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On Protosystem Thinking & Lowenfeld Projective Play Therapy

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Before we come to consider Lowenfeld's concept of Protosystem Thinking, it may be useful to consider the more general, idea of Human Thought and the whole question of Thinking.

What do we mean when we say "that's a clever thought", "that's an amusing thought", "that's not a thought, it's a feeling" or when we talk about "musical ideas" or "artistic thought"? Are we referring to the same kind of process? Do we have a unified view about Thought and Thinking in general?

Let us reflect a little more deeply- about the questions- raised. Is there a difference between thoughts expressed in words by a philosopher or those by a scientist; thoughts of an artist through his art or those of the critic of his art through the use of words; and thoughts expressed through the different artistic traditions such as painting, sculpture, architecture, music and dance?

It seems to me that as soon as we begin to look into the question of Expression and Understanding, of Communication, we become not a little confused; thoughts and feelings become mixed up; things become a little fuzzy. Has the recent coining of the term "Fuzzy logic" got anything to do with our dawning awareness that Thoughts and Thinking are not as straightforward as we had imagined?

One reason that we seem to make an absolute connection between verbal language and thought, perhaps, has to do with the fact that we mainly use words to express our thoughts and feelings about all the different ways artists, philosophers and- scientists have communicated their ideas to us. And because words seem to have been the pervasive medium with which people have communicated with each other, we have tended to forget that at least painting, music and dance as means of expression may have had an equally long history. Visual, musical and dance narrative,

as well as oral story-telling go back a long way in the history of human civilization. Perhaps the real question is: why have we developed all these different forms of expression? What fundamental needs were these ways of communication meant to serve?

Recently, a mature student on a postgraduate course in urban design. was reflecting on his professor's statement that "Everyone has a Theory". His question was whether the theory needs to be when obviously it is already articulated in the architectural design for instance that of Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao or the Eiffel Tower or the urban design of L'enfant's city of Washington. He was of course thinking about ideas which are articulated in languages that exist other than in verbal language and which have an existence of their own apart' from language. He finally posed the question: If buildings and cities etc are indeed texts (ie have a language of their own) then why don't we let them communicate by themselves instead of talking behind their backs all the time?

I think what he has identified is our propensity to think that words are our only medium of communication. This is not entirely foolish of us. There is some basis for our thinking thus. Let us consider the ways we usually express ourselves. Of all the ways we communicate, verbal language is demonstrably the most ubiquitous. Most people have a native tongue. The fact that there is an agreed lexicon and grammar for our discourse strongly suggests to us that communication can be unambiguous. Misunderstandings are somehow otherwise psychologically significant.

We may ourselves have experienced the exasperation which parents speak of when faced with an inarticulate child whose only vocabulary. seems at that moment to consist of. "Don't know". Indeed, as professionals, we tend to regard children who are termed "elective mutes", at best as suffering from some psychological blockage.

In the art world, words have recently become part of the 'text' of the art object. In fact, Brian Ashbee wrote in the April (1999) edition of the Art Review "... in the visual arts, .. the experience of the work is often meaningless without critical text to support it." A case in point is Damien Hirst's exhibit of a large shark suspended on wires in a tank of formaldehyde; it was accompanied by the words "The physical impossibility of

death in the mind of. someone living". This text, I, think, is meant to illuminate the idea expressed within the exhibit, but it seems that the artist was not confident that the viewer would get the point without the text, as indeed I did not.

Let us examine more closely this sense of the objectivity of language, our feeling that words are essential—- to our ability to express ourselves. We know that every cultural group has a shared verbal language, that is one of the ways they distinguish themselves from each other. Despite being able to show the— universal existence of what Chomsky calls a "deep structure" underlying language and what Pinker calls our "language instinct", we have managed to develop verbal languages which are more or less incomprehensible to each other. That is, verbal language serves to divide as well as to unite people.

Furthermore, some distinctive but fundamental features in one language can be absent in another. My, own example is the group of words, describing family relationships, in major Chinese languages which do not appear in say, the English language. Thus there are certain things which the Chinese feel is essential to give expression to, but which the English do not seem to find sufficiently significant to. provide the vocabulary. Joseph Needham, the great authority on Chinese science and civilization, has written "While European philosophy tended to find reality in substance, Chinese philosophy tended to find it in relation." [Capra, Tao of Physics, p215], And coming from a different perspective, the author Anthony Burgess, in "Little Wilson and Big God", has written that "Malay and Chinese language [sic] changed the whole shape of my mind."

Thus verbal language is subject to cultural. values and not culture free. And when one considers languages as a whole (verbal or otherwise), it is clear that they are subject not only to particular cultures but also to changes through the particular history of any culture. Through time, the same words can carry different and sometimes contrary meanings. What is interesting is that words can take on new meanings without any obvious pressure for change (eg "gay" now invariably meaning a male homosexual which had been originally a prison slang [Chambers] and a consequent loss of its other uses: lively, bright, colourful, playful, dissipated etc), or conversely words do not always take off when consciously introduced, eg the word:

“pood” which had, been, suggested as an intermediate term meaning something which is neither wholly good nor totally poor, whilst continuing to use the phrase “a curate’s egg”, which as established religion has declined is much less commonly used & probably unknown amongst the young.

We now come to the Thinking Process. What do we mean by Thinking? and How do we do it? We accept unquestionably as fact that we- think, even without knowing about Descartes and his oft-quoted dictum “I think, therefore I am”.

Perhaps we could pose the question another. way. More importantly for our purposes, we should perhaps ask a more telling question: “Do babies think?”. And if so, how do they do it, since they manifestly cannot use verbal language, wield a brush, fashion clay‘, design or erect buildings, make music or dance?

To begin to answer the question, I propose to start from a fundamental point. Perhaps it could be phrased as two-questions: What is the task facing the foetus as it rapidly develops into a baby? To do this job, what are the tools with which nature has equipped the infant?

It seems to me that the answer to the first question, the question of the task, has to be “survival”; and the answer to the question of the tools for the job, has, to be the entire bodily structure, that which is bounded by our skin: here I should emphasise the importance of not separating the Mind or the Brain from the Body as of course a person is an indivisible whole, and not really divisible into the physical and psychological in personal experience.

Let us begin with survival: to survive means first, survival. in the womb, then survival in the world outside the womb. To do this, we need first and foremost to make sense of the world around and in us, as well as the world within and the world without the womb. How does an infant make sense of her- experiences? How does an infant organise her experiences?

Lowenfeld, after years of watching children play, came first to- the conclusion that babies think This in the 1920s and 19303 was quite a new concept. Furthermore,

she came to understand that play and playing, action and acting, were the means by which they expressed themselves, communicated with themselves, ordered their experiences, made- sense of their experience of themselves and their environments.

This process is achieved through what Lowenfeld called Protosystem Thinking Lowenfeld: has used various other terms as well, such as Non-verbal Thinking, Pre-verbal Thinking and even- Pre-Logical Thinking as well as Primary System Thinking. All these other terms have disadvantages: Non-verbal thinking focuses our minds on—what it is not rather than what it is; whereas Protosystem Thinking suggests a different kind of thinking, the term Pre-verbal Thinking gives the impression that it is a process which predates verbal thinking but is replaced by verbal; thinking in later life; and: Pre-logical Thinking suggests that it is not logical without intimating that it has a logic of its own. The term Primary System was, eventually rejected for a different reason: she did not wish to have the notion confused with Freud's Primary Process.

This is a roundabout way of orientating ourselves to the idea of another way of thinking that we have all been and are still using, a way that perhaps we are dimly aware of but have not been able to put into words, or even found impossible to put into words.

This kind of thinking is organised differently from verbal thinking. (You will recall the exercise we did on the first day of this Course) This kind of thinking isn't possible in words, because it isn't possible to distil experience into words without serious distortion; this kind of thinking is about making sense of the totality of experience and has logic of its own. Moreover, Lowenfeld postulates that this kind of thinking is there from the beginning of human life. In fact, she had been known to say that this activity may occur in the last stages of intra-uterine life.

Let us consider the child in its first few years of life. The most obvious point is that it is unguided by any previous experience of the external environment apart from that of being in its mother’s womb. So that for some time, all it’s knowledge of itself and its world comes through its senses. That is, all its EXPERIENCE is SENSORIAL.

We are usually born with five senses: that of touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight. It is through these five senses. that we experience our world; it is in the simultaneous interplay of the five senses that our picture of the world is formed. And this picture is imaged, not cast in words (cf Damasio: The feeling of what happens. 2000). And to these five senses should be added the Kinesthetic Sense [Chambers: the sense of the body's movement or muscular effort; for motor development, cf Eliot, p261-289], which enables a person to experience where the body as a totality is: that is it enables us to experience where our bodies, the position of our limbs, etc are, whether it is at rest or inaction. This combined with the sense of balance given by our ears gives us our sense, of ourselves in relationship to its surroundings in space. The kinesthetic sense also dynamically joins the other five sense to give expression to our E (cf Lowenfeld's Theory of B) through our behaviour and our emotions. Thus the personality forms a dynamic whole.

[1] Of the five senses, the sense of touch is the most pervasive as well as fundamental. It is indeed the touchstone of our experience. It is also the sense which brings us closest to our environment. And skin stimulation of premature babies has been shown to have a positive effect on their survival. It is also the sense which brings us closest to the Other, it is the sense of intimacy par excellence. On a functional map of the brain, the hands occupy a proportionally large space (second only to vision). (See also Damasio, p300-2;- Eliot, p123-156)

[2] There is evidence that the sense of taste is allied to, our sense of touch. There is evidence (cf— Eliot, p172-195) that taste buds are developed very early in the foetus, and the ability to taste begins in utero. But "The experience of taste is partly tactile. Taste is to qualities of mouth feel, such as the texture and temperature of food, whether it is crunchy or melting, greasy or acid." John McCrone: Going inside tour round a single moment of consciousness. London, Faber, 1999, p85.

What has become general knowledge is that thumb- sucking occurs before birth' as well as afterwards. Certainly, that is one of our earliest ways of exploring the objects in our world. The sight of babies stuffing something, anything and everything into their mouths must be one of the commoner, experiences of adults in the company

of babies. And as we also know. that our tongue is capable of magnifying the feel of things inside our mouth.

[3] On the scale of intimacy then touch, and taste bring us closest to the external world, smell prescribes a small area around us but has an immediate [sometimes transient] but just as powerful an effect as that of touch and taste. In fact, it works in tandem with taste in the location of the "what" of a sensory event: "Scents are laid out along an axis from pungent to flowery, or fresh to rotten, rather than having the more obvious spatial co-ordinates for sight, hearing and touch." McCrone ibid p85—6. (cf ASD children - use smell a lot. SS) According to Lise Eliot (Early Intelligence, p157-171), our sense of smell has a key role in bonding and social development from early infancy. And we as adults certainly think that smelling "nice" can be important in our sense of being socially attractive.

[4] Our present understanding is that although our sense of hearing continues to develop after birth, hearing is one of the earliest sense to develop in the womb. It is now known that foetuses can distinguish the mother's voice from other voices. Hearing has a particular importance to our knowledge of our world. It Wm (we can hear a shout when we cannot see the person doing the shouting). Nowadays, through the invention of the telephone, we can also identify a person by voice alone. What is more, it is the only sense which allows us to share certain experiences. When we make sounds the listener and the maker of the sound, hear the same sounds, knowing that is so this enhancing the experience of sharing. There is a natural: spatial limit to this, the limit being defined by how far we can project our voices so that other people can hear us, as well as the sharpness of our hearing, except when we are on the telephone of course. (eg A mother's voice can soothe an infant from a distance. It is also the last of our senses to leave us before death overtakes. us. + Autistic Spectrum Disorder children are often extremely sensitive to high noise levels.) cf also Eliot, p228-259.

[5] Sight develops last and, like hearing and touch, continues to develop outside the womb. It gives us the furthest and broadest view of our surroundings, within its frame, even when we cannot hear the movements. It enables us to discern the dynamics of action and possibly more importantly, the dynamics of the reaction to us. And of most importance, it allows us to detect warning signs of danger from a distance,

thus giving us time, to organise a thoughtful response. Certainly we now have evidence that vision occupies a major part of our brainscape. (Part of this is located next to that for the hand.) We also have evidence (cf Mary Sue Moore) that the gaze of babies is the single most powerful trigger for the development of neuronal connections in the brain of the newborn. (.cf also Eliot, p196-227).

Thus hearing and sight give us a much larger area of awareness. They have, however, separate and different functions. Hearing can bridge the distance even without objects being in view of each other, and tells us the approximate location of the source of the sound; whereas sight can show us objects even when. we. cannot hear them. Above all, sight can show us the movement of objects, it can show us an event in time.

We can perhaps judge the relative importance of each of. our senses by an act of imagination: Try to imagine what it would; be like for us to lose our sense of smell, ...our sense of taste, ...our sense of hearing, our sense of sight and our sense of touch, singly and in combination. Although we classify our loss of a sense of smell as an illness (anosmia), to do without the sense of smell also diminishes the sense of taste (anosmics cannot distinguish subtle flavours, only between salty, sweet, sour and bitter tastes). Thus to do without one's sense of smell is less of a misfortune to do without the Sense of taste. It is certainly disabling for those without either sight or hearing; and devasting for those without both sight and hearing. But you may find that it becomes impossible to imagine yourself without the sense of touch.

PATTERNING: So the picture formed by our senses is dynamic and comprehensive. It is the pattern formed and informed by our senses which determines our inner world and our view of our external world. Patterning according to Lowenfeld, is an important function for us, to make sense of the world around us. I am reminded of the piece of research which showed that babies will respond with interest to an unfamiliar language, but not to gibberish. Perhaps they were responding to the pattern of the language even though the sounds were unfamiliar to them.

This propensity to patterning develops from birth, and Lowenfeld hypothesised that possibly in the last stages of intrauterine life. Furthermore, this patterning is across

the senses. For instance, it has been shown (in a study in the 1970s) that a baby, within twenty four hours of its birth, will react with more interest to the sight of its mother's face accompanied by mother's voice, than to that of a stranger's face and voice. What is of particular interest is that this infant will show discomfort when presented with mother's face accompanied by stranger's voice (or the other way round). It seems as though the infant has taken cognizance of the incongruity of the presentation, which suggests that the accepted pattern is multi-sensorial, across sense modalities. cf Travarthen & Aitkin review of literature on the brain & how it is organised. ACPP Journal, Jan 2001. This has obvious repercussions for premature babies, or early adoption or foster care arrangements for children. There is also evidence that the brains of children diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder are not integrated - ASD children tend to see details without seeing the context, the whole picture & how the details relate - so, how does this affect their Protosystem thinking?

One direct example of this patterning across the senses, comes from another study. Margaret Donaldson suggests, in Human Minds [1992, Penguin, p38], that there is "evidence ....accumulating that early perception is pervasively 'supramodal' or 'amodal'. That is to say, it somehow transcends a specific sensory channel." She quotes Meltzoff and Borton's study. [A N Meltzoff & W Borton, Intermodal Matching by Human Neonates, in Nature, 1979, 282, p403-4], They gave three-week old babies dummy nipples to suck, having first covered the babies' eyes, so that they could feel the shape of the dummies in their mouths but were unable to see them. It was reported that, when the babies were later shown two nipples side by side, they looked more often at the nipple of the shape they had previously only known through sucking. Donaldson concluded that the "response to the new Visual input was influenced by prior experience in the modality of touch".

SELF—EXPRESSION: So we make sense of our world through our senses, our sensorial experience. But we also express ourselves through our senses. We communicate visually when we write, draw or paint; we invoke anothers (or sometimes our own) hearing, when we speak or when we make music; and we do both when we dance in a ballet, or perform in a Peking opera where we make use of the whole of our bodies, expressing through gestures and movement (ie using the kinesthetic sense as well) both the story and the emotion. Sprinkling scent upon our bodies appeal

to our sense of smell, and often we judge people by whether they, smell attractive or not. But drinking and eating tempt both our sense of smell as well as our palate, thus enjoyment ensures our survival.

Touch is involved in all the above: we wield a pen or brush or tap the keys on the keyboard; we stir the ingredients in a pan, we cut up food on our plate, we taste the food and drink and we handle the Mosaic pieces and the sand as well as the World material. Above all, our intimate relations with objects as well as other people, our shallowest, most fleeting and deepest feelings all are expressed through our sense of touch from love to hate in all its fine gradations, from a passionate embrace through an introductory handshake to a punch in the nose; from caressing a favourite bowl to crumpling an unwelcome letter. When we come to expression of feelings, we also need to consider the role of Culture. The same gesture, the same touch may not have the same meaning for the giver and the recipient. Thus touch is, involved at some point and at some level in all human intercourse.

So as the infant grows, it begins to, get a picture of what kind of world it inhabits. Always included; in this picture making is the internal status of the infant, for instance whether it has a fever, whether its tummy is rumbling, whether its itching from eczema or discomforted by a wet nappie. This picture is thus influenced simultaneously, multidimensionally, enlarged or developed, depending on its present and previous experiences as well as what it has already made of its previous experiences. This picture can also be dramatically changed and this too will be interpreted accordingly. All this is based on the infant's subjective and therefore idiosyncratic view of the meaning of its experiences, because of course the infant has not been able to share this view, and check whether this' view. is also that of the other people around it.

So the nature of our senses, our personal perceptions, is our first consideration in our thinking about Protosystem Thinking.

Secondly, there are other factors in infancy which Lowenfeld had noted which need to be taken into account, and that is firstly, their lack of a sense of time and time elapsing, and their lack of a sense of location. For adults, when and where something happens are important dimensions of the event.

For an infant, the lack of a notion of time and the elapse of time, who has no sense of before or after, means that although she is aware of movement, she does not recognise the direction of movement. So ideas of up and down, forwards and backwards these ideas are not present at birth and are only very gradually acquired.

Lowenfeld had also noticed that infants are also unable to grasp the notions of here and there: something is either present or it is not; and what they see, hear, smell, touch, taste and feel thus form a whole. We now know that this is developmentally quite logical. You will remember that the three senses, which will only be fully developed after birth, touch (as in the grasp reflex), sight and hearing, are largely to do with the spatial dimensions of our sensorial experience. (see McCrone, [.4] above)

So it is also not surprising that modern research has confirmed another observation of Lowenfeld's: that very young infants have no sense of whether an sensorial event is happening inside or outside them (e.g. a pain is experienced as a sensation, but not as something located inside or outside the body). Thus for an infant every experience is global in nature and timeless. These ideas develop as the infant grows It takes time' and personal experience of space/ time for a sense of continuity to develop.

Thus ideas formulated in early life can only be modified by later personal experience.

Thirdly, it follows that when an infant has a sensory experience and this experience arouses in him a feeling, because the infant is incapable of distinguishing between itself and the external stimulus for that experience, nor the feeling the stimulus has aroused in it, the infant's mind registers all this as one totality. (e.g. baby at breast)

Fourthly, it also follows that the child cannot detach the qualities of an object or aspects of its experience, from the object or the experience: (eg scent and sound, colour and taste, usage and. so on.) Lowenfeld said that the infant only "knows a series of total experiences". For example: the taste of mother's milk, the blue of mother's

dress, the smoothness of. the fabric, the scent of a bunch of roses, and the barking of a dog are perceived as one undivided experience. So, the taste of mother's milk, the sight of the blue, the feel of the fabric, the smell of the flowers and the sound of the dog barking will be fused into one experience and is or cannot be deconstructed into its various components. The sensorial qualifies are not separated out; the experience is perceived as an indivisible whole: "therefore that quality which arouse (sic) in him the most powerful or the clearest (feelings) IS to him THE quality of the object. The feeling and the object become identified".

Let us see if we can find some examples from ordinary living. I would like to ask you to tell me what picture comes immediately to mind when I ask you to think about "warm clothing". [Examples]

Your pictures will no doubt be individual, even though the words you used will be general and may be the same. What I would like you to notice, however, is the ease. with which you were able to identify an article of clothing with the feeling of warmth which you felt when you put on that jumper or whatever. That is, the feeling belongs to you, but your feeling of warmth has become identified with that particular article of clothing.

Lets try another example: tell me what picture comes immediately to your mind when I ask you to think about "a happy holiday".

What is more, there is no way an outsider can tell which one of the qualities has come to represent the essence of the experience (sometimes we ourselves are surprised by them and some of. you might be able to recall items in your-Worlds or Mosaics which have surprised or puzzled you). Thus I could not predict what picture would come to mind for each one of you, although I could be pretty certain that you would all have something different!

Therefore, to quote Lowenfeld again: "There is no means for the external observer to know WHICH quality of the perceived object has thus reached pre-eminence, and has become joined to the [feeling] in the child's mind." Lowenfeld gave the following example: "If a child seeing slime on a pond and spinach on his plate

evokes a relation 'green' by this perception, the slime and the spinach become actually identified; they are for him the same thing."

Fifthly, along with the patterning informed by their senses, children organise experiences by the FEELING which the experiences evoke and they do this by classifying experiences through the similarity of Feeling. So taking the above example further. If the greenness of the slime went with the horridness of the touch, then the very sight of the spinach would provoke a similar feeling. Lowenfeld said that "These feelings are absolute to the child, he would never question their absoluteness or enquire if other people also felt the same." Because he feels them, they bear the stamp of universal truths. So at the sight of the spinach this same child would likely burst into tears and refuse to eat his spinach. Perhaps that 1's why we often use the words ‘think’ and ‘feel’ interchangeably.

Lowenfeld: Quotations are from - A Thesis Concerning the Fundamental Structure of the Memo-Emotional Processes in Children, given to the General Section of the British Psychological society in Manchester, 18.4.1937.

Put differently, three main points emerge about children’s early experiences and the way they think about them:

Firstly, Sensorial experience is our primary source of knowledge of our world and the "nature of early experience is such that sensation, [feeling], concept and memory all coalesce into an indivisible whole". This perceptual world and knowledge is subjective, across the sensorial modalities, multidimensional and simultaneously formed. Lowenfeld has given the term CLUSTER to this idiosyncratic indivisible whole. cf Gopnik, Meltzoff & Kuhl: “How babies think: the science of childhood” London Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999.

Secondly, early experiences are organised through patterning, and these experiences are classified or grouped by the similarity of the emotion evoked by the experience, and this kind of organisation, classification and grouping has been termed by Lowenfeld as Protosystem Thinking. Images and picture making rather than verbal language is its natural medium of expression.

Thus, Protosystem thinking is Idiosyncratic, mum-sensorial, multidimensional, simultaneous and global in nature and its logic derives from emotions.

Thirdly, Protosystem Thinking is capable of generating ideas. Let us begin with ordinary ideas, ideas arising from ordinary experience.

Has a chair or table ever been defined for you? Yet I am sure you can all recognise what a chair or table looks like in this Culture, even though there are many designs of chairs or tables. Actually our knowledge is more refined than that, we all seem to know the difference between a simple chair, an armchair', a sofa, and a stool; nor do we mistake a stool for a table.

That was an example of an idea of a concrete object, what of something more abstract, some thing like the notion of mm. Do you remember ever being taught about the idea of weight? Do you ever remember being taught how to judge the weight of a ball so that you can run towards it and scoop it up effortlessly and run off with it? Perhaps we have all seen young children doing just that. Certainly, my two year old grandson was quite capable of playing a sophisticated ball game with me, with seeming expectations of how the ball would behave relative to his actions in order to fulfil his intention of either making me miss or catch the ball.

On the other hand, we have no doubt observed young babies grasping objects and letting them go or dropping them, or older infants sitting in a high chair picking up a rattle or some such object, throwing it on the floor, to be patiently retrieved by its carer. only for the same process to be, what must sometimes seem to its carer, endlessly repeated

Using Lowenfeld's idea of Protosystem Thinking through our sensorial experiences, my conjecture is that such behaviours with different objects, enable us to learn about not only the concept of "Weight", but about the relative strength of our skeletal muscles as well as the right amount of energy needed for particular tasks; about how objects behave in different circumstances, about textures and shapes of objects, the sight, sound, smell, taste and feel of things all in one seamless whole.

In fact ideas generated by Protosystem Thinking are likely to be the foundation of our belief systems, because notions formed early in life, unless consciously modified by later experience, have the quality of universal truths. Because they are not formulated through use of verbal language, they are not amenable to verbal argument. A neat example comes from Stephen Jay Gould's "Bully for Brontosaurus" [Life's Little Joke, p168, Penguin, 1991], albeit from adults rather than children. Gould was talking about the use of visual aids to illustrate scientific theory, like the use of the horse to illustrate the evolutionary ladder, and, the image of the 'evolutionary tree' to demonstrate the idea of ever increasing varieties. In fact, of course, the scientific evidence suggests the opposite to be the case. But the idea as captured in the image, has so captivated the scientific as well as the popular imagination, it seems not easily amenable to later verbal correction in learned treatises.

Protosytem Thinking and Lowenfeld Projective Techniques

It is to enable the expression of a child's subjective experiences [of herself and of the world around her], to render these thoughts and feelings communicable, that Lowenfeld devised the World Apparatus and World Technique, and designed the Mosaics. In the event, Lowenfeld found that World-making and the Mosaics can also help adults to express themselves, thus demonstrating that the World Technique and Mosaics are useful media of communication for all ages. Worlds are plastic, multi-faceted (that is able to express many aspects of an experience, including contradictions, simultaneously), multi-dimensional (that is, able to represent not only movement but the conjunction of experiences normally separated by space and time), and permitting of an entirely personal statement. The process of making a Mosaic and the Mosaic itself, especially a first Mosaic, convey a portrait of a personality in action at an unique moment of time.

Since protosystem thinking underlies our most basic assumptions about the world around us, as well as accounting for our idiosyncratic: likes and dislikes, it behoves us to work towards what Lowenfeld calls "the prevention of the playing out of these ideas in the stuff of later reality, by the adequate facing of childhood". (Manchester Paper, in Selected Papers, p247 - 264).

Of course not all our protosystem thought requires externalisation. We live our lives with its up and downs, and that is the stuff of life. We experience physical and emotional pain, we have moments of joy and times of misery. We seek help usually only when it has become “too much”, that is when there is unbearable dissonance between our reality and our picture of ourselves and our situation: or when our reality seems to belie the truth of our belief system: it may then be helpful to give ourselves the opportunity to see all round the picture, to give dynamic expression of our World. This is where the presence of an external observer of the process can be invaluable. Once we have become aware of our inner world and how it relates to our external circumstances, change becomes possible. And this applies as much to children as it does to adults. But first this world needs first to be expressed, using media which are appropriate to its expression.

For as Lowenfeld wrote in her book 'Play in Childhood': " the less a man or a child is aware of the interior forces of his mind, the more irresistibly is he driven to express them. The nature of his protosystem logic is at utter variance with the logic of his conscious mind, and man 's disharmony with himself is due to the fact that he is unaware of this situation; that, once childhood is over, he takes his games for reality, his fantastic conceptions of the world for political sanity, and his momentary myths for considered thought." (1969, p.325)

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