

'Recent advances in Psychiatry'

By Margaret Lowenfeld

In modern psychiatry it is coming increasingly to be more realised that progress depends upon the devising of means to achieve two aims: the creation of instruments or techniques which make it possible for the patient to express his interior experiences both himself and to the observer, and the finding of ways by which accurate record can be made of these presentations which are produced by the patient and used for study and comparison with other records.

Innumerable techniques have been devised which offer the patient, whether psychotic or neurotic, means of protecting into them his interior experiences. In addition, the invention of the tape-recorder makes now possible the actual recording of the words used by the patient for subsequent replaying. In certain cases, motion picture records are also a possibility. It would seem therefore, particularly in centres where all these tools are available, that the combination of all these methods of expression should at least make it possible on the one hand to provide, for the majority of patients such possibilities of expression as would serve his need, and on the other hand such possibilities of these expressions as would bring us within sight of the desired goal of being able to put on record comparable pictures of interior states, the study of which will enable us to make rapid progress in the understanding of the structure of mental and emotional disturbances.

Closer examination, however, suggests that certain possibilities of an important nature are lacking in this equipment. These are as follows. In the great majority of projection tests, an identical stimulus is presented to each patient to which a response of a definite type is invited. That is to say, while the subject is left free to vary the content or mode of his response, for example, to the Rorschach, the T.A.T. or the Bender Gestalt Tests, in that he is asked to do - whether to make images, construct a story, carry out certain prescribed performances, draw a person and so on - the same specific kind of response is required. Moreover, the proportion of tests is very high in which the ultimate form of the response is verbal, whatever its content may be.

Psychotherapeutic work with children suggests that important areas of human personality are left untouched by these methods.

During the years before and since the war, an exploration has been carried on by Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld and her colleagues at the Institute of Child Psychology London, and by Dr. Lowenfeld with children and some adults her private practice, into the possibility of creating nodes of expression which shall not only provide possibilities of a different kind from those covered in projective tests, but which directly and

permanently record the whole response of the patient in the medium in which the expression was made, it possible to compare interior states of being of persons or all kinds and all ages.

The Lowenfeld World Technique

The Lowenfeld World Technique, devised in 1950 and the years following, is proving itself an instrument through which unexpected components of personality are being brought to light. The essence of this technique is that, while it puts the same materials before everybody, the range of these is so wide and the nature of the material so flexible that there is an almost infinite possibility of modes of expression in the uses that can be made by the subject of what is actually standard material.

The material composing this technique consists of a tray, either of metal or wood with a metal lining, of roughly 75 cm. x 52 cm. with a depth of 7 cm. painted blue inside, placed on a table: sand with spoons or shovels; water; amorphous material such as rubber tubes and funnels; and a cabinet containing the 'World' objects. These 'objects' are representations in miniature, such as shops, will provide, of as many varieties as possible of the animals, men, and objects to be found in the World itself. The subject is left quite free to make what use of these he wishes.

The fundamental fact about the technique is that its aim is to provide the maker with a new language of expression. As this is both visual and plastic, and moreover: a large proportion of the item of which it is composed have a conventional as well as a symbolic value, it is essential that the maker should grasp the general purpose of the process to which he is introduced, and be prepared to use the material not as custom dictates but following his own whims and wishes.

To achieve this end a technique called 'Picture Thinking' is used. In this the attention of the subject is drawn to the fact that both in ordinary language and in cartoons, comic strips and the like, ideas of all types are conveyed by means of pictures (actual or verbal) to all types of people from small children to serious politicians, and that many of these - although often, as in advertisements, intended to convey serious meaning and to induce practical action - are expressed in fantastic form.

It is then suggested to the subject that he make use of any part of the materials of the World apparatus that appear to him appropriate, in any way that he chooses. It is explained to him that what he does will be significant both to him and to his therapist, and that when completed it will be recorded and discussed with him.

It is in the newer of this introduction of the World material to the patient that the essential of the technique lie. The aim is to present the individual with the possibility of making picture of all types using all kinds of symbolism, combining in one

presentation remembered fact or feeling, current reality, early experience, affective situations, primitive concepts and sensorial experiences

As the Lowenfeld World Technique is a scientific instrument it is of the greatest importance that the exact meaning to the subject of each object he employs be ascertained by the therapist. This does not in any way limit the therapist's knowledge of what is occurring to more significances which the subject himself sees; but it does prevent therapist from attributing to the objects used by the patient a significance different or even opposite to that intended by the latter. For example, a cannon in one World indicated to the maker friendliness and cheerfulness and had no relation to aggression.

It is important that the exact position on the tray of each object or moulding of the sand be noted, as in a sequence of Worlds, these positions will tend to be repeated, and it is often only through examination of the series of objects or mouldings which have occupied the same position on the tray in different Worlds, that the significance of these symbols becomes clear.

Direct interpretation according to any of the recognised schools of psycho-therapeutic thought is rarely given; instead the attention of the patient is drawn to the internal connection of the objects used, the relation between the distribution and use of these in a sequence of Worlds, and the mode in which the interior structure of the patient's personality and his particular problems are unrepresented by these means, the therapist's experience of this technique and the way it is used by normal and disturbed subjects being the main guide to understanding of these.

As a consultation technique, particularly when used in combination with the Lowenfeld Mosaic Test, a World can be of crucial value, but its particular quality lies in the relation between the Worlds made by patients and their own experiences in the new material that these bring before us. The making of a World can be a psychic event to the patient, bringing about in him profound changes.

Such a World, once created, becomes the starting point for a series, each bringing to light new aspects and new psychic materials. A test, however good, is a test, and is a response by the subject to a specific invitation from the therapist - a World is a spontaneous creation by the patient made at his own time in his own way.

The most essential characteristic of the research being carried on with this technique is the mode of treatment of the material when it has been created by the patient. It has been a very common experience of psychiatrists that clinical material, at one time abundant, ceases to appear when no interpretation is given, and the material thus tends to be seen by the therapist only within the psycho-analytic framework of concepts. The characteristic of the World technique however is that

when the therapist examines as with the subject, who has made it in the light of his experience of the technique, with reference to its exact constitution as a whole and the meaning of each component part to the subject (when taken in reference to previous Worlds), new aspects of interior experience. Material then continues to be poured forth, facts and psychic aspect and events relevant to the patient appear and the clinical condition changes.

The richness of the material brought to light by this technique, and the complexity of the mode of handling it, are explained in detail in a book concerned both with the nature of the material obtained and the deduction which seem to follow from it, which is now in course of preparation.

Kaleidoblocs

This technique is one part, or a series of procedures used in the Institute of Child Psychology for the study and treatment of disorders of personality of certain of the psychosomatic conditions, and of problems of educational and vocational guidance, supplemented from Dr. Lowenfeld's private practice with certain studies of adults. or the other forms of test used, the Kaleidoblocs, (which had been out of manufacture owing to wartime difficulties, but which is now in course of remanufacture) have been used for the study of developmental processes and differences of personality in children by Ames and Learned of the Gesell Institute.* The Kaleidoblocs test is a combination of a three-dimensional projective test with individual items testing specific abilities. Owing to the pressure of work in the reestablishment of the pre-war Training Cause in Child Psychotherapy which is recognised by the Association of Child Psychotherapists (non-medical), no publication on this test is yet available; but is hoped that this gap will soon be filled.

The Lowenfeld Mosaic Test.

The Lowenfeld Mosaic Test which has been in use for over 20 years has now been fully described in The Lowenfeld Mosaic Test published by Neman Neame London with 144 coloured illustrations supplied in a separate container". The aim of the test is the same as that of the World Technique, namely, to put in the hands of the subject an instrument with which a free construction or type of any size can be made by the subject. It differs however from the World Technique in that the material used (456 pieces of flat plastic cut in 5 interrelated geometrical shapes each supplied in 6 colours for use upon a board 12 3/8 x 10 1/4 or 31.5cm x 26cm) is two dimensional of fixed shape and colour, and used on a board of fixed dimensions. Experience has shown that while the variety of productions that can be made with this material are almost infinite, yet they fall into definite classifications which have an intimate relation to the structure of personality in the subject who makes them. Like the World Technique, also has instrument also has the great advantage that it can be used an

indefinite number of times by the same individual. It has proved, like the World Technique, attractive to all ages and types of people.

An unexpected aspect or the material brought to light by this test is the occurrence of types or response in the U.S.A. (known as the Am.-type response) which do not occur in Europe, although the European type of response (known as the Eu.-type) is also found in the U.S.A. This ability of the test to bring to light cultural difference has appeared also in the study of primitive peoples. Dr. Margaret Mead comments ...* "One of the great beauties of the tenet is that the form of the results is such that these are available for reproduction without translation into words or percentages or other symbols so that between members of different cultures, or different disciplines, or within a research team, direct communication is possible. The representative work of a tribal group, or some special category of persons within a group, or the same individual over time, can be presented simultaneously side by side. Preliminary experimentation in Manus and in the British West Indies has shown that it is a sensitive cross-cultural tool, providing both differentiation among individuals within a culture, and a valid statement of cultural regularities.

It has been argued in criticism of this technique that no attempt has been made at statistical evaluation or standardisation. This is a valuable criticism and raises a point of considerable importance. From one point of view the Lowenfeld Mosaic Test is not a test in the sense in which this word is commonly used, but a technique. But from another point of view the fact that definite results can be obtained from a single use, puts it also into the category of testing techniques. But this inevitably raises the question of the exact meaning of the word test. Essentially this word, in whatever connection it is used, implies a procedure through the application of which to an 'unknown' which does or does not contain the specific substance or quality which the test procedure brings to light can show whether it is present or not, or correlatively indicate whether the reaction of the 'unknown' to the test procedure shows that the unknown falls into one or other category of an already identified and described list of possible varieties of substance.

One reviewer in referring to the Lowenfeld Mosaic Test has said..."A striking omission, all too familiar in books on new clinical techniques, is even the simplest evidence on validity, other than anecdotes. Is it too much to ask that authors at least count and report the percentages of hits and misses made by the test when predicting certain verifiable diagnoses or other events.?"

Implicit in this apparently simple question however are certain assumptions which in fact it was one of the purposes of the Lowenfeld Mosaic Test book to challenge. These assumptions are that specific categories of psychoses, types of personality and types of neuroses exist which have been completely described, and the validity of the descriptions generally accepted. The idea of a test, in this conception, is the existence of a procedure from the evidence of which a conclusion

can be drawn which will place the subject in one or other of these already defined categories. If such a conception of the nature of testing is accepted, it is obvious that a "hit and miss" count could be kept for the Lowenfeld Mosaic Test in relation to any class of human beings for whom accepted categories already exist; and it is clear that investigator who failed to do this would be failing in the elements of test procedure..

But the idea that analyses, descriptions and definitions, of the psychoses, the neuroses etc., exist into which patients can be accurately fitted, is perhaps the illusion which, more than anything else, clouds the usefulness of most test procedures and fills the technical journals with meaningless statistics. One of the central characteristics of modern psychiatry, as practised in any day to day study of patients, is the indeterminate nature of psychiatric descriptions and the interpenetration of categories. So real is this difficulty in a large-scale study of psychotic individuals that statistics based upon the comparison between the results of a given test and psychotic categories are more often misleading than helpful. What is attempted in the Lowenfeld Mosaic Test is something different, to which this ticking of hits and misses does not apply. This is the provision of an instrument whose use brings to light certain basic characteristics of mental functioning. It is intended not to tick off one or other already defined category, but to enable a study of individual personality to be made with reference to the presence or absence of these characteristics and their combustion in the individual personality. In short, the purpose of the technique is to throw fresh light on the structure of individual personality, not to test whether the individual, considered as a whole, falls into the particular classification, although this aspect also has its uses.

Detailed study of the Lowenfeld Mosaic Test is only in its infancy. What has been aimed at so far is to provide an itemisation of the main classes of design which have been so far identified as constantly recurring responses, and an account of the main conditions which have been found to be associated with these responses. The book therefore forms a foundation for statistical research, not an account of such research.

In regard to all these instruments a common characteristic has been observed, namely that to the subject using them, productions made with them represent a creative event, which has meaning to the maker and which in itself can bring about changes in the personality. In the Lowenfeld World Technique particularly it is clear to the observer that in the Worlds made by subjects, new levels of human experience can be and often are expressed simultaneously. Amongst these levels of experience and their combination are certain kinds not met with in current psychoanalytic description, but which seem to derive from the action of early cognitive processes upon early sensorial experience. This type of material and the deductions drawn from it are closely related to the work of Schilder and Clifford Scott on the Body-Image. The differences however are as essential as the resemblances; and in order to make research along these lines possible, and also to distinguish it from the 'primary process', this function of my mind is termed the 'proto-system'. It seems to be

intimately connected with the origin of certain psycho-somatic conditions and, although described differently, is cognate with that studied by MacAlpine and Hunter. The study of the 'proto-system' is the present focus of work at the Institute of Child Psychology and a systematic description or it is under preparation for publication.