These defences create further confusion for the infant between its experience of what is self and what is not-self, leading to a further breaking down of ego boundaries in a desperate attempt to avoid feelings of separateness and the envy that accompanies separateness. The whole process creates a vicious cycle driven by anxiety, and brings about the creation of a form of object-relating that both Klein (1930) and Segal (1957) have termed 'symbolic equations'.

Hinshelwood (1989) pointed out that, linked to the whole area of symbol formation is aesthetics and the distinction between ugly and beautiful representation. He noted that Rickman (1940) linked the notion of artistic creativity to the attempt to restore life to damaged objects – Rickman thus bringing together the notions of aesthetic experience and of the depressive position.

Hinshelwood (1989) remarked that Segal (1957) would develop this understanding as she advocated that creativity requires the simultaneous occurrence of 'a depressive pining over the damaged object with an effort to recreate it through the medium of art' (Hinshelwood 1989: 450).

The effort to repair the internal object which is the essence of the depressive position is an artistic endeavour, only expressed and made directly communicable in physical form by the artist. The piece of art is an externalisation into physical reality that becomes a symbolic expression of the state of the internal world and of the work that has been put into it. (Hinshelwood 1989: 450)

III.A.iii. Early anxieties and symbolic equations

Klein (1930) argued that the capacity for symbol formation is fundamental to psychic development and object-relations. Disturbances in the earliest object-relationships lead to difficulties in symbol formation, and this process, in turn, further disturbs the normal development of object-relationships.

Klein (1930) underlined the pivotal roles that the anxiety and aggression experienced in the first object-relationship play in symbol development. She remarked on this in a case study of a child (Dick) whom she described at the time as being psychotic, emphasising that early anxiety can both aid in the development of symbolism and paralyse it.

Tustin (1983) noted that Klein, in her 1930 paper 'The importance of symbol formation in the development of the ego', 'described her analysis of a four-year-old boy whom she calls Dick and whom we would now recognise to be an autistic child' (Tustin 1983: 119). Tustin continued: 'It is a mark of Melanie Klein's originality and perspicacity that in her paper she anticipated many of Kanner's findings' (1983: 119). She pointed out that Klein's (1930) descriptions of Dick showed that 'he was a classic example of Kanner's type of autism' (Tustin 1983: 119), underlining the fact that the first diagnosis of autism was made by Kanner in 1943 and that, therefore, the term 'autism' was not yet in use at the time of Klein's 1930 paper.

Mitrani (2007) also highlighted this point:

Although at the time Klein analysed Dick, Kanner's (1943) work on early infantile autism had not yet been published, one can ascertain from Klein's keen observations, paralleling Kanner's own to a remarkable degree, that Dick would have been diagnosed on the autistic spectrum. (Mitrani 2007: 825)

Symbols were understood by Klein (1930) to become concretised through the use of excessive projective identification processes – this bringing about the formation of 'symbolic equations': a

situation where the symbol becomes experienced as being undifferentiated from the thing being symbolised.

Segal (1957) also gave the term 'symbolic equations' to the very initial types of symbols created, contending that these come about when the object and the symbol for the object are experienced as one and the same:

In the symbolic equation, the symbol-substitute is felt to be the original object. The substitute's own properties are not recognized or admitted. The symbolic equation is used to deny the absence of the ideal object or to control a persecuting one. (Segal 1957: 395)

She argued that this experience arises in states of overwhelming projective identification,

when parts of the ego and internal objects are projected into an external object and identified with it. There is a lack of differentiation between object and subject – since part of the ego is confused with the object, the symbol, which is a creation of the ego, becomes in turn confused with the object which is symbolised. (Segal 1957: 53)

As the good object becomes gradually internalised, the use of symbols also changes, and whilst aggressive and libidinal aims become inhibited, empathy develops. The symbol itself is understood by Segal (1957) to provide an important means for displacing aggression and lessening the fears of loss – the process whereby the symbol becomes gradually internalised by the subject being understood as

a means of restoring, re-creating, recapturing and owning again the original object. But in keeping with the increased reality sense, they are now felt as created by the ego and therefore never completely equated with the original object. (Segal 1957: 394)

The process of symbol formation allowing the subject to become 'consciously aware and in control of symbolic expressions of underlying primitive phantasies' (Segal 1957: 396) – to the extent that the symbol and the external object are distinguished from each other – means the symbol then becomes a creation of the subject and may thereby be used more freely.

Klein (1946) and Segal (1957) both described the manner in which persecutory anxiety leads the subject on a compulsive search for ever-new substitute objects with which to have conflict-free relationships.

Hence, both authors described an ongoing cycle of acquisition and substitution, whereby new objects are themselves affected by aggressive, frightening feelings, creating the repeated urge to find and make new equations. However, both authors also point out that, if this persecutory anxiety remains too strong, symbolic equations instead of symbols become the mainstay, inhibiting any further symbolic development.

III.A. iv. Bion's beta elements – Symbolic equations?

Bion (1956, 1962, 1967) understood that excessive projective identification mechanisms lead to objects becoming 'agglomerated and compressed' (1967: 40), this process leaving them unavailable to internalisation and consequentially devoid of emotional meaning. He gave the terms 'beta elements' (1962: 6) and 'dream furniture' (1957: 270) to these phenomena, noting that, as they are unprocessed emotional experiences (elements), they leave the subject with 'the concreteness and the meaninglessness of his own experiences' (1956: 40).

Bion (1956) proposed that the infant's phantasied attacks towards the breast and the mother's internal objects (as described by Klein (1946)) are matched by equally fierce attacks 'directed against the apparatus of perception' (Bion 1956: 344) – these lead the personality to become experienced as being splintered into minute fragments that the subject then expels outside of himself in fantasy. The fragments of the subject's own personality are then felt either to be contained by, or to contain, actual objects in the external world. These are sensory experiences that have failed to become internalised and therefore remain meaningless.

This psychic process leaves subjects feeling surrounded by 'bizarre objects' (Bion 1956: 345), each of which is experienced as consisting of both a real external object and of a piece of the projected

personality. These fragments of the subject's own personality are felt to have become engulfed and controlled, the subject having a sense that he has become equated with the object. Bion (1956) noted that what would ordinarily be perceived by the subject as actual parts of his own mental functioning (ideas, phantasies, senses, words, etc.) become indistinguishable from and merged with real external objects:

One result is that the patient strives to use real objects as ideas and is baffled when they obey the laws of natural science. (Bion 1956: 346)

The term 'beta elements' (Bion 1956) is used to describe the consequences of this excessive use of projective identification that gives rise to the construction of symbolic equations rather than symbols. The subject is unable to transform his initial sense-impressions (beta elements) into meaningful experiences (alpha elements) through the use of a transformative, containing presence (mother). This leaves the subject incapable of distinguishing between conscious and unconscious phenomena. Bion (1956) argued that this incapacity to transform emotional experiences leaves the subject feeling overwhelmed by meaningless, concrete emotional experiences that cannot be internalised, mentally digested or transformed, but simply become agglomerated. Overwhelming experiences therefore remain unprocessed concretions within which the subject feels entrapped.

III.A.v. Epistemophilic instinct and symbol formation

Another issue that is relevant to this current study is how autism and hoarding can help shed light on the psychic mechanisms inherent in symbol formation.

Klein (1923) understood that the infant expects to find an accumulation of part-objects within the mother. Her description of the epistemophilic instinct lies at the core of her formulation regarding symbolic equations and symbolic development.

In her paper 'Early stages of the Oedipus conflict', Klein (1923) underlined the notion of the infant's early phantasies of intrusion into the mother's body – a concept she later developed in 'The

importance of symbol formation in the development of the ego' (1930). In this latter paper, which explores symbol formation, Klein proposed that, during the earliest stages of mental development, the infant's aim is to possess the contents of the mother's body and to 'destroy her by means of every weapon which sadism can command' (Klein 1930: 24). As discussed above, she argues that this developmental stage and the manner in which the infant relates to the external world will affect further psychic development, notably the infant's ability to move towards symbolisation.

Tustin (1990) also highlighted the importance of Klein's understanding of the epistemophilic instinct, remarking that it appeared absent in pathological states of autism – the subject beginning to experience it only once separation from the other could be tolerated. She described a child patient, John, who begins to gain a sense of curiosity and interest about the insides of his mother's tummy whilst simultaneously developing an awareness of others as being separate from himself. The understanding was that John was expressing his epistemophilic instinct, his desire to possess these internal objects, describing them as 'bright shiny things inside' (Tustin 1990: 194), 'snaking into the mummy' (1990: 195). Tustin described John as wanting 'to pull out my private things with his eyes, with his mouth, with his hands' (1990: 195).

Curtis (2007) notes that Meltzer (1975) believed that the infant experiences both pleasure and pain 'in its contact with the mother, and the ensuing conflict gives rise to the growth of the epistemophilic instinct with its search for knowledge' (Curtis 2007: 116). Meltzer (1975) also proposed that, by contrast, those infants for whom the epistemophilic instinct brings about too much mental pain (autistic subjects), would 'seek knowledge through intrusive identification' instead of being able to learn things from their own experiences (1975: 114).

Whilst claiming that the subject's attempts to resolve the conflict between pleasure and pain gives rise to the growth of the epistemophilic instinct with its search for knowledge, Meltzer (1987) also argued that this process forms the basis for creativity. The relevance of this to hoarding is explored further on in this thesis.

III.B. Core psychoanalytic concepts linked to autism

Having described the core characteristics of autistic modes of functioning as seen from a psychoanalytic perspective in my 'Literature Review' section above, I will now focus on how the term 'autism' came about and what it is understood to represent. I will also underline both Tustin's (1980, 1992) and Feldman's (1994) understandings that the infant's feelings of envy, which mobilise rigid defences, may lie at the core of autism. Meltzer et al's (1982) and Bisagni's (2012) understandings of two- and three-dimensional forms of awareness are also examined in the following section.

III.B.i. What is autism?

Kanner was the first to describe the spectrum of clinical conditions that had previously seen children labelled as feeble-minded, idiotic or schizoid. In his 1943 paper entitled 'Autistic disturbances of affective contact', Kanner describes autism as a distinct syndrome.

I will next introduce Klein's work in relation to autism, as her 1930 writings were the first (after Kanner) to describe autistic features (Kanner did not publish his own findings on autism until 1943). In this work, she noted her experiences of one of her child patients (Dick), whom she described at the time as psychotic (not being aware of the term 'autistic').

Klein (1923) emphasised a stage of development that she termed the paranoid-schizoid position, where the notion of early oral incorporation fantasies, projective identification and the infant's fantasies about the interior of the mother's body predominate. She later developed this understanding and – with other analysts such as Meltzer, Bick and Tustin – would describe earlier, more primitive mental experiences and states of being linked to 'autistic' ways of relating to the world.

Tustin (1983) differentiated schizophrenic experiences from autistic ones, declaring that the inhibition in development that autistic functioning highlighted was not, as in cases of schizophrenia, a regression; whereas the schizophrenic child is understood to have made tenuous psychological

development from which he regresses when faced by difficulties that are too much for him, the autistic child is cut off from the mother and manifests an almost complete arrest of psychological development at an early stage. 'To use Winnicott's terms: The autistic child is unintegrated, whereas the schizophrenic child is disintegrated' (Tustin 1983: 120).

Tustin (1972, 1981, 1986, 1990, 1991) published clinical material on patients whose autism she termed 'psychogenic autism', as her experiences of working psychotherapeutically with these children had shown her that her approach with them was successful in moderating their autistic features. She understood that autistic modes of functioning could be brought about by a number of different catalysts – as a reaction to brain damage, or due to organic factors; as a result of sensory defects or due to traumatic experiences felt to be life-threatening.

In her 1991 paper 'Revised understandings of psychogenic autism', Tustin reassessed her initial understanding that autism was a 'halt at, or a regression to, what is conceived of as a normal early infantile stage of autistic unawareness' (585), by asserting that this view of autism was 'no longer tenable' (585). She remarked: 'The crux of these revised understandings is that autism is an early developmental deviation in the service of dealing with unmitigated terror' (Tustin 1991: 585). She proposed that this terror was linked to the infant's sudden traumatic awareness of bodily separateness that 'had been experienced as a black hole associated with elemental panic and rage about the seeming loss of part of his body (1991: 585).

The autistic subject is described as experiencing a sense of having been wrenched apart from a mother with whose body they had previously felt fused and equated. Prior to this traumatic awareness of separateness, the infant would have experienced a pathological state of fusion with the mother, with which both child and mother had colluded. Tustin (1991) argued that this abnormal state of fusion could be due both to genetic susceptibility and to environmental pressures.

Tustin (1991) underlined the writings of Brazelton (1979), Trevarthen (1970) and Stern (1985, arguing that in the light of their observations she would no longer propose the existence of a normal autistic phase in infancy:

I have come to see that the delusory state of union which existed prior to the catastrophic awareness of bodily separateness was not a normal early infantile stage but an abnormal state with which both mother and child had colluded and for which there may have been some genetic susceptibility in both of them, as well as environmental pressures which provoked it. (Tustin 1992: 12)

She claimed that autistic modes of functioning involve a shutting down of awareness of shared realities:

A massive 'not knowing' and 'not-hearing' provoked by traumatic awareness of bodily separateness. As such, it would seem to be an intensification and entrenched exaggeration of an in-built set of reactions which are specific to trauma. It is of the nature of a post-traumatic stress disorder. It is also a survival mechanism. (Tustin 1992: 11)

Autism and envy

Having revised her initial theory, to an understanding that autism could not be considered to be part of a normal developmental stage, Tustin (1992) proceeded to explore the notion that the infant's own feelings of envy could precipitate autistic modes of functioning.

The infant's sense of being separate from the mother is argued by Tustin (1992) as being experienced as a loss of part of its own body, and this experience precipitates extreme feelings of envy:

The savage, predatory envy of 'sticking out bits on other bodies which are felt to be the same as the bodily bit which has been lost. Amongst other functions these 'sticking out bits' are seen as plugging the holes resulting from separation experiences, which lead to sensations of helplessness, hopelessness and extreme vulnerability. At this level, having the 'sticking out bits' means being all-powerful and in control, and this is felt to ensure survival. This is one aspect of envy of the breast, particularly the nipple of the breast, of the later penis envy, and of envy of the 'baby' within the mother's body. (Tustin 1992: 92)

Through her psychotherapeutic work with autistic children, Tustin discovered that the overwhelming feelings of distress, panic, rage and predatory rivalry needed to be talked about before any talk about love, aggression, envy and jealousy could be experienced as having any meaning for the child: 'Autistic subjects have experienced an agony of consciousness in early infancy in which these more sophisticated feelings were experienced precociously and in a compacted way' (Tustin 1980: 37). Hence, Tustin (1980) proposed that autistic states of functioning are set in train in an attempt to completely block out the subject's overwhelming feelings of envy.

To explain the importance played by unbearable feelings of envy in precipitating autistic states of functioning, Tustin (1992) described how a sudden rupture in the sense of fusion the infant has experienced with its mother's body is felt as 'a hole or as a wound ... the illusion of a sensuous bodily flow between mother and infant seems to have been broken in a catastrophic way and is dealt with by the pathological use of autistic and confusional objects' (Tustin 1992: 91). This sudden experience of separation from the mother is equated with 'a loss of comforting sensation, which in the concretised mode of functioning at these elemental levels is felt as the loss of a sensuous object' (Tustin 1992: 91).

Feldman (1994) proposed that, when this sudden sense of rupture takes place, the child's experience of catastrophic loss, of lack and of the unattainability of the qualities of the idealised omnipotent object (as described by Tustin throughout her writings) brings about unbearable feelings of envy – the strength of the defences that then become mobilised against the recognition of envy, directly affecting continuing psychic development.

III.B.i.a. Two- and three-dimensional ways of object-relating and autistic modes of functioning

One of the most important themes from the literature on autism seems to be the discussion on the notion of dimensionality, as discussed by Meltzer (1974, 1975), Mitrani (1992) and Bisagni (2012).

Not all psychoanalytic writers who have had the experience of working with autism have used this exploration of dimensionality. It is therefore a significant element in my conceptual discussion.

Meltzer's (1974, 1975), Bisagni's (2012) and Mitrani's (1992) descriptions of the processes of projective and intrusive identification and their comparisons between two- and three-dimensional ways of object-relating reveal something about the differences between autistic and non-autistic ways of functioning, whilst highlighting the unmentalised nature of autism, where subjects cannot see another individual as a person but rather as an object. This exploration of dimensionality adds something more to the insights already provided by Tustin.

Meltzer (1975) and Meltzer et al. (1982) advocated a stage of development prior to the paranoid-schizoid position, which they proposed corresponds to the period of infantile autism. Meltzer (1975) posited that, due to a failure to fully achieve the the paranoid-schizoid position, the autistic child falls back on the more primitive technique of dismantling his whole psychic apparatus and thereby defaults to a 'mindless' state of being.

Meltzer proposed that the autistic child's state of 'mindlessness' arises out of its attempts to protect the mother from its own needs, in response to the perception of her depression. He (1974) argued that the outstanding characteristic of this autistic phase of development was the absence of any paranoia, or of splitting or projections, and of the presence of protective phantasies. The consequences of projective identification delineated first by Klein (1923, 1930, 1946) and then by Bion (1962) would, Meltzer (1975) argued, suggest two categories of phenomena: the projective and intrusive types of phenomena and the identificatory ones.

He described his interest in the former, remarking that these projective and intrusive phenomena, which come to the fore in the analytic setting with autistic children, reveal the structure, function and implications of a two-dimensional area in the life-space of subjects.

Meltzer (1986) proposed that the objects that exist within such a space are perceived by the subject as occupying both height and width, but that no awareness of depth exists in these states – the awareness of depth being a prerequisite for the existence of whole objects, for containment and for communication. Hence, a lack of awareness of the depth dimension would be akin to a sort of ‘mindlessness’.

His understandings follow in the tracks of Klein’s (1955) belief that intrusive identification processes are both an unconscious omnipotent phantasy and a mechanism of defence. Taking into account Klein’s (1946) argument that projective identification can take a pathological form and the distinction made by Bion (1962) between pathological and normal, communicative forms of projective identification, Meltzer (1986) developed his understanding that the inside of an object that is penetrated by intrusive identification is a sort of container, but a container that differs from the transformative one described by Bion. Meltzer et al. (1982) proposed that the failure of the maternal function (Bion’s notion of ‘maternal reverie’) in either holding, containing or transforming projective identificatory mechanisms would precipitate pathological consequences, revealed in the formation of what Meltzer (1986) called a ‘claustrum’.

It is the projective aspects of projective identification that Meltzer contended bring about the creation of this ‘claustrum’ (the contents of these projective processes were initially described by Klein (1930) in relation to the epistemophilic instinct, as being primarily linked to the phantasied interior of the mother’s body).

Meltzer et al. (1982) pointed out that, when projective identification mechanisms take on pathological forms, they ought to be termed ‘intrusive identification’ mechanisms – this term highlighting the manner in which the subject attempts psychically to invade and become one with the other. These attempts by the infant to intrude into the other are given the term ‘overwhelming projective identificatory processes’ by Klein (1946).

Meltzer et al. (1982) noted that the use of the term 'claustrum' ought to be restricted to descriptions of an unconscious phantasy of the external object becoming the recipient of the subject's projective and intrusive identifications, and the term 'container' reserved for 'a more abstract level of discourse' (Meltzer 1982: 200).

Bisagni (2012) observed and described his understanding of adhesive identification in autistic modes of functioning:

The mechanisms of adhesive identification/equation that go together with a two-dimensional psychic functioning (Mitrani 2007) are typical of autistic functioning and must be linked to the dismantling phenomena and to those innate inadequacies that establish a secondary short circuit, preventing the object from being assimilated meaningfully. This type of functioning must be distinguished from three-dimensional object relations, where the object is penetrated and potentially 'known' through projective identification. This also happens, of course, in very serious clinical situations – as in delusions and hallucinatory states, as well as in normal development; when the object takes on a third dimension, even briefly, in an autistic child this phenomenon is clinically significant. (Bisagni 2012: 686)

Hence, in this extract, Bisagni (2012) is pointing out that three-dimensional states of awareness can occur, alongside two-dimensional ones, in autistic modes of functioning. This idea is explored further in the next section.

III.B.i.b Differences between two- and three-dimensional experiences

Outlining his understanding of the differences between two- and three-dimensional experiences and the autistic experience, Bisagni (2012) stated:

Being imprisoned in a three-dimensional internal object through massive projective identification causes an isolated individual to live in an alien and distant world, from which we feel excluded. The autistic child, at least in cases where the dismantling and the two-dimensional use of objects is more pronounced, lives in a non-world made up of dismantled particles; he cannot penetrate the objects in his world and he does not allow the objects in the world to penetrate him, in context with what is metaphorically described as the anxiety of meltdown and dissolution. The surfaces he presses up against are insurmountable barriers to him. (Bisagni 2012: 686)

Reflecting on the manner in which a profoundly and purely autistic experience can shift into a way of functioning that allows for the co-existence of a three-dimensional awareness, Bisagni (2012) noted:

On the contrary, an autistic child who develops a hallucination or a delusion allows himself to enter an object and allows the object to enter him. He thus gains access to a dimension that is other in respect to the strictly autistic dimension, and while this is still a critical state, it does foreshadow scenarios with different meanings. (Bisagni 2012: 686)

Bisagni outlined the different ways of attempting to manage what he described as 'the pain of emptiness' (2012: 687), which can bring about two- or three-dimensional states of awareness:

An intolerable absence can lead to a controlling and two-dimensional hyper-concreteness in the use of the autistic object, or to the palliative concreteness of autistic shapes. Hallucinations compensate in a different way for the pain of emptiness; they displace its recurrence onto a more plastic and three-dimensional level of complexity. (Bisagni 2012: 686)

He furthered this understanding:

An autistic child, at least in cases where the dismantling and the two-dimensional use of objects is more pronounced, lives in a non-world made up of dismantled particles; he cannot penetrate the objects in his world and he does not allow the objects in the world to penetrate him, in connection with what is metaphorically described as the anxiety of meltdown and dissolution. The surfaces he presses against are insurmountable barriers to him. On the contrary, an autistic child who develops a hallucination or a delusion allows himself to enter an object and allows the object to enter into him. He thus gains access to a dimension that is other in respect to the strictly autistic dimension, and whilst this is still a critical state it does foreshadow scenarios with different meanings. (Bisagni 2012: 687)

To conclude, then, two- and three-dimensional experiences are understood by Bisagni (2012) to have a certain plasticity, being open to modification as well as to co-existence or overlap. This understanding has helped me in my own attempts to explore and understand the psychic mechanisms that may underlie hoarding behaviours. It also allows us to think about the notion that Richard (in the TV documentary) may experience different ways of relating to his hoarded objects; perhaps some of his experiences are more two-dimensional and others more three-dimensional.

IV. Methodology

I shall initially give an overview of what a methodology is and does, and then describe which methodologies I used for my thesis, giving a systematic view of the research process I went through.

IV.A. Methodologies in general

Qualitative and quantitative forms of research

The quantitative research method uses measurable data in order to try to formulate facts and uncover patterns. This method of data collection is usually very structured, often including various forms of surveys. Numerical data or data that can be transformed into statistics are core to this type of methodology. Attitudes, opinions, behaviours and other defined variables thus become quantified. Results are often generalised from large population samples.

Willig (2001) remarked that qualitative research, on the other hand, tends to be concerned with meaning: how people make sense of the world and how they experience events. She described how this type of research is interested in the quality and the texture of experience. However, although qualitative research starts with language and meaning, it can reach out into the domain of numbers and variables (in turn, quantitative research starts with numbers and the causal linkages between variables, but can reach out into the domain of stories). Willig (2001) underlined how mixed-methods research seeks to harness both forms of knowing at the same time. Hence, qualitative/narrative and quantitative/pragmatic forms of knowing would complement one another. Popper (1959) proposed that the generation of knowledge should be a piecemeal process, arrived at through the rejection of false hypotheses (hypothetico-deductivism): a slow-growing but continuous process. Paradoxically, Kuhn (1962) proposed that scientific research develops and evolves in leaps and bounds through scientific revolutions leading to shifts in conceptual frameworks or paradigms.

Many researchers adapt and combine methods, in the spirit of a 'bricoleur' (Denzin & Lincoln 2008), with the aim of acceding to the most useful kind of data collection and analysis to answer a particular research question. However, as highlighted by Willig (2001), maintaining a philosophical consistency across the specific methods used and the underlying methodology and epistemology of a study is also necessary.

A research methodology either aims to create theory or to test an already formed hypothesis, which may have come about either as a kind of hunch or from the exploration of a previous piece of work. Hypothesis testing involves initially making observations and formulating a question, the hypothesis being itself the answer to a question. Once the researcher has chosen a hypothesis, they must then propose a testable prediction, which they then test over and over again through the use of data.

Many types of data can be used for theory testing: literature, case studies, field study, transcripts, video footage, etc. These are standard types of data. Data can also be non-standard – for example, data from a reality TV programme, which exists not for the purpose of research but for entertainment. What then would be the use of this kind of non-standard data when employed for research purposes? Data that exists within a reality television programme is data that originated for the purpose of entertainment or public education. When then used as data for research purposes, it will not allow for a direct observation of something to take place, as whatever is being explored and observed as part of the research process itself will actually already have been observed and edited to suit the purposes and agenda of the TV producer or educational body, following their own specifications. Therefore, there may well be distortions of the actual material that has been observed, and the editing will potentially affect the aims of the researcher and their ability to view the data objectively.

However, Sandelowski (1993) noted that, whether we wish to acknowledge it or not, we cannot completely separate ourselves from who we are or from what we already know when exploring data. The theories that we carry influence our research in multiple ways, although we may use them

unconsciously. Included in the research process are data (whether in the form of texts, the recounting of events, videos, etc.) and the observer's interpretations of these events, objects, happenings and actions. There is also the interplay that happens between the data and the researcher in both the gathering and analysing of the data. Although a researcher can try to be as objective as they can, this may not be entirely possible.

Literature – a standard type of data – is a familiar analytic tool that provides a rich source of information to stimulate thinking, asks conceptual questions, and helps readers to develop their ideas on theoretical sampling. Using non-standard types of data, such as TV programmes, can bring about surprisingly interesting and alternative insights into the things being explored: bringing a new perspective to something through allowing for a different type of engagement with the data or an observation of a process to take place. When attempting to understand something, it is never possible to discern all the possible features, multi-layered complexities, links, interactions between processes, patterns and consequences of whatever is being observed. Hence, the more diverse the forms of data used in the endeavour to bring meaning to, understand, or explore something, the greater the potential for coming up with a broader set of ideas and understandings.

One type of analysis appropriate for a TV programme would be thematic analysis, used to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within data. Thematic analysis is a flexible approach that can be used across a range of epistemologies and research questions. The researcher plays an active role in this kind of methodology, searching for certain themes or patterns across an entire data set. In contrast to interpretative phenomenological analysis and other methods such as a narrative discourse, thematic analysis is not wed to any pre-existing theoretical framework and can be used across a variety of theoretical frameworks, as well as in order to do different things with them. It can report experiences, meanings and the reality of participants. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. It can provide a rich thematic description of an entire data

set, allowing the reader to gain a sense of the predominant or important themes, which when identified and analysed serve to reflect the content of the entire data set. Braun and Clarke (2006) contended that this is a particularly useful method for investigating an under-researched area.

IV.B. Methodologies used for this research paper

Qualitative research

I used a qualitative approach that was exploratory in order to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations behind the hoarding process I observed. Psychoanalytic research is very much concerned with narratives – that is, unconscious phantasies, such as the Oedipus complex. As a trained psychoanalytic psychotherapist, I am interested in seeing how a clinical eye can be used for research purposes – hence my interest in undertaking a professional doctorate in this vein.

My aim in undertaking this thesis was to help further my initial hypothesis (which was that the hoarding process observed appeared to reflect core features of autism) and to bring insight and meaning to the phenomena I was aiming to understand. My exploration process was largely subjective and experiential. The approach used was a social science one, which explored already existing categories (autism) in relation to data taken from video footage of a hoarding process. The methodology used gave me the opportunity to use clinical insights as data to formulate a research question. A qualitative-based methodology can use semi-structured or unstructured research techniques, some of the more common being focus groups, individual interviews and observational studies. The sample sizes used in qualitative studies are generally small and, in this particular study, a single person was observed. The single case study is discussed later.

Hence, I used one type of qualitative methodology from the wide range of existing ones that Flick (1998) describes as being very different from one another. He proposed that, in terms of the ways in which they collect and analyse data, the philosophical grounding they claim and the types of

questions they seek to address, these methods can be divided into two groups. The first is organised around a separation of the researcher and the object of research. The second uses methods whose goal is to operationalise personal, subjective experience as a source of data for research purposes. In this study, the latter approach is used.

Dreher (2000) described this second method, which operationalises the researcher's subjective experience, as bringing about a change in the thinking about qualitative psychotherapy research methods; she notes that 'the analyst is rediscovered' (2000: 53) in an attempt to get closer to the phenomena in the analytic situation and to the analytic process. Dreher also remarked that classic psychoanalytic research presents 'single case histories and courses of treatment' (2000: 54), proposing that aggregated single case research, involving a sort of layering of cases, would allow for possible regularities and features of theoretical interest to highlight common patterns.

These forms of studies are based on implicit intuitivist assumptions: vignettes from different cases highlight connections between cases in order to justify and bring evidence to the researcher's reflections. Several case observations, and the further unfolding of theoretical arguments, lead to the development of therapeutic insight.

In this study I used literature on case studies on autism in order to highlight potential connections between two different processes: autism and hoarding. The literature is the body of generalisations inferred in the experience of many researchers. The method was a process of operationalising autism and setting out its essential characteristics, some of these being noted in my observation of hoarding.

A single case study

I was initially concerned that the fact I had used a single case study of hoarding might limit the effectiveness of this research project; however, Yin (2009) proposed that single case studies are commonly used for research purposes.

Yin (2009) gave five instances in which using a single case study might be appropriate:

1. If it represents the critical case in testing a well-formulated theory.
2. If it represents an extreme or a unique case.
3. If it is a representative or typical case.
4. If it is a revelatory case.
5. If it is a longitudinal case.

One of the five rationales that Yin gives is that what is being explored is revelatory:

This situation exists when an investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyse a phenomenon previously inaccessible to social science inquiry. Such conditions justify the use of single-case study on the grounds of its revelatory nature. (Yin 2009: 49)

I have undertaken a single case study, as I felt that this particular study was revelatory; no other such case studies have been conducted that explore the links between autism and hoarding behaviours.

As in this thesis I have observed and explored a process that has not been previously explored, it would reflect Yin's (2009) understanding that a single case study can have a revelatory nature.

Hinshelwood (2013) suggested that, when undertaking a single case study, not only does a precise research design need to be followed, but the question must be posed in such a way as to ensure that variables are kept to a minimum. He underlined the single-case potential for new revolutionary understanding, giving as an example Columbus' expedition to determine whether the Earth was indeed flat, as was believed at the time: 'We know the result. It was a decisive one: the earth is round. The point is that it needed only one expedition' (Hinshelwood 2013: 68). Hinshelwood (2013) noted that Columbus' discovery 'is a good example of a decisive single case-study, so decisive in fact that it radically changed the course of European and world history to the present day' (2013: 69).

This is a single case study in physical science, and such a study can be typical of natural science.

Hinshelwood (2013) argued that, when using a single case study, it is crucial that a single variable is

involved, producing as it does a binary question – it would take only one answer to invalidate the generalisation made. He also pointed out, however, that:

a generalisation that may be flawed may still have some value and cannot simply be dismissed as being false; sometimes, when an initial theory does not hold, it is possible to reformulate it in order to gain further insight: modern experimental design employing the principle of falsification and a single case is quite adequate in many instances for describing the progress of psychoanalytic knowledge. (2013: 71)

Hinshelwood's (2013) point about Columbus' discovery demonstrates the power of the single case study in natural science. He also described how, in psychoanalysis, a debate between Ferenczi and Abraham was settled by a single case study: Ferenczi (1921) had argued that a tic was an example of an auto-erotic, objectless discharge of impulses, while Abraham (1921) declared that his own analysis of tics had found a double relation to the object. Hinshelwood noted:

In principle, one single clinical case in which an object relation is demonstrated is enough to decide against Ferenczi's generalisation and therefore to allow the alternative theory instead. Can we find a case? (Hinshelwood 2013: 113)

A case in which a tic was linked with an object-relation was soon reported.

Unlike the example above, the single case study in this thesis is not testing an argument but is instead building up an argument (that hoarding has similar features to those observed taking place in autism). It does not use the same research design or logic. My research design and logic will be described shortly.

Heuristic approach

Moustakas (1994) asserts that a heuristic methodology emphasises the researcher's connectedness with, and relationship to, the phenomenon observed. This can lead to a discovery of the researcher's own personal motivation for the enquiry as well as the discovery of core meanings inherent in the data explored.

A heuristic method of investigation is often perceived as involving a process of personal immersion in a topic or a question, this immersion leading to new insights, the validity of which is exposed to critical and/or affirming responses from others. A willingness by the researcher to surrender to the research question, to the extent that a personal transformation can take place, is part of this type of approach. The initial themes emerging arise in large part from the observer's own personal space.

I used this approach in my own attempts to explore the potential connections and differences between the features of autism and those of an extreme hoarding process. By exploring my own subjective experiences in relation to my observations of the hoarding process, and then comparing my impressions with existing understandings of core autistic features, a gradual emergence of potential core meanings regarding the hoarding process developed. My interest and resolve to try to understand what meanings may lie behind what I saw taking place grew. I also began to consider what personal significance this project might have for me, as I felt so passionate about it. I think that I am sensitive to the struggles inherent in separation/fusion issues, as I have been drawn to and interested by the form these take in other situations (art). Using a heuristic approach heightened the curiosity and fascination I felt towards the extreme hoarding process I was observing.

The process itself

In formulating my initial hypothesis, I used a process called induction. In order, then, to test out this hypothesis I used a deductive approach, operationalising key features of autism against data collected from my observations of the extreme hoarding process.

During my explorations for this research study, I was surprised by the dearth of existing psychoanalytic writings directly exploring the potential unconscious reasons involved with hoarding, and of writings linking hoarding and autism. The aim of my research project was to bring meaning and understanding to the phenomena observed. This thesis started with the observation of a TV programme. Watching it led me to experience a sense that the subject (Richard) was somehow attempting to fuse with his objects. This was more a 'felt' sense than a thought process. I had read

Tustin's writings and was aware of her descriptions of the manner in which autistic subjects attempt to fuse with objects in the outside world. I then wondered if the extreme hoarding process I was observing could be linked to similar psychic experiences.

My research project therefore started as a result of an initial encounter with video footage from a TV programme on hoarding and an idea that what I was observing appeared to reflect something about autistic processes. In order to test this hypothesis, I operationalised core features of autism against data from this video footage. This procedure helped to ascertain what similarities and differences could be observed between the two processes.

A phenomenological approach

The phenomenological approach encourages an interpretation of the meaning of what is being observed rather than the use of a systematic open-coding technique. I used this approach in my attempts to elucidate the essence of the phenomena I was observing, and to elucidate the essential dynamics of such phenomena, as they appeared to exist in the concrete experience of the subject (Richard, the hoarder). The phenomenological approach I took involved the following steps. As I watched video footage of an extreme hoarding process, I was left with a sense that Richard was attempting somehow to merge with his hoarded objects. Throughout her writings Tustin writes about how autistic subjects attempt to confuse themselves with outside objects: trying to fuse with them in order to avoid an experience of being separate. I decided to explore whether something similar may be happening in the extreme hoarding process, and whether there were observable correlations between the two processes. I therefore decided to operationalise key features of autism, as described by Tustin, against the phenomena I observed taking place in the extreme hoarding process. I repeated this process many times, whilst writing down my thoughts and interpretations of what I felt I was perceiving; as I proceeded, the behaviour I was observing began to take on more meaning.

The research design

I used psychoanalytic texts and case studies on autism in order to elicit the core features of autism that could be applied to the hoarding process observed. The testing involved operationalising the features of autism, and examining the documentary and my notes for these features. The lack of any psychoanalytic literature (or any other research literature) that explicitly links hoarding and autism suggests that:

- Research on hoarding from an object-relational perspective is sorely needed.
- Research on the potential links between autism and hoarding needs to take place.

In conducting my literature review, I therefore tried to discover whether there were any existing psychoanalytic writings on either autism or hoarding that could help further my own explorations. This is described earlier in the thesis, in the 'Literature Review' section.

Keeping memos

Throughout the whole process I kept memos and created diagrams. This enabled the incubation and development of my emerging understandings. In these memos I explored the different aspects I was trying to think about:

- I wondered what psychoanalytic understandings could help us find meaning in the safety risks Richard exposed himself to through his hoarding behaviours.
- I free-associated (or went through a process of reverie) regarding what possible meanings the hoarding process was expressing, or attempting to communicate, that could help us understand it. Could it represent an attempt to hold on to the mother's gaze? (Bollas's (1974) notions of the transformational object). Could it be an attempt to be held in mind by the mother? Or to manage the experience of loss of a sense of wholeness through trying to merge with what was other?

A further description of these memos can be found in the 'Discussion' section of this thesis, which explores a clinical interpretation of hoarding as stimulated by my associating it with separation trauma and autism.

Countertransference

Countertransference is a clinical psychoanalytic concept, understood (Sandler et al. 1992; Heimann 1950) as coming about due to the demands of the psychoanalytic process, where the analyst aims to scan his reactions to the patient in his attempts to understand the patient's communications. Dreher (2000) argues that there are contrasting approaches to understanding the notion of countertransference. Freud (1905) initially equated countertransference with the analyst's own transference to his patient, and saw it as 'an obstruction to the analyst's understanding of the patient' (Sandler et al. 1992: 83). Others after Freud (including Fliess 1953; Balint 1949; Heimann 1950, Kernberg 1975) saw it as being 'the total emotional reaction of the psychoanalyst to the patient in the treatment situation' (Kernberg 1975: 49). Countertransference is mostly viewed as a phenomenon of fundamental importance in helping the analyst to understand the hidden meaning of the patient's material. The essential idea is that, through his countertransference, the analyst has elements of understanding and appreciation of the processes occurring in his patient; he can be aware that these elements are not immediately conscious and that they can be discovered by the analyst if he monitors his own feelings and associations whilst listening to the patient (Sandler et al. 1992). This scanning of his own feelings and emotional responses to the patient during the therapeutic encounter is understood to allow the analyst to gain further insight into what is going on for the patient. Heimann (1950) was to describe it as 'one of the most important tools... The analyst's counter-transference is an instrument of research into the patient's unconscious' (1950: 81). Poland (1988) described its usefulness in furthering therapeutic results in a clinical setting: 'Clinical analysis brings to life inner forces within a unique dyadic context that makes implicit meaning meaningful with immediacy and thus permits historical facts to grow into personal truths'

(Poland 1988: 341–369). Holmes (2014) has appraised the use of countertransference in qualitative research, exploring its mapping from a clinical concept into the research setting, describing its various manifestations, and offering alternative suggestions for the use of the researcher’s feeling and bodily states. Hinshelwood (2016) delved into an exploration of what it is that continues to make countertransference a challenge for psychotherapists and psychoanalysts, his insightful writings throwing much-needed light on both the connections as well as the contradictions between its various understandings. Hinshelwood and Stamenova (2018) noted that there does not exist an accepted standard form of research on countertransference outside of the clinical practice of psychoanalysis, so they proposed a variety of non-clinical methods for collecting and analysing countertransference data.

Much has been written about countertransference, or the ‘clinical eye/ear’. I engage with it here only as far as it brings meaning to the experiences and thoughts I had when I viewed the television programme. Indeed, although I was obviously not actually in a clinical setting or a clinical relationship with Richard, the impressions I had when viewing his hoarding behaviours in the TV programme appear to reflect those experiences that come about for me during my work with patients.

A clinical approach to the data

This is a method of research into subjective experience and is therefore different from other sciences that research physical and material things. As a psychoanalytic psychotherapist I am interested in seeing how a clinical eye can be used for research purposes, and so was interested in undertaking a professional doctorate with this aim.

The manner in which I engaged with the data was initially from the position of a television viewer intrigued by what she saw, but then I also started listening to and observing things with what is sometimes called a ‘third ear’, allowing myself to flow with what I was seeing, just letting images and thoughts appear, without trying to understand them or give them meaning, and without attempting

to analyse them. Whilst I watched the TV programme, snippets of Baudelaire's poem '*Correspondances*' (Baudelaire 1957: 13) came to mind, as well as pictures reflecting words from his poem '*L'Invitation au Voyage*' (Baudelaire 1957: 58), a poem that I have always loved. These poems describe experiences of and longing for fusion between self and other, and of multi-sensory environments. Perhaps these impressions and the way in which my interest developed because of them resulted in part from my clinical experience, as they are the sort of links that could come more easily to clinicians. Although I did not really pay these experiences much attention at the time, as I think I was really pulled into the shock value of the TV show, they would make a lot of sense to me later on, highlighting as they did the phenomena (core autistic features) that this thesis has explored. However, as these thoughts regarding artistic creativity are not actually a part of this thesis, they will simply appear again in the 'Discussion' section.

I had a patient at the time, a young woman in her early twenties, who had just completed a degree in fine art and who, as a child, had been diagnosed as having Asperger's syndrome. During our sporadic therapy sessions, she would sometimes talk about the difficulties she experienced when returning home to visit her mother, whom she described as being a hoarder. My patient also believed that she had her own hoarding habits. This patient had described her difficulties in trying to relate to others as individuals with their own views and opinions. She had been arrested and charged following her having stalked a man whom she was attracted to. When in session with her, I would have a strong sense that she seemed to wish to deny her own vulnerability as well as her need for others. In this, she reflected my impression of Richard – both individuals appearing to find it difficult to share in some of the realities perceived by others, as well as having difficulties in their relationships with others. Both subjects appeared to me to experience difficulties that lay at the root of their personalities.

I decided to apply to do a professional doctorate, and, as I looked for a supervisor, I found a description of Bob Hinshelwood online, where his interest and deep knowledge of symbolisation

processes and of the work of Melanie Klein struck me and led me to ask him if he would supervise me.

I started with a hypothesis that hoarding may be a result of and a response to the experience of separation/fusion trauma that psychoanalytic writings describe as lying at the core of autistic modes of functioning. For ease of understanding I will describe my research process as two steps.

- Step 1: From my experience of witnessing the extreme hoarding process, I was struck by the impression that there was something about the way that Richard (the hoarder) interacted with his objects, as his behaviours seemed to reflect an attempt to try and fuse with them. I mentioned above that there may have been something about my clinical training, and my use of countertransference, that led me to this experience when watching Richard's behaviour.
- This made me think of descriptions of autism. I then wondered if the extreme hoarding process, may, like autism, be the result of separation/fusion trauma. This was an inductive process that led to my need to find a way to test it out, to deduce whether it may have some validity.
- Step 2: I needed to deduct, to test out my initial hypothesis. In order to do this, I decided to operationalise key features of autism against data from the video footage on hoarding. As part of the research process I cross-referenced all my findings in the hope that this would bring greater clarity, comparing the features from the literature review on autism with the features that stood out for me in the documentary. I found that there existed both similarities and differences between the two processes – the differences noted being just as interesting as the similarities.

As the experiences I had – snippets of Baudelaire's poetry popping into my mind – when watching the hoarding process sparked my curiosity, I became interested in the notion that creative works of art may throw light on the links between the extreme hoarding process I was observing and some of

the descriptions of autistic forms of functioning that I read about in the psychoanalytic literature. I looked at various artworks, including Schwitters' *Merzbau* and Baudelaire's poetry, in order to explore them for reflections of what I felt I was observing going on in the hoarding process. Although further on in this thesis I do give a snapshot of my thoughts in relation to this, I am aware that in order to do this exploration justice it would have to be the subject of much research and debate, which this current thesis cannot undertake. Although I was disappointed by my understanding that an enquiry into potential links with artworks would need to be regarded as a separate project, I was also aware that it would be one that could grow out of this one, therefore allowing me to note that the value of this current thesis is that it can have relevance elsewhere. Indeed, it would be worth investigating if such a project could grow out of this one, and whether it may throw unexpected light on the process of aesthetic creation. All I wish to do, therefore, in this current thesis is to point out that there is something about the attempt to manage loss that can be observed through the aesthetic process, and that the reactions to loss that lie at the root of the aesthetic process may be connected with those evident in both hoarding and autism.

Attempts to establish validity for my own subjective observations

I envisaged that my training and my work as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist would help to minimise the subjective distortions of my interpretations. I am aware, however, that my evidence is a product of the 'halo effect', and that other narratives might have been neglected. In order to try to manage the potential for subjective bias, I asked two lay friends to watch the documentary, and then explored with them what it had elicited for them; what their own impressions of the hoarding process were. I then asked them to read my interpretations of Richard's behaviours and to let me know what they felt about those. The auditing process that I followed was an informal one. I showed my interpretations to ordinary people who were not specifically trained in psychoanalytic ideas or practice, but who would have perhaps an ordinary, intelligent view of human beings.

In order to minimise subjective bias in any future, more lengthy study, it would be useful to set up a larger-scale project, exploring the experiences of many other observers, whilst also taking a more formal approach to the discussions. In this current study I used my own countertransference as well as the subjective impressions of the two lay-people; this process was less to do with a psychoanalytic or psychotherapeutic understanding of things than an experiential one. An ordinary process of empathy was used, of trying to feel one's way into what Richard was doing, and how it appeared to somebody who was an onlooker.

Results of my attempts to validate my own observations

When I asked my two lay friends to report on their impressions, they both described their sense that there was something protective, encapsulating and very sensory going on in the hoarding process: that Richard seemed to be using objects to create a sort of protective shield around himself, but that there also seemed to be an attempt by Richard almost to try to disappear into his agglomerations, which they felt must create a very rich sensory environment around him. I am aware of the proviso that, as these were two good friends whom I have known for a number of years, they may have similar intuitive responses to my own, or perhaps they were trying to please me. I did not explore this, as my timescale was short. However, in retrospect, it would have been useful to allow time to deal with the potential subjective biases that come from using personal subjective experience.

Hinshelwood (2013) pointed out that the researcher needs to have a subjective instrument (the clinician's or the researcher's own experience) for any investigation. He noted that this is of course not one hundred per cent reliable, but that, actually, no research instrument is. This fact needs to be acknowledged in order to help limit the effects of research bias.

My research project relies on subjective assessment, from my own clinical approach and through the experiences of my two lay friends. Hence, a repeated, more complex project is required that might involve validating my own intuitive understandings against those of additional people. In order to

manage the potential for subjective biases, more research, including research designs that involve formal auditing from others, needs to be undertaken.

Data collection

As described above, on observing an extreme hoarding process on TV, I operationalised the data accumulated from these observations with the core features of autism.

Description of the TV programme on hoarding

The Channel 4 programme *Obsessive Compulsive Hoarders* was a series that aimed to show that, across Britain, thousands of people live amongst mountains of 'clutter and rubbish'. This particular episode, shown on 21st December 2011, highlighted how a particular individual, Richard, lived a life dominated by his hoarding compulsion. The programme informs us that Richard's hoarding behaviours became more intense since the death of his mother. It emphasises the extent to which Richard's life is dominated by his hoarding behaviours, and how socially isolated and ostracised by most of his fellow villagers he has become. One of Richard's neighbours (Andy) attempts to help him get rid of some of his hoarded items, and the programme shows them appearing to develop a strong friendship in the process.

Richard is shown crawling through his accumulated objects, which appear not only to have invaded every room of his house, but also to have spilled out into and taken over his garden. A psychologist who specialises in hoarding behaviours makes an appearance near the beginning of the programme. His visit to Richard is an attempt to evaluate the severity of his hoarding problem and to help him explore what may lie at the source of his hoarding behaviours. The psychologist is unsuccessful in trying to bring Richard to think about the notion that his extreme hoarding behaviour may result from emotional difficulties.

At the behest of the psychologist, a team of firemen then arrive at Richard's house in order to try and ensure Richard's physical safety by installing fire alarms throughout his house. They are filmed

struggling to make their way through his hoard in their attempt to do so. Their disbelief at what they are witnessing is highlighted as they demonstrate their attempts to crawl through the hoarded material.

The programme highlights Richard's initial inability to perceive the realities of his hoarding behaviour and the real dangers that it represents to his own physical safety. It is only by three quarters of the way through the programme that Richard seems to become aware of the extreme nature of his hoarding compulsion. He voices his distress, his horror and the anxiety he feels regarding his own psychological wellbeing.

V. Data Analysis – Results

The two following tables summarise how findings from the data-collection process have been operationalised against specific features of autism.

- Table 1 summarises some core features of autism. These features are taken from my exploration of Tustin’s work, as well as that of other psychoanalytic writers (details of which can be read in the ‘Literature Review’ section).
- Table 2 highlights specific moments in the documentary where these autistic features appear to find reflection in the hoarding process.

The section following Table 2 will describe in more detail the moments from the documentary that I have listed in the table.

Table 1

Some core features ascribed to autism that appear to find reflection in the extreme hoarding process observed
1. A compulsive attachment to objects
2. A perseverative preoccupation with objects that appears to block out the experience of lack, and to replace the need for others 2.a. Mastery and control 2.b. Ruminatory processes
3. Bizarre ritualistic use of objects
4. Stereotypical behaviours and bodily manoeuvres
5. Blocking out awareness of the difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’ through the use of sensory patternings 5.a. Adhering to the surface of hard objects 5.b. Encapsulations/second-skin formations 5.c. Fusion 5.d. Rhythmical sensory patternings 5.e. Multisensory environments

V.A. Summary of findings

Table 2 highlights moments in the documentary where some core features of autism as described by Tustin and others appear to find reflection in the extreme hoarding process.

Table 2

Core features of autism	Vimeo reference https://vimeo.com/96753156	Duration
1. Compulsive attachment to objects – refusal to be parted from them	00:25–00:34: We are shown Richard’s hoard.	9 seconds
	38:30–39:26: Richard is unwilling to throw out his decaying newspapers.	56 seconds
2. A perseverative preoccupation with objects that appears to block out the experience of lack, and to replace the need for others	06:51–07:03: The hoard has left no space.	12 seconds
	21:22–21:33: Richard attempts to keep his objects in piles.	11 seconds
	19:09–19:14: Richard typing.	5 seconds
	19:17–19:21: Richard sleeping.	4 seconds
	19:34–19:37: Richard carrying his eggs and toast to his chair.	3 seconds
	19:46–19:51: Richard eating his eggs and toast.	5 seconds
2.a. Mastery and control	05:51–06:05: Danger of collapsing piles.	28 seconds

2.b. Ruminatory processes	38:12–39:25: Richard moves things around, but does not throw anything out.	1 minute 13 seconds
	21:20–21:36: Richard amongst piles of objects.	16 seconds
3. Bizarre ritualistic use of objects	00:25–00:34: Richard crawls through his hoarded objects.	9 seconds
4. Stereotypical behaviours and bodily manoeuvres	09:56–11:09: Richard’s behaviours and movements appear to follow a precise set of rules.	1 minute 13 seconds
	04:22–04:39: Richard manoeuvres himself through his hoard.	16 seconds
5. Blocking out awareness of the difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’ through the use of sensory patternings	03:50–04:30: Richard squeezes himself through his hoard.	40 seconds
5.a. Adhering to the surface of hard objects		
5.b. Encapsulations/second-skin formations	04:43–05:08: Richard’s hoard appears to encapsulate him.	25 seconds
	10:31–11:38: Richard’s hoard appears to encapsulate him.	1 minute 7 seconds
	01:11–01:41: Richard’s hoarding has alienated him from others, encapsulating him both physically and emotionally (he cannot see that he has a problem).	30 seconds

	13:36–13:53: Richard’s hoarding has alienated him from others.	17 seconds
	18:13–18:19: Expressions of anger towards Richard.	6 seconds
5.c. Fusion	00:00–00:34: There is hardly any space between Richard and his hoarded objects.	34 seconds
5.d. Rhythmical sensory patternings	03:46–04:39: Richard shows how he pushes his body through his hoard of objects. These bodily movements appear to have particular patterns, and the objects he pushes up against may allow him particular sensory experiences.	53 seconds
5.e. Multi-sensory environments	04:53–05:09: Richard’s hoarded items appear to have formed a multi-sensory encapsulating presence.	16 seconds
	06:30–06:52: Richard’s hoarding has spread across boundaries, creating a multi-sensory environment within which he lives.	22 seconds
	21:20–21:36: As Richard is shown attempting to rearrange his piles of objects, they make a variety of noises as they bounce around the densely packed piles.	26 seconds

The next section explores these findings in more detail.

Exploration of the video footage where features of autism can be observed in the documentary on hoarding

The data collection and operationalisation identified several core features of autism that appeared to find some form of reflection in the extreme hoarding process, as well as several core autistic features that could not be observed in any form in the extreme hoarding process.

I will now describe in more detail how some of these features, argued by psychoanalytic writers as being core to autistic modes of functioning, appear to be taking place in the extreme hoarding process observed.

1. A compulsive attachment to objects – refusal to be parted from them

Richard appears to have formed compulsive attachments to his hoarded objects as he cannot bring himself to throw any of them away. He becomes quite defensive when being teased regarding his emphatic refusal to throw out a threadbare pink umbrella:

Transcript (00:25–00:34):

- Andy, holding up a threadbare, broken umbrella: *'That's rubbish, really. You have to let go of that!'*
- Richard: *'No! It's got all kinds of saveable bits and pieces on it!'*
- Andy: *'There's nothing on it!'*
- Richard, emphatically: *'It's got spares!'*
- Andy: *'So you wanna keep it?'*
- Richard: *'Yes!'*
- Andy, looking and sounding as though he can't believe what he is hearing: *'No you...'*
- Richard, visibly agitated: *'Yes! Yes! Yes!'*
- Andy: *'But that's no good for anything is it?'*

- Richard: *'Yes – for spares. You can't go through everything and just keep saying, "Rubbish! Rubbish! Rubbish!"'*

Richard seems to become agitated and distressed at the possibility of being separated from some of his hoarded objects. He strenuously refuses to throw them out, putting forward rational arguments for his decision. These objects are in very visible states of decomposition or fragmentation, and are no longer usable for the purpose for which they were intended.

Transcript (38:30–39.26)

- Andy, pointing to the pile of visibly decomposing newspapers: *'This is all rubbish I presume, yeah?'*
- Richard mumbles something under his breath, without looking at Andy.
- Andy: *'Why isn't it rubbish? Look at that!'* He points to the mould and decay on the newspapers.
- Richard: *'Oh! I know some of it is like that, but some of it...'*
- Andy: *'They're all stuck together!'*

Richard's observable distress at the possibility of having to throw out these fragmented, decomposing objects (umbrella and newspapers) suggests Tustin's (1980) descriptions of the autistic child's reactions to the loss of one of his objects and her understanding that the loss of an autistic object is experienced as a loss of a body part by the autistic subject.

2. A perseverative preoccupation with objects

For clarity and more detail, I have broken this section down according to three distinct headings: preoccupation with objects, mastery and control, and ruminatory processes

The television programme highlights Richard's preoccupation with his hoarded objects: he appears to spend most of his time ensconced within his hoard, apparently lacking any desire for the company of others.

Richard's preoccupation with his hoarded objects seems to leave him no space to experience a need for relationships with other people: he sleeps and eats alone and all his activities revolve around ritual-like behaviours linked to his hoarding. He is seen churning objects, rearranging piles of objects, eating his daily two boiled eggs whilst perched among his hoarded objects, etc.

The apparently compulsive activities linked to his hoarded objects – his constant touching of, rearranging of and crawling through these objects – reflects Tustin's (1980) descriptions of how autistic subjects are so intensely preoccupied by their objects that any other needs are blocked out (see <https://vimeo.com/96753156> 06:51–07:03, 21:22–21:33).

In the following clips, Richard is carrying out what appear to be ritualised, regimented daily activities.

He ordinarily undertakes these in complete isolation, ensconced within his surrounding hoard:

19:09–19:14: Richard typing

19:17–19:21: Richard sleeping

19:34–19:37: Richard carrying his eggs and toast to his chair

19:46–19:51: Richard eating his eggs and toast

Again, these clips highlight Richard's extreme isolation from others and the manner in which his interactions with his objects appears entirely to dominate his experience of life.

2.a. Mastery and control

We are shown how Richard repeatedly sorts through and rearranges piles of hoarded objects. This behaviour seems to reflect Tustin's (1990) descriptions of the manner in which autistic subjects attempt to control, define and gain a sense of mastery over their experience of the world.

The following clip shows Richard's apparent surprise on suddenly realising that one of the piles of objects that he has created has shifted by itself, without his having initiated this change. His reaction perhaps highlights his consternation and disbelief that his hoarded objects are not, in fact, under his complete control:

Transcript (04:22)

Richard: 'Ooh! Nooo! You know what?! You see that!? It wasn't provoked was it? It just does it on its own. The fact that my... pissed off! OK.'

Richard does not use any of the objects in his possession for the purposes that they were originally intended. He appears, instead, to gain some form of gratification from constantly rearranging them: controlling and maintaining their immediate and constant presence around him. From observing Richard's manipulations of his objects, we can only infer that Tustin's descriptions of 'pathological auto-sensuous objects' (1983: 124) may reflect, at least to some extent, Richard's own use of his hoarded objects. As mere observers of the hoarding process, we can only infer that some part of Richard's behaviour may be aimed at eliciting 'the sensations that he wants, just when and how he wants them' (Tustin 1983: 124).

Richard's goal of building an archive out of his hoarded newspapers also brings to mind Muensterberger's (1994) understanding of the collector's attempts to experience a sense of mastery and an avoidance of uncertainty. The following clip highlights this ambition.

Transcript (05:10–05:37)

Richard: 'The long-term objective is to construct and maintain an archive of papers and magazines. I know you can get newspaper libraries as such, but I was intending to scan the various information into a computer so that I could then access all the information electronically.'

By wishing to create a digital archive that would contain the information held in the newspapers, Richard could be attempting to ensure that he can always have access to it. By storing it electronically he is ensuring, via an impossible fantasy, that the information he wishes to possess is never going to be subject to decay or to destruction. He may be attempting to ensure that he will never need to experience the loss of these 'objects' that he wishes to hold on to.

2.b. Ruminatory processes

Hoarding is a repetitious, unbroken process of agglomeration. Richard is preoccupied by constantly sorting and rearranging his hoarded objects. This behaviour finds reflection in Tustin's (1972) understanding of the experience of familiarity brought about by the autistic subject through the repetitive use of autistic shapes and objects.

Richard is shown churning his objects (putting them into different piles in order to 'deal with them later'). This churning process – a repetitive activity that is core to hoarding behaviours – appears to highlight an attempt to maintain a sense of continuity and constancy, potentially avoiding any experience of a gap, a lack or a loss. Tustin's (1972) descriptions of the way autistic children will make their food 'repeat' on them, in an attempt to avoid experiencing 'an emptiness or nothingness' (1972: 112), springs to mind in relation to Richard's repetitive churning of his objects. Tustin (1972) described a sort of unending ruminatory process at play in autistic modes of functioning; the hoarding process itself highlights a continuous absorption and reabsorption of accumulated materials that very, very gradually follow the natural order of things and succumb to a process of greater and greater fragmentation. Every object acquired remains as a part of the ever-growing hoard. The churning process is an unbroken one: objects become subject to a gradual, unpreventable process of decomposition.

In the clip from 21:20–21:36, Richard attempts to throw some plastic bottles to the top of a pile of similar items. The things he tries to throw to the top of the pile slip and topple down the pile again. He then throws them up again and they fall back down.

All manner of hoarded material is continually being rearranged and churned: newspapers, juice cartons, plastic milk bottles, egg boxes, etc. Layers upon layers of objects gradually decompose.

3. *Bizarre ritualistic quality of objects*

Richard becomes distressed when urged to throw out a very old, fragmented pink umbrella (which may have belonged to his now deceased mother).

Transcript (00:25–00:34)

- Andy, holding up a threadbare, broken umbrella: *'That's rubbish, really. You have to let go of that!'*
 - Richard: *'No, it's got all kinds of saveable bits and pieces on it.'*
 - Andy: *'There's nothing on it!'*
 - Richard, emphatically: *'It's got spares!'*
 - Andy: *'So, you wanna keep it?'*
 - Richard: *'Yes!'*
- Andy, looking and sounding as though he can't believe what he is hearing: *'No you...'*
- Richard, visibly distressed: *'Yes! Yes! Yes!'*
 - Andy: *'But that's no good for anything is it?'*
 - Richard: *'Yes – for spares. You can't go through everything and just keep saying, "Rubbish! Rubbish! Rubbish!"'*

Tustin's descriptions of the pseudo-protective qualities allocated by autistic subjects to their objects came to mind for me here, as Richard's reactions could be linked to his experiencing the umbrella, which once belonged to his mother, as a talismanic object providing him with some sort of protection.

He appears to deny, at least to some extent, the extreme damage undergone by the umbrella, attempting to restore its value by declaring it to be useful for 'spares'.

Hence, Richard's reactions also bring to mind Klein's (1930, 1946) understanding of the infant's anxieties of having damaged the envied objects that are part of the mother's body due to his own possessive, sadistic urges (hence the epistemophilic instinct and the urge to repair the object).

My research project argues that Richard's wish to preserve and hold on to the umbrella mentioned in the above extract not only highlights the sense of the hoarded object as being imbued with some sort of talismanic quality, but also potentially reflects his anxiety regarding his own unconscious destructive impulses, echoing Tustin's understanding of the autistic subject's anxiety regarding their epistemophilic instinct and the envious, destructive feelings that accompany it. (Tustin describes the manner in which an autistic child refused to bite up his food but had to have it turned into purée before he would consume it.)

4. *Stereotypical behaviours and bodily manoeuvres*

Richard also demonstrates unusual patterns of movement that appear to be entrenched activities. In the following clip, he can be observed showing the cameraman how he manoeuvres his tray of boiled eggs and toast through his hoarded items, demonstrating how he rocks his body back and forth, adroitly using the momentum generated by this bodily rocking to 'propel' and 'twizzle' himself and his tray through the extremely narrow passageways that still exist in the midst of his hoarded agglomerations.

These rocking and clambering bodily manoeuvres that Richard undertakes reflect Tustin's descriptions of the stereotyped, ritualised movements carried out by autistic children. The following clip highlights this notion.

Transcript (09:56–11:09)

Richard puts two eggs in their egg cups.

09: 56 Richard: 'Two.'

We see Richard trying to carry his tray down a very low, narrow aperture in the midst of hoarded materials.

10:00 Richard: *'That goes up like that and then like that.'*

10:01 Narrator: *'Every aspect of Richard's home life operates to a precise set of rules.'*

Richard demonstrates how he performs these stereotypical repetitive movements as part of his daily routine.

10:06 Richard: *'You have to find a gap big enough to, sort of, accommodate the tray and then, sort of, wriggle it through.'*

10:14 Richard: *'Okay! Now I'm going to have to use my momentum to get through... like that.'*

Watching these bodily manoeuvres, I could not help wondering if Richard may experience pleasure or pride carrying out these agile contortions of his body and of the tray that he carries through his encroaching accumulations of objects.

Alvarez talks about stereotypy (1992: 217) or repetitive forms of behaviour, and the obsessional rituals undertaken by autistic children:

One autistic patient, Mark, can go on engaging in his repetitive rubbing of the table, walking in circles, rubbing the table, walking in circles again for half an hour at the far end of the room whilst my gaze is on him. (1992: 203)

These stereotypical, repetitive, rhythmical movements or bodily manoeuvres are described as being a core characteristic of autistic modes of functioning.

Entrenched, stereotypical, rhythmical activities can also be observed as being undertaken by Richard as he manoeuvres himself through his hoarded objects. This is especially noticeable in the way he squeezes himself through narrow tunnels and apertures, repeatedly twisting and forcing his body into masterful positions and contortions.

In the clip from 04:22–04:39, Richard demonstrates to the camera just how he manoeuvres his body in order to clamber over and through piles of objects, making evident that he is accustomed to squeezing himself into narrow passageways and to crawling or slithering through his hoard of items; all this is part of his daily routine.

Richard appears to experience some pride in demonstrating how he has mastered the art of moving through the treacherous environment that he has himself created through his hoarding process. He does this by contorting his body, and shows the cameraman how to follow him by manipulating, squeezing and propelling his own body through the hoarded objects.

Transcript (04:22–04:39)

Richard: Are you watching me? *Get your leg through like that, lean back that way, so that goes through like that... I'm holding on to a thing up here now, and I'm going to go up in here like that, then go through there like that and then lay yourself, spread your load out so as you can slide through like that. OK? Now do you seriously want to attempt that?*

Cameraman: *Yeah!*

5. Use of sensory patternings

I have divided this section up in order to highlight how the different features described as being linked to the autistic use of sensory patternings find reflection in the hoarding process.

5.a. Adhering to the surface of hard objects

5.b. Encapsulations/second-skin formations/claustrophobia

5.c. Fusion

5.d. Rhythmical sensory patternings

5.e. Multi-sensory environments – merging of sensory experiences

5.a. Adhering to the surface of hard objects

From observing the manner in which Richard physically engages with his hoarded objects, the same idea of a sort of pushing up against and adherence to the surfaces of external objects comes to mind. Richard's hoarding process has created a situation where his body is constantly made to press up against his hoarded material as he manoeuvres himself through it, clambering over it.

Tustin (1983, 1986) understood that the autistic subject adheres to the surfaces of his objects in order to gain a sense of bodily definition. This thesis argues that Richard's hoarding behaviour may be an attempt to gain a similar experience.

In the following clip, Richard demonstrates to the camera how he pushes his way through his piles of objects, climbing over and through them, his body squeezing up against them (see <https://vimeo.com/96753156> from 04:22, danger of collapsing piles; see transcript on page 112).

Tustin (1986, 1990) described how this process of adhering to or pressing up against the surface of things is continuously experienced and reinforced through the repetitive sensation-generating use of autistic objects. Richard's constant need to push his body up against his hoarded objects in order to move between them to carry out his basic living requirements brings to mind Tustin's (1986, 1990) descriptions.

5.b. Encapsulation/second-skin formations/claustra

Richard lives within an enveloping, densely packed accumulation of hoarded items. His extreme hoarding behaviour has brought about a monstrous physical agglomeration of objects, within which he lives and crawls around. The growth of these accumulations has, to all appearances, created a sort of encapsulating structure around Richard who appears to have become alienated and disengaged from the world outside of his envelope and of his hoarding activities.

The television programme underlines the fact that no one else has actually entered Richard's home since the death of his mother 15 years previously. Whoever might wish to enter his property is shown to have to be willing to 'crawl between the rooms of a house, five foot above the floor on accumulated clutter' (statement by the psychologist who came to visit Richard).

Richard does not appear to have any wish to engage with the external world, we do not have a sense that he has invested in any relationships with others, and he does not describe any interest in carrying out activities outside his house. (He does, however, do the paper round in the village.)

Most of his time appears to be spent preoccupied with his hoarded objects. As observers, we get the impression that he is so engrossed in his hoarding process that he does not feel the need for anything else in his life (see section 'A perseverative preoccupation with objects').

Hence, the physical results of his hoarding behaviour – agglomerations of objects that have not only taken over his house but also his garden – appear to have almost completely encapsulated him on both a physical and concrete level, as well as emotionally.

Richard's garden is full of accumulations of all kinds of broken and decaying items (including old cars as well as newspapers). This has led to resentful, angry reactions from his neighbours and fellow villagers. The TV footage shows some of the villagers, who do not seem to know Richard personally, expressing moral outrage and destructive phantasies towards him. The encapsulating presence of the hoard therefore appears to have alienated Richard from the world and from the people around him.

The following clip highlights the manner in which Richard's agglomerations have created a sort of blockade, stopping anyone from entering his house.

Transcript (03:32–03:48)

Narrator: *Richard has lived in the village his entire life, but no one has got close to his front door in years.*

Richard, showing the cameraman how to can gain access to the entrance of his house by manoeuvring himself through piles of hoarded objects:

Richard: *This is where it gets complicated. Just here, you watch me and try and imitate me – OK?*

Voice: *But no one has got close to his front door, let alone stepped inside, since his mother died six years ago.*

The following clip gives a sense of the encapsulation brought about by Richard's hoarding process as he is shown navigating his way through his hoard.

The camera follows Richard, the soles of whose shoes loom large as he appears to be attempting to slither his way through a sort of tunnel or an aperture in his hoarded material.

Transcript (04:43–05:08)

Narrator: *Every room of Richard's three-bedroom bungalow is packed full to the rafters.*

Richard is shown crawling through his accumulations and is then seen standing at a lower level than the cameraman.

Richard: *This is the kitchen basically, or what is left of it: chock to the ceiling with literally, with, well, clutter basically. Total and absolute utter madness and I am the first to admit it.*

As mere observers, we cannot assume that Richard actually has a sense of being encapsulated by his hoarding process. However, he does express something about this feeling in the following clip.

Transcript (11:28–11:38)

Richard: *It's not a life it's just an existence – at the moment, anyway. Someone said to me the other day, did I live here? I said, no, I exist here. Subtle difference.*

In the above extract, Richard appears to be aware on some level that his hoarding behaviours may be affecting his ability to live a fuller, freer life (perhaps that they are a defence against loss, or unconscious anxieties regarding loss).

Although he has lived in the village his whole life, the encapsulating nature of Richard's hoarding behaviours appears to have alienated him from other inhabitants of his village. Some of the residents talk about Richard and his hoarding behaviours as though he were a complete stranger amongst them, a mad and/or immoral individual.

Some express aggressive, destructive phantasies towards him as in the following clips.

Transcript (01:11–01:15; 13:36–13:53; 18:13–18:19; 20:29–20:31)

13:36–13:53 (village resident who is driving past Richard's property):

We've had to put up with this rubbish for many years. That's why I'm wondering if there's anything being done to resolve the situation. Even if he was a neighbour, I'd probably stay away from him as much as possible – he's a weird character... It is immoral in my opinion.

20:27–20:31 (another resident of the village):

Mr Wallace [Richard] only comes up in the sense of, do we avoid him or do we go past him?

01:11–01:15 (another resident still):

We've been very nice. Nobody's gone round and, you know, gone round and threatened him. Frankly, there are times I walk past there and think: I wonder if a match would have any effect – you'd really probably need a bit of gasoline as well.

The narrator of the television programme explains that the villagers have tried to obtain a court order in an attempt to force Richard to get rid of the accumulations in his garden. In response, Richard himself took the village council to court, winning his case. This angered many of the villagers, as the following extract attests.

Transcript (18:13–18:19)

An individual speaking from behind the bar at the village pub:

Let me assure you, when he got away with it people were screaming blue bloody murder, and they really were extremely, extremely cross.

These extracts suggest the extent to which Richard's hoarding behaviours have alienated him from those who live around him. They have contributed to isolating him from others – encapsulating him, as it were. The above comments highlight the hostility with which Richard is perceived by his neighbours, but by which Richard himself does not appear to be affected. Indeed, he does not appear to feel hurt or to be upset by this evident hostility from other villagers and I would question

whether his encapsulating hoarding behaviours contribute to his apparent lack of concern. In describing one of her autistic subjects, Tustin (1983) noted: 'When he was hurt, he displayed very considerable insensitivity to pain and felt nothing of the desire, so universal with little children, to be comforted and petted' (Tustin 1983: 119). Does Richard's apparent lack of concern perhaps find some correlation with Tustin's (1983) remarks about her autistic patient's lack of response to pain?

5.c. Fusion

As highlighted above, Richard is enveloped by his hoarded objects, which not only appear to encroach on his physical body, squeezing up against its boundaries, but also seem to threaten to collapse on top of him, burying him within.

Tustin (1974) described the autistic subject's attempt to confuse his own body parts with those of external objects and other people through activities that attempt to bring about a sense of confusion of boundaries between what is 'self' and what is 'not-self'. Her descriptions appear to reflect what can be observed in the hoarding process, as is highlighted in the following clip.

Transcript (04:53–05:09)

Richard can be seen squeezing himself through tiny passageways within his agglomerated materials.

Richard: *I'm absolutely stuck now. There's just enough room for me to squeeze through here.*

The above clip brings to mind Tustin's (1981) notion of how autistic subjects appear to try and plug up any existing space between themselves and their objects. Richard similarly seems to wish to draw into himself the 'not-me' objects he has amassed around him, leaving very little space within which to move.

Mitrani (1994) understands that, in autistic forms of functioning, the idea of getting into something becomes replaced by that of having contact with something, in order to bring about an experience of fusion with the external world. This sense of the autistic subject's attempt to maintain the most minimal space between 'self' and 'other', in order to bring about a feeling of fusion or merger with

what is 'not-self', finds reflection in the manner that Richard's hoarding behaviours have created a living situation where his agglomerated objects have invaded his house from floor to ceiling, forcing him to push himself up against them and through them in order to move around.

Transcript (04:53–05:09)

04:53 Narrator: *Every room of Richard's three-bedroom bungalow is packed full to the rafters.*

05:09 Richard: *This is the kitchen basically, or what is left of it: chock to the ceiling with literally, with, well, clutter basically.*

5.d. Rhythmical sensory patternings

Richard is enveloped by his objects, which he is seen constantly rearranging in their piles: continuously touching, manipulating and reordering them. I argue that Richard's objects and the way he is engaging with them may provide him with a deeply sensuous experience. His body is inescapably forced continuously to press up against these objects as he climbs and crawls through the narrow apertures and tunnels in this deeply sensorial environment.

These hoarded objects do not appear to be used for their original purposes. Richard's repetitive activities involve an idiosyncratic, apparently meaningless use of them.

The following clip highlights the way Richard has created an ever-present, tightly ensconcing sensory environment within which his body is immersed and within which he is in constant physical contact with the surrounding hoarded objects.

Transcript (00:00–00:34)

00:34 Richard: *I'm just about stuck now. There's just enough room for me to squeeze through. Oh, blimey! Christ! Oh! This is getting ridiculous now!*

The highly sensory nature of this extreme hoarding process is explored in the next section of this study.

5.e. Multi-sensory environments – merging of sensory experiences

Although mere observation of Richard's various repetitive activities does not allow us to categorically affirm that his experiences are indeed akin to the multi-sensory ones described by Tustin (1998), the sheer bulk of objects with which Richard has surrounded himself, and the varied yet very obvious stages of decomposition they have sustained throughout the years, attest to the hoard being a deeply layered, sensorial environment.

Richard has enveloped himself within agglomerated layers of all kinds of objects (empty milk and juice cartons, newspapers, toilet rolls, etc.) that have accumulated over many years. The compacted nature of these accumulations, their sheer bulk and the diversity of the materials involved allow for the observation that they must bring about a multi-sensory experience for anyone living in their midst. Richard's hoarding behaviours appear to have created a milieu of inviting experiences of equivalency between kinetic, olfactory, visual and auditory impressions (Stern 1985).

The following clips allow for a sense of this potentially multi-sensory enveloping experience:

<https://vimeo.com/96753156> (04:56–05:09)

<https://vimeo.com/96753156> (06:30–06:52)

<https://vimeo.com/96753156> (21:20–21:36)

Summary of findings

The above examples help to highlight why my observations of an extreme hoarding process have led me to hypothesise that it appears to reflect some core autistic features. These features do not take place in exactly the same manner as they do in the descriptions given of extreme forms of autistic functioning, and although they appear to be present in the hoarding process in some manner, there is a difference in their quality.

It is also important to underline that, whilst the autistic features explored above may be taking place in some form in the hoarding process, other features that are only visible in hoarding and not in autism are also taking place. I will present these in the next section ‘Differences between autism and hoarding’, and aim to explore my understanding that autism and hoarding are not the same condition, but may share both similar and different underlying psychic processes.

V.B. Differences between autism and hoarding

Table 3. Some of the main differences observed between descriptions of autism and the extreme hoarding process

Differences	Vimeo reference https://vimeo.com/96753156
<p>1. Replacing an object (autism) versus accumulations of objects (hoarding) – see page 121</p>	<p>11:08–11:16 8 seconds</p>
<p>2. Richard’s behaviours are not purely stereotypical or rhythmical but have a functional and a relational quality – see page 122</p> <p>Desire to build an archive – see page 132</p> <p>Demonstration to cameraman how he gets around – see page 123</p>	<p>05:10–05:37 27 seconds</p> <p>04:22–04:39 17 seconds</p>
<p>3. Unlike autism, hoarding is not characterised by a complete lack of symbolisation and representation ability. Richard is able to perceive</p>	<p>38:30–38:42 (newspapers) 12 seconds</p>

the objects around him as separate from himself – see page 124.	
4. Richard is able to communicate with others, whereas in extreme autism the subject does not relate to the other as a separate human being and cannot communicate with them.	10:06–10:14 (communicates with cameraman) 8 seconds
5. Autistic subjects are completely out of reach of shared realities, whereas Richard can participate in shared realities that lie outside his compulsive hoarding process – see page 125	00:36–00:55 (Richard defends himself in court) 19 seconds

V.C. Exploration of these differences observed between descriptions of autism and the extreme hoarding process

1. Replacing an object (autism) versus accumulations of objects (hoarding)

Whereas Richard accumulates an endless series of objects and seems to feel that he never has enough, even as his pile of hoarded items just keeps growing, autistic subjects are more preoccupied with keeping a particular space occupied by any object of the same type: ‘If one [object] were lost there was always another to replace it’ (Tustin 1981: 113). Over a period of time, ‘a succession of objects’ are used in turn (Tustin 1981: 113).

Objects are used, discarded and replaced by another one. If an autistic object is gone, the child is distressed as if he had lost a part of his body, but the object is soon replaced by another one which is experienced as being the same. (Tustin 1981: 113)

The above features would hence highlight different methods of coping with loss in autism as compared to hoarding. Whereas there appears to be a quality of sufficiency in autism, where one object replaces another, hoarding is characterised by continuous accumulation.

Richard’s vast agglomerations have created layers upon layers of compacted, decomposing objects. He does not experience his objects as being the same, but discriminates between the types of objects that make up his hoard by creating different piles for different objects. He voiced his wish to

create an archive out of newspapers and, unlike Tustin's above description, his hoarding behaviours highlight an ongoing cycle of acquisition and substitution. Klein (1949) and Segal (1957) described this process as being linked to persecutory anxiety – see section on 'Core psychoanalytic concepts'.

2. *Richard's behaviours have a functional quality and are not purely stereotypical or rhythmical in nature*

I would like to re-emphasise that this thesis is not trying to say that Richard's behaviours or experiences are the same as those of profoundly autistic subjects. It is trying to point out that there is something about the hoarding process that reflects autistic forms of functioning, notably in the sensory use made of objects.

Richard's behaviours, unlike those described in relation to extremely autistic subjects where behaviours are perceived as mindless and limited to pure stereotypy (Alvarez 1992: 203), do appear to have a function. Indeed, Richard also describes his desire to build an archive with his objects (see <https://vimeo.com/96753156> 05:10–05:37).

Hence, unlike the extremely autistic subject, Richard can voice and communicate something about his behaviour. He demonstrates and describes how he moves around his own house in the midst of his hoarded items, he talks about his aim to create an archive out of his decomposing newspapers, and he argues that he wishes to keep and use a fragmented umbrella 'for spares', instead of throwing it out.

However, although Richard's behaviours do appear to have a definite functional aspect to them, I contend that they simultaneously reflect something of the rituals and sensory rhythmicity in the manner objects are used by autistic subjects.

As Richard attempts to negotiate his way around his hoarded items, he undertakes unusual, repetitive patterns of movement that appear to be entrenched activities. He demonstrates to the cameraman how he moves around his house, his actions appearing to have a practical function

whilst also reflecting the rhythmical movements and the sensory usage of objects described as taking place in autistic forms of functioning.

Transcript (04:22–04:39)

Richard: *Are you watching me? Get your leg through like that, lean back that way, so that goes through like that... I'm holding on to a thing up here now, and I'm going to go up in here like that, then go through there like that and then lay yourself, spread your load out so as you can slide through like that. OK? Now do you seriously want to attempt that?*

Cameraman: *Yeah!*

As Richard is acknowledging the presence of the cameraman whilst demonstrating his actions to him, his behaviour has a relational quality, and in this it differs from autistic behaviours that fail to acknowledge the presence or even the existence of the other. Hence, when there is someone else present, Richard's behaviours can be said to be relational.

Alvarez talked about the stereotypy (1992: 217) or repetitive forms of behaviour, and the obsessional rituals undertaken by autistic children:

One autistic patient, Mark, can go on engaging in his repetitive rubbing of the table, walking in circles, rubbing the table, walking in circles again for half an hour at the far end of the room whilst my gaze is on him. (1992: 203)

Richard's actions are reminiscent of this ritualistic mode of behaviour that Alvarez (1992) described.

In the clip 09:56–11:09, (transcript on page 110-111), we see Richard demonstrating to the cameraman how he has perfected his ability to manoeuvre and squeeze his body through the narrow passageways in his hoarded items whilst carrying his tray of boiled eggs and toast. We are told by the programme presenter that this is Richard's daily meal. Although Richard's repetitive actions appear similar to those described by Alvarez (1992), he is simultaneously capable of recognising the existence of the other: something that the profoundly autistic individual cannot do.

Hence, we can see that, whilst there are similarities in Richard's behaviour – and hence in his experiences – to those of an autistic patient, there are also differences.

3. *The extreme hoarding process is not characterised by a complete lack of symbolisation and representational ability*

Unlike the complete lack of representation that is characteristic of profound autism, Richard's difficulties with representation appear to lie exclusively in relation to his way of engaging with his hoarded objects.

Thus, unlike profoundly autistic subjects, Richard is evidently capable of symbolisation and communicative language. Even in respect of his hoarding behaviours, his representational capacity is not completely lost. In many ways he still perceives his hoarded objects as being separate entities, as is understood by his declared ambition to create an archive out of his newspapers.

He also communicates his awareness that some of the objects around him are souvenirs that bear sentimental importance for him. He thus acknowledges that some of his objects are linked to experiences he has had in the past with others: that they represent memories. This apparent ability to perceive these objects (photographs, etc.) as being representations of his past experiences with others and of others indicates that he does not – as is the case with autistic subjects – experience his objects as actually being other people, and demonstrates that there exists a degree of separation between Richard and his hoarded objects that is not present in the way autistic subjects engage with their objects.

4. *Richard is able to relate to others as separate human beings*

Alvarez (1992), Meltzer (1975) and Kanner (1943, 1944), among others, described how an autistic child cannot perceive others as being separate human beings; instead, they treat others as though they are just pieces of furniture. They also described how these children are unable to clearly communicate their thoughts. Richard, however, communicates to others what he thinks and means, appearing to perceive them as separate beings. He also interacts with the cameraman, showing him

how he manoeuvres himself through his objects (03:32–03:48). Symbolic communication through the use of language does not appear to be a problem for Richard, as he responds to interaction from others. Unlike profoundly autistic children, he is capable of having a social life. His apparent social isolation at the start of the programme seems to have come about due to his all-consuming preoccupation with his hoarded objects and his lack of desire to engage with others. In the programme, Richard seems to begin to interact with others when they start helping him in clearing some of the hoarded objects in his garden. He therefore seems to begin to relate to others through his hoarded objects!

5. Richard participates in shared realities in areas that are outside of his extreme hoarding compulsion

Alvarez (1992) and Tustin (1990) described the oblivion of autistic children to shared realities. In contrast, Richard appears to share in realities other than those linked to his hoarding compulsion. The programme allows us to gain a sense that it is solely in this area that he is unable to perceive what everyone else can. He appears unaware of the very real physical danger in which he is putting himself by living within his agglomerations.

When a psychologist tries to point out to him that his extreme hoarding behaviours may be symptomatic of emotional difficulties, Richard can engage with him, and does so by refuting the psychologist's interpretation. Richard argues that, if he could find another way of storing his items, his difficulties would resolve themselves. He also asserts that his hoarding behaviours are a lifestyle choice that he has deliberately made: one individual's rebellion against a consumerist society.

Richard is shown lighting a gas stove amidst piles of highly inflammable hoarded newspapers. Although, as onlookers, we are immediately aware of the possibility of the surrounding newspapers catching fire, Richard appears apparently oblivious to this danger. Hence, in the initial stages of the programme, we get a sense that, although very able to interact and discuss his opinions with others,

Richard is unaware (or is in denial) of certain obvious realities in relation to his hoarding behaviours. However, in the extract 11:28–11:38 (see transcript on page 115), he does describe being aware that his hoarding compulsion is affecting his ability to live more fully. As the programme progresses, Richard gradually appears to become more able to perceive the reality of his hoarding difficulties. This shift in awareness seems to take place as he begins to form relationships with some of the villagers who have come to help him clear his garden of hoarded material.

In the next clip, which takes place three quarters of the way through the programme, Richard expresses distress and anxiety as he begins to become aware of the true extent of his difficulties.

Transcript (43:04–44:43)

Richard: *I mean, it's just absurd! When you put it all out and see it all! I mean, I'd forgotten I'd got most of this stuff – and you do... tend to do that over time.... What a bloody pickle I'm in – you ... just can't believe this! Truth be told, it's really far, far worse than I ever envisaged. You just can't... it's really quite shocking.... Now that it's all laid bare like this I can see the stupidity of it and... and this medical condition known as hoarding, and that it's a psychological problem. I say I'm beginning to recognise it – I have recognised it now as a result of this. It's just ridiculous. They do say that you have to recognise the situation for what it is, otherwise you're in self-denial. I mean, how can you fail to recognise where you're going wrong with this mess? I mean, it's just indescribable... I really am... [He shakes his head and his voice breaks.] I'm worried about it. [He looks distraught and as though he feels unable to speak.] My mother would be absolutely horrified! [Shaking his head and crying, and then appearing to try to move away from his feelings.] But there we are! I need to press on!*

Tustin (1981) pointed out that when, through therapy, an autistic patient begins to develop an awareness of just how alienated and cut off he has been from others, it is a sign that real progress has been made in the analysis. She pointed out that it is only once the autistic child begins to emerge from his protective autistic shell that he can begin to gain this awareness. Likewise, Richard's growing awareness (in the above extract) of the extreme nature of his hoarding compulsion, and his evident anxiety and distress regarding this reality, reflects Tustin's (1981) notion of emerging from a protective, autistic shell. This suggests that autism and hoarding are not the same condition and have different underlying processes, and this is further explored in the following section.

VI. Discussion

VI.A. Hoarding: A prototypical expression of a creative endeavour?

I argue that the notion that the hoarding process may, itself, be a 'primitive form of art' (Charles 2001) – in the sense that it could be perceived as a prototypical expression of a creative endeavour – could help to further our understanding of the potential links observed between hoarding and autism, whilst offering a way to think about the existence of a sort of symbolic continuum, where more concretistic forms of representation could be found at one end and more symbolic forms towards the other – that is, that hoarding would be found somewhere along this continuum, between extremely concretistic (autistic) processes and more creative ones.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, the fact that both processes (autism and extreme hoarding) appear to share similar behavioural features highlights the notion that they must also share similar psychic experiences. If similarities between the surface features of two processes (autism and hoarding) allow for a hypothesis that they may share similar psychic experiences, could these same primitive psychic experiences also be expressed and communicated through more symbolic, creative processes, such as works of art? Evidently, both Rose (1987) and Oremland (1997) believed this to be the case (see 'Literature Review').

In summary, I was intrigued by the notion that creative works (poetry, music and art) could throw light on the notion that phenomena described as core to autistic forms of functioning – which I also perceived to be taking place in an extreme hoarding process – may also be being communicated through the medium of artwork. In order to explore this, I looked at Schwitters' *Merzbau* and Baudelaire's poetry to ascertain whether both these forms of artwork could be of help in highlighting the existence of the primitive psychic experiences that Tustin has linked to

separation/fusion trauma (and which this thesis contends are also taking place, amongst other more developed psychic mechanisms) in the extreme hoarding process observed).

These two art forms (poetry and *Merzbau*) are very different in nature (one being highly symbolic and the other extremely concrete). Notwithstanding this difference, I contend that they share and communicate similar early psychic experiences; hence, whilst the psychic contents of these artworks reflect one another, their forms of representation are very different.

When my curiosity was initially triggered as I watched an extreme hoarding process on television, I had a sense that something about a struggle with separation/fusion was being enacted by Richard, the hoarder. Whilst watching the TV programme, words and imagery of one of Baudelaire's (1821–1867) poems came to mind. Although I initially couldn't understand why this was happening, this experience led me to wonder whether artwork may also communicate the same sorts of struggles that I felt were being enacted and somehow communicated through the hoarding process I was observing.

I have always been a fan of Baudelaire's poetry, and when images and words from his poems started popping into my head as I watched the extreme hoarding process I began to consider whether what was being 'communicated' by the hoarding process was something that Baudelaire's poetry was also expressing. I was aware of my sense that Richard was somehow attempting to merge with his hoarded objects through the various behaviours that took place as part of his hoarding process, and that there was something about a struggle to do with boundaries going on. I then wondered if the words and images from Baudelaire's poem that were intruding into my mind could reflect something about this merger attempt and boundary struggle that I was experiencing whilst witnessing Richard's behaviour vis-à-vis his hoarded objects.

Indeed, Baudelaire's poem '*Correspondances*' (1857) communicates an attempt to bring about an intense experience of a fusion of sensory modalities. The line '*Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se*

répondent (perfumes, colours and sounds co-respond), describes an enveloping, multi-sensory environment.

I have translated below the whole poem so that you, the reader, can gain a feel for what I am trying to convey.

Correspondances

La Nature est un temple ou de vivants piliers
Laisent parfois sortir de confuses paroles
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Correspondences

Nature is a temple, where living columns
Seem to murmur muffled words;
Man wanders through these forests of symbols
That look on him as kin.

Just as lengthy echoes, heard from afar, seem to merge
In a unity both profound and shadowy,
Vast as the night and as luminosity
So do perfumes, colours and sounds co-respond.

Labarthe et al. (2002) stated that this particular poem evokes a pantheistic experience, a merging between self and nature, between self and not-self. They proposed that this poem communicates an undifferentiated experience of profound peace.

Leakey (1992) also described this sense of fusion – of oneness – communicated by the poem '*Correspondances*': 'From the various sensory impressions from inside and out, coming together, a single corresponding and transcending unity can be inferred' (1992: 37).

Hence, reflecting on my own impressions when watching the hoarding process, where words and imagery from Baudelaire's poetry came to mind, I wondered if the hoarding process communicated

something of the same experience that Baudelaire was trying to express through his poetry. Did Baudelaire's poem '*Correspondances*' reflect something about the attempt at fusion with the outside world that I thought I perceived to be taking place in an extreme hoarding process, and that Tustin described as lying at the heart of her autistic patients' traumatic experiences of separation?

A number of writers have described how not only experiences of fusion but also traumatic experiences of separation and loss are communicated through Baudelaire's poems, such as '*L'Albatross*', and '*Le Cygne*', as well as poems that are part of the section '*Parisian Sketches*' in Baudelaire's work *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857).

Both Rose (1987) and Oremland (1997) described their understanding that works of art can communicate the struggle between the pull to fusion and the trauma of loss and separation. The following writers appear to echo something of this understanding in relation to Baudelaire's poetry: Benjamin (1969, 2007), Bartoli-Anglard (1998) and Baer (2000). They described their sense that Baudelaire's poems enumerate a series of irreparable experiences of trauma, loss and alienation. Gosse (1917) wrote:

To admirers [of Baudelaire] such as Sainte Beuve and Leconte de Lisle, Baudelaire was the artist endowed with a fatal sensibility who had plunged into every species of physical and moral indulgence and had found suffering and terror at the root of all enjoyment. (Gosse 1917: 133)

Hence, Baudelaire's (1857) poems describing, as they do, experiences of traumatic separation and fusion suggest the very earliest psychic struggles that Klein and others have linked to the development of symbolic thought.

I will now describe how Schwitters' (1847–1948) art, notably his *Merzbau* (1933), reflects these same struggles.

When I explored what had been written about Schwitters' (1933) artwork, I found that various writers described their belief that it communicated experiences of traumatic loss. Hence, the same sense of trauma linked to separation/fusion issues seemed to be being communicated by Schwitters through his artwork, but in a very concrete manner – unlike the highly symbolic nature of Baudelaire's work.

Schwitters' *Merzbau*, which he built within his own house, apparently out of an agglomeration of all kinds of objects that he stuck together, has been described as 'Transgressing limits between rooms, between inside and outside, between above and below ground, using both solid and liquid in its growth' (Dickerman & Witkovsky 2005: 111). This description highlights the *Merzbau* (1933) as being an aesthetic work that attempts to communicate something about a wish to override the boundaries separating things from one another, to block out the reality of the experience of separate existence in order to bring about a fusion between what is 'self' and what is 'not-self'.

In another observation, the *Merzbau* (1933) is perceived as expressing the sense of a traumatic experience of separation, damage and loss: 'The reality of the *Merzbau* with its collection of damaged images and ruined fragments would suggest a traumatic disturbance and an experience of shattered wholeness' (Dickerman & Witkovsky 2005: 121).

I would like to claim that both Baudelaire's and Schwitters' works – though very different in form – communicate, through their emotional content, experiences of traumatic separation and loss, as well as attempt to transgress or deny the realities of a separate existence through phantasies of fusion.

My limited foray into these works in relation to this thesis also allowed me to observe that both these art forms appear to communicate many of the other core features of autistic modes of functioning that I have highlighted above. I reiterate that, although this exploration of the potential links between psychic phenomena at the heart of separation/fusion trauma and those inherent to

works of art was not the main aim of my research project, the importance of this brief foray is that it can potentially indicate that my results extend into other fields of study (including aesthetics), and that this glimpse of an exploration of aesthetic processes, limited though it is, could potentially open up ideas for further research.

However, as this is not the main aim of this thesis, I shall not further this discussion here. To integrate an exploration of the links between art, hoarding and autism, I would need to whittle it down to such an extent that I would not be able to do it justice. It would require another thesis, and I have to regard this as a separate project or a project that will grow out of this one. Indeed, it would be worth investigating if a project could grow out of this; that might throw unexpected light on the process of aesthetic creation. Therefore, all I wish to point out in this thesis is that there is something about loss and the attempt to manage it that also appears to be expressed through these artworks.

VI.B. Résumé and justification for the method of analysing data

This piece of work aims to gain an insight into the psychic phenomena that reside at the heart of, or are a consequence of, early separation/fusion struggles. These experiences are understood by Tustin to be core to autistic forms of functioning. Having observed the phenomena taking place in the extreme hoarding process, I decided to set out the core features of autism and attempt to operationalise my observations of hoarding against these.

In relation to my choice of which psychoanalytic writings on autism to consider, I referred mainly to those of Frances Tustin, whilst taking into account the contribution of other psychoanalytic writers – mostly from the British object-relations tradition. I chose to base my explorations on Tustin's work as not only is she a very senior and experienced authority on the psychodynamics of autism, but her

vivid descriptions of the embodied, sensory nature of autistic forms of functioning helped me begin to understand my own experiences when observing the extreme hoarding process.

I was aware of Tustin's caveat about her understandings of autism:

There is as yet no generally agreed scheme of classification for autistic disorders; some schemes of classification include features that are not covered by other schemes. This is an area of great controversy. (Tustin 1994: 112)

She pointed out that Kanner's (1944) original description of autistic features 'was of external features only' (Tustin 1994: 112), arguing that:

To make our diagnostic assessments of autism more precise, we need to have some understanding of the urgencies within the child that give rise to the external features. Classification in terms of external features alone is bound to lead to controversy... the external descriptive features alert us to autistic syndromes... but psychodynamic psychotherapy gives us insight into the autistic processes that give rise to the syndromes. These processes constitute the autistic psychopathology. (Tustin 1994: 113)

I also chose to base my research on a Kleinian interpretation of the data observed, with Klein and her followers being leading innovators in the understanding of severe mental health difficulties, and Klein's understanding of primary envy and its concomitant psychic processes being fundamental to my attempts to bring meaning to my observations.

I explored video footage from a reality TV programme on an extreme hoarding process in order to find out whether the phenomena I observed taking place could, in some way, reflect descriptions of some of the core features of autism. I wanted to find out whether there is a correspondence between these two processes at the psychodynamic level.

I found that many of the core features of autism that I correlated against the phenomena I observed in the hoarding process did appear to be represented in some form. However, none of these core features could be observed to take place in exactly the same manner in hoarding as they manifest in extreme forms of autism. Indeed, when they could be observed, these autistic features exhibited a difference in quality (Bisagni 2012), presenting in a much less rigid, less intense manner.

Also visibly taking place in the extreme hoarding process were other phenomena that did not appear to be linked to autistic modes of functioning. For example, Richard, the extreme hoarder, argued that his behaviour was functional. As observer, I could also see that he was, unlike extreme autistic subjects, able to communicate and to perceive shared realities when these were outside of his hoarding compulsion. I also observed that he did not lack in either symbolic or representational abilities.

Throughout the duration of the research process, I jotted down my thoughts and ideas. On page 128-129, I describe some of the questions that initially came up for me in relation to my original hypothesis. What follows are a few 'free-associations' that helped me to develop my understandings and to process things as I went along.

- Does an experience of a loss of wholeness lie at the core of the hoarding process? Perhaps the accumulating of objects is an attempt to recreate a feeling of being merged with the omnipotent mother? Does the accumulation and possession of objects allow the subject to have a sense that they are creating something, and could a hoarder experience something akin to what an artist may feel whilst creating a work of art?
- 'Richard, the hoarder, seems to have attempted to create a sort of almost-living creature by putting together part objects, decomposing objects, objects that are vestiges of a former existence. This makes me think of Picasso's cubist work... The hoarder has appropriated the role of Creator – of mother? The hoard is a powerful metaphor for both cultural and personal crisis.' (From my memos.)
- 'The hoard is both a kind of almost-living creature as well as a mirror, as the external observer (unlike the hoarder) can see reflected in it the horrors and perils at the heart of the hoarder's separation/fusion struggles. Psychic petrification. Medusa...' (From my memos.)
- 'Horror' elicited by the hoard for the onlooker – is it experienced as both disturbingly familiar and utterly foreign? Ugliness – an eruption into consciousness of disturbing frightening feelings or phantasies....The hoard stands for something we can never quite resolve in ourselves (problem with our own psychic and bodily boundaries?), which is one of the reasons we may react so strongly when being witness to a hoarding process.

These hunches and queries led me to realise that there is truly a great richness of discovery to be had in exploring the potential links between autism and hoarding.

VI.C. Findings

I realised that a number of these autistic features appeared to find reflection in the extreme hoarding process. The similarities observed offered ways of interpreting how underlying metapsychology can be used to understand what may be going on. Some differences were also revealed, although I should like to point out that I found the existence of similarities even when describing the differences. For example, when exploring notions of anxiety in relation to destructive impulses, I felt that it was the degree of anxiety that made the difference – hence, again, the difference is one of quality. The categories that I describe are nosological: they are ways of seeing things.

Tables of core features of autism

I found a number of similarities and differences, as shown in the following tables.

Table 1: Table of similarities (where core features of autism appear to find reflection in the extreme hoarding process; pp. 101-103)

Table 2: Table of differences (some of the main differences observed between descriptions of autistic features and the extreme hoarding process; pp. 120–121)

VI.D. Some theoretical understandings of the differences found, and a discussion of the results

I have found both a number of similarities and a number of differences. I will now discuss the differences that I found, highlighting the psychodynamics that give rise to them.

I found that there exists a difference in quality between the features of extreme hoarding and those of autism – I explain this finding in relation to an understanding of the following:

- The role of primitive envy and the epistemophilic instinct
- Experiences of anxiety in respect of one's own destructive impulses

- Autistic encapsulation (repetition of the original trauma)
- Continuity hypothesis

I will discuss the underlying psychodynamics with reference to Tustin, Bisagni, Mitrani, Meltzer, Melanie Klein and Sydney Klein.

VI.D.i. A difference in quality between extreme hoarding and autism

Clearly, profound autism and hoarding are not the same condition, yet I have observed something about autistic features being reflected in an extreme hoarding process. In order to help to explain this, and to explain why there also exist significant differences between the two processes, a consideration of Bisagni's (2012) understanding of two- and three-dimensional awareness is useful:

There is a difference in quality between conditions in which, on the one hand, absence is denied through an extreme fragmentation of representation and distress and the object is reduced to its mere surface (as in profoundly autistic types of functioning), and, on the other hand, those conditions in which the absent object and dependence on an object that is perceived as potentially not always available is superseded in an arrogant and omnipotent way by the production of hallucinations, and the object – even if persecutory and imprisoning – is re-created and possessed. (Bisagni 2012: 680)

Whilst Tustin's work focusses on experiences that take place at the extreme end of the autistic spectrum, where autistic subjects are perceived as living mostly in a two-dimensional world, she also acknowledges that this way of object-relating may shift: 'at times, he may be teetering on the edge of three-dimensionality' (Tustin 1983: 123).

On the one hand, the phenomena observed taking place in an extreme hoarding process could simply highlight a difference in the quality of the autistic experience (the features observed in hoarding appear to be a reflection of the descriptions of autistic forms of functioning – they do not replicate these). However, this thesis does not argue that the extreme hoarding process is simply a less pathological manifestation of autism, as there exist notable features that appear to distinguish the extreme hoarding behaviours from autistic ones (see 'differences between hoarding and autism', pp. 120-121)

. Another argument is that there may be a co-existence of both two- and three-dimensional approaches to object-relating in the extreme hoarding process. Indeed, when compared to the purely two-dimensional mode of object-relating understood to take place in extreme forms of autism, which denies any sense of separation between self and object 'where the patient reacts to any awareness of separateness with either total obliviousness or complete collapse' (Mitrani 2011: 25), Richard appears to manage to maintain a degree of separate identity and autonomy from his objects.

Whilst Richard's behaviours suggest that he may be making use of his accumulated objects for the enveloping, tactile, sensory experiences with which they may provide him, he is also capable of perceiving these objects as separate entities and as having a function (he argues that he wishes to create an archive with his newspapers).

Mitrani (1994) described how two-dimensional, or 'adhesive' modes of relating, may co-exist with more developed forms of object-relating:

Whilst I believe that such an aberrant mode of pseudo-relating may (like the autistic enclave in the neurotic personality) exist on a dual track (Grotstein, 1986) alongside normal/narcissistic object relations, I maintain that, in an enduring and rigidified form, adhesive pseudo-object-relations are nearly always pathologically defensive and, in turn, pathogenic and consequently obstructive to the ongoing development of normal object relatedness. (Mitrani 1994: 356)

Although Bisagni (2012) remarked that two- and three-dimensional ways of object-relating need to be distinguished (see 'Literature Review'), he also argued that they can co-exist: a severely autistic child patient whom Bisagni (2012) saw in therapy for a number of years from the age of four, and who is described as, having 'reached *some* capacity for communicative language, [he] began to use objects in more three-dimensional ways (in terms of symbolic equation rather than as actual symbols), improved his capacity for relational contact and began to use the pronoun "I" and depict himself as a whole figure' (Bisagni 2012: 670).

The same patient began to display

greater modulation in his responses to the rhythm of presence and absence of the object, when compared to the fixed quality of his earlier reactions of falling apart when frustrated. Generally speaking, he seemed to have a greater capacity to find a third dimension in his mental space. (Bisagni 2012: 670)

I have described how certain features of the extreme hoarding process are very different from those described as core to autistic ways of functioning (sharing of realities, representation and symbolisation abilities). I am not attempting to contribute to the diagnostic elucidation of autism in this study; my aim is to investigate the potential underlying psychodynamics of an extreme hoarding process. Following Mitrani's (1992) and Bisagni's (2012) arguments regarding the co-existence of two- and three-dimensional ways of object-relating, I contend that the autistic features that appear to find reflection in the extreme hoarding process would co-exist alongside more integrated, less pathological forms of object-relating. Observations of the extreme hoarding process suggest the co-existence of both adhesive identification and projective identification processes; of both two- and three-dimensional ways of object-relating.

The next section of this thesis explores some of the psychodynamic understandings that may help explain this understanding.

VI.D. ii. Primitive envy and the epistemophilic instinct

In the introduction, I remarked on the way I felt Richard's hoarding behaviours elicited an image of a covetous dragon ensconced in its accumulated treasures. As discussed above, observing the hoarding process reflects Klein's (1957) descriptions of the epistemophilic instinct: the infant's wish to possess the contents of the mother's body and spoil her envied objects, her power and her creativity, and the intense anxiety that this brings about.

Psychoanalytic literature describes how the autistic subject replaces a lost object with another one: not appearing to be attached to a specific object, but seeming simply to wish to fill a space with an object. In the case of extreme hoarding, we see an endless accumulation of objects. The pile of

objects just grows and grows, the hoarder appearing never to feel that he has enough objects in his possession.

Perhaps this difference may have arisen due to a difference in the degree of envy experienced in each of the processes explored – envy having been linked by Klein (1930) to curiosity, to the start of all learning and to the epistemophilic instinct. Whereas Richard's behaviour would suggest that he has retained some degree of curiosity, in spite of envy, Tustin (1990) contended that envy destroys curiosity in the autistic child, describing how social emotions of 'love, hatred, envy and jealousy' (1983: 124) are not manifest in autistic subjects until therapy has allowed for bodily separateness to become more tolerated: 'The autistic child has little curiosity about the inside of the mother's body' (1983: 124).

Richard's difficulties appear to reside solely in relation to his hoarding compulsion – unlike the autistic subject's experience, which is described as all encompassing. Meltzer (1963), in describing his understanding of autism, argued that primal oral envy can be triggered in response to trauma, overwhelming the subject and bringing about autistic forms of functioning. The death of Richard's mother was described in the programme as coinciding with the commencement of his extreme hoarding behaviours. This would suggest that Richard's potential traumatic experience of his mother's death may have triggered overwhelming oral envy. His epistemophilic instinct does not appear to have become completely blocked off in the way that Meltzer (1988) described as being the case in profoundly autistic states, but instead has potentially brought about a situation where there is an attempt to deny the boundaries between himself and his objects.

VI.D.iii. Anxiety in respect of own destructive impulses

Unlike extremely autistic subjects, Richard appears to recognise that his hoarded objects are not parts of himself, although he seems unable to accept that certain objects are damaged beyond repair and need to be thrown away. He instead argues that he wishes to use them as 'spares' (fragmented umbrella) or 'to create an archive' (decaying newspapers). He does not appear to be

expressing a wish to repair the damaged objects in his possession, yet he cannot bring himself to throw them away, voicing a wish to keep them in his possession. How can we try to explain what he may be experiencing?

Klein (1957) understood that overwhelming feelings of envy precipitate persecutory anxieties about the infant's own aggressive impulses, which, in turn, can bring about pathological projective identification processes. When the infant develops over-rigid defences against its own sadistic feelings, the establishment of a 'right relation' to reality becomes threatened and the infant's capacity to create symbolic relations to the objects that it perceives as representing the mother's body becomes disturbed, further disrupting normal development of object-relationships.

Richard seems to have established a 'right relation to reality' in areas that are outside of his hoarding compulsion. I suggest that his apparent difficulties in accepting that some of his hoarded objects have decomposed and his distress at the notion of parting with them could highlight his attempts to deny his own destructive feelings: his fears of having 'damaged' his objects. He seems to have difficulty in being able to experience his objects as being truly separate from himself, as is highlighted by his distress at the thought of throwing any of them away. This could be understood in relation to Klein's (1930) understanding regarding overwhelming feelings of envy and destructiveness, and the anxiety and attempts to deny the experience of separateness that this brings about.

Tustin (1980) argued that a traumatic experience of separation has led autistic subjects to block off their destructive feelings, describing that their aim is to feel continuous with the outside world: undifferentiated from it. She pointed out that even biting up food is avoided and 'supplanted by sucking' (Tustin 1983: 123).

VI.D. iv. Autistic retreats and repetition of the original trauma

‘The effects of the trauma of separation can lie in the depths of the somatic psyche like an unexploded bomb.’ (Tustin 1991: 586)

Klein (1980), Tustin (1971, 1990, 1994), Mitrani (1992, 2012), Rosenfeld (1992), O’Shaughnessy (1992), Meltzer (1968) and Steiner (1993) all highlighted the notion of an undisturbed, autistic encapsulated part of the personality (autistic retreat/island/capsule, etc.). This split-off part of the personality is understood to be linked to very early trauma and to deeply narcissistic organisational states (Rosenfeld 1971). This thesis will focus on this notion of autistic encapsulation, rather than on the term ‘trauma’.

Hinshelwood (1991) noted that Sydney Klein (1980):

demonstrated autistic aspects of patients who presented with neurotic problems. These were encapsulated in rigid structural isolation, and often conceived in dreams as hard insects or animals with carapaces, reminiscent of the hard, muscular secondary defensiveness described by Bick (1968). (Hinshelwood 1991: 225)

Tustin (1992) remarked that, for many individuals who have not been diagnosed as autistic, relatively normal development forms itself around a hidden, encapsulated part of the personality: ‘A terror-stricken frozen part of them, that has been covered over, in the push to grow up and deal with life’ (Tustin 1992: 148). She (1981) remarked that these encapsulated parts of the self are very primitive, evasive reactions and are not equivalent to the psychoanalytic notion of defence (as we have seen, she uses the term ‘protective manoeuvres’ for these phenomena, rather than ‘defence’).

Tustin called this encapsulated, sealed-off part of the psyche a ‘black hole of psychotic depression’ (Tustin 1992: 80), describing how, at particular life-stages, autistic barriers may break down, as in situations of stress or biological change (bereavement, puberty, etc.). As they break down, the individual becomes flooded with ‘psychotic black-hole depression’ (Tustin 1992: 80), previously kept at bay by autistic reactions.

Unventilated, unprocessed bottled-up explosive panic, rage and black hole anguish can manifest itself in psychosomatic and phobic conditions of various kinds in later life. (Tustin 1983: 588)

The television programme on extreme hoarding implicitly refers to such an occurrence when it highlights the fact that Richard's hoarding difficulties really began when his mother died (although he had apparently already been a keen collector of classic cars). Meltzer (1963) also makes reference to this type of breakdown when he describes how the experience of unintegrated primal oral envy can be set in motion by any internal or external stress.

In line with Meltzer's (1963) understanding of autistic forms of encapsulation, Richard may have experienced deep shock at his mother's death – this trauma, if breaking through an autistic encapsulation, recapitulating an experience of traumatic separation and loss (which would have, amongst other things, brought to the fore unintegrated experiences of primal oral envy and destructive impulses; Klein 1939). Tustin has remarked: 'Traumatic experiences of bodily separateness can be triggered into action by present-day happenings' (1994: 19). Mitrani also described how patients suffering from hidden autistic capsules give the impression that they are

searching for something missing in their lives; perhaps the emotional contact with an elemental quality of self... missing elements of experience, linked to various un-lived and heretofore unheard aspects of self and their 'uncontained' (in Bion's sense of the term) perceptions or encounters with the agony and ecstasy of being. (Mitrani 2011: 22)

Mitrani's (1992) writings reflect that, following on from Tustin's own work, several other authors have expanded the understanding of certain personality organisations that 'impede development in our adult patients and which constitute an impenetrable resistance within the analytic relationship' (Mitrani 1992: 549):

Klein posited that walled off in these cystic areas of the mind are intense and unbearable fears of 'pain, and of death, disintegration or breakdown' (Klein 1980 p. 400) related to unmentalised separation experiences in early infancy, and he suggested that such phenomena are strikingly similar to those observed in so-called autistic children. (Mitrani 1992: 549)

Nissen (2008) noted that autistic phenomena occurring in non-autistic adults are being increasingly discussed in the psychoanalytical literature. He described how these 'retreats are meant to offer protection against paranoid-schizoid fears of the external unintegrated states of the internal world' (2008: 261), proposing that 'these autistic reactions are not exclusively due to traumatic separations and inadequate containment of primary objects, but also in constitutional weakening' (2008: 261). He pointed out that Bick (1968), Meltzer et al. (1975) and Tustin (1972) were forerunners in the investigation of autistic phenomena in non-autistic adults in the early 1980s, and that their writings play a major part in our discussions of these types of autistic encapsulations or 'mental retreats' (Nissen 2008: 261). Many other writers have followed these explorations into autistic encapsulations, including Rosenfeld (1984) with his thoughts on hypochondria, and Innes-Smith (1987) in her descriptions of patients with 'autistic pockets of functioning' (1987: 405) and her understanding that a preoccupation with sensation-objects is a factor in the aetiology of adult psychopathology.

Gampel (1988,1998) also alluded to the notion of autistic forms of encapsulation, describing how trauma suffered later on in life, when experienced as unthinkable and unspeakable, may call forth the same protective reactions as those experienced in infancy. Gampel's (1988, 1998) understanding of an autistic protective reaction occurring later on in life is also highlighted by Tustin (1994):

The Argentinean psychoanalyst Dr David Rosenfeld (1992) has described how his work with Holocaust victims has shown him that their traumatic experiences had been 'preserved' and 'sealed off' by autism, ready to come up later, intact and vivid, with every detail of the original experiences clear and sharp. (Tustin 1994: 17)

Tustin (1994) argued that, when separation trauma is experienced in later life, it is not just the recapitulation of an old situation, but a re-enactment of it with something new injected into it: 'This can bring hope. A psychic catastrophe can become a psychic opportunity' (Tustin 1994: 17).

Tustin (1994) described how the patient living with an autistic encapsulation experiences 'pain but not suffering' (1994: 19), as they are 'insulated from the pain by autistic procedures' (1994: 19). I have explained how this understanding seems to link to Richard's experience in the section above.

VI.E. How convincing are the results of this exploration?

I observed similar phenomena taking place in the extreme hoarding process to those described by psychoanalytic writings as being core to autistic modes of functioning, but do these observations necessarily imply that similar psychic experiences and unconscious phantasies must underlie both processes?

If both processes do not, after all, share similar psychic dynamics, what could account for the observations made?

- Could the large number of similarities observed be purely coincidental, having absolutely nothing to do with the existence of similar psychic dynamics?
- Could I have mistakenly labelled phenomena as being two-dimensional, when they were in fact indicative of three-dimensional states of awareness?

The similarities I observed between processes are, as demonstrated by the data analysis section, numerous and consistent. In psychoanalytic understanding, external behaviours are seen as reflecting (often unconscious) underlying psychic mechanisms; hence, the observation of such repeated and consistent similarities allows for an understanding of a similar correspondence in some of the underlying psychic mechanisms shared by the two processes (autism and extreme hoarding).

VI.E.i. Alternative explanations

Green (1964) and Grinberg (1966) understood that hoarding may be associated with obsessive compulsive disorders, the homes of hoarders being an expression of sexual satisfaction that no

longer involves the genital zone and the quest for the other, but instead involves obtaining satisfaction by means of a regression to anal eroticism, masked by the justification of cautious economising and saving. Grinberg (1966) describes a hoarder's habitat as being an 'auto-erotic hovel'.

Camps and Le Bigot (2019) describe a case of hoarding that, they contend, is an atypical case of obsessional neurosis – their patient is described as being

hampered by endless ruminations and trapped within highly limiting obsessional defence mechanisms: primarily isolation – and more specifically isolation of affect and representation – but also intellectualization, invalidation, displacement, counter-investment and estrangements. ...Most of her thoughts served to repress internal conflicts and the anxiety associated with them. (2019: 212)

The subject's hoarding behaviours are described as satisfying

two movements of the obsessional conflict in her: the passion for order and the love of disorder, the pleasure in playing with what is dirty and soiled, and that of tidying up. The accumulation and the handling of filth reveal strongly repressed infantile pleasures and an intense, secret pleasure, without the other, achieved via anal eroticism that did not seem to weaken with age. (2019: 213)

Camps and Le Bigot (2019) argue that the accumulation of objects and waste, the neglect of the home and personal neglect are deliberately used by the hoarder in order to repel others and avoid intimacy:

The state of her apartment and her body hygiene protected Suzanne from having to invite someone to her home, and, imaginarily, from having to invest in an intimate relationship. It protected her from conflict inherent in any relationship and from the unavoidable disappointment that dealing with others generates. ...Her apartment served as a protective environment, a non-objectal shelter that helped her avoid the encounter with the other and the possible intimacy it would lead to. (Camps & Le Bigot 2019: 215)

Chebili (1998) argued that hoarding comes about in the face of narcissistic injury, when the skin-ego deteriorates and loses its capacity to act as a container. Hoarding, Chebili contended, is an attempt to 'stitch up' this skin by accumulating objects. Hoarders' dwellings, which are felt to be a metaphor for the envelope of the skin, are felt to recover impermeable, reinforced boundaries, and a filling of gaps, through the hoarding of material. The hoarder experiences this as preventing external

interventions, perceived as being invasive. Chebili (1998) contended that hoarding has a narcissistic, 'sealing' function, which is experienced by the subject as essential to his very survival.

I would argue that, although autistic modes of functioning are not mentioned at all, Chebili's (1998) understanding is not very far away from the ideas presented in this thesis regarding the reflection in hoarding of the function and usage of autistic objects to 'plug a gap' and create a 'second skin'.

Camps and Le Bigot (2019) highlight Mathieu's (2014) notion of a 'cloacal coat', which he describes as being used by the homeless or people experiencing extreme poverty.

Wandering homeless people wrap themselves in odours and body substances, which constitute what Mathieu (2014) refers to as a 'cloacal coat', a 'second skin', a 'bark' that protect the subject from collapse, but also affects the object. This cloacal coat is composed of a sensory envelope filled with noise, odours and constant stimulations that act as a 'sensory booth' numbing the psychic life and, more specifically, psychic distress. The odours and substances also make the subjective appropriation of space possible. (Camps & Le Bigot 2019: 214)

Camps and Le Bigot believe that these functions would also apply to the hoarding process.

Again, although arguing for a Freudian understanding that hoarding is linked to anal eroticism and obsessional neurosis, by pointing out that the hoarding process appears to provide a similar sensory and emotional function as described by Mathieu's (2014) descriptions of the 'cloacal coat', Camps and Le Bigot (2019) are also picking up on the usage in hoarding of primitive sensory processes, described by Tustin, Mitrani and others as being core to autistic forms of functioning.

Kristeva: Hoarding as an expression of the fear of an engulfing bodily fusion, as well as a longing for reunification

Whilst Klein (1946) underlined the importance of the experience of envy as provoked by the mother's body and what the infant perceives as being its prized possessions, Kristeva (1982) argued that the subject experiences a dread of the mother's body, fearing that he may fall back into it. She

argued that there is an attempt by the subject to create an experience of ownership of the object in an effort to reverse the sense of being invaded and possessed by the other (maternal object/body).

Kristeva (1982) used the term 'abjection' to describe her understanding: that what is abjected can never be altogether banished, but will remain on the periphery of our existence, challenging our own flimsy boundaries of individuality.

She emphasised the attraction as well as the horror of undifferentiated experiences: the mother's body being perceived as the primal home, recalling a state of oneness and completion, with both its seductions as well as its horrors reflecting the dual aspect of fearing an engulfing bodily fusion but longing for reunification.

This would appear to be a valid alternative understanding of the hoarding process, taking into account as it does very early psychic processes. Yet, it does not really help further awareness or understanding of why, when observing an extreme hoarding process, there appears to be a reflection of some of the features described as core to autism – especially of the sensory features of autistic forms of functioning. It also does not take into account Klein's (1930) understanding of the importance of envy or the epistemophilic instinct in influencing the very early psychic development and the development of symbolic thought, which this thesis understands to be invaluable to an understanding of hoarding behaviours.

Steiner: Psychic retreats

Steiner's (1993, 1996) notion of 'psychic retreats' claims that many varieties of pathological organisations precipitate subjects to seek refuge from psychic reality. He contended that many neurotic or borderline subjects resort to the use of these psychic retreats in their searches to find a way of escaping from intolerable anxieties. Steiner (1993) argued that, although these psychic retreats allow the patient to experience an illusion of safety, they are also used for defensive purposes, hindering therapeutic progress. Steiner understood that underlying the psychic retreat are

pathological forms of organisation of the patient's personality. The psychic retreat is felt by the patient to be 'a pleasant and even ideal haven' (Steiner 1993: 2), the patient expelling from himself intolerable experiences through the means of projective identification. In defining the term 'psychic retreat', Steiner (1993) contended that, whereas projective identification processes are universally deployed, reversing the process – that is, bringing back into themselves what they have projected out (which Steiner links with the ability to mourn and process loss) – is not something that everyone can do: the psychic retreat creating an impasse, preventing the reversal of projective identification. Steiner described the psychic retreat as being a perverse form of psychic organisation – a 'narcissistic perversion' (1993: 96) – as the subject is brought to seek out ways of being and of experiencing that are not helpful but paralysing and self-persecuting. This results in patients who are 'neither fully alive nor quite dead' (1993: 24): an in-between state where reality is not quite abandoned but is simultaneously accepted and denied. Steiner introduced the notion of a 'borderline position' (1993: 52), which he argued is to be found within both the paranoid-schizoid as well as the depressive positions, and occurs when subjects experience something that does not quite fit into either the paranoid-schizoid or the depressive position, leaving the subject blocked and unable to engage with life as they would in either of the other two positions (this is hence a modification of the Kleinian model).

Steiner (1993) described psychic retreats as being often linked to sadomasochism: the patient may find a sadistic pleasure in frustrating the progress of therapy, whilst also experiencing masochistic pleasure in depriving himself of the potential for improvement. These patients would be dominated by feelings of resentment and grievance, yet never able to acknowledge these feelings, which are 'neither openly enacted nor given up' (Steiner 1993: 75). Stuck in their sense of having been betrayed, unable to reverse their projective identifications, they are unable to mourn and must remain in this neither/nor state.

Jurist (1997) noted that, whereas Steiner's (1993) description of this 'borderline position' is a useful contribution to thinking about borderline pathology, having the potential for a wider application, Steiner does not appear to address the mechanisms of how it would work. Whilst describing the borderline position that lies at the core of the psychic retreat as a neither/nor state, Steiner also implies that it interferes with the developmental evolution from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position, as it keeps projective identification from being reversed and, hence, impedes the mourning process. Jurist (1997) argued that Steiner's (1993) writings fail to clarify how the borderline position would impinge on the other two positions: whether it blocks the flow between the other two positions, or prevents the change from one to the other – or whether it may somehow do both.

Steiner (1993) described psychic retreats as involving massive projective identification mechanisms (therefore situating these retreats at a stage of psychic development more advanced than autistic states, with psychoanalytic literature contending that autistic states of awareness preclude the existence of projective identification processes). Yet, Steiner's (1993) use of the term 'psychic retreats' also appears to reflect that of 'autistic encapsulation', as described by many writers (Klein, Tustin, Mitrani, Rosenfeld, O'Shaughnessy and Meltzer), who similarly contend that neurotic or borderline patients may experience these splits of parts of the personality, noting that they are linked to deeply narcissistic organisational states and autistic forms of experience.

The psychic mechanisms described by Steiner (1993) in relation to his notion of psychic retreats allow for fascinating insights into his clinical cases. Yet, Steiner's (1993) descriptions of a phenomenon that he believed to lie in the Oedipal position, whilst offering an alternative explanation to what may be going on in hoarding behaviours, does not help in bringing our attention to, or in furthering our awareness of, the nature of the intensely sensory processes observed in the extreme hoarding process. I hence contend that, whilst Steiner's (1993) concept of psychic retreats offers a very plausible and truly interesting alternative to the purely Freudian anal characterological

understanding of hoarding behaviours, it does not help to advance our understanding of the potential psychic meanings underlying the deeply sensory processes taking place in the extreme hoarding process. Attempts to bring about multi-modal sensory experiences have, however, been described in clinical psychoanalytic writings as being at the heart of autistic forms of functioning (Tustin, Mitrani, Meltzer, etc.). This thesis therefore argues that the experiences described as inherent to 'autistic capsules' or 'autistic retreats' (Klein 1980) may more fully help in getting a sense of, and an insight into, the intensely sensory use of objects that appears to lie at the core of the extreme hoarding process.

VI.E. ii. Conclusion

Some of the features observed in the extreme hoarding process look as though they highlight two-dimensional states of awareness. The question then arises: could two-dimensional states of awareness be taking place without the existence of a link to autistic forms of functioning? The observation of these features would suggest that there is autism somewhere. Of course, as argued above, as Richard is also evidently capable of three-dimensional ways of object-relating, the two-dimensional ones observed could potentially be encapsulated.

Another thesis could delve into further explorations of potential alternative explanations to hoarding. Perhaps some of these alternative explorations would not find it necessary to take into account the notion of autistic features; they might focus more on the notion of extreme projective identification mechanisms, which are probably also at play here. But I am trying, in this thesis, to point out and explore the similarities I observed between some of the features of an extreme hoarding process and those described as core to autism.

This thesis is an exploration of the links between autism and hoarding, and proposes that one explanation for hoarding behaviours may be that they are indicative of the breaching of an autistic retreat, as described by Klein (1980), Mitrani (1992, 2001), Rosenfeld (1992), Gambel (1983) and others. Where a trauma is suffered later on in life and is experienced as overwhelming, it may bring

about the same protective reactions as those experienced in relation to separation trauma in infancy, and inherent to autistic forms of functioning.

Freud described a similar personality split in the fetishist, where the 'replacement of the object by a fetish is determined by a symbolic connection of thought, of which the person concerned is usually not conscious' (1905: 155). Hence, whereas Freud (1905) claimed that hoarding is to do with anal eroticism, this study has had as its aim to explore whether this may not necessarily be the whole picture, proposing that two-dimensional states of awareness, and phenomena that are understood to take place in autistic modes of functioning, might also be taking place in an extreme hoarding process.

Following my results, I refer to Arieti's (1974) work and his understanding that hoarding appears to be very much linked to much more primitive, pre-Oedipal experiences of 'self' and 'not-self' than those purely to do with anal eroticism: 'Like the primitive man, the patient tries to counterbalance the transmutability of the inner reality by plunging into external reality; that is, by collecting and possessing' (1974: 419).

The extreme hoarding process appears to reflect similarities to many of the features described by psychoanalytic writers as being core to autistic forms of functioning. Very archaic primary process cognitions would hence seem to be in operation in hoarding, but they appear to co-exist alongside more developed, secondary ones (such as massive projective identification). Two dimensional states of awareness appear alongside three-dimensional ones. This would therefore further align with my initial hypothesis: that extreme hoarding compulsion may have at its roots very early separation/fusion trauma. This thesis therefore argues that, whilst extreme hoarding does not highlight a case of autism proper, it may well help further an understanding of the notion of autistic retreats.

VI.F. Limitations of this study

VI.F.i. A description of the TV programme that has been used as data

I used a TV programme as data for this piece of research. The programme showed an extreme hoarding process. The people whom we see taking part in the programme are Richard (the subject), who is Caucasian and appears to be in his forties. He lives on his own in a large three-bedroom bungalow filled with his hoarded objects. The house where he lives is set in its own large grounds, which also hold a three-bedroom semi and five garages – all used just for storage. The garden itself is said to contain tons of rotting household waste, as well as 18 classic cars, all currently in a state of decomposition. This is described as the house that Richard grew up in with his parents and in which he has been living all his life. Since the death of his mother 11 years ago, nobody but Richard has entered the property. The narrator, whom we hear but do not see, describes Richard's background and provides a description of the traditional, apparently quite affluent village, within which Richard lives – giving us an understanding of the numerous societies and groups that the residents have created as part of their community, and of which Richard is not a member. The manner in which the other village residents view and feel about Richard and his hoarding habits is highlighted by the programme and by the narrator, as is the ongoing conflict between Richard and the village council. There are a number of people taking part in the programme: the TV interviewer, who follows Richard around with a camera, and whom we hear but do not see; Andy, the helpful neighbour, who is a landscape gardener and who befriends Richard; Steve, a clinical psychologist who has been asked to try to help Richard, and who is described in the programme as being one of the country's leading experts on hoarding. When Steve meets and tries to talk with Richard, Richard argues that his own opinion is that he doesn't have a problem, that he only needs more storage space. Richard makes it clear that he is unwilling to explore the possibility that his hoarding difficulties may have an emotional cause. Unable to do anything further for Richard in his capacity as a psychologist, Steve then asks the local fire brigade to conduct a home visit, in order to try to make Richard's property as

safe as possible for him. We are shown how three burly firemen try to crawl their way around Richard's property, squashed between the piles of hoarded material and the ceiling, in their attempts to install a fire alarm in every room. They express their disbelief and shock at what they see. Various neighbours, as well as a passer-by, are interviewed by the cameraman about Richard. It is made evident in the programme that their feelings towards Richard and his hoarding behaviours are at best ambivalent but also hostile. The local councillor, a publican, the vicar and the chairman of Westcott in Bloom (a yearly competition) are some of the main interviewees to air their feelings about Richard. The producer and the editor(s) of the TV programme are behind the scenes, not appearing to have any contact with either Richard or any of the other people taking part in the programme.

As a main theme of the programme, Andy, the landscape gardener, is shown befriending Richard and attempting to help him to overcome his hoarding habits and begin to get rid of some of the decaying hoarded items that are littering his garden and filling up his house and the adjoining bungalow. Towards the end of the programme, some of the villagers, contacted by Andy, rally around Richard, helping him to clear his garden and bringing him home-cooked meals. Richard is shown actively engaging with them in trying to get rid of his accumulated items – something that he is visibly experiencing as a very difficult thing to do. Towards the end of the programme we see Richard emotionally expressing his shock and horror, as he appears to begin to become more aware of, and more able to face, the reality of his situation.

Strengths and weaknesses of using a TV programme on an extreme hoarding process as data

The strength of this research is that it is seizing an opportunity to explore a hoarding process, as most hoarders do not wish to seek out therapeutic help, and psychoanalytic psychotherapists tend to work within a particular setting and do not go out 'into the field', as it were. Using a TV programme as data has both benefits and drawbacks: despite being unconventional and indirect, it

offers a view of hoarding that could still help bring more awareness to this process itself, its effects on the subject's daily life and his relations with others, and its effects on the lives of those around him. Using already edited data such as this – although potentially distorting the facts in some way or other – exposes more information on hoarding behaviours and therefore deepens our understanding of its potential meanings.

As mentioned above, my observation of data has not been direct. I have taken my data from a TV programme, thereby observing something that has already been observed and edited by a team of television documentary makers. They edited their own observations to their own specifications and agenda, which was presumably to provide a programme of entertaining viewing for the public. There may therefore be distortions of the initial observations, due to the editing of data to suit their own requirements, in order perhaps to provide something to fascinate the viewer. As I have observed the documentary for a very different purpose, their editing may not be the kind of editing that I would have chosen personally to apply had I had the opportunity to directly witness Richard's behaviour. Perhaps I would have tried to find footage that engaged more directly with Richard, exploring with him how he actually felt about his hoarding process (yet, when the psychologist in the programme tried this approach Richard visibly became quite defensive). Perhaps I would have reduced the number of images that could have been devised to elicit strong feelings from the viewer. Yet, I feel that the programme makers did a good job of highlighting the extent of Richard's difficulties, allowing the viewer to really gain a sense of what it might be like to live within such an accumulation of articles. So, although my observations and the data I collected had already been edited by the TV team for their own purposes, I did actually feel that the programme itself allowed me to gain a much greater insight into the phenomenon of hoarding, and of the experience of the hoarder, which until then was something I was only vaguely aware of. In fact, by choosing particular bits of their footage in order to fascinate the audience, the editors of the TV programme may intuitively have picked out the especially relevant emotional aspects of the hoarder's relations with his objects, and therefore in some way they did the job for me! Indeed, the programme definitely stimulated my own

professional interest and my thoughts and feelings about the potential meanings at the core of the hoarding process.

Other forms of investigation into hoarding may reveal other factors than those I have proposed, exposing other potential meanings and explanations for hoarding behaviours. My own approach used and explored data from outside a formal psychotherapy setting, and complements the usual clinical method. But had I used a formal psychotherapy setting, more objectivity and more reliability may have resulted. At the same time, I may also have lost the ability to witness the hoarding process 'in action', as it were, which stimulated many ideas for me.

The transcripts, which are central to the presentation of my findings, are also data that I have taken from the TV programme. The transcripts are my own transcriptions of the dialogue in the programme. I have used the transcripts as my source of observational data, picking out particular bits of the dialogue in order to illustrate and give some degree of evidence for the points that I am making. As the dialogue in the programme is part and parcel of the editing process by the programme makers, it is also potentially subject to any distortion that would come about following the editing process that the programme makers would have subjected the programme to, in order to fulfil their own aims. Also, a transcript can leave out some quite fundamental indicators: tone of voice, hesitations and other emotional communications.

VI.F. ii. Narrow focus

By focussing predominantly on the links between autistic features and the phenomena taking place in an extreme hoarding process, the true picture of what may be going on is potentially narrowed and reduced. Indeed, I was less interested in observing what other, non-autistic types of psychic processes may be at play in the hoarding process and I did not explore any other potentially relevant psychic mechanisms. I am aware that the risk of my research design is that I could also unwittingly be biasing my readings of the existing literature on autism in order to get it to conform to the data I

found on hoarding. My attempts to understand the extreme hoarding process I observed could similarly have become biased as a result of having correlated my observations against writings on autism.

Having also predominantly relied on Frances Tustin's writings, my study is potentially more biased towards predominantly looking for the existence of sensory experiences in the hoarding process than if I had included the accounts of other authorities on autism. Tustin's (1972, 1981) descriptions of the sensory use of autistic shapes and objects lead to an understanding of the use of objects that is totally opposite to the use described by Winnicott (1953) in transitional experience. As noted by Bisagni (2012): 'She describes the exclusion from access to the areas of illusion and play and from the representational and social – that is to say, shared – use of objects' (Bisagni 2012: 687).

VI.F.iii. A single case study

As I used a single case study for this project, it could be argued that the similarities observed between autism and hoarding are coincidental. On the other hand, according to Hinshelwood (1993), only one case study is necessary in order to find the existence of similar characteristics. Given the detailed data I collected, the probability of the similarities found being purely coincidental would appear to be small; yet, this study does need confirming with other instances of severe hoarding, especially where clinical observation is concerned – if only extreme hoarders came for treatment!

Whilst noting that unusual or revelatory studies are more likely to involve single case studies, Yin (2009) posited that research involving multiple case studies has many core advantages over that involving only a single case – a main advantage being that the evidence from multiple case studies is often experienced as 'more compelling and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust' (2009: 53). He argued that, where the choice of and appropriate resources exist, multiple case designs would be preferred over single-case ones. Single case studies are often being criticised

for their uniqueness or the artificial conditions that surround them – characteristics that lead to scepticism about the researcher’s ability to conduct empirical work.

VI.F. iv. No clinical data

Although this is a professional doctorate that explores a field of work that is clinically relevant, no primary clinical material on autism or hoarding has been used. There are two reasons for this:

1. I have not worked with a patient whose primary difficulty has been directly expressed as hoarding (although I did work with a patient who had been diagnosed with Asperger’s disorder and who described her mother as being a hoarder). My aim for this research was to explore a documentary on hoarding in order to test my hypothesis.
2. I have been unable to find any psychoanalytic clinical material on hoarding.

There is no direct clinical data in this study: all the data has been taken from secondary sources (mainly Tustin’s clinical case studies and the television programme on hoarding). I do not have the data to exclude the possibility that Richard as a person is autistic, and not just his hoarding behaviours (although this does not appear to be the case). If Richard were to be diagnosed as being autistic then that would make this study irrelevant, as the overlaps highlighted as existing between autistic forms of functioning and Richard’s hoarding behaviours would be expected. Yet, because of the differences I have mentioned between the features of deeply autistic modes of functioning and those I observed taking place in an extreme hoarding process – especially Richard’s capacity to relate to others and his evident capacity for symbolisation, including language – Richard would not receive a diagnosis of autism.

I therefore uphold the understanding that the extreme hoarding process I observed could highlight the result of a breaking down of an original autistic encapsulation.

VI.F.v. Restricted data

Further research projects would benefit from using a wider, more diverse data-gathering process. The use of clinical case studies, focus groups with hoarders, questionnaires, discussion forums, etc. linked to hoarding processes would also have provided very useful information.

VI.F.vi. A subjective understanding

I have attempted to highlight observable phenomena that I have interpreted as reflecting some of the phantasies and protective manoeuvres described as existing at the core of autistic modes of functioning. The observations and interpretations made are arguably subjective. A number of other possible understandings regarding the significance and meaning of the phenomena observed may exist. I have not as yet checked my findings with other observers, so it could be critiqued as my forcing the data into showing my own expectations and understandings. That is to say the dynamics of autism at play in the extreme hoarding process could be simply my preferred conclusion resulting from cherry-picking the evidence. Any further studies could include a wider network of researchers in order that both the observations made and the data collection processes used may be compared and cross-referenced, allowing for a cross-pollination of understandings to take place to provide the possibility of greater validation.

I have argued that defences and phantasies relating to a mainly Kleinian understanding of very early psychic development may lie at the core of hoarding. This Kleinian approach may not only have influenced the observations I made, but also the data collected, as well as my understandings of these observations and data. I could have broadened the perspective of this study to include other schools of psychoanalysis, notably Winnicottian, whose concepts of transitional objects and processes could potentially have furthered these explorations. As described above, by focussing on Tustin's (1972, 1981) descriptions of autistic shapes and objects, I have aligned with a way of looking at the use of objects that is totally opposite to the use described by Winnicott (1953) in transitional experience. Tustin's contention that autism is precipitated by traumatic awareness of bodily

separateness and functions as an attempt to avoid this awareness has been core to this study's approach. If I had not based my understanding on explorations mainly of Tustin's descriptions of autism and its defences, I may not have come up with the results that I did.

VI.F.vii. A limited exploration

Other forms of investigation into hoarding may reveal other factors than those I have proposed, exposing other potential meanings and explanations for hoarding behaviours. I have not explored the possibility of differing developmental levels of traumatic experience in relation to the differences found between hoarding and autism, suggesting instead that differing degrees of envy linked to traumatic separation/fusion experiences may, in one instance, bring about intensely rigid, endemic, all-pervading autistic defences, whilst in another these traumatic experiences become encapsulated, allowing the rest of the personality some degree of freedom. This could be further explored in another project.

Hence, my hypothesis was that hoarding results from a dilemma brought about by trying to manage the trauma of separation/fusion struggles. I would also have liked to explore whether hoarding could be an omnipotent 'creative act' in an attempt to manage this trauma and envy – that is, would hoarding be an attempt to bring about a fundamentally good, transformative, containing object? Would it aim to enable psychic integration in the face of a disintegrating traumatic experience?

This study raises many questions that appear to me to link in to two overriding ideas. Could works of art and, hence, the creative process help us in understanding the psychic phenomena at the core of autistic forms of functioning and hoarding behaviours? And could autistic forms of functioning and hoarding behaviours allow us to think about creativity from a new angle?

I brought into the foreground the works of two artists, Schwitters (*Merzbau*, 1933) and Baudelaire (*Les Fleurs du Mal*, 1857), as I felt that they offered insight into notions of fusion and loss. Each of these works expresses things in a very different manner: Schwitters' walk-in sculpture, *Merzbau*

(1933), is very concrete, whereas Baudelaire's poetry (1857) is highly symbolic. Whilst I have only touched on this interesting area, as I cannot do it justice in this current thesis, I believe that an exploration of these creative works, as well as others, in relation to the phenomena observed in autistic and hoarding processes could further our understanding of autism, hoarding and creativity.

VI.G. How might this study be of relevance – Further research required

This research furthers understanding of why hoarding behaviours are so resistant to treatment. The results have a use in a clinical setting, because they suggest an understanding of what features may be present in other conditions that could also result from autistic 'pockets of functioning' (Innes-Smith 1987). There is a lack of psychoanalytic research on hoarding. Other disciplines (psychiatry, clinical psychology and cognitive behaviour psychology) have produced a number of recent studies. This discrepancy may be because hoarders wish not to engage in therapy, as mentioned. I also focussed on exploring a small area of the hoarding problem: the unbearable quality of separation, which leads to massive denial and a delusional fusion with objects. This leaves aside a lot of possible explanations based on other dynamics, such as envy of helpful others and invasive projective identification.

The results support the notion of autistic 'capsules' or 'cysts', which give a new meaning to the hoarding process. It supports Klein's (1980) and Mitrani's (1992, 2001) descriptions of working with patients who, although benefiting in some ways from analysis, remained untouched by it in some fundamental way (see pages 49,50 and 51 and pages 142 143 and 151 amongst others).

Mitrani's (2001) and Bisagni's (2012) descriptions (see pages 50, 521 and 77- 81 in this thesis) of the co-existence of both two- and three-dimensional ways of object-relating may be observed in the extreme hoarding process. Bisagni's (2012) descriptions helped me in my own attempts to explore and understand how what appeared to be autistic modes of functioning could co-exist alongside

other more developed psychic mechanisms. The results therefore supported Bisagni's thesis. Richard may at different times use autistic modes of functioning, massive projective identification, or more developed forms of object-relating. Perhaps all these different ways of object-relating do co-exist and overlap. Steiner (1993) described the notion of a 'psychic retreat', where massive projective identification would take place – the subject being unable to take back into himself what he has projected out. Steiner's (1993) ideas reflect O'Shaughnessy's (1992) notion of 'enclaves'. Both researchers wrote about the existence of non-communicating split-off parts of the personality into which a person can retreat. This notion of the attempt to create a refuge from psychic reality appears to be very similar to Klein's (1980) and Mitrani's (1992, 2001) notions of the autistic 'retreat', autistic 'capsule' or 'cyst'. Yet, it would operate at a more developed level of psychic functioning than autistic forms of experience. It also fails to further an understanding of the potential autistic forms of functioning (repetitive sensory patternings, ruminatory processes, perseverative preoccupation with objects. etc.) that I perceived to be taking place in the extreme hoarding process and that I have explored in this thesis. I have underlined these examples in order to show that both two- and three-dimensional forms of object-relating can be perceived to be taking place in the extreme hoarding process. Hence, whilst hoarding does not appear to be exclusively an expression of autism, it communicates something about 'unbearable fears of pain and of death, disintegration or breakdown' (Klein 1980: 200), and a similar defensive reaction: a walling off from the subject's awareness.

This investigation suggests further research into hoarding behaviours is required. The hypothesis that an autistic cyst/capsule would lie at the core of an extreme hoarding process should prompt research into whether similar experiences may also be connected to other conditions in such areas as Asperger's and ADHD, as well as certain addictions and eating disorders.

The existence of potential links between autistic modes of functioning and hoarding processes should be explored. Projects comparing autism and hoarding could decide whether my findings are

reliable and valid. This study points to the need for more investigation, including the investigation of meanings, and to the need to explore the link in the clinical setting.

The relevance of this project is to show the continuing importance and influence of early infantile experiences of trauma arising from separation/fusion struggles. Those early separation/fusion trauma experiences in autism may become concretely represented and enacted through a hoarding process.

This study is important as it affects the basic psychoanalytic assumptions held up until now about hoarding (and also, by extension, about collecting behaviours). The current psychoanalytic writings fail to make any links with autistic modes of functioning. This study sheds light on how an exploration of hoarding brings greater understanding of how experiences of sudden loss may precipitate unmentalised, unintegrated experiences of separation/fusion trauma.

Part of the importance of my results is that they may stretch into other fields (including aesthetics) and, hence, further research is required in relation to the variety of insights into other areas of psychic functioning. Rather than using a reality television programme on hoarding behaviour, more effort to find clinical cases could afford a more rigorous collection of data. It may also be of relevance for further research to interview analysts who have worked with autistic patients in order to explore whether they have also encountered hoarding behaviours in their clinical work and what their thoughts and experiences are.

The use of a focus group of patients in order to explore the potential links between hoarding and autism may also be of use in further research. Krueger and Casey (2009) remark that the use of a focus group allows data to be generated from spontaneous dialogue between members of the group, or from the use of a questionnaire put to the group. A variant on the focus group method is the nominal group technique (Delbecq et al. 1975), which combines focus group and brainstorming strategies. The focus group set-up mobilises participants to respond to and comment on one

another's contributions. In this way, statements and feelings are challenged, extended, developed, undermined or qualified in ways that can generate rich data for the researcher.

In finding some way of bringing external insight, help or relief for those who hoard, it may be important to take into consideration and to further explore whether psychotherapy is even something that would be considered to be an option for individuals who hoard, as they may not wish to seek help, they may refuse it, or they may deny that it could benefit them. If this were the case, perhaps a community-type approach may be more acceptable to the subject, as well as more helpful.

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