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Playing and Reality

With a new preface by F. Robert Rodman,
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London and New York

that has value in the summing up of what I am trying to convey. She had asked a question, and I said that the answer to the question could take us to a long and interesting discussion, but it was the question that interested me. I said: 'You had the idea to ask that question.'

After this she said the very words that I need in order to express my meaning. She said, slowly, with deep feeling: 'Yes, I see, one could postulate the existence of a ME from the question, as from the searching.'

She had now made the essential interpretation in that the question arose out of what can only be called her creativity, creativity that was a coming together after relaxation, which is the opposite of integration.

Comment

The searching can come only from desultory formless functioning, or perhaps from rudimentary playing, as if in a neutral zone. It is only here, in this unintegrated state of the personality, that that which we describe as creative can appear. This if reflected back, but only if *reflected back*, becomes part of the organized individual personality, and eventually this in summation makes the individual to be, to be found; and eventually enables himself or herself to postulate the existence of the self.

This gives us our indication for therapeutic procedure – to afford opportunity for formless experience, and for creative impulses, motor and sensory, which are the stuff of playing. And on the basis of playing is built the whole of man's experiential existence. No longer are we either introvert or extrovert. We experience life in the area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation, and in an area that is intermediate between the inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of the world that is external to individuals.

5

CREATIVITY AND ITS ORIGINS

THE IDEA OF CREATIVITY

I am hoping that the reader will accept a general reference to creativity, not letting the word get lost in the successful or acclaimed creation but keeping it to the meaning that refers to a colouring of the whole attitude to external reality.

It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living. Contrasted with this is a relationship to external reality which is one of compliance, the world and its details being recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation. Compliance carries with it a sense of futility for the individual and is associated with the idea that nothing matters and that life is not worth living. In a tantalizing way many individuals have experienced just enough of creative living to recognize that for most of their time they are living uncreatively, as if caught up in the creativity of someone else, or of a machine.

This second way of living in the world is recognized as illness

in psychiatric terms.¹ In some way or other our theory includes a belief that living creatively is a healthy state, and that compliance is a sick basis for life. There is little doubt that the general attitude of our society and the philosophic atmosphere of the age in which we happen to live contribute to this view, the view that we hold here and that we hold at the present time. We might not have held this view elsewhere and in another age.

These two alternatives of living creatively or uncreatively can be very sharply contrasted. My theory would be much simpler than it is if one or other extreme could be expected to be found in any one case or situation. The problem is made obscure because the degree of objectivity we count on when we talk about external reality in terms of an individual is variable. To some extent objectivity is a relative term because what is objectively perceived is by definition to some extent subjectively conceived of.²

While this is the exact area under examination in this book we have to take note that for many individuals external reality remains to some extent a subjective phenomenon. In the extreme case the individual hallucinates either at certain specific moments, or perhaps in a generalized way. There exist all sorts of expressions for this state ('fey', 'not all there', 'feet off the ground', 'unreal') and psychiatrically we refer to such individuals as schizoid. We know that such persons can have value as persons in the community and that they may be happy, but we note that there are certain disadvantages for them and especially for those who live with them. They may see the world subjectively and be easily deluded, or else while being firmly based in

¹ I have discussed this issue in detail in my paper 'Classification: Is there a Psychoanalytic Contribution to Psychiatric Classification?' (1959-64), and the interested reader can pursue this theme there.

² See *The Edge of Objectivity* (Gillespie, 1960), among many works that deal with the creative element in science.

most areas they accept a delusional system in other areas, or they may be not firmly structured in respect of the psychosomatic partnership so that they are said to have poor coordination. Sometimes a physical disability such as defective sight or hearing plays into this state of affairs making a confused picture in which one cannot clearly distinguish between a hallucinating state and a disability based ultimately on a physical abnormality. In the extreme of this state of affairs the person being described is a patient in a mental hospital, either temporarily or permanently, and is labelled schizophrenic.

It is important for us that we find clinically no sharp line between health and the schizoid state or even between health and full-blown schizophrenia. While we recognize the hereditary factor in schizophrenia and while we are willing to see the contributions made in individual cases by physical disorders we look with suspicion on any theory of schizophrenia that divorces the subject from the problems of ordinary living and the universals of individual development in a given environment. We do see the vital importance of the environmental provision especially at the very beginning of the individual's infantile life, and for this reason we make a special study of the facilitating environment in human terms, and in terms of human growth in so far as dependence has meaning (cf. Winnicott, 1963b, 1965).

People may be leading satisfactory lives and may do work that is even of exceptional value and yet may be schizoid or schizophrenic. They may be ill in a psychiatric sense because of a weak reality sense. To balance this one would have to state that there are others who are so firmly anchored in objectively perceived reality that they are ill in the opposite direction of being out of touch with the subjective world and with the creative approach to fact.

To some extent we are helped in these difficult matters by remembering that hallucinations are dream phenomena that have come forward into the waking life and that hallucinating is

no more of an illness in itself than the corresponding fact that the day's events and the memories of real happenings are drawn across the barrier into sleep and into dreamformation.³ In fact, if we look at our descriptions of schizoid persons we find we are using words that we use to describe little children and babies, and there we actually expect to find the phenomena that characterize our schizoid and schizophrenic patients.

The problems outlined in this chapter are examined in this book at the point of their origin, that is in the early stages of individual growth and development. In fact, I am concerned with a study of the exact spot at which a baby is 'schizoid' except that this term is not used because of the baby's immaturity and special state relative to the development of personality and the role of the environment.

Schizoid people are not satisfied with themselves any more than are extroverts who cannot get into touch with dream. These two groups of people come to us for psychotherapy because in the one case they do not want to spend their lives irrevocably out of touch with the facts of life, and in the other case because they feel estranged from dream. They have a sense that something is wrong and that there is a dissociation in their personalities, and they would like to be helped to achieve unit status (Winnicott, 1960b) or a state of time-space integration in which there is one self containing everything instead of dissociated elements that exist in compartments,⁴ or are scattered around and left lying about.

In order to look into the theory that analysts use in their work to see where creativeness has a place it is necessary, as I have

³ Though this is inherent in Freud's hypothesis of dream-formation, it is a fact that has often been overlooked (cf. Freud, 1900).

⁴ I have discussed a specific instance of this elsewhere (1966), in terms of obsessional neurosis.

already stated, to separate the idea of the creation from works of art. It is true that a creation can be a picture or a house or a garden or a costume or a hairstyle or a symphony or a sculpture; anything from a meal cooked at home. It would perhaps be better to say that these things could be creations. The creativity that concerns me here is a universal. It belongs to being alive. Presumably it belongs to the aliveness of some animals as well as of human beings, but it must be less strikingly significant in terms of animals or of human beings with low intellectual capacity⁵ than it is with human beings who have near-average, average, or high intellectual capacity. The creativity that we are studying belongs to the approach of the individual to external reality. Assuming reasonable brain capacity, enough intelligence to enable the individual to become a person living and taking part in the life of the community, everything that happens is creative except in so far as the individual is ill, or is hampered by ongoing environmental factors which stifle his creative processes.

In regard to the second of these two alternatives it is probably wrong to think of creativity as something that can be destroyed utterly. But when one reads of individuals dominated at home, or spending their lives in concentration camps or under lifelong persecution because of a cruel political régime, one first of all feels that it is only a few of the victims who remain creative. These, of course, are the ones that suffer (see Winnicott, 1968b). It appears at first as if all the others who exist (not live) in such pathological communities have so far given up hope that they no longer suffer, and they must have lost the characteristic that makes them human, so that they no longer see the world creatively. These circumstances concern the negative of civilization. This is looking at the destruction of creativity in individuals by

⁵ A distinction must be made between primary mental defect and clinical defect secondary to schizophrenia of childhood and autism, etc.

environmental factors acting at a late date in personal growth (cf. Bettelheim, 1960).

What is being attempted here is to find a way of studying the loss by individuals of the creative entry into life or of the initial creative approach to external phenomena. I am concerned with aetiology. In the extreme case there is a relative failure *ab initio* in the establishment of a personal capacity for creative living.

As I have already indicated, one has to allow for the possibility that there cannot be a complete destruction of a human individual's capacity for creative living and that, even in the most extreme case of compliance and the establishment of a false personality, hidden away somewhere there exists a secret life that is satisfactory because of its being creative or original to that human being. Its unsatisfactoriness must be measured in terms of its being hidden, its lack of enrichment through living experience (Winnicott, 1968b).

Let us say that in the severe case all that is real and all that matters and all that is personal and original and creative is hidden, and gives no sign of its existence. The individual in such an extreme case would not really mind whether he or she were alive or dead. Suicide is of small importance when such a state of affairs is powerfully organized in an individual, and even the individual himself or herself has no awareness of what might have been or of what has been lost or is missing (Winnicott, 1960a).

The creative impulse is therefore something that can be looked at as a thing in itself, something that of course is necessary if an artist is to produce a work of art, but also as something that is present when *anyone* — baby, child, adolescent, adult, old man or woman — looks in a healthy way at anything or does anything deliberately, such as making a mess with faeces or prolonging the act of crying to enjoy a musical sound. It is present as much in the moment-by-moment living of a backward child who is enjoying breathing as it is in the inspiration of

an architect who suddenly knows what it is that he wishes to construct, and who is thinking in terms of material that can actually be used so that his creative impulse may take form and shape, and the world may witness.

Where psychoanalysis has attempted to tackle the subject of creativity it has to a large extent lost sight of the main theme. The analytic writer has perhaps taken some outstanding personality in the creative arts and has tried to make secondary and tertiary observations, ignoring everything that one could call primary. It is possible to take Leonardo da Vinci and make very important and interesting comments on the relationship between his work and certain events that took place in his infancy. A great deal can be done interweaving the themes of his work with his homosexual trend. But these and other circumstances in the study of great men and women by-pass the theme that is at the centre of the idea of creativity. It is inevitable that such studies of great men tend to irritate artists and creative people in general. It could be that these studies that we are tempted to make are irritating because they look as if they are getting somewhere, as if they will soon be able to explain why this man was great and that woman achieved much, but the direction of inquiry is wrong. The main theme is being circumvented, that of the creative impulse itself. The creation stands between the observer and the artist's creativity.

It is not of course that anyone will ever be able to explain the creative impulse, and it is unlikely that anyone would ever want to do so; but the link can be made, and usefully made, between creative living and living itself, and the reasons can be studied why it is that creative living can be lost and why the individual's feeling that life is real or meaningful can disappear.

One could suppose that before a certain era, say a thousand years ago, only a very few people lived creatively (cf. Foucault, 1966). To explain this one would have to say that before a certain date it is possible that there was only very exceptionally

a man or woman who achieved unit status in personal development. Before a certain date the vast millions of the world of human beings quite possibly never found or certainly soon lost at the end of infancy or childhood their sense of being individuals. This theme is developed a little in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) and is referred to in a footnote which I consider to be a very important detail in Freud's writings: 'Breasted calls him "the first individual in human history".' We cannot easily identify ourselves with men and women of early times who so identified themselves with the community and with nature and with unexplained phenomena such as the rising and setting of the sun, thunderbolts and earthquakes. A body of science was needed before men and women could become units integrated in terms of time and space, who could live creatively and exist as individuals. The subject of monotheism belongs to the arrival of this stage in human mental functioning.

A further contribution to the subject of creativity came from Melanie Klein (1957). This contribution results from Klein's recognition of aggressive impulses and destructive fantasy dating from very early in the life of the individual baby. Klein takes up the idea of the destructiveness of the baby and gives it proper emphasis, at the same time making a new and vital issue out of the idea of the fusion of erotic and destructive impulses as a sign of health. The Klein statement includes the concept of reparation and restitution. In my opinion, however, Klein's important work does not reach to the subject of creativity itself and therefore it could easily have the effect of further obscuring the main issue. We do need her work, however, on the central position of the guilt sense. Behind this is Freud's basic concept of ambivalence as an aspect of individual maturity.

Health can be looked at in terms of fusion (erotic and destructive drives) and this makes more urgent than ever the examination of the origin of aggression and of destructive fantasy. For

many years in psychoanalytic metapsychology aggression seemed to be explained on the basis of anger.

I have put forward the idea that both Freud and Klein jumped over an obstacle at this point and took refuge in heredity. The concept of the death instinct could be described as a reassertion of the principle of original sin. I have tried to develop the theme that what both Freud and Klein avoided in so doing was the full implication of dependence and therefore of the environmental factor (Winnicott, 1960b). If dependence really does mean dependence, then the history of an individual baby cannot be written in terms of the baby alone. It must be written in terms also of the environmental provision which either meets dependence needs or fails to meet them (Winnicott, 1945, 1948, 1952).

It is hoped that psychoanalysts will be able to use the theory of transitional phenomena in order to describe the way in which good-enough environmental provision at the very earliest stages makes it possible for the individual to cope with the immense shock of loss of omnipotence.⁶ What I have called the 'subjective object' (Winnicott, 1962) becomes gradually related to objects that are objectively perceived, but this happens only when a good-enough environmental provision or 'average expectable environment' (Hartmann, 1939) enables the baby to be mad in one particular way that is conceded to babies. This madness only becomes true madness if it appears in later life. At the stage of infancy it is the same subject as that to which I referred when I talked about the acceptance of the paradox, as when a baby creates an object but the object would not have been created as such if it had not already been there.

We find either that individuals live creatively and feel that life is worth living or else that they cannot live creatively and are

⁶ This antedates the relief that comes from such mental mechanisms as cross-identification.

doubtful about the value of living. This variable in human beings is directly related to the quality and quantity of environmental provision at the beginning or in the early phases of each baby's living experience.

PIE

Whereas every effort is made by analysts to describe the psychology of the individual and the dynamic processes of development and defence organization, and to include impulse and drive in terms of the individual, here at this point where creativity either comes into being or does not come into being (or alternatively is lost) the theoretician must take the environment into account, and no statement that concerns the individual as an isolate can touch this central problem of the source of creativity.

It seems important here to refer to a special complication that arises out of the fact that while men and women have much in common they are nevertheless also unlike. Obviously creativity is one of the common denominators, one of the things that men and women share, or they share distress at the loss or absence of creative living. I now propose to examine this subject from another angle.