

PSYCHOANALYTIC QUESTIONS TO DONNA WILLIAMS¹

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Lieven Jonckheere (LJ) and Donna Williams (DW) conversed via mail and Skype at times between 28 October and 22 November 2015.

“Autism = The World of Sensing” OR “Autism = A Fruit Salad”?

LJ: Combining your testimonies on your own autism and your more theoretical statements on autism in general I got the impression that you use the word/diagnosis “autism” in two ways, at two poles. To start with, that autism is “the world of sensing,” your “being drawn to light, colour, textures, movement, sounds and tones in a sensing world of pattern, theme and feel” (I quote you). I would call this your primary autistic world.

DW: Agreed...One's OWN² world...AUTism...And whatever hell

¹ Donna Williams (1963-2017), also known by her married name Donna Samuel, was an Australian writer, artist, singer-songwriter, screenwriter and sculptor. In 1965, aged two, Williams was assessed as “psychotic.” During the rest of her childhood, she was tested multiple times for deafness and labelled as “disturbed.” In 1991, she was diagnosed as autistic and also underwent treatment for gut, immune system and sensory perceptual disorders. She wrote four autobiographies - *Nobody Nowhere: The Extraordinary Autobiography of an Autistic Girl* (1992), *Somebody Somewhere: Breaking Free from the World of Autism* (1994), *Like Colour to the Blind: Soul Searching and Soul Finding* (1998) and *Everyday Heaven: Journeys Beyond the Stereotypes of Autism* (2004). She released two solo music albums, *Nobody Nowhere* and *Mutations*. During the mid-1990s, she was the subject of several TV documentaries, wrote textbooks about the autism spectrum and was a qualified teacher, international public speaker and autism consultant. In 2000, she married her second husband, Chris Samuel. Williams died of cancer on 22 April 2017 (note by the editor).

one's autism fruit salad might be, it can also be one's sanctuary...This sensing world, this primary autistic world, can be that sanctuary...sometimes from the overwhelming nature of one's fruit salad, sometimes from the clash of systems: one's autistic reality within the external largely non-autistic world...and I think this is also the crux of the conflict/dichotomy of autism as “condition” versus autism as “culture”... that in autism as “culture” there is a collective rallying cry for non-autistic culture to respect not only the strengths that can sometimes be inherent in autism, but also the beauties, the sanctuary, the sanctity... and then of course there is also fruit salad...which is “condition.”

AS AN AUTIST...The world of sensing can be something one is by nature...or by default...for me, perhaps both...some people are naturally more sensing, more kinesthetic, more the “body mind”...But other things push this “ability further”...meaning deafness, visual perceptual fragmentation, meaning blindness, face blindness, lack of simultaneous self and other, inability to internally mentalise so that one is always in the moment...These things push the “system of sensing” further...much the same as the blind person may become an exceptional piano tuner. But whilst these parts of my fruit salad DID make me highly sensing, (and I remain highly sensing, for it is also part of both my nature and my early neurological and cognitive patterning), various strategies, adaptations and treatments reduced all these issues...allowing me to function consistently beyond “just sensing” whilst still retaining this system of functioning.

Equally...AS AN AUTISM CONSULTANT...I worked with over one thousand people with autism...so learned that THEIR FRUIT SALADS play out differently to mine...so some were also highly sensing and in part or whole for the same reasons, whilst others were not...Theirs played out differently...So as tempting as it may be, it's important not to see any one of us as the key to understanding all of us.

² Please note that the idiosyncratic use of capital letters and spelling by Donna Williams is retained (note by the editor).

LJ: But to me the question remains: is this “world of sensing” really a primary fact – or is it rather the result of some trauma (prenatal or postnatal)?

DW: It’s a great question...And I think it’s a case where “different roads lead to Rome”...So anyone with brain injury...whether from suffocation, or fetal alcohol, or simply being oxygen-deprived in the birth canal...may also have had the sensory perceptual and processing issues I had and also been stuck in the sensing state longer...i.e. developmental delay...but equally...could trauma, loss/grief do that too...or even co-occur under certain environmental circumstances...i.e. child with genetic collagen and immune anomalies gets born to mentally-ill psychopathic mother...Yep...we know that developmentally-at-risk kids get born into all kinds of families...including into the ten percent who are significantly dysfunctional if not downright derailed and damaging. But does this then apply to “all autistics?”...that would be silly.

LJ: On the other hand, in the end, autism turns out to be a “fruit salad”...

DW: Agreed...the system of sensing...MY primary autistic world, was a PRODUCT of both the overwhelming nature of my fruit salad (condition and its clashes with the system one is surrounded by) and the additional burden of “baggage” (i.e. trauma, grief, loss) but I could have reached “Rome” by one path or both.

In general, I learned that there are many ways people's autism fruit salad can play out. Take DPD...or NPD...or Schizoid PD...These are other ways people's fruit salad might play out...Perhaps depending on the nature of the fruit salad, the inherited p'types,³ the environment's responses to one's fruit salad...So character is also a predisposition...and of course environment hones, exacerbates or diminishes various aspects of character too.

³ P'types is shorthand for prototypes.

I believe I was also predisposed by character to being more sensing; in terms of Oldham's p'types I'm idiosyncratic, exuberant, vigilant, sensitive...the idiosyncratic and sensitive traits have higher links to dissociative states (see <http://blog.donnawilliams.net/2011/01/20/the-spectrum-of-dissociative-disorders/>), the vigilant and sensitive predispose to the potential for chronic fight-flight and the exuberant is a hedonistic pleasure-seeker avoidant of pain, so strongly drawn to seeking the joy and rapture in sensory experiences.

LJ: This fruit salad autism is the result of several factors: you mention “pre-natal abuse, followed by post-natal abuse (most significantly in your first two years),” that has been “exacerbated by severe trauma and associated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Dissociative Identity Disorder.” We could call this your autism in progress...

DW: I see it as parts of a multifactorial case of “straws on the camel's back”...I have a genetic collagen disorder - Ehlers Danlos Syndrome – and, given collagen is essential for brain connectivity and immune regulation, both of which will predispose to “fruit salad,”... and my father descends from double cousins...so at some point twenty-five percent shared genetics, which we know results in a range of “fruit salad,” so we can't cherry pick and fixate only on pre- and post natal brain injury or trauma, or loss even if it feels enticing to do so...again, multifactorial, many roads leading to Rome...even simultaneously. Autism is a matter of too many straws on the camel's back resulting in functional impairments, derailments... which comes about from a variety of circumstances...brain injury (whether caused by abuse or not), genetic anomalies and their functional complications, character and its reactive and motivational predispositions, any significant trauma, loss, neglect before the age of three ... and yes, in any combination of such causes there may also be compensatory strengths...like sensing...which present AUTistically.

LJ: Would you agree that autism as a fruit salad kind of shields the

original autistic world of sensing?

DW: I see no problem with being primarily sensing being part of one's fruit salad...just as being a kinesthetic learner might...or any other learning or thinking style. I see these as twofold in some ways... i.e. my PERSONAL, more experiential explanation of being AUTistic...versus my more FUNCTIONAL explanation... i.e. what makes it inevitable one is stuck functioning by sensing versus meaning. So in other ways, the two are too interconnected to be twofold. For me, your hypothesis does not make sense. Sensing is accurate on an EXPERIENTIAL level. Fruit salad is accurate on a FUNCTIONAL level. Same beast, different lenses. I can't see how fruit salad shields the original world of sensing, but I can see how those dealing with fruit salad can take refuge/consolation in the sanctuary/playground of sensing.

Polly as “True Autistic Self”?

LJ: Let's talk about your so-called “characters” – nowadays you prefer to call them “alters.”

DW: I did see them as my “characters”...as a whole I have my own character...as we all do...and each of my alters have different combinations of my character...I was also being encouraged by the autism world to downplay my multiplicity.

LJ: According to you these “characters” are “offshoots of the original self, made of the same stuff, but sculpted in different ways.”

DW: Agreed.

LJ: Quote: “All of my characters, my parts, my selves, are autistic – but different parts of my autism feature each in different collections: not because all the features cease existing, but because some parts have adaptations others don't have.” And you call to mind your two main “characters”: Carol = “appearing” and Willie = “mind” – who

together assumed (and still assume?) responsibility for your relationship with the outer world ...

DW: Different alters (in my case compartmentalised combinations of one's own character) end up “specialising” in a function... so Carol became Polly's “meta self” to tolerate the relentless sculpting and contortions by the non autistic world...my mother, teachers, fellow students, later men...and Willie became Polly's “protector” partially because of overwhelming trauma and threat of the environment, but also because of the inherent social vulnerability of lacking functional verbal speech, lacking simultaneous processing of self/other, struggling to internally mentalise...so I can also see that “fruit salad” contributed in each case to the necessity of this “splitting,” compartmentalisation and specialisations.

Willie and Carol however were the only alters Polly was consciously aware of...but in time it became clear that as Polly became frozen at age four, Anne emerged as what remained as the embodiment of Polly's grief, that Carol had further split into Bobby and Addie, and was Shirley when out shopping in the community. Then Addie split, out of which came Marnie, and during one particular trauma Katrina appeared. Then when Bobby (one of Carol's alters) was “killed” Lee (now Bobby's alter) later emerged from the ashes. And in addition to Polly, Rose and Da had also developed in their own rights. Also Polly had no memory of those before her: Esby and me before Esby. So perhaps you can see why Polly had limited memory or awareness of the broader “system.” As all began to emerge and speak for itself, Polly was progressively aware and no longer frozen at age four, but also at forty-seven I came out of dormancy that I'd been in since around sixteen months old. So way too simplistic to hone in purely on Willie and Carol. Regarding these two, however, Willie and Carol no longer function as hosts/alters managing the worlds of mind and appearance. Nor is Polly four years old any more. I achieved relative integration, so these are now integrated parts of the whole. Though we all took on the name Polly as a whole, the alter named Polly is a pivotal part of this, but not the whole.

LJ: On the other hand, hidden behind those two “characters” on the outer scene, there’s the inner world, with Polly = “sensing”...

DW: That was true back in 2010 when I was dx'd1 [first diagnosed] with DID2 [Dissociative Identity Disorder] But by the end of 2010 there were fourteen alters, including three animals, and the core self woke up. The work from there toward integration was intensive but essentially meant all parts got to know, respect, co-operate with, empathise with and ultimately identify with each other until it was like a team, then a family, then parts of a whole relatively cohesive self...Polly was part of that...Because that name was associated with the most healthy part of development and the first eight years (nobody was called Donna until late childhood) this team-self identifies with that name (as the core self I had gone dormant by age two so had no identifiable name...and, yes, we could certainly do an interview on identity and the importance of identifying with a name and what it means when one has no idea one has one!)

LJ: Do you regard this Polly-character as equal with the “real” Donna, the real autistic Donna?

DW: Many were sensing; Polly, Anne, Katrina, and though Willie was “mind” that part was also highly intuitive...but Polly was not only sensing, that part was the home of “joy” and “connection.” Polly was the third to emerge...me, Esby, then Polly...but though dissociation was on board I could not call Esby or Polly a “defence”...though I could call Carol, Willie, Bobby, Lee, Shirley, Addie, Marnie, Katrina “defences”...and Da (who was the most identified with my father and almost an introject of Jackie Paper) has elements of “defence” but is almost a means of “preserving” Jackie Paper...i.e. my mother could ensure I lost this father, he could also change and become a monster, but I could preserve him in a way neither could eradicate...so, yes, again, partially from attachment, partially defensive...and Rose, not a defence at all...just the product of attachment to an Italian carer, Mrs Capellazzo...or if there was a defensive element it was that being Italian was an escape from being the daughter of my Anglo

abuser...an escape into another culture...and I feel this was also an element of Rose but not the whole...Polly is perhaps in part also an introject of the paternal grandmother...and if we are considering introjects then Willie was largely an introject of the paternal grandfather...essentially the grandfather to protect the grandmother when entrapped in the bedroom inside the house with the abuser with the grandparents in the shed in the back yard unable to help or save “me.”

So characters...yes...alters...yes...defences...often but not always and not completely...and if you are talking the system of sensing, Polly was the first to develop socially...So really Esby was far more in a purely SENSORY state (and was bonded on this level with the father and paternal grandparents) and before her I was in both a purely sensory and SENSING state (and bonded only with the paternal grandmother), and Polly...being the extension of each of these forebearers, had both of these skills, but added the capacity to socially interact with our father and paternal grandparents...so in this sense Polly was the first bridge between our own world and the external world.

LJ: Is Polly also a “character” or is she your “true Self,” if I may say so? Finally, do you believe in the existence of something like “the true autistic self”?

DW: There was me...the core...then a sensory self called Esby...out of which came the echolalic and socially bonded joyous sensing child of Polly...and all the alters from there were parts of Polly's inability to cope...But just because as a team we now all use the name Polly does not mean Polly alone...its [sic] just a far more relatable name for the whole team than “Donna” – which none of the team ever identified with...i.e. there was never an alter, a part, or a whole that thought of itself as “Donna” and there was no feeling of connection with this name...but keep in mind we had been called Polly by everyone on our father's side as well as his work colleagues and the dance teacher and fellow dance students until we were eight and at school we were enrolled as Donna, and Mrs Capellazzo only spoke Italian and we

thought our name was Dondola (means “rock this”...she was having me rock her baby in a bouncer and saying “Dondola, dondola”)...which I later changed to “Rose”...and my younger brother was born when I was six and by age eight called me Da Boy...and people at the shops called me Shirley (because I struck them as a Shirley Temple) and my mother called me “Dolly” (openly seeing me as her doll/object) but more often as “that thing” and “it.” So I didn't hear “Donna” consistently at home until late childhood when I was then bashed into responding to it. I always felt it was interchangeable with any name out of a list, it felt no more significant than that.

LJ: Can this Polly/Donna “character” or Self ever change, can it really develop, can it grow up?

DW: Polly in 2010 was stuck at age four, which was when we lost both grandparents (main carers). It took a lot of harrowing work for that part to cope with the reality it had frozen and split off into so many other parts. In time though, Polly did come to terms with that and began to grow up...which was a process of dealing with the original grief/loss and the trauma of that...Out of that came the realisation that all 'came home' to her... as did her predecessor, Esby, who was purely sensory, and I was happy to see Polly as “who I'd have been had I not gone dormant” leaving this fragment to continue in my absence. So Polly was not a “meta-self” (Carol was), not a depersonalisation (which Willie was), not a compartmentalisation of rage (like Marnie) or distraction (like Da), or victimhood (like Addie)...etc. ...Polly was the home of heart and social connection....I had known bonding with my grandmother, but didn't know her as a person (knew her smell, texture, voice, objects). In this sense Polly was the one to most completely bond...with those after her being far more “defences”...and so, hence she was, if you like, both “sacred” and the lantern, the light, and so in the end all returned to the one each had split from which ultimately returned all to her...much like a broken vase, fragments above the stem, and then some of the fragments get stepped on, fragmenting these further, then if you played the movie of this in reverse, it all ultimately returns to the

vase just before it had fragmented, and that vase by then was well adhered to its stem and base – Esby and before Esby, to me.

LJ: Can it/she (Polly) be touched by something, by some one or will it/she forever remain “lost in sensing”?

DW: Polly would continually fall into grief on remembering the grandparents were gone. But equally, as the home of joy and heart, that part was more capable of being touched by others and by experiences than any that came after her.

I was the one who was most detached...Polly's connectivity always threatened to wake me and ultimately it did...of course it WAS mine...but I'd turned away from it, withdrawn from it...and when the grandparents died, Polly froze and all the others developed out of survival.

Polly was my first “social Self” – she was the first to bond with others, and so the home of the “heart,” this part was traumatised, frozen in time, and got stuck in the world of sensing as a far more integrated team, as a whole, Polly is the name now for this more integrated whole.

(See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZeXkWSiMV8>).

LJ: Your answer makes me realise that Polly is liable to the same distinction or double meaning as the word/diagnosis autism (see above) – in fact Polly even seems to show three “faces”...To begin with, Polly is the name you “emotionally identified” with, making up the kernel of what could indeed be called your “social Self” (the side of your father, that you bonded with, as opposed to your mother with whom you never developed any bonding at all).

DW: Agreed

LJ: But Polly also seems to be the name for your “traumatised Self”, for the part that was “frozen in time and stuck in the world of sensing” (Polly = sensing)

DW: Agreed.

LJ: And last but not least Polly is the name you actually prefer for yourself as “a more integrated whole”... you answer my questions in the name of Polly, if I may say so ...

DW: Agreed.

LJ: ...but isn't Polly also a name for your inconceivably private fruit salad?

DW: Not sure on this one ... perhaps I was more autistic, or Esby, in other ways it would be Anne or Katrina who were more autistic...depending on your archetype...

I thought I was a ghost channelling everyone...that's VERY autistic!

Esby experienced everything on a purely sensory level...that's as autistic as being purely sensing. Anne was the grieving self when Polly froze...also thought she was a ghost...Very AUTistic...Katrina has never run the body and used Anne to channel her...that's pretty schizotypal and “autistic” but in a different way again.

Autism as Endless or Unendless Self-Therapy? A Brief History of Autism-Paradigms

LJ: In my texts I identified a series of transitions in your work with your own autism – transitions that you seem to confirm. But apparently I missed the last transition, after 2010. This is not only due to the fact that since then my evenly poised psychoanalytic attention got stuck with all kinds of other “things.” Rather I had the conviction that with the fruit salad paradigm you had reached a sustainable solution for your autism.

DW: Perhaps I did.

LJ: Let's say that I was at ease that from then on you had found an arrangement that you would manage. But now it appears that you

still had two more steps to take. First you had to end your “Dissociative Identity Disorder journey, integrating all the split-off ‘characters’”...

DW: Only some with autism will also have DID...I've met over half a dozen dx'd with both...So just because my DID journey was an essential part of MY autism journey (and my autism influenced my DID journey AND vice versa) doesn't mean we can project this onto others. Another way of looking at it is that the fruit salad of my autism was so functionally overwhelming in one way or another that it served as the “great distractor”...putting on hold equally essential work...work most essentially about personhood...that until I had cleared the deck so to speak re condition I could not dedicate myself adequately, consistently or fully enough to the essential work that was waiting in the wings...that of my DID. So it's like if you are falling from the sky, you can't use your parachute if you don't yet have any hands so you first have to solve that before you can deal with the equally survivalist task of your parachute...sometimes you must gain capacity to function in order to then save your soul.

LJ: And secondly you had to become aware that “one is a balance of personhood and condition(s)”...

DW: I think that I didn't see myself as conditions...by my mother, by teachers, by fellow students. I was treated as pathology/conditions and strived to retain my equality/relative normality/personhood...but often this was merely pathologised. Feeling my personhood was being invalidated as condition...and so it became essential to understand and advocate for each but also explore how the two are related and can peacefully co-exist.

LJ: Does this mean that your autism journey now has come to an end? Or does it on the contrary imply that your treatment of your autism never will come to an end, that there are still transitions to come (*encore un effort*, one more effort, as they say in French)?

DW: Who knows. I think the answer is in fruit salad...Have I clearly set out and explored all the fruit salad...all the extenuating circumstances...and the answer is yes, I have. And in doing so I can be clear...of what the journey was...what was personhood, what was condition...What was uniquely mine...what might apply to others.

LJ: Basically the same question, but now in a “public” formulation instead of the previous more “private” formulation. You sketch an illuminating history of the paradigms of autism – all of which you have been floundering through on your own autism journey. And you state that one either can be in line with each of these paradigms or in rebellion against them. What does this mean in your particular case? In the sixties, in line with its psychiatric discoverers or inventors, psychoanalysis made autism a childhood psychosis – with the refrigerator mother who was to blame...

DW: In line with this paradigm one is “damaged,” but equally if the mother is truly damaged... i.e. in my case possibly a mother with Reactive Attachment Disorder, alcoholism, Aspergers and DID...then that mother needed rehabilitation. To be in line with this paradigm is to be 2D in one's understanding of a condition that is 3D. It is theoretical, reductionist, and it's like “religion”...people get invested in it as a belief...Reality is more 3D. Rebellion against it means understanding it in a more 3D fashion...the capacity to celebrate what works about one's autism...to utilise multiple approaches and strategies.

LJ: In the seventies, educators took over and autism became an emotional/behavioural disturbance – with alexithymia at its core...

DW: in line with this paradigm one is treated as “a case,” therapised...it is 2D and reductionist...it may be part of the picture - but is not the whole rebellion against this paradigm a matter of humanising, asserting personhood...rejecting pathologising and its damaging effect on identity...

LJ: In the eighties, psychologists defined autism as a cognitive problem – with the problem of information processing of ambiguity...

DW: This paradigm is equally reductionist, 2D, but functionally helpful if one is significantly meaning deaf, meaning blind, face blind, lacking simultaneous self-other, struggling to internally mentalise. Being in rebellion against this paradigm means that one considers the SELF, as more than mind, more than cognition. To consider the sociology, the roles of identity and personality... the personhood...and the identity and emotional journey with one's condition.

LJ: Around the turn of the century, at the wake of the so-called hypermodern times autists themselves came to the fore – with your fruit salad theory...To begin with you yourself must have been in line with your own paradigm. Upon discovering it, I immediately had the feeling “this is it.” Not only had it allowed you to find a sustainable solution for your own autism, but it also seemed to initiate a new sustainable paradigm for the treatment of autism in general in the so-called “hypermodern” times. But now we learn that one can also be in rebellion against this fruit salad paradigm of autism – with “the awareness that one is a balance of personhood and condition(s)”...

DW: this is not rebellion of the fruit salad paradigm...the fruit salad paradigm is ONLY ABOUT CONDITION...So it is my philosophy that the PERSON is a balance of personhood and condition (i.e., fruit salad)...it IS possible to be in rebellion against the fruit salad paradigm...those who believe in autism archetypes, stereotypes, one size fits all “autistic culture,” in NT [Neurotypical] versus Neurodiverse...these people are in rebellion against the fruit salad paradigm...I'm not one of these people...I find this stuff 2D, simplistic and surfacy...It's flimsy.

LJ: Does this imply that the fruit salad paradigm runs the risk of becoming “a public theory, a stereotype (promoted by social media

forums)”...

DW: This doesn't make sense

LJ: ...or that it runs the risk of derailing effects for autists themselves (as all previous approaches finally did)?

DW: The fruit salad approach does risk exposing the term autism...the concept of autism AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT...And with this is awareness that AUTistic is merely an adjective that got promoted to a noun as “autism” because professionals benefitted from doing so and funding was possible once this was adhered to...but at what cost...I don't mind risking people having to face that they have fruit salad...that we all do...that we are all a balance of condition/s and personhood...Sounds healthy to me...but can't say people will like it :-)

LJ: We're in the twenty-first century now. Are there any signs that a new paradigm of autism is needed, is in the making? And what could it be? I myself do not have a clue: as already said, to me it seems that your fruit salad might be the ultimate paradigm; in any case, it is not incompatible with the most recent psychoanalytic treatment of autism (based on the theory of Jacques Lacan, which promotes the singularity of each human being, called “speechbeing”)...

DW: I think the world is still struggling to catch up to a dynamic and 3D model of “autism as fruit salad.”

LJ: In response to this annoying series of questions of mine you initially referred to your account of your developmental and diagnostic history. (See <http://www.donnawilliams.net/diagnosis.o.html>).

Although I had already tried to reconstruct it myself, as a background for my articles on you, I was still pretty much surprised to discover your complete developmental and diagnostic history. Also I was astonished to learn that this developmental and diagnostic

history is more than twenty times as long/big as your biography...

DW: Funny.

LJ: Biographies should be concise: the German philosopher Martin Heidegger wanted his to be summed up as *Geburt* (birth)/*Arbeit* (work)/*Tod* (death), in opposition to a famous Flemish writer, Jef Geeraerts, who liked his biography to be summed up as *Geboorte* (birth)/*Orgasme/Dood* (death) (making up the letter word "GOD")...But nevertheless...Does this mean that your developmental and diagnostic history takes the place of your biography, that it really is your life's work?

DW: No...it means that the world has been fixated on my "case," my "condition"...the website is my public statement...my bio is more personal...the personal is my prerogative, belongs to me...I don't need to share it...if I do so then it is not required, it resolves nothing to do so but the diagnostic history...this satisfies the stalkers, the obsessives...yes, and the analysts :-)

If you wonder at my life's work...It was the puzzle of how a broken child was glued together with love then lost it in all its forms and so lost herself creating her life's work to find out the how, the why, the what with the goal to deliver those fragments back to the whole they had come from.

LJ: One last question concerning your endless or unendless self-therapy. You told me "perhaps your question is what made you a Taoist"...

DW: I was already one when I learned what one was...Is Taoism not the only solution to find a place of harmony out of a bipolar reality? Is it also not so that one needs spirituality of some kind to comprehend the incomprehensible...that we seek frameworks...and I learned that the ghost of a dead Jewish guy from 2000 years ago was unable to save me, the animals and had never saved my grandparents...so with no Jesus and one's saviors already despatched

[sic], and the only remaining one, my father, a co-opted train wreck, what does one do to feel safe? Perhaps find God within oneself? Which is, of course the Buddhist path...and what is one to do with all the shit? The more I made sculptures of it the more I brought in the light... light to that shed that had lost all life and become a shell...light in the darkness my mother was so adept at generating...because she feared light...and the more light I found, created, converted, the more I found God in myself, that feeling that it really would somehow be "alright"...and this became the foundations of my Taoism but also there is guilt, and what putting shit to great use meant

I was not weighed down by guilt and there is despair, but light distracts from despair and comforts those in it - and there is rage and what better justice in the David and Goliath battle between my mother and I, as forces of light and dark, to determine to side with light at all and any costs - and there is love - and if I could have given my trainwreck mother just one thing...then it would not have been love, it would have been to be the relentless example that she need not have feared light, that... yes...all she did she did out of her own pain, her own reactive attachment - and she found no light in her parents...and rejected the light in my father's parents - but me...although she determined to extinguish me many times over so too is she clearly compelled by me....and I realised unconsciously, long before I realised consciously, that she had gifted me with something amazing...she gifted me with the awareness that I was extremely RELEVANT and gifted me with a journey, a purpose, a drive...to hold on to the map, to record and remember the puzzle pieces, to survive her as a representative of every replica bogie man and monster I could ever encounter on life's journey...and what a gift to give...and perhaps in some way unconsciously she intended these gifts...because SHE needed to be found, she needed to be known, to be RELEVANT and to have a living example of all she could not dare to be to experience it by proxy because she would never do the work to experience it personally...

And THAT is my gift, perhaps unconscious but at least in part conscious, and certainly intuitive, back to her. I do not feel she was

my mother, more that she was MY antithesis and me hers and that we sculpted each other through our contrasting determinations. She is from incestuous, alcoholic parents in a family of nine siblings and an atmosphere of favoritism, neglect, violence...and though I am her biological daughter she saw me as her hated older sister Margaret... the golden child and a failed mother replacement (my mother was the invisible child) and determined to scapegoat me...which was meant to raise her above the golden child older sister so she would become RELEVANT, not invisible, and so begin to live, not just exist and I feel this dynamic shaped my impression of her as my "sister" - she was a sister bent on killing me, owning me, damaging me to raise herself above the damaged goods...but the kind of sister I was? I became the unattainable sister, one that she would never be a safe enough person to be able to have. I could have been the RESOLUTION, the healthy older sister she didn't have. Instead she has watched as if through a window all she and I never had with each other - and there is vengeance in my success as a healthy human being but had she done the hard work and become a safe person, I have enough compassion to have befriended her.

Autism versus Psychosis (Schizophrenia) and Personality Disorders: Towards a Negative Diagnosis?

LJ: In one of my texts (2014), I put forward the claim that your fruit salad model of autism always excludes two ingredients (which by the way allows for an interesting "negative definition" of autism): "From a diagnostic point of view, at least as important as the ingredients of any autistic fruit salad are the two types of disorder which, according to Donna, cannot be part of any "real autistic" fruit salad at all. With one of these present, "real autism" is out of the question. I suppose it is no coincidence that both disorders are intimately associated with two lovers Donna had to separate herself from. First of all Psychotic Disorders would be incompatible with "real autism" - this is especially the case for schizophrenia. But wasn't Donna's first lover labeled schizophrenic? On the other hand Personality Disorders would not be compatible with "real autism" either: Multiple

Personality Disorder, Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder – according to Donna all of these would be typical of Asperger. May I recall again that her second lover was considered an Asperger, by Donna?” (Jonckeere, 2014a, 108).

My first question is: how is it that autists get all of those diagnoses (as ingredients of their fruit salad) – and not even wrongfully?

DW: I can accept that many people with autism can and do have a range of mental health challenges. I was a person with autism being accepted...to a degree...in a non autistic professional circuit in which it was taboo to dare suggest that autism and mental health issues could co-occur...over time I called it as I saw it...and it took a long long time before professionals (psychologists...very proud of their cognitive model) could agree...

LJ: Well let's get down to business, with this little exclusion theory of mine. Do you think this is a correct rendering of your opinion on the matter at all?

DW: Probably in my twenties, perhaps into my thirties... but I'm fifty-two now.

LJ: Growing old as part of the “therapy” of autism...

DW: Yes, I think many would say so; it is about delayed development...

LJ: But do you still stick to the idea that real autism is incompatible with schizophrenia or personality disorders?

DW: I think this theory is lacking in huge amounts of information.

- I was sexually abused in childhood.
- I lived ten years as a homeless person from 15-25 living with a range of men to stay off the streets, each as significant/insignificant as each other...including Ian. Sion

was more significant...the first time parts of me had fallen in love...

- But if you're looking to understand aversion to being labelled psychotic you would be better looking at what it is like to have one's mentally ill mother introduce one as "that's Donna, she's psychotic"...i.e. "Now never presume she will ever make sense, speak comprehensibly or ever tell you anything you can believe..." How marvellously convenient out of the mouth of an abuser...There is the aversion to the pathologising and reductionism of the presumption and projection of psychosis. Remember my mother lived to create pathology...So rejection of psychosis is rejection of her "creativity." As you can see... the woman was an "artist": (See <http://blog.donnawilliams.net/2015/02/16/surviving-munchausens-by-proxy-and-suffocation-abuse/> and also <http://blog.donnawilliams.net/2014/02/04/the-legacy-of-a-pedophile-mother-by-donna-williams/>).

So it is very convoluted and silly to me that you would overlook such extreme traumas associated with being publicly advertised as "psychotic" in favour of a rather flimsy theory about my "lovers"...Personality Disorders and Schizophrenia can be part of one's fruit salad...sure...for some it will be, for others not. To me Personality Disorders [sic] were just personality-types with the volume turned too far up...I could see how chronic fight/flight whether due to trauma or info overload could do that, and how environment could hone Personality Disorders...as for the Welshman, he had had meningitis at age four – so impossible to know how this fitted into both his autism and his psychotic breakdown...as for Ian he had experienced years of sexual abuse from age three and rejection by his narcissistic mother who only loved her daughters and had an aspie (Aspergers) father who was completely rote⁴ so not present...so all of these things fed his Personality Disorders and Dissociative Identity Disorder...as for whether and to what degree these derailed his development in

⁴ Possibly means "mechanical" or doing things on automatic pilot.

autistic terms, who knows?

LJ: Why is it crucial to you that autism, in general, is not considered a form of psychosis? Indeed, most psychoanalytic approaches look upon autism as a new “postmodern” form of psychosis (first diagnosed at the end of World War II), which is distinct from classical forms of psychosis (schizophrenia, paranoia, melancholia)?

DW: Everyone tries to claim Van Gogh as in their club...and he was actually a fruit salad....so its similar...why should autism be claimed by any one camp...it is a fruit salad...different combinations of things contribute... and sure, for some, psychosis of various kinds may or may not be in someone's fruit salad...but you can't take one of those pieces of fruit salad and claim it represents the whole...so...for example...I have a genetic collagen disorder - Ehlers Danlos Syndrome IV...collagen is essential in brain connectivity and immune regulation...I was born to an alcoholic and likely have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, which essentially means brain injury...I have IgA deficiency which is genetic and impacts digestion, immune function...all of these contribute to info processing and associated overload and related responses to a world that does or doesn't understand these things or how to adapt to them...so can we legitimately call all these things psychoses? No...and yet take the same person and stick them with an abuser, rob them of the carers they did bond with and cause them trauma and loss...and put them on a diet they cannot digest and are allergic to and you will likely ALSO have some issues you could broadly call 'psychosis' in their fruit salad, but this does not justify claiming their autism as psychosis in its entirety, however self-serving that may be to a psychoanalyst to do so. Some people have one, the other, or both. Where there is both they may be co-occurring merely by default or because one has some non-exclusive causal relationship with the other. What is dangerous is the naive and outdated presumption that autism is any one thing...it is not ALL cognitive, not ALL immunological...not ALL genetic...not ALL brain injury...not ALL about brain connectivity...not ALL social-emotional...not ALL

communication based....not ALL associated with mental health...but it can be different combinations of these things for different people with different loadings in each case.

Autism with DID and PTSD: Towards a Positive Use of Trauma?

LJ: One of the most interesting and provocative insights I gained from the study of your testimonies is the possibility of a “positive use” of trauma. I quote myself: “Now which disorders are an ingredient of Donna’s inconceivably private autistic fruit salad and which cannot be? Two disorders seem to make up its core: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). Indeed, for Donna her so-called “Big Black Nothingness” is a manifestation of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Notwithstanding our deeply-rooted Lacanian aversion to the ideology of disorder-diagnoses in general, we can agree with that, as the Big Black Nothingness seems to correspond to a repetition of the dishcloth-trauma, in relation to the mother. Otherwise it should be noted how fiercely Donna defends herself against all kinds of anti-experts who “cyberstalk” her – which means that they try to expose her, by claiming that she does not really suffer from autism but from PTSD. To Donna it appears to be vital to defend her invisible autism as more fundamental than the salient PTSD (which she only accidentally acquired in her traumatic relation to her mother). The second core-element of Donna’s fruit salad is Dissociative Identity Disorder – the DSM-IV diagnosis for her “characters.” Donna herself puts great store on her DID. According to her it has laid the foundations for her major autotherapy: thanks to her characters she finally got educated, or “normalized,” and she found her way in the world. But more importantly: in the meantime, hidden behind this mask of “normality,” she has been able to cherish the autistic *jouissance* of “sensing.” So in her internet discussions with other autists Donna always breaks a lance for DID” (Jonckeere, 2014b, 108).

Is it correct to say first of all that your “characters” are the result of a

trauma at the hands of your mother, and secondly that your “characters” allowed you to secure your primary autistic “sensing” from the outerworld – and that consequently you may be said to have made a positive “use” of trauma? In any case you yourself never posed as a victim of trauma...

DW: I most definitely made positive use of trauma. The trauma involved for each of the fourteen in my team [of “alters”] was different. My mother was the trigger for most, but in the case of Rose it was about inability to reconcile attachment to the Italian mother, Mrs. Capellazzo (that it was a place of belonging and safety but a completely different culture); for Anne it was the loss of the paternal grandparents; for Carol it was partly the trauma of being expected to be a non-autistic child particularly once started at a mainstream school; for Da it was largely domestic violence between my parents but more so my father brutalising my mother. The creation of Shirley was to reconcile being paraded as a golden child out shopping and being the scapegoat the moment we were back out of the public eye...so once a person is dissociative the sources of trauma, loss/grief, neglect can be from more than one source. Did my alters allow Polly, Anne, Katrina to keep their sensing selves sacred, private, separated from the external world? Hmm. Each coped in different ways, these were the ways of those parts...different alters allowed survival of very different types of circumstance.

Autism and “To Live and Let Die”: Asexuality and Euthanasia

LJ: The following questions may come across as quite personal! First things first: the confused questions of life...I would like to ask you a question about sexuality in persons with autism. But I do not really know what it should be about or how to formulate it. Anyhow, it has to do with the sustainability of the claim of “asexuality.” According to me, in your case at least, this claim of asexuality formed the basis of what I call (with a French expression, coined by Jacques Lacan) an *autisme à deux* (shared autism, bi-autism) with the man you call Ian.

You bonded with each other precisely to the extent that both of you could claim to be asexual. But as you yourself have shown, this asexuality turned out to be an illusion – in any case, it was shattered on both sides. Would you say asexuality (or should we say “the illusion of asexuality”) is typical of autism?

DW: You don't understand inability to simultaneous process self-other, you don't understand Alexithymia and...yes...some people will also be more Schizoid than others, making them more asexual than they might be at a given time.

LJ: I do not understand...do you mean that I do not understand? Or do you mean that these three factors (inability to simultaneous process self-other, alexithymia and being schizoid) are responsible for the development of asexuality, implying that asexuality is not inherent to autism? (contrary to the idea that the word “autism” is a contraction of the word “autoerotism,” meaning that the only source of enjoyment is the internal “sensing”).

DW: Asexuality is not exclusive to autism...different roads lead to “Rome”...inability to simultaneously process self-other, alexithymia, being schizoid are three such roads that would be common in an autism fruit salad...but attachment disorders could happen in autism or without autism and also result in asexuality...or body dysmorphia...or depression/anhedonia...or...

LJ: But before discussing asexuality maybe we should first of all ask ourselves what sexuality really is? According to psychoanalysis sexuality has to do with the difference between man and woman, womanliness being the main problem for both – which confronts everybody with the question: what is a woman, how does one feel and behave as a woman, with a woman? This implies that, according to psychoanalysis at least, sexuality is always a problem, and even an impossibility (Lacan said, provocatively: “there’s no such thing as a sexual relationship,” all sexual relationships are botched-up jobs, are “home-made”...). Now, I cannot help asking you what your definition

of sexuality is? And what does it imply for men and women with autism?

DW: My definition of sexuality...this would have changed over time and depending on which alter... and since integration is different again...And because each of these alters was the result of compartmentalising different “genres” of trauma, loss, neglect, etc., the sexuality of each was differently effected...So for Willie – asexuality. But for Anne sensuality was completely intact, just subject to extreme exposure anxiety; so provided the approach was “cat,” sensuality to sexuality was intact. For Rose, (the Italian) again, healthy sexuality, probably because the Italian mother she arose from provided a healthy social-sensual foundation...for Polly sensuality was intact but sexuality hadn't developed...for Addie sexuality was engulfed in trauma and “obligation”...for Carol, (Polly's “meta self” for society), sexuality was that of a sexually-abused child who had grown up to fit the natural progression into “domestic prostitution” (sleeping with someone to stay off the street)...Da was the one most bonded with Jack...and had intact sexuality but identified as a gay man in a woman's body...and Lee had a male gender identity and a sexual misogyny toward women...so there was a lot of work on gender identity, sensuality and bridging this to sexuality, healthy versus unhealthy sexuality (i.e. domestic prostitution) and getting these parts to ultimately have a cohesive response to sexuality with our husband Chris – and we were ultimately successful in doing this.

Yes, my mother's issues with me were about her sexuality in relation to her sister, her father, her mother and then played out with my father, my brothers, me...If you like she saw me as a threat to her – “another female,” yet one more female in the way of her monopolisation of my father - and my view is she was playing out her role in relation to her sister and mother in vying for the attention of her incestuous and sociopathic alcoholic father (because she preferred him to her alcoholic “baby machine” mother who made her feel invisible, irrelevant). So my father was her father replacement... and her sister had had a child at 14 to her own father, then when I

was three my mother caught this sister with my father...so you can see the situation.... She needed someone to play out on, and I was her “doll,” so in effect her representational object...For me, people can “be their objects” (i.e. objects as keys to whom they evoke) but people should never themselves be objects.

I feel sensuality is the basis of sexuality, not performed sexuality, but actual experienced sexuality...and sensuality is also the basis of trust and bonding...so with my grandmother I was sensual. My experiences of her were sensory and bonding. With my grandfather I felt safety and trust. This came from his steadfast quietude and capacity to relate through nature/objects (which is also very freeing, says “I acknowledge your own entity”...his music of beingness instilled this, for my grandmother and for me). My father was fun, energetic, entertaining, not sensual but physical, and in terms of closeness he would give me his coat to wrap up in as a “nest” on the back seat, I was provided the enclosed bubble of the car...a womb if you like, his womb - for a child who had survived the womb of a mother who had twice attempted home abortion. Out in the car with him was a bonding space, me and him in a moving enclosed bubble...from zero to three years old [we were] commonly out at nights, the movement of the car was like being rocked. Even now I come home in the car and sometimes just sit there in the car for some time. So experiences of trust are bound up in sensuality...intimacy...people who share objects, experiences...a coat, an enclosed space, a cup of tea, some shiny sweet wrappers, a handkerchief puppet, bugs in a park...and this is the foundations of love and of sexuality.

But, my mother's influence was very different. She taught me all love was not...And she was emotionally incestuous, sexualising, endangering, and sought at all levels to “own me.” I found her a sexual threat much as one would expect living with a predator. I also found her a sexual threat in that she had the inclination to target any partner I lived with, to sidle up...so for example rubbing their leg under the table, feeding them off her spoon...And enjoying the power of it, the compensatory narcissism. She went through “campaigns” to traumatise and confuse me about my body, about sexuality, about my

gender. She utilised her biological mother status to strive to instill a rejection of myself with statements like “you know where you came from...you slopped out of my creamy cunt”... and constant references to how I smelled, displaying my body to visitors. It was expected I would end up living in abusive relationships, which I did for ten years, but it has been epic that I have managed to determine that at any and all costs I would strive to know, to trust and find home with healthy intimacy, sensuality, sexuality...and if you read *Everyday Heaven* (2004) you see I achieved that...fifteen years now with my husband Chris...a great and healthy relationship...so ultimately, however damaging she was along the way, her determination to destroy my sexuality ended up empowering me to strive to salvage it.

So, yes, there is much to be said of sexuality, but I believe you were looking in the wrong directions, also there's a fair bit of Maslow [in terms of a hierarchy of needs] .. [I] had to deal with the physical threats first... the life-threatening stuff... then the emotional threats... the stuff that makes one a suicide risk or at risk of self endangerment... then it was possible to deal with the structural stuff of sensuality, gender identity, sexuality and dynamics and identifications that had left this in a fragmented and compartmentalised chaos.

LJ: ...on the other hand there also remains the annoying question of death. Speaking of death, your Big Black Nothingness experience immediately comes to my mind. I quote my attempt at an interpretation of it. “At the age of 4 Donna suddenly had this experience of the room around her coming alive as a pumping “shell of living flesh.” An extremely frightening experience in which the object of the gaze disappeared and the object of the voice came to the fore. First of all, an inner voice calling out repeatedly “don’t wanna die!” trailed off in a kind of echo, in an outside voice whispering “die!” Meanwhile little Donna dashed in all directions, looking for the mirror, in particular looking for the eyes in her mirror image (the “other girl”) – but not finding them (which means that, at that very moment, her mirror image was no longer animated). Finally a voice was heard, shouting “Stop It!” – and “everything did stop dead in a

state of suspended animation.” After this initial experience the “Big Black Nothingness” kept coming back, even for several times a day – be it in a different version, which also seems to be its final version: the shell of living flesh has melted into “a wall of water, of tidal waves,” while the voice has risen to “a roaring sound.” Now, how do we have to understand this “Big Black Nothingness”? According to Donna herself, at the time of her relationship with Ian, it pointed out an emotional overload: “just like a computer that is working at full capacity suddenly can shut down.” If we may translate “emotional overload” as “enjoyment” (a psychoanalytic concept of Lacan, meaning “pleasure that is too much, that it is not pleasurable anymore”), then we can understand this “Big Black Nothingness” as “the return of *jouissance* on the border” (Éric Laurent’s basic intuition concerning autism). In Donna’s case this border is constituted by the room; the room that transforms itself into a shell of palpitating flesh and later on into a wall of rushing water, corresponds to the return of *jouissance*” (Jonckeere, 2014a, 69). What is death to you? Is it different from this Big Black Nothingness? And do you still suffer from it? Has it taken on any new forms?

DW: I lost chronic fight/ flight in 2001 following low dose Risperdal and then low dose Seroquel after ten years on these my brain had forgotten how to trigger into fight-flight.

LJ: What do you make of my interpretation of the Big Black Nothingness as “return of the *jouissance* on the border” (inspired by Éric Laurent)?

DW: There was no joy in it... it was more like a seizure.

LJ: In a private conversation with a colleague, I recently let slip out that euthanasia is an autistic way of handling one’s own death – death being one of the very few points where autistic people positively expect something from the other, where the other really has something to give to the autist – I would say that “The only thing the other can give an autistic person is his death.” I hope you do not

find this a shocking proposition (not my intention!!) Do you think there could be a kernel of truth in it? What do you expect from death? Is the idea of suicide (in opposition to euthanasia) conceivable for people with autism?

DW: Plenty of people with autism have killed themselves, plenty of non-autistic people have too...

LJ: Do you in Australia also have this discussion about euthanasia for people with “unbearable psychic suffering”? And what do you think of that?

DW: I lost my respiratory drive by 2012...a terrible thing, but also a great privilege (especially as a breast cancer survivor). I am one of the rare people who could choose any day to “just die”... all I have to do is fall asleep without my bilevel ventilation. I think all people should have such choices. When we have such choices we know we have chosen to live. I'm pragmatic and believe in autonomy and self-determination...life is short...we can live it, enjoy it, or endure it, bemoan it...And if we can't be bothered to strive to do the former then we should have a right to pull the plug. Of course supporting VOLUNTARY euthanasia is not the same as condoning people making choices on behalf of others unless it was clearly the expressed wish of that person themselves [sic].

Your Invention in the Treatment of Autism: “How to Let Fall an Object”

LJ: In the course of treating your own autism you not only have become a teacher or a theoretician on the subject with the development of the fruit salad paradigm. But you also became a consultant, a clinician working with autistic people (adults and children alike). An important innovation, that you have introduced, is a very particular use of objects in ‘interaction’ with people with autism. An extensive quote from one of my papers on you. Feel free to interrupt me! “Donna’s invention of new therapeutic techniques

for the treatment of autism is an imitation of the way her imaginary dead father handled objects between the two of them.”

DW: Imaginary? Memories are memories. Imagination is imagination.

LJ: “Donna remembers how her father would bring home some tiny, fancy, shining thing of nothing, and play a kind of game with it, a game between himself and little Donna.”

DW: He was a second-hand car dealer...he would bring home little objects found in the seats of cars and hanging on their mirrors, key rings...miniature icons, tiny figurines, beads, etc...what he did was play hard to get...chat out loud to himself allowing me to tune in, interact with the objects...much as one would entice a cat...

LJ: “In this game three scansion can be distinguished. First, *the Thing an sich*. He would turn the thing around and around, not looking at Donna, but only at the thing itself, as if hypnotised by it.”

DW: Yes... modelling how the “cat” might explore it if it dared to...

LJ: “Second, *the Thing* and the signifier. Then he would go on to name the thing – as a category: “this thing really is a *specialy!*” [sic] (again a kind of neologism) – but he also gave it his name with “words in which the meaning was still yet to be found” (e.g. “this is an Angus Buldarum Blackarse Brookenstein Specialy”).”

DW: Yes...he got this from his mother...it was her style and language...clearly it had intrigued him...except she was not playing hard to get...she WAS autistic...she had limited simultaneous self/other so when absorbed with objects she “danced as if there was nobody watching”...He was replaying what had captivated him. And the irony is that he was “speaking autistic” and this was socially comprehensible to me in ways directly confrontational interaction (which stems from simultaneous self-other) was not.

LJ: “And finally *the Thing* and the body. Finally little Donna never would be able to resist grabbing at the thing, and after some squabbling she always would slip off with ‘her *specialy*.’”

DW: Yes, the cat would snatch the object...and my father took this as an achievement...

LJ: I wrote the following about the *specialies*. “This fatherly play with the *specialies* shows through in Donna’s technical guidelines for the handling of objects with autistic children. Guideline 1: do not make eye contact. Which means two things. Do not force an autist to look you in the face: do not display facial expressions; do not post yourself in front of an autist, but always on the edge of his field of vision. And do not look at an autist yourself: look through the window, possibly at your own reflection; and if you happen to look at an autist, do as if you were looking at your own mirror image. In short: act as a body double of the autist, not in a confrontational, face to face way, but on the edge of an autist’s field of vision, in an oblique way” (Jonckeere, 2014b, 99).

DW: Yes, it is a “language”...a language of behaviour....Behaviour that stems from a form of cognition...lack of simultaneous self and other...Visual perceptual fragmentation and associated information overload triggering chronic fight flight...one becomes “cat”...so the language is ‘cat people’ language...not “dog people” language.

LJ: “Guideline 2: do not search for meaning. Do not show signs of interest for the meaning of what an autist says. And do not try to arouse interest in an autist for the meaning of what you say” (2014b, *ibid.*)

DW: Yes, do not narcissistically take ownership of the interaction...don’t “pounce.” If an interaction is working you are speaking to their body...their body is trusting you...so do not seek to wake up the person with a chronic fight/flight state...to jolt them out

of body, into mind. It is their body that needs a wealth of trust experiences...No amount of intellectual awareness can instill this...in fact it may sabotage it and empower the involuntary self-protection responses to be “on guard” next time.

LJ: “Guideline 3: do not give an autistic something directly in the hand/do not talk directly to an autistic – but reduce yourself to a *passing machine*, of things and words alike. So present “things” to autistics the way Donna’s father did with his *specialies*: hold them in between you, looking intensely at them and naming them, and finally abandoning them somewhere in the indeterminate space between the both of you. Basically the same applies for words: do not attach any importance to them, just let them drop from you; do not talk directly to an autistic, but talk about him, in objective terms (so do not say “you are...” but “autistics are ...”). In conclusion: between therapist and autistic words and things should be treated alike, as *specialies*” (2014b, *ibid.*)

DW: RDI, Intensive Interaction, Original Play, Sand Play Therapy all take up this “oblique” style.

LJ: Could you tell us something more about the development of your “object relation”? How did the object come into being for yourself? Your grandmother seemed to be one of the first ‘whole objects’ (as opposed to your own feeling of being fragmented)??

DW: I don't really understand your question...but I'll try and explain my relationship to my grandmother. I can remember being less than three months old, being six months old, and I can remember deep attachment to my grandmother AS a smell, a set of movements, a voice, a set of textures...her skin, her hair, the crocheted blankets and shawls and cardigans she wore that I enmeshed my fingers in. These memories are from around 3-6 months old. I know my mother likely did not hold me after being born and that my grandmother slept with me until I was three months old, so its likely that I experienced her as my first “mother,” and in this sense she

represented the world and my own lovability and the safety of attachment. It was around 3-6 months that things were very dangerous with my mother. And at six months I got thrown through the bedroom window (which I remember) which is likely how I ended up in the welfare programme from six months to two and a half years old. I was still home for evenings and weekends but I think this removal – essential to my survival – disrupted the relationship to my grandmother even though it was a very safe and regimental place that in other ways was good for me...because next time I remember my grandmother was as Esby transitioning into Polly...and this was around age 2-3...a different relationship now...the grandmother was still the home of eucalyptus oil, tartan, the sound of playing the spoons, the harmonica, the squeezebox, her distinct laugh and her smiley eyes...but she was other things now...The provider...of shiny sweet wrappers, bits of colored glass, bits of wool, of biscuits, raisins, cups of warm tea, the warm bed of my grandparents...attachment was now that of a “parent” doing “parenting” but very sensory and object based. This lasted until Polly was four and a half years old. But by two to three the DID was fragmenting Polly's cohesive reality...so connection with the grandmother became like a faulty light switch...not always accessible. But when she left the same week the grandfather died, it was absolutely crushing...like being killed...and then she became “sacred”...Polly was traumatised and frozen in time, virtually now never in the body in the company of others...a fairy child...and Anne took her place...like Ophelia...a ghost girl replaying the grandparents movements and voices to keep them “alive.”

LJ: And your father ...

DW: First memories of Jack would have been him sneaking in to feed me, sing to me, keep me from complete dissociation...I was around six months old, my cot was acrid with urine and there was shit everywhere...I had sores, everything was pain, the room was dark most of the time, those who entered whispered to avoid my mother finding they were defying her command to “let it die”...so

Jack was the “bringer of sunshine”...food for the soul...ensuring I stayed “incarnated,” not “giving up the ghost”...and next I remember him as the driver of the bubble that was the car...a mobile “womb,” him and me, untouchable, moving through the world...he would sing and whistle and do characterisations all the time...a living “cartoon” like Gene Wilder in Willie Wonka (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1y8aYd9uqFY>)...this was likely when I was one to three years old...and he'd take me out at night with him...he'd wrap me in his chunky woolen coat...swaddling me so I was in a “nest” in the back seat of the car...he'd go into houses to collect money (he was selling cars on terms) but he would always return to the bubble. At his work I felt I was in a wonderland...he traded all kinds of things...he was a “fence”...so there were all manner of objects I could not understand but would explore...small, large...furniture, electricals, trinkets...like an antique shop...and he was completely supportive of me learning experientially, physically...he would “advocate” for me saying “that's Polly, she's feral” (because I didn't have functional speech and would commonly run away from strangers if not bite or slap). And this was the man who was then banned from looking at me, picking me up, speaking to me...he had to sneak looks at me, pulling faces and trying to make me laugh when my mother wasn't looking...so from ages three to nine Polly largely lost Jackie Paper...and then we were dumped at his car yard in the absence of a childminder...probably as “insurance” against his sex addiction and endless whoring...harder for him to whore compulsively with this child hanging about...but he was now a workaholic, rarely stopping...though he would teach me RDI⁵ style how to do jobs...wash windows, scrub seats, wash cars...so he treated me then as a boy, as his “on”...as Da Boy. And at home, a few times I was going selectively mute and having breakdowns...he would revert to Jackie Paper from when I was three and sing, dance, make me laugh...try and keep me “incarnated”...commonly connecting via objects, but also through music and silliness...the ability to make me

⁵ Relationship Development Intervention is a family-based, behavioural treatment of autism.

laugh, to wake me up to myself...to remind me joy existed in my darkest times...and so he was very magical. He was also extremely violent during domestic violence, terrifying, rampaging with an axe, shooting off guns, physically brutalising my mother and I saw him then also rape her. No doubt she was just as horrendous, but it was an enormous conflict...to see this monster in a loved, valued, needed, and identified with parent.

What can Autism expect from Contemporary Psychoanalysis: An Interpretation or Something Else?

LJ: Being a psychoanalyst (educated in the mainly French-speaking schools, founded by Jacques-Alain Miller, in order to explore and to promote Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic ideas) I am interested in your current position towards psychoanalysis. I would like to ask you whether you are interested in or informed about current psychoanalytic thinking on autism? And what do you, as a person with autism, expect from psychoanalysis?

DW: Read these, then ask yourself whether I fear psychoanalysis, whether and where I see it intersect with my autism ... for the comparative relevance of the two relationships you selected to focus on, see: on my mother <http://blog.donnawilliams.net/2015/04/23/abuser-mothers-with-dissociative-identity-disorder/on> my father <http://blog.donnawilliams.net/2015/05/16/7373/> on me <http://blog.donnawilliams.net/2015/04/22/7151/>

Most in the autism world outside of Europe and Ireland have/are rejecting psychoanalysis as having any relevance to autism: they see it as archaic and irrelevant...I can see roles for it in trauma, grief, neglect, identity disorders, personality disorders...sometimes these things exacerbate autism, sometimes autism exacerbates the likelihood of these things. I particularly feel DID was part of my autism, and that psychoanalysis was an essential part of my work with DID...in terms of other people's autism we can talk about how much or how little can we use my example to suggest the relevance of

psychoanalysis to others with autism...my view is that it will have some relevance for those whose autism is exacerbated by identity disorders, personality disorders at the very least ...but that it should never be presumed that all with autism will have these issuesespecially now dx (diagnosis) is 1 in 100....not 4 in 10,000 like when I was dx'd (diagnosed) at age two...the breadth of what is called autism is far, far broader today.

LJ: I recall that you were rather unhappy with a psychoanalytic interpretation that was made to you, in your first therapy, by the psychiatrist called Mary. I mean the interpretation of the panic attack while you were working in that cake shop – when a much-loved customer, whom you had ignored when he waved at you in the street (due to faceblindness and because he was out of context), later on made it clear that you had snubbed him. Even if you agree that Mary's psychoanalytical interpretation (old-school style, it is true) was “right,” and that indeed the panic was “fuelled from there by the traumatic experience” of your grandfather and father who all of a sudden had stopped existing...can such psychoanalytic interpretations ever make sense to you, to persons with autism? Or do they on the contrary always imply a danger...precisely because they are “right”?

DW: A very “loaded” question...if you feel you have the answer already why ask the question? Psychoanalytic interpretations are often quite convoluted and often reasons are far simpler, more logical.

LJ: How then should psychoanalysts treat or speak with autistic people (apart from shutting our mouth)?

DW: if you have had your head bitten off by other people with autism, this has not been me...there are many approaches I like...sandplay therapy, original play, intensive interaction, relationship development intervention...my own Indirectly Confrontational Approach for the chronic fight/flight state of

Exposure Anxiety...any of which psychoanalysts may be quite at home with...

Autism and Contemporary Politics or Ideology: The Management of (the Tiny Enjoyment in) Ambiguity

LJ: Upon reading my texts you may have felt some irritation on my behalf – irritation towards the way autists today are encouraged to handle their difficulties with ambiguity, and especially the inherent ambiguity of natural speech. I mean the psycho-educational approach, based on the idea that “in brains everything is a matter of information processing and information integration, of getting all the bits of information working at once – and that this is precisely where autists are ‘handicapped’: they do not succeed in processing and integrating all that information” (Lawrence Bartak to you). A quote, where this irritation of mine rears its ugly head. “Bartak suggests to Donna that she should radically change her subjective position. When communicating with the other, autists have to put themselves in the meta-position of “the Other of the Other.” Witness the following psycho-educational instructions. To start with, autists should come out as such and explain that their autism means that amongst other things they are “meaning deaf” – so they should make clear at what moment they cannot any longer follow another man’s speech. Whereupon autists have the right to instruct others how to speak to them in order for them to be able to extract meaning. What it boils down to is that autists have the right, even the obligation to format the speech of others in three dimensions. First the signifiers or words: “Speak to me with my own words! Speak my own language!”, “State the facts! Leave out the garble, leave out that emo-crap!” Then the voice: “Take that dancing out of your voice! Speak evenly!” “Speak to me, one person at a time!” And finally the gaze: “Speak to me in my own familiar surroundings!” “And don’t pull faces when you talk to me!” [...] In the case of Donna all that formatting of another man’s speech leads to a measurable increase in meaning. [...] Nevertheless, serious problems remain: meaning is rigidly fixed [...] and extracting meaning becomes terribly

exhausting, because it is devoid of any form of enjoyment: it is “meaning without inner experience,” there is “no enjoyment of conversation for company’s sake.” And last but not least aggression crops up when others resist this formatting, and do not allow Donna to fixate the meaning of their speech. At such moments Donna simply walks away, saying: “Your words, I have no use for them, they’re just words.” Of course, the dimension and position of this impasse radically change when psycho-educated autists achieve positions of power – which, in our contemporary management- and ICT-ridden society, more and more becomes the rule. Then they no longer simply walk away, being in the position to simply compel others to comply to the formats of communication they themselves completely identify with...” (Jonckeere, 2014b, p. 64).

For clarity’s sake, my irritation does not so much concern the way individual autistic people try to handle ambiguity (of speech) as the huge success this formatting of communication is having in politics today. Indeed, for some obscure reason politicians all over the world have started shouting from the rooftops that, yes! Not only the growing number of autists, but the whole population will surely benefit from disambiguation of speech. In Belgium, simplifications of the school system and the subject matter taught have been motivated by the need to include autistic children (and rightly so), adding, in the margin, that those simplifications will benefit ~~to~~ other children too because “aren’t all human beings a bit autistic at heart?” Of course reasons for these reforms are economical (scaling up in order to be able to save money; no separate schools for autistic children needed anymore, and so on).

What do you make of this critical, ideological analysis of mine? Do you see my point? Or do you simply think that I am overreacting, in a paranoid way, fearing that “they” (the bad guys from the government) only use the autistic problem with ambiguity in order to be able to steal away from us “neurotypicals” our poor little enjoyment of all things ambiguous?

DW: I certainly like the fluid, ambiguous way of looking at autism...the fruit salad model allows that...including a place for the

psycho-social approaches. I think the autism field is all “jobs for the boys”...everyone vying for their own pet theory...everyone claiming Van Gogh for their own club...ridiculous. The psychosis model, the emotional disturbance model, the cognitive model, the sensory model, the physiological model, the neurodevelopmental model...: ALL of them could be drawn upon as required depending on the MAP established through setting out a given person's “fruit salad.”

LJ: Could it be that the formatting of speech in order to make it less ambiguous and more of a message, is not an invention of autistic people themselves? It did not come up spontaneously in their minds. It was passed off on to them by psychologists who told them this is what they always had wanted without knowing it, without daring to ask for it. I refer to the promotion of disambiguation of speech in the psycho-educational paradigm (Bartak) of autism.

DW: Agreed, but equally, dealing with retraumatisation caused by societal presumptions of madness when one is not comprehensible is also a pain easily alleviated with “language lessons”...if done with respect...as a second language...why not...it has “utility.”

LJ: Is this unambiguous speech, this disambiguation of speech what autistic people themselves want? True, it means a big relief to them, but is this what they really want themselves?

DW: I'm one person with autism, hence I don't speak for all with autism...but I can say that from my FRUIT SALAD, someone who has poor simultaneous self-other, poor internal mentalising, chronic fight/flight, faceblindness, simultagnosia, meaning deafness (and associated echolalia), meaning blindness, alexithymia, needs interaction, communication, learning techniques that are accessible with this whole fruit salad... i.e. an indirectly confrontational approach which involves kinesthetic and external mentalising practices (i.e. representational objects) involving small moving objects (simultagnosia means seeing larger objects bit by bit but when they are moving they “glue” together as a whole).

But let's say the fruit salad was DPD, social emotional agnosia, speech aphasia, depression/anhedonia...the approach would have to be adapted to THAT fruit salad. So what an autistic person "wants" or "needs"...what makes each feel functional, understood...will depend on that person's fruit salad....Yes, mine IS a common fruit salad...but so is the second example.

And finally, Dear Donna, Why I Am So Invested in Your "Case"...

DW: I answered a lot of this...but eventually got tired...perhaps this "sculpture" is getting you closer to a form you can make sense of...now tell me Lieven why are YOU so invested in my case? I'm one human being among billions...we're all interesting, or not...so why me?

LJ: Should I be surprised at this reversal of positions at this interview? Some of my patients also ask me this kind of question at a particular moment of their analysis.

DW: and of course a) I'm not your patient and b) this is an exchange, not a reversal...I ask myself why I am interested in spending my time answering and one key to that is getting information as to whether my time is well spent.

LJ: My "investment in your case," as you call it, is not mere calculation, not mere speculation: what I can gain from it...

DW: For me, answering you is about what am I to gain from this. For clearly I have done well as my own psychoanalyst so I figure it is really what does an editor get out of working with an author...hope that the work of the author might be more accurate, representative etc.

LJ: It has to do with many things, it corresponds to a confluence of multiple, rather personal factors. I guess you could call it a fruit salad

of motivations – with sweet, bitter and bittersweet ingredients.

DW: Great answer and of course with journalists I ask...well who are you...And if you want candid honest responses what are you risking...and so journalists prove their worth in being capable or not or being a full and real human being with me if this is what they are also expecting of me. Perhaps that is my need...some realness and respect in a world full of roles, and hierarchy and assumptions...All marvellously safe for them.

LJ: It surely has to do with my interest in the end of psychoanalysis, with what I expect from PA. At the end of a psychoanalysis it appears that people's lives are patched up stories, life as not one single history but as a kind of "telescoping" of several stories (like Lacan said in the case of the new words that Joyce invented in *Finnegans Wake*).

DW: And as "editor" I care too about the content of patched up stories...I am relating to you far more as a journalist and here I am both interviewee, but also editor...

LJ: But behind that it also has to do with my intimate conviction that life is impossible. Consequently I have always been fascinated by people who "embody" this impossibility of life, by the sheer fact that their life has really been made impossible, or by the fact that they have been able to tell what this impossibility of life in their particular case consists of. How do they manage?

DW: Yes, this is a great driving belief to have...that one can create one's own life, build castles from dust...yes, for sure I have done so...and the first thing that comes to mind is that my father was very like Gene Wilder in Willie Wonka...So all things were possible. View this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1y8aYd9uqFY> and his mother was also like this...made her own reality as she muddled along...she was "magical"...I think neurologically this came from the

inbreeding...she was descended from double cousins...a pair of brothers married a mother and daughter and their offspring then married each other...she was a child of those offspring...and she was a “simpleton” but gifted in arts, and warmth, and love of animals and nature...she was carefree, joyous, but in many ways I feel she had Pollyannism...as did my father, as have I... Optimism bias...

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pollyanna_principle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SVsK3UQbEo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8rmi95pYLo>

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=pollyanna+principle

cultural, yes, but also perhaps neurological.

LJ: From that standpoint I have already “analysed” many dead people: Kafka, Joyce, Duchamp ...And I have always been surprised to discover how the jokes and machinery of their unconscious and the scenarios and imagery of their fantasy finally enabled them to live with their body and their minds, enabled them to bond with others and themselves, to mind others and themselves.

DW: Yes, the unconscious doesn't judge or create obstacles the same way the conscious mind does... and a conscious mind struggling with a brain with poor connectivity which therefore can't filter well becomes overloaded like an overflowing bucket...the response of which is either “meltdowns” or “dissociation” or stepping out of conscious mind, into the preconscious mind, allowing life to unravel and respond intuitively to that unravelling – the system of sensing...of course trauma only increases this tendency...the two, theoretically, potentially creating a super sensor navigating largely preconsciously.

LJ: But from time to time one also has to turn to the living. That's why I became interested, or invested, in the testimonies of my psychoanalytic colleagues about the end of their own analysis, which made them able to function as a psychoanalyst. But also in an artist like Jan Fabre, my latest “crush”...And in you...What else besides the

unconscious and fantasy makes life possible? What inconceivably private solutions in progress do the living invent in order to go on with living (this is what Lacan calls "*sinthome*")...

DW: Living examples are models and one can ask them questions.

LJ: My "investment in your case" also has to do – and this is a tough one – with my relationship with women, with what I expect from a woman and a woman and woman...Every time I get "acquainted more intimately" with a woman I get a bit more acquainted with myself: I lose something of myself and become a bit more of myself. And yes, you are a woman...

DW: When we connect deeply with any human we shake up our existing sense of self...its part of the flow between deeply connected people...and though we lose some things we gain others... (provided one is not BPD with poorly developed identity and no boundaries...or rather DPD and easily giving up our autonomy as soon as we sense a "nurturer")...So perhaps you are merely capable of deeper connections and trust with women so this process flows better...Or...

LJ: And last but not least is also has to do with my feeling that man is changing, that man's definition of "man" is capsizing. A posthumanist definition of "man" is emerging, a definition that goes beyond the postmodernist definition of "man" as an "empty subject" with all of its constructions. Are we not moving towards a "body subject" with all of its tinkering...Maybe there's some fundamental, ontological truth in the opposition between the "neurotypical" and "neurodiversity," with autism as its spearhead...

DW: I think all people are neurodiverse...take the alcoholic, the diabetic, the neurotic...one need not be autistic to be neurodiverse...but society is changing...the trends...it is no longer okay to be prescriptive, to believe in one size fits all, to dictate who one should and will become...and in this way we are no more diverse than we ever were but we no longer *carte blanche* are trained into

eradicating, hiding, controlling all our differences...we are ALL coming out of the closet...asexuals, furies, self-injurers, psychopaths. Everyone is advocating, connecting with their “tribes”...including “autistics”...but we are more diverse fruit salads than say diabetics or furies...so we are diverse beyond our stereotypical diversity.

LJ: Do we have to face the fact that man is becoming increasingly autistic, that some autistic kernel of man is starting to surface? And shouldn't we as a consequence ask ourselves what this implies for man's self-definition (there's no other definition) and his relation to his fellow man?

DW: Yes, and no. Yes, with technology we appear progressively more “autistic” and are losing our social skills, our emotional skills...yes...but in terms of the increasing numbers of autistic children, no...This is a façade and recent studies have found in fact there is no increase...see <https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/autism-prevalence-unchanged-in-20-years/>

LJ: If we accept that man is autistic at heart, that autism is the new “normality,” what does this imply? Does it imply that everybody is the same, that everybody will speak the same, the same language? Or does it on the contrary imply that everybody is different, that everybody speaks his or her language (I suppose this is where the fruit salad approach leads to)?

DW: Being emotionally, socially “autistic” was natural and normal for all humans...but we had it trained out of us...it was “unsociable,” “would get us nowhere,” “was rude”...but as the social trend is to prove how diversity-friendly we are, we now are progressively less prescriptive...we are falling out of the closet but this “autistic,” the adjective is not “autistic,” the fruit salad...no, more than a smell of apple pie - is the actual apple pie...

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