

Direct Projective Therapy

Margaret Lowenfeld

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Advance in objective investigation can only be made through limitation of enquiry to specific fields. To be fruitful, an enquiry into any aspect of human behaviour needs instruments capable of revealing facts relevant to the nature of the enquiry. There is an intimate connection in the progress of all forms of objective study between instruments used in an investigation and the achievement of a new understanding of the subject investigated.

Much knowledge¹ has already been won in the fields of child psychology and child psychotherapy and we already possess a considerable store of information concerning the relation of children to their human environment, to their own developing physical powers, to each other, and to external objects. The psychotherapies of Freud, Jung & Adler have brought us information concerning the development of the instinctive drives and their relation to the ego components, concerning the influence upon a child of factors of racial and parental emotion and of the effect upon a child's life of his own self valuation.

¹ 'Piaget: The Child's Conception of the World' R.Griffith: Imagination in Young Children (Kegan & Paul) Dr Michael Fordham: Child Life Herbert Read: Education Through Art (Faber and Faber) Erik Homburger Erikson 'Configuration in Play (Psychoanalytical Quarterly 1937) - ditto - Section on Play Therapy' (American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 1938, pt.3)

I want today to direct your attention to a sphere which is outside all of these and which, I believe, lies below or around them, this is the sphere of the child's non-verbal thoughts about his own intimate experience, and the effect they have upon his later development.

In such reading as the limitations of life as a practising physician allows, I have been able to find no direct reference to this region of the mind as such. But I think Piaget's SYNCRETISM and Freud's conception of 'condensation and displacement in dreams', passages in Ruth Griffiths and Dr Michael Fordham's, 'Child Life', passages in Herbert Read's 'Education Through Art'

In the U.S.A., Erik Homburger Erikson seems to be investigating some of the same facts as I, and in a very difficult monograph suggests a terminology to describe them. Had there been time I should have liked to discuss his suggestions today and to have made use of some of them. But as this is not possible I must do my best with our terminology.

To return to the reasons why this part of the personality has so far escaped observation.

Before lenses were discovered and made available to scientists, the facts about the universe which the microscope and the telescope have revealed were inaccessible to men, and because inaccessible, unimaginable. The same is surely true of the human mind. Without instruments suitable for the observation of an aspect of mental functioning, the existence of such functions must escape observation. The two are bound together. So too, unfortunately, is the case of the expositor in exposition. Description of the instrument and of the region brought to light through use of the instrument are inextricably blended and until each listener has tried himself to work with the instrument, description is apt to be incomprehensible or to sound too improbable to carry conviction.

For this reason, I had hoped it might have been possible to bring drawings of material for display by epidiascope, but the latter being unobtainable, and as time is too short for discussion of drawings passed around, I propose to do what I can with words, but with acute consciousness of their limitations.

Let us take first the question, to what problem is this work upon which I wish to report, the answer? The query 'what goes on in the mind of the child before speech

becomes an instrument of thought?' Now I would like to draw attention to the point that the word used here is mind, not heart, if the word heart is taken as the symbolic seat of the emotions. It is not the instinctive part of the child's experience upon which I want to focus attention, but the child's interior early mental or reasoning processes. And again not these processes as applied to the outside world but as they deal with processes and experiences occurring within the self.

The question naturally arises how these can be investigated since speech is here essentially irrelevant? Speech is a system of abstract symbols which need general external agreement: to make them relevant and these are by definition concerned with experiences common to all. How difficult the voicing is of passionate or individual experience in the common coin of speech everyone in love and every poet is aware, though perhaps 'Finnigan Wake' and the work of Gertrude Stein are the only attempts we have to transcend it.

To understand this region, we need an instrument by which it can be reached and demonstrated, and by means of such demonstration analysed and understood. It has been my work for the last twenty years to forge such an instrument.

For some time now it has been an accepted fact that a child's relation to toys and his form of play with them reveals a great deal concerning his interior experience.

But the points to which attention has been directed in the study of this material, and therefore the deductions which have been drawn, have been almost exclusively concerned with the affective life of the child and his relation either to affects within himself or to those of other people, together with his concept of the nature of those affects.

This valuable work I can now supplement with observations directed to another aspect. This aspect is to be found to some extent, if looked for, in all children's use of all play material and especially in any child's use of the particular play material I have devised. But to some extent if it is to be recognised it must be understood beforehand, a fact which is true of all scientific observation, namely that we must know something of the nature of what we are looking for in order to be able to perceive it.

To indicate therefore the sort of material we are investigating, let us take the question of movement and of space. To an adult or an older child it is perfectly clear that there is a difference for example between movement up and movement down, that within

is not the same as without; that the glove is not the same as the hand. We know these things because they are external happenings; they are relations in the world outside us and relations that we constantly experience. Similarly, we know that our body trunk intervenes between our head and our nether end and that these two are different in function and in character. We know further that if we vomit, matter rushes from within us to without and we swallow, it goes from without within. That if we fall into a rage, feeling wells up within us but nothing material leaps out, and that if we are hurt with an unkind word or look, nothing material again goes from without within us. Our knowledge of the external world makes distinctions clear to us.

Now a small child, when he has recovered from the trauma of birth, begins his conscious life in mid-air. He is carried from place to place and for him there is no 'above' or 'below', only motion or lack of motion, appearance or disappearance. Things appear within his area of sight, smell, taste or touch, and disappear again. He has no notion of the causality of either. They are; they are pleasant, neutral, unpleasant, they have certain qualities which his senses register, and then they are not. They have vanished, slipped, as far as he is concerned totally out of existence. Similarly with states within his own body (only he does not know these are 'within'), they are, and they are not, they come and go, as external objects come and go, only as we well know there is no difference as yet to his awareness between 'within' him and 'without'. There is in him a centre of awareness with a relation to things that happen, and, I submit, the nature of these happenings to that centre is indistinguishable the one from the other.

Similarly, when he gains the personal power of movement this is for him for a long time only in one place, the horizontal. Here things roll away but do not come back, though a cry will bring larger human objects back, the cry having apparent power over their movement and that perhaps of household pets, but not of other objects. Similarly, he begins to find certain 'inside' feelings can be called up by personal attempts, cries and so on, and certain others, hunger, sleepiness, anger, come and go on their own. There is no order and no coherence in this universe.

There is however in every sane human mind an imperative need to reduce to some kind of order its own experience and it is here the first relevance of this work appears. It appears from the type of investigation about to be described that there is a form of

synthesis of experience which has not yet been identified and which is additional to and earlier than the form we already know which is that of combination through association (in all its forms) of words, objects, ideas and experiences. This mode of mental functioning was discussed at length some years ago in a paper read to this Society in Manchester, and it is upon this that I wish now to build.

This form of organisation I suggest takes place through Identification of experiences with each other so that they become part of a new whole. That which results, I believe, forms the core of every human mind.

The difference between the two modes of mental function is that in the usual process of association, mental object A remains unaltered as object A (such as for example a pillar box calling up the idea of a red dahlia). The dahlia becomes mental object B. Some characteristic of A leading to the mental image of another object B. This characteristic selected here is the colour of redness. Thought of A (or of B) will bring up the idea of B or part of A or B) or vice versa through the selected characteristic, here the idea of redness. But in this process A & B remain themselves unaltered, and clearly distinguishable from each other.

In the process I have called the formation of 'Identities' this does not happen. Here the possession by A & B of a common characteristic X results in the fusion of A with B so that they become part of a new whole Z. which once joined is in future evermore inseparable into its component elements. It becomes therefore impossible in the future, except by special apparatus and long experience, to diagnose in the fused conglomerate what originally was A or B, or to distinguish the linking characteristic X, A, X and B and now become qualities of a new whole, Z. That Z may not exist or be capable of existing in any 'real' world make no difference whatever to the creator of Z, since to him Z is real, being his own experience, and the 'real' world unreal.

If this be admitted the question immediately arises: according to what rules does this identification take place, that is, what brings about such a fusion of experience?

The essential quality of the mass of material made by fusion of this kind is that it is purely subjective and relates wholly and entirely to subjective experience where the more usual form of association with which we are familiar is mainly concerned with relations in

the external world. How then does identification take place? It appears that the essential quality which brings about fusion of two experiences is a similarity of subjective tone, ideas, objects or experiences become fused together which arouse the same subjective experience. When one thinks this over it becomes natural that this should be so since a young child possesses no other criterion. At the time fusion begins to take place the child possesses no knowledge of the external world which is shared by others which it can use as a criterion. If similar experiences are to be selected it must be by subjective criteria.

It is because of these two characteristics that fusion of this kind cannot be observed by other human beings. For the same reason, these fusions are taken for granted by the child himself and become later invisible to him as well.

To go a step further, it is a commonplace of popular speech that emotional experiences are portrayed by physical analogy, as 'a sickening thought', 'he gives me a pain in the neck', 'You could have knocked me down with a feather', and so on, which is to say, that since certain personal experiences are incommunicable in direct speech, knowledge of them can only be conveyed indirectly through analogy with bodily states having similar subjective content.

This is universal in early childhood. A child being unable to separate bodily subjective experiences from emotional ones combines both in a single concept and the central self uses either indifferently to express the other. So I have found vomiting, diarrhoea, constipation, pyrexia, skin eruptions, coughs, colds and a host of other apparently physical happenings, can be merely the physical side of a mass of fused experiences containing physical as well as mental experiences. Being 'identified', physiological process and mental idea become inseparable. Here the syncretism of Piaget, the "condensation" and 'displacement of affect' of Freud and much of Gestalt psychology are relevant.

There are many other elements in this most delicate and intricate process which time does not allow even of mention. Thus the whole makes up a structureless mass which I have hitherto termed the 'primary system' and which I now want to propose we call the primal or primary conglomerate or jelly. This, I believe, exists as part of the matrix of personality in all children, normal and neurotic. The difference between them is that in the 'normal' child or perhaps we should say the happy child with a satisfactory background, the matter composing the primal conglomerate is sufficiently similar to that of other people and

sufficiently akin to external reality, for the ordinary processes of mental, emotional and physical growth and development, together with the bridges of myth, fairy-tale etc. to enable him to pull his main forces out of it and to apply them to real life.

In neurotic children or children from an obstinately neurotic background, it appears that the composing elements of the conglomerate are at once too strange and their implications too threatening, for him to be able to extricate his energy. Too much of it remains therefore entangled in the web of the primary conglomerate and development is hindered or ceases.

Let us now consider an illustration.

A well brought up dainty little girl suffers from an attack of acute anxiety if undressed by any but very familiar people. She is very pussy about her clothes and will make a scene unless very nicely dressed. She is a pretty child and her parents amuse themselves and her by a great emphasis upon pretty clothes. She has also been anaemic and been given an iron tonic which turned her excreta black.

One day her favourite tortoise died, and she found it later in the garden half-eaten by maggots. The soil of the garden of the house in which she lived was very black. She was not allowed to play with it, as she wanted to, because it 'spoiled her clothes.

Later she suffered from intestinal worms and her mother appeared to - her to be very revolted about this, as she was with dirty clothes.

We have here several subjective similarities. First, the soil is black, often moist and also mouldable; a substance comes out of her which has the same qualities. She would like to play with the soil and may not because it spoils: or dirties things. She has at one time also shown a similar relation to her own stools and been trained out of this desire. Soil and stools, therefore, look alike, may be presumed to feel alike and have a similar quality that handling either is a forbidden pleasure which has become something from which we must turn away. Since there is no difference as we have explained, to a small child between inside and outside, soil and 'inside' become fused and the result runs 'I have black soil inside me, dirty, spoils things, mustn't touch'.

This is followed by a horrifying experience of seeing something that was alive, moving and be loved, stationary, eaten away and full with maggots and that at a time when

the word 'dead' conveyed no meaning. Passing excreta gives to most children a feeling of there being something inside moving out and this time in her experience, worms like maggots come out. Both are horrifying experiences and the similar horror makes of these a fusion also. As a result, it became clear to her that she was full of black earth, riddled with worms, as the tortoise had been with maggots. She then had a short bout of diarrhoea in which faeces 'rushed out of her: as she felt. This set up an acute and perfectly logical anxiety, lest at any moment the wormy earth inside might rush out of her and make clear to everyone the horrible nature of her own body. The only possible response to her was to refuse to allow anyone to see her body lest they might see the horrible inside of it, always remembering that inside and outside are continuous, and to redress the balance by concentrating attention upon exterior clothes to distract people's attention from thinking about or wanting to look at the child within.

Two other questions here arise. What is the relation of this part or aspect of the mind to the rest of the mind and what effect has it upon development?

Time does not allow more than a sentence or two in answer to either query.

The answer I would like to give to the first is intricate and complicated as it involves consideration of how much of what is normally called the unconscious comes in here. But it cannot be attempted here. Very chiefly it appears to persist through life, to have an intimate connection with bodily illness and to vary greatly in importance in different individuals according to individual constitution, temperament and the relation of the individual to the external world.

The second query involves the equally important and also complicated question of the relation to growth and how human beings normally escape from identification of the self with the primary conglomerate. All I can say today is that here is involved the question of the individual's relation to words and of the type of education he receives. There is also involved his active and affective experiences and what happens to the rest of his personality, each part interpenetrating the other.

We have in this short exposition two remaining points to deal with a) by what means can this conglomerate be investigated and b) how do we know when our reading of it is correct?

To take a) first. I have drawn attention to the fact that to the small child internal and external are either identical or continuous. There is further a dynamic drive in all children to get away from that which torments them, to set a distance between it and them, and so to regard it objectively. It is upon this dynamic that the design and operation of our technical instrument is built.

This instrument is the provision in sizes and consistencies suitable for use is a child's small lingers of material objects in which he can express the curious ideas he has in himself. The process of investigation or treatment is the analysis of these into elements of his probable experiences and concepts.

It is essential that this material should be able to express all the elements of space, time and movement, should be capable of being both ways at the same time, in and out, up and down, of being glove and hand, bottle and contents, and that its elements should easily represent both fragmentation and fusion and be taken at the value the child gives it. There is no attempt in this method to import into analysis of the child's production, anything from knowledge the observer may have from theoretical psychology except as a corollary to what the child himself shows or does. What is attempted is direct contact with the child's intimate structure of experience by means of projection by the child, of this interior jelly-like thought into external material.

How then do we know when we are drawing the correct conclusion? The answer is simple. The child tells one. We must remember that to a child his interior world is the only one existing. As to the average Englishman, English ways are 'normal' and other forms of behaviour 'foreign', so to a child, his interior concepts ARE and others are odd or queer. So if we analyse a structure produced by a child and tell him what we find, he will nod and smile as if the result of our sweating labour and thought is the easiest and most obvious thing in the world and say 'yes' or 'of course' or else just look up and nod and go swiftly to the next stage. Once experienced, there is no doubt about this criterion, the child knows whether we are right or not and if right most clearly tells us. If he does not agree with what is put to him, I think it is rarely sound to postulate resistance and instead usually find it is due to lack of understanding on the part of the adult. The child here probably is right and the adult wrong.

Now when a child agrees with you that a certain piece of play or a certain structure that he has made has the nature that you suggest, this piece of his explanation to himself of his own experience comes into focus and a process takes place which is familiar in all education. His intelligence can then get to work upon it and with your help he can test out this conception and compare it with reality and so dissolve it as in all education true knowledge dissolves error and misconception. This false part of the conglomerate then disappears with all its consequences and the energy caught up in it is freed for growth.

It is for these reasons therefore that DIRECT PROJECTIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY has been chosen to describe this method of approach to the child's problems.