

Topical Problems of Psychotherapy

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The technical psychotherapeutic procedure called “The World Technique” arose gradually through direct psychotherapeutic work with children, in London. It came into being through the use the children made of the contents of a cabinet of drawers filled with miniature reproductions of objects from the real world, from current films, plays and fairy stories. The name “the world” had been given to this cabinet for convenience in note reporting.

The first stage in the development of the World Technique was my observation that children preferred to use these toys in combination with a watertight tray partially filled with sand.

It was some weeks after that evidence accumulated to show that the arrangements made by the children with the “World” toys in the tray of sand had a special value for them and the making was for them a significant event. From the subjective angle this was shown in their manner of using the material, what they said about what they were doing, their eagerness of expression and the relaxation and air of “completion” that came with the end of their activity with these materials.

On our side, as I and my colleagues began to learn to draw and describe what the children did with these materials, we noticed certain recurrent features suggesting more than a personal or individual content. The term “World” thus became gradually transferred from the cabinet of toys to what the children did with them and with the sand in the tray.

I use, in an earlier paragraph, the word “activity” advisedly, since the child’s relation to the apparatus is as often active as static. Toys, amorphous objects, plus sand and water; or sand and water alone, with or without the addition of amorphous objects, are used in a wide range of activities which come under the heading of Worlds, these all having in common that they have a beginning, a middle and an end and are to the maker a purposeful activity.

The equipment for the World Technique is a metal tray approximately 75 x 52 x 7 cm half filled with sand for use on tables of different height according to the size of the children using them; water should be near at hand; implements for use with the sand such as shovels, funnels, moulds, a sieve; amorphous materials such as plasticine, wooden slats, rubber tubes, tin’s and oddments of any kind.

A World cabinet with drawers containing miniature objects of the following kinds:

Living creatures: ordinary men, women and children; soldiers; entertainers; people of other races; wild and domestic animals.

Phantasy: and Folk-lore: figures; animals, including prehistoric and “space” specimens.

Scenery: buildings of any kind, trees, bushes, flowers, fences, gates and bridges. '

Transport: for road, rail, sea and air.

Equipment: for road, town, farms and gardens, playground and fairs, hospital, school, etc.

Miscellaneous Objects: which may be anything at any time obtainable in shops.

This apparatus has proved as valuable in psychotherapeutic work with adults as with children and is welcomed by adult patients as an aid to their understanding of themselves and to communication with their therapist.

Children are introduced to the World apparatus in the following way. It is explained in simple words that there is a gap between a child's world and that of the adults of his environment, and so a lack of mutual understanding. This leads to a short talk about “Picture Thinking” in which it is pointed out that children have many ideas and experiences “in their heads which won't go into words” and which nobody seems to talk about. Further, that many things are more easily “said” in pictures and in actions than in words (“comics” and advertisements used as an example). It is explained to the child that this is a natural way of “thinking” and that this is what we would like him to do for us here, and that the work to be undertaken will make a bridge between the two worlds—that of the child and that of the adults.

The World apparatus is then introduced, and the child invited to make “whatever comes into his head”.

When used with adults this introduction is modified into a general discussion of modes of symbolic representation in art, literature, advertisement and satirical cartoons.

Since part of the value of the World Technique is the record it provides of material produced by the patient, which is presented to him at suitable stages in treatment for his study review, all Worlds are recorded and filed with case notes. In 1935 Dr. Charlotte Bühler saw the World in use at the Institute of Child Psychology and during the years of the Second World War developed out of it a personality test which she named the World Test and which she has described in “The World Test”, 1949. This test has also been used and developed in other ways by other workers.

To understand the relation of the World Technique, as it is used by myself and my colleagues, to the World Test, we need to consider for a moment the differences between a test and a therapeutic technique.

Whatever its nature and in whatever field of scientific enquiry it is used, a test is a procedure which is based on previous experience widely held, each detail of which is designed by the author to elicit certain spontaneous responses which vary,

while holding all other conditions constant. The essence of a test is that its mode of administration should be standard for all subjects, that the free responses should occur only in the previously delimited field, should be scoreable, and that the conclusions drawn by the tester concerning the significance of these responses should arise from the comparison of individual responses with all others so far obtained.

A good test in the psychological field presents the subject with stimuli to known aspects of the psyche whose appearance can be clearly recognised and evaluated and from the evaluation of which a picture of the subject can be built up.

A test therefore is administered once and represents the individual as he is at that moment in time.

A therapeutic technique, on the other hand, is a procedure which is a part of a process of change taking place in a given individual during a period of time. It may be composed of pictures of aspects of the self as they present themselves from time to time within the process of psychotherapy, but these are aspects of the psyche only, and are accepted as such both by the patient and therapist. Such single presentations of aspects of an individual psyche can be, and indeed must be, if they are to be valuable, compared with presentations of other aspects of the same individual and, if they are to be understood, with similar presentations of other individuals; but these comparisons are quite different from the designed and scoreable comparisons and evaluations of the single "test".

The Nature of the World Technique

The essential feature of the conditions for which psychotherapy is sought by or for a patient, is a state of distress which the patient is unable to understand, to control, or to communicate. While, therefore, evaluation of the nature of the patient plays an important part in the preliminary stages, it is communication which forms the essence of therapy; communication of unknown aspects of the patient to himself and to the therapist, and explanation from the therapist to the patient of what is revealed. It is as an agent of communication that the World apparatus plays its invaluable part in the process of psychotherapy. Patients, whether children or adults, feel that with these tools expression can be given to states of being and happenings within the psyche which they find impossible to express in any other way. It is my aim in this paper to show you representations of one or two worlds which may make these possibilities of the World Technique as a means of expression more comprehensible.

Before presenting these, however, I would like to consider first what are the qualities of the World apparatus from which its power of expression derives.

Characteristics of the World Apparatus Considering Tool of Expression

1. Its Multidimensional Nature

We are all aware of the fact that many processes—and often processes at variance with one another—take place simultaneously within us. If these are to be expressed in words, or even in drama, descriptions of one aspect must *follow* another and their interactions cannot be presented.

Not only is this true, but processes occurring within the psyche take place at different levels, are of different orders of significance, and often appear to cancel each other out.

The sand tray in the World apparatus, with the range of possibilities orders by its mouldable sand, amorphous objects and World cabinet, makes possible the simultaneous presentation, within a single framework, of processes and concepts going on at different levels in the psyche and consisting of elements of very different nature. The drawings of Worlds I propose to show illustrate this from the work of three children and one adult.

2. The Dynamic Possibilities it Offers

Worlds can be static or dynamic and it is this second possibility which is of such value with children. The life of a child, both externally and internally, is one of action. Their own experiences and those of the constituents of the world around them are seen by children as stories: stories which can be endlessly repeated or varied and whose endings on one occasion, even if this ending the total destruction of all constituents, have no effect upon the next beginning. These can be directly represented in the World tray, played out, analysed with the therapist, and the contents realised as they appear in endless repetitions.

3. The Power of the Apparatus to Present States of Mind Hitherto Unknown

All schools of psychological thought agree about the importance of the pre-verbal stages of interior development, and also as to the great difficulty of arriving at an understanding of their nature and content. With the World apparatus states of being of the greatest complexity and processes of perception and of phantasy of the highest degree of unexpectedness and confusion can be, and are, directly presented.

4. Its Independence of Skill

While, at times, young adolescents make constructions in the World tray which display very considerable degree of manual skill, for the most part the fact that no technical ability of any kind is demanded for the making of a World constitutes a strong appeal. Anything in a World cabinet can be utilised to represent anything else and plasticine used to supply what is missing.

Illustrations

The World Apparatus in the Consultation Interview

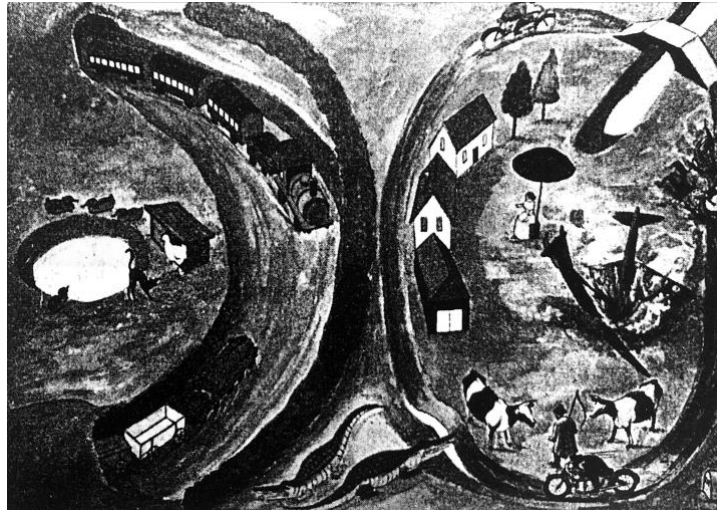


Fig. 1 is a drawing of a World made in Consultation by a boy of 10/12 years with an I. Q. of 156, referred from a distant village for unhappiness at school and being bullied by other boys.

Fig 1. World made at Consultation interview

This boy was an only child, frequently ill and tied to his mother by these constant illnesses. He was not liked by his teachers, bullied by the other children, and said "to stand apart from everyone else". The school situation had become so acute that the parents were advised to seek psychiatric help. He was said to be generally excitable, to cry easily, to bring trouble on himself because of his bumptiousness, to be a very bad loser at games, and too talkative and impulsive. Physically he was the fair haired, pale faced, catarrhal type and had one undescended testicle.

The World was spontaneously made in two halves, the left being completed first. The boy's account of it was- concerning the left half- "The cat is threatening the hen, the ducks are about to swim"; he could say nothing about the trains. Concerning the right, "The dirt track cycle race has no connection with the scene within it; the houses and trees are part of a peaceful village; the woman sits in the sun but knows nothing of what is going on round her!" He saw the crocodiles as unconnected with these scenes and did not mention the milestone.

This World depicts the boy's emotional situation. On the left are no people, a quiet pool in the centre of an enclosed circle, around which thunder a goods and a passenger train- majestic symbols of power to a boy of this age- appearing out of and disappearing into tunnels. Ducks can swim, cats and hens cannot. The cat torments the sheltered hen. On the right the swinging circle of movement is complete; it is competitive, human, dangerous. Cataclysm comes crashing from the sky; it screeches and burns, but the village is undisturbed, the mother figure sits placidly under a tree with her back to all the disasters. Femininity in another form (the cows) is dominated by man, and a man with a whip. Continuous inescapable movement hedges in the cat and birds on the left and the people on the right. Outside these circles of movement a crocodile faces each way, and in the further right corner stands an isolated milestone. This boy is shut into an inner world of

threatening disaster and dynamic drives he could not control and to the existence of which his mother was oblivious.

Fig. 2 This is a drawing of a World made by an over life-size boy of 7/43 years, I. Q. 153, referred for enuresis, behaviour difficulties at school and inability to make friends. This World was made at his first treatment session.

The boy entitled the whole World “a desert”, but nevertheless started its construction by making the central strip of water, which he called first “a river” and then “a crocodile creek”. The fencing which extends three parts around the scene was put in at the end of the session. To some extent, therefore, the collection of objects in the tray formed together in his view a kind of unit and certain other unitary concepts appeared in the making. The whole of the session hour was occupied in the construction of this World, the boy placing, moving, describing, talking about and altering the positions of the objects with such animation and speed that an accurate detailed record of its development was impossible to make. As in so many of these dynamic Worlds a choice has to be arrived at of the moment when the drawing is to be made (usually that which the therapist feels to represent the most significant features), and this drawing presents the penultimate phase, one new element having been added later.



Fig 2. World made at first treatment session

Process of Construction

Having made and titled “the crocodile creek” (without putting any crocodiles in), the boy’s attention focused on the Indians. The white man and girl tied to a post were chosen, with two Indians, one holding an arrow and one without. This one he stabbed fiercely in the chest several times with the arrow of the other, and then laid flat on the sand saying he was dead. The Indian, put in next, was, however called “Benny the bank robber”, but this did not prevent the part of the tray to the left of the

creek being termed “Indians’ Camp”. While this facet of this thought occupied his attention, the covered wagon was put in “coming in” from the front left.

The “bank robber” was moved to beside the wagon and two elephants, said to be “Father and baby” placed along each side of A period then followed in which wild animals were placed on the tray at such a speed that it was impossible to follow.

The second phase began with the placing of cannon and tanks on the right front side of the creek, accompanied by noises of shooting and machinery. The fact that a wire chair happened to have been left in the covered wagon by the last user, led to its being taken and placed, with a seated Indian on it, by the tied-up people; a cowboy with a lasso was put outside the fence “about to lasso the Indian off the chair”.

The third phase was occupied with the insertion of disjointed incidents and people, for example, a woman carrying a bucket and medieval knights in armour. The danger of direct questions to children making Worlds was illustrated here, as when it was asked where the knights were going, the response was to move them to “sensible”, positions around the wagon with the remark that “they were guarding the wagon against the Indians” together with an almost immediate placing of an Indian in the covered wagon. A giraffe and a camel were now put in “to show it was a desert”, and four crocodiles in the water. Red coated soldiers were next put by the cannon. Other small incidents followed, such as an Indian with a hatchet attacking a man from behind, a “very strong” bison, a man digging in the space between the bison and the water, the therapist’s attention being specifically drawn to each.

Tall people and objects suggesting space, now appeared- a very large figure of an Italian soldier drying himself (put outside the fence), a totem pole, and “space” animals. Some reeds were found and, in contrast to his chaotic use of animals and human beings, these were I placed very intelligently around the creek, and- for the first time— a riding and standing Indian were put on the further part of the right side of the creek. The fences were then put in.

The tray was now so full that there was no room for further addition when he suddenly said “I want a town”. After careful discussion of this with the therapist, he contented himself with a large thatched cottage which was placed in the further left corner, with some trees intelligently disposed around it. (Not included in the drawing because it pushed many of the other objects out of place.)

The boy now said he wanted water, he wanted to flood the whole tray. It was explained to him that there were other sets of World objects which, because they were metal, could be used with water in Worlds, but that these would spoil. He was assured he could make a flood next time and left contented.

Comment

This is a boy with enuresis. His school work was considerably below his inherent intellectual ability; he was felt by his school- teachers to have a great deal of physical energy which he was unable to direct and to be jerky and unpredictable in

school. It is a suggestive possibility that the objects and their inter-relations in this crowded World presented, as it were, the heading of the ideas, feelings, phantasies and images which, accumulated together, achieved a physiological expression in a urinary outpour; and indeed this turned out to be the case. His insistence on the naming of the whole “a desert” was an apt description of his inner feeling of aridity and the absence in his experience of the warmth and “life” of human relationships.

After sixteen months treatment, he was discharged to go to a new school when his family moved out of London and was reported as “a happy boy with a friend of 12 with whom he enjoys doing practical things”.

Fig. 3. This is a World made by a boy of 11 years born in the early days of the second World War, the eldest son of his parents, and referred by the family doctor for screaming attacks of great severity, asthma, enuresis from birth, and tics of face and foot. This was a very difficult case, owing partly to the severity of the complaints, partly to the fact that the family lived far from the Institute and once weekly sessions were all that were achievable, and partly to the temperament of the mother, who treasured her son’s infantile dependence on her but at the same time had no insight into his needs. In contrast to Fig. 1 and 2, this was the 31st World and made at the 74th session. It illustrates the value of the amorphous material.

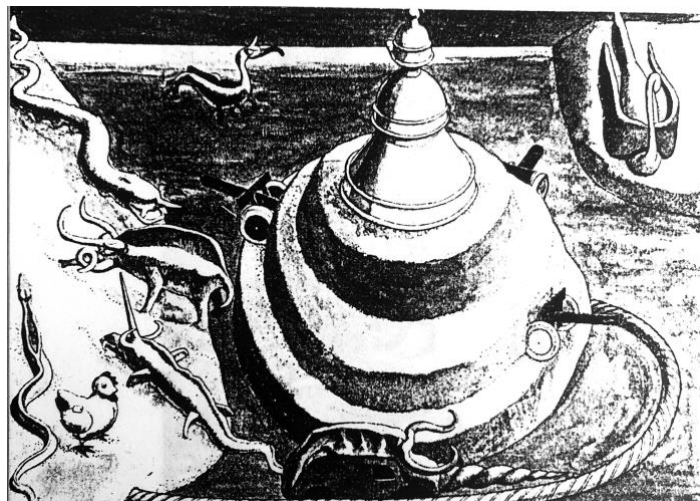


Fig. 3 World showing use of amorphous objects.

The first half of the session the boy spent modelling with plasticine. He made a long, thin creature with pincers at the back, a long sting, and a curved beak. With the pincers, he said, the animal “grabs his food, then strings it and with his curved beak tears the flesh off”. Next, with purple plasticine, he made another long creature, with a long horn sticking upright (“with which he spears his food”, and tusk-like teeth. The third creature was similar in shape and had a sucker on the end of its tail and also tusk-like teeth. The fourth was a white elephant with upright trunk and long tusks, which the boy felt he had made to look prehistoric “by the shape of his back”. The final figure was a long-necked creature with a beak and two wings, made to appear asleep with its head tucked safely under its wings.

Having finished the animals he next took a fire-engine and covered the top, front and back with brown plasticine, put two yellow horns on top and fixed in front a yellow "screwdriver" horn which was said to drill into the animals. "When the animals are dead their horns go down, but when the horns stick up", he said "it was very exciting". He then started work in the tray. With firm wet sand he built a round mound which he cut in tiers, making on the top a nipple-like structure. "All around", he said, "was the sea". "People live in this mound and it is a very long time ago". "The person", he said, "who has to climb to the top finds it awful as it is so cold up there".

Having constructed the mound, he now made "an island" in one corner and started putting the animals in, partly in water and partly on land already there or made for them. When they were placed he went back to the mound and put over the nipple-like top a big inverted funnel and a smaller one over that, and capped the top of that with a teat from a baby's bottle. He now took a gas tube and pushed one end into the "island" and the other into the base of the mound, saying that the people on the island were the first to find gas. He looked for and found a baby's bottle, filled it with water and started squirting at the mound, making a hole in one spot. A toy hen which could be made to lay eggs was then worked and made to lay her eggs "in a nest". Finally, he fixed four guns on the lowest tier of the mound facing outwards at the points of the compass.

Comment

For the first three months of his life this child was breast fed; anxiety concerning her husband who was away at the front and terror of air-raids then dried up the mother's milk, and the baby was put on a bottle. At the time of his treatment it proved impossible to get any genuine picture of the young mother's attitude at that period, either to her baby or to her own feeding of the baby, as she was a poor informant, often ill, exhausted with the long journey to the Institute, and subtly hostile to the idea of treatment. In temperament she was passive and sensuous, always full of complaints and without any genuine warmth.

This World, which followed one of a central mound containing gold which was attacked for the sake of the treasure inside, made clear to the boy and also to his therapist, his feeling about the "cold breast", the substitution of rubber teat for nipple and the confused turmoil of passionate feeling in mouth and penis which were aroused and centred in this experience, reactivated, as it had been, by the birth and breast feeding of a younger brother.

Fig 4. This is a World made during my study of a young woman of 26 years suffering from an undiagnosed psychosis of some six years standing.

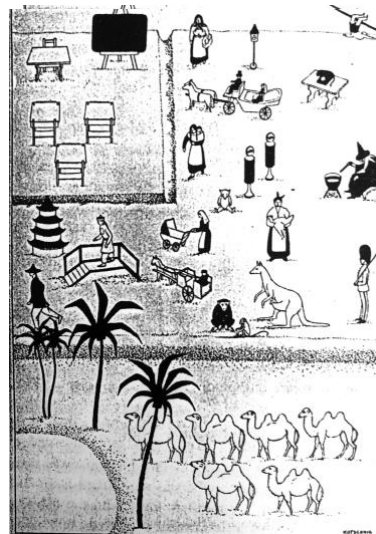


Fig. 4. World made by a young schizophrenic woman.

The girl was one of a pair of twins, both of whom had trained as hospital nurses. She had broken down shortly before her state examination and had spent several periods in different mental hospitals. Her condition approximated more to schizophrenia than to any other state, but there were anomalous features. At the time I was asked to conduct a study of her, she was inaccessible, incoherent in speech and occupied in constant, equally incoherent, scribbles. By the time this World, the sixth in the series, was made, she had improved to a point being able to give a coherent account, though expressed in brief and jerky sentences, of the objects in her World.

Description

Where Fig. 2 is a "fragmented" World, this one belongs to a type which is divided into two or more sections, and one of the sections is "fragmented". The division of the World tray, usually into two parts, and the construction on each of a scene or collection of pieces entirely unconnected with those on the other had been a recurring feature of several of the earlier Worlds. The theme of a desert had also appeared before. The three parts of this World each represent a different aspect of the psyche.

The oblong in the further left corner was for her the class-room of her school. It is empty, she said, because she learned nothing at school. The desert across the front of the tray expressed a recurring phantasy "to get away", to get to somewhere romantic where her family had never been.

In the centre of the tray, between these two parts, are sixteen separate objects or groups of objects, all, except the scene of the pagoda, bridge and two Chinese figures in the lower left-hand corner, representing feelings and actual events

in her past life. For example, the woman with the basket, the sewing machine and witch presented her mother as seen by herself as a child and schoolgirl; the carriage contrasted with the petrol pumps; the woman with the hen and a nurse and pram brought up thoughts and feelings about her sister's baby, babies in general, nursing and domesticity. The teddy bear was a favourite toy; the small cart, one the twins had had at one time; the soldier represented her good-looking father in his aspect as a war time soldier; the animals, the Zoo. The little scene with the pagoda suggested the idea of "holidays abroad". The acrobatic figure in the further right-hand corner she said was herself, "her real self". It expressed something very important in her personality, and, in my view, in the genesis of her illness. Both she and her sister had been "tomboy" girls, with an intense love of movement. The outbreak of war in 1939, her father's sense of patriotic duty, and the contagious desire at the beginning of a war "to do something to help", had driven her into the long hours and harsh discipline of nursing at a time when she was barely out of the middle period of adolescence. All her images with a positive content were ones of movement, all painful images and associations those in which movement was excluded. In swinging on a bar at the top of this picture she felt she was swinging defiance to the whole represented by the rest of the World.

These four Worlds have been selected to illustrate the potentialities of the World Technique as a therapeutic procedure. Such forms of Worlds tend to occur from time to time in the treatment of most severely disturbed children, although the average World made by children under treatment is of much simpler construction and significance. Much depends upon the use of the introduction and the manner of handling of the first World made by the patient. Discussion of this and of the handling of subsequent Worlds is outside the scope of this communication.

Summary

The essential focus of psychotherapy is communication; communication of one aspect of the patient to another within himself and from the patient to the therapist. A brief description is given of a technique of intra and interpersonal communication called the World Technique. This is illustrated by drawings of four Worlds, three by children and one of an adult, made at various stages including the consultation interview, the first treatment session, the 31st World Of a total of 34, and lastly presenting simultaneously contrasting aspects of personality in an adult schizophrenic.