

WINNER: Main Prize

‘The Liberation of Place: Winnicott’s 1962 Lecture Tour of California.’

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Prelude

Long before D.W. Winnicott achieved international renown as a pediatrically-informed psychoanalyst, he participated in one of the most riveting moments of the Controversial Discussions at an evening meeting of the British Psychoanalytical Society on 17 February 1943. Freudian and Kleinian partisans held centerstage. The on-going debate about the true nature and origins of the infant’s psychological life was so fierce that its participants hardly noticed that London was about to be bombed. Amidst the storm of words, D.W. Winnicott calmly stood up and said, ‘I should like to point out that there is an air raid going on.’ (Grosskurth, 1986, p. 321) Gripping as these discussions were to those gathered there, Winnicott simultaneously maintained a survivalist’s link to the emergency beyond the walls of the Society’s elegant Georgian building at 96 Gloucester Place. And so, the members repaired to shelter in the Underground.

A decade later, in 1953, after the publication of his landmark paper, ‘Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena,’ Winnicott had become the *de facto* leader of the Independent or ‘non-aligned’ group of primarily British analysts who had selectively appropriated from those Freudian or Kleinian ideas that suited their theoretical proclivities. Winnicott, who had for years been a Kleinist enthusiast, then brilliantly synthesized aspects of Freud and Klein in his own account of the infant’s first year of life. For the first six months of the infant’s life, Winnicott still foregrounded Freud’s ideas: according to this account, the infant exists in its own world of pleasure, frustration and solipsistically-invoked omnipotence, where it imagines that it creates everything it sees. In one of his manuscripts, Winnicott put this idea in the form of a comical math equation: ‘I = D.W.W. = God.’ The infant here is initially quite unaware of who it is that tends to its bodily needs. In short, the infant exists in a ‘personless’ world where its only concern was with provision and with no capacity to recognize the nature of the provider for the first months of life.

Here Winnicott disagreed with Klein, who opined that the infant was born with a rudimentary sense of being person-related. Winnicott implicitly believed that Mrs. Klein had conflated what ailed young children with how infants psychically developed in the presence of the mothers who tended them. Winnicott’s pediatrically-informed views were supported by fellow Independent John Bowlby (1951): at the outset, infants are not bothered by brief separations from their mothers until six months of age; separation from mother only matters once an emotional attachment has been made to her person. Winnicott (1945) also described to a receptive war-weary nation eager to return to ‘normalcy’ ordinary sequences of infants with their mothers. In a typical sequence, a sleeping infant awakes crying; mother comes and feeds the infant—and the infant sinks back into renewed sleep. When the infant stays awake longer, he or she must learn to

wait to be fed—it is at this point that thumb and fingers are substituted. In due course, an intense emotional attachment to the first ‘not-me’ possession ensues. The nature of the child’s libidinal tie to mother only gradually unfolded in the second half of the first year—and it was at that point, once the infant began to prefer ‘transitional objects’ like Teddy bears and blankets that a partial emotional attachment to mother had been made.

But as commonplace as these ideas appear to us nowadays—inferences about the infant’s first months of psychological life—they became the stuff of lifelong rivalries and competition at mid-century amongst the members of the three training groups at the British Society. This training system based upon a particular model of the infant’s psychic life was born out of an unending disagreement among these groups. As early as 1945, A ‘Gentlemen’s Agreement’ was hammered out and resulted in a three-track training system for the London Institute’s candidates and future psychoanalysts—Freudian, Kleinian and ‘nonaligned,’ later called ‘Independent.’ King and Steiner (1990) have documented all the theoretical divergences that surfaced with great vehemence once the German/Jewish refugee group arrived to live and work in London in the late 1930s—chief among them, the Freud family from Vienna, then under the leadership of Anna Freud, who for years had tended her ailing father. While King and Steiner covered in meticulous detail this defining period in the inception of the new training program, the post-war fight continued between members of the Klein group and the likes of ‘Independents,’ such as D.W. Winnicott. It is a history that has been left mainly untold.

The publication of *The Collected Works of D.W. Winnicott*, (hereafter, CW, L. Caldwell and H. Taylor Robinson, eds., 2016) now provides for the first time the basic materials for an enriched account of how it was that Winnicott came to part company with the London Klein group, with which he had been affiliated from 1935 through 1951. Historians and analysts alike can now begin to reconstruct Winnicott’s odyssey from his initial interest in psychoanalysis as a British pediatrician (when he was analyzed in the 1920s by James Strachey, whose association as a member of the Bloomsbury group presaged his later fame as the editor/translator along with wife Alix of Freud’s *Standard Edition*) to his final papers as a world-renowned psychoanalyst, (1931-1979). With this new work, chronologically arranged, order, students of Winnicott’s thought also benefit from the technological advances of the digital age insofar as the invaluable Volume XII, ‘Appendices and Bibliographies,’ affords innumerable search and research possibilities, allowing a previously unavailable degree of access to the breadth and depth of Winnicott’s thought. (CW, XII: 353-470)

In this essay, I will focus on a single episode in Winnicott’s illustrious career, an incident that may throw fresh light on how Winnicott creatively navigated his differences with theoretical adversaries. I cover fairly unfamiliar ground related to Winnicott’s lecture tour of California in October, 1962. Wellknown in Europe, his work was now warmly welcomed at both the San Francisco and Los Angeles Institutes. I maintain that these distant cities were ideal localities for Winnicott to discuss what was still so heated and controversial in London. His continuing disagreements with members of the Klein group found a receptive environment in this ‘new world,’ where Winnicott made both his appreciation and critical assessment of Klein’s theories plainly known to a group of analysts unencumbered by ‘old world’ controversies.

Winnicott's 1962 Lecture Tour of California

What do Winnicott's two iconic California papers tell us ('A Personal View of the Kleinian Development,' *CW*, VI: 325-332; and 'Communicating and Not Communicating Leading to a Study of Opposites,' *CW*, VI: 433-445, presented at the Los Angeles and San Francisco Institutes)?

Winnicott presented his 'Personal View of the Kleinian Development' in Los Angeles on 3 October 1962. This was clearly a paper he could not have given at the British Society, a veritable hot-house of theoretical strife at that time. Then on 8 October 1962, Winnicott probably startled his audience of primarily Freudian analysts in San Francisco when he stated: 'Starting from no fixed place, I soon came, while preparing this paper for a foreign society, to staking a claim, to my surprise, to the right not to communicate. This was a protest from the core of me to the frightening fantasy of being infinitely exploited. In another language, this would be the fantasy of being eaten or swallowed up. In the language of this paper, it is the fantasy of being found.' Why would he have made such an outlandish opening statement as an honored guest lecturer?

The California of the early 1960s clearly offered a different space of possibilities. Thousands of miles away from London, Winnicott constructed a sort of analytic sanctuary. The 'other language' that Winnicott referred to was Kleinian argot. Taken in this way, 'Communicating's' opening statement now reads as a declaration of liberation, an unshackling from his own orienting fantasy of being exploited, eaten or swallowed up. For decades after Klein's (1932) own groundbreaking work on the analysis of small children, analysts from her group had conceived of the primitive nature of the young child's *phantasies* as oralsadistic and cannibalistic. Kleinians still prefer to use the term *phantasy* as it accentuates its truly unconscious nature. Imagine for a moment, Winnicott giving 'The Kleinian Development' paper in London. There are compelling reasons to think that he would have felt 'eaten alive' by members of the Klein group! Such were the animosities and rivalries of the 'war between groups' that precluded open debate and discussion. (Aguayo, 2002)

But on this occasion, Winnicott deployed Klein's work as a sort of creative foil for the formulation of his own ideas. In 'Communicating,' he equated the frightening fantasy of 'infinite exploitation' with the fear of 'feeling found.' He then argued for differentiating the defenses of a secret or False Self from an 'isolate' but healthy aspect of human personality, one that is private and prefers to remain so. Winnicott in his ever-playful and adroit use of language put it well:

'Here is a picture of a child establishing a private self that is not communicating, and at the same time wanting to communicate and to be found. It is a sophisticated game of hide-and-seek in which *it is a joy to be hidden but disaster not to be found.*' (*CW*, VI: 439) Like a young child who deploys his or her ingenuity to find a spot where he won't be found, the discovery of which carries with it great tension and excitement, Winnicott found a way towards his own integration. It was beyond the Kleinian ideas he had learned over the years of his supervisory work with Klein and analysis with Joan Riviere, one of her closest associates in the 1930s.

In the cloistered, stifling and ghettoized public discourse at the British Society—Kleinians

only attending Kleinian meetings, Freudian doing much the same—Winnicott had long been accustomed to taking to operating from the underground, making clear his evolving views and perspectives expressed in letters to members of the Klein group in the 1950s. Dominique Scarfone (*CW*, IV: 7) has emphasized how illuminating these letters are in the development of his ideas: ‘I cannot insist too much on the value of reading his correspondence in parallel with his main papers. The chronological order in which letters and texts are presented offers a rich opportunity for watching his ideas make their way in varied circumstances and under different guises.’ In another paper, I have emphasized an implicit group-relational aspect conjured up by Winnicott in his letters to members of the Klein group. There he evolved a differentiated sense of what the London Klein group now represented to him in the wake of his theoretical maturation in the 1950s. (Aguayo and Regeczkey, 2016) He distinguished three different subgroups, which one might think as (after Makari, 2008) the ‘All-In Kleinians,’ the ‘Not-So-All-In Kleinians’ and the ‘Promising Kleinians.’

Considering the first group, Winnicott sometimes issued missives highly critical of what he thought of as their ‘groupishness,’ their sense of theoretical superiority. In a letter (21 February 1952) to Hanna Segal, a well-known Kleinian, Winnicott mentioned a new group phenomenon that was becoming apparent to him at meetings of the British Society. In his own words, it seemed like ‘...the way the sub-Kleinian group pops up in defence every time one of them reads a paper gives the impression, which it will take a long time to eradicate; that there is a paranoid organization amongst the custodians of the good internalized breast.’ (Rodman, 1987, p. 27) On the one hand, Winnicott readily acknowledged that in order for the science of psychoanalysis to move forward there would have to be some agreement on terminology, a ‘common language’ that could facilitate meaningful and constructive discussions. On the other hand, Winnicott found it genuinely counterproductive to scientific openness when the Kleinian group protectively banded around their members.

Winnicott then adopted the strategy of stating his findings in his own unique language—and his sincere hope was that Klein might find some merit in what he regarded as his ‘creative gesture.’ It was a hope that Klein ultimately thwarted, and generations of London Kleinian analysts have largely followed Klein’s lead suit by relegating Winnicott’s contributions to their footnotes. (Aguayo, 2002)

Denouement: Winnicott’s Final Critique of the Kleinian Development

By 1962, Winnicott had ended his private critiques and entreaties to members of the Klein group. From this perspective, his Los Angeles presentation of ‘The Kleinian Development’ can now be read as a sort of dress rehearsal before the appearance of the final version in 1965. (*CW*, VI: 325-332) In the wake of Melanie Klein’s death in 1960, Winnicott now had to sum up his critique and appreciation of Klein’s theoretical work.

Living in Los Angeles, and with an abiding interest in tracking down archival materials related to the numerous lecture visits made by illustrious British analysts, such as Wilfred Bion, Herbert Rosenfeld, Anna Freud and Hanna Segal, I recently tracked down an audio-taped copy of Winnicott’s original lecture of 1962—and this archival remnant has been donated to the Winnicott Trust in London. In comparing the oral with the published

version of the paper, I wondered how the two versions compared with one another. The central critique that appeared in both version was how Klein's ideas about the infant's psychic life underplayed the role of actual mothering. He wrote that Klein '...paid lip-service to environmental provision, but would never fully acknowledge that along with the dependence of early infancy is truly a period in which it is not possible to describe an infant without describing the mother whom the infant has not yet become able to separate from a self'. Here Winnicott's famous statement was that Klein was 'temperamentally incapable' of paying 'full attention to the environmental factor...' (CW, VI: 331)

But more intriguing was what Winnicott edited out of his published version of 'The Kleinian Development'. In the Los Angeles lecture, death and mourning were in the air, not only with Klein's recent death, (September 22nd, 1960) but also that of Winnicott's second analyst, Joan Riviere (May 20th, 1962). An era was ending. Winnicott recapped some of Klein and Freud's major achievements—the play technique, the hypothesis of the depressive position as ranking in epistemic status with Freud's Oedipus Complex as fundamental cornerstones of psychoanalytic theory. But then, he abruptly attacked Klein's theories frontally in terms omitted from the published version:

'And you can see, that if I absolutely *hate* Mrs. Klein's paper, on which she based her book of "envy of children", it doesn't really matter to me, I just went up to Mrs. Klein after the paper and said "I don't like that, there's something wrong with it and I don't know what it is", and I still don't know... But the fact is, that it doesn't make any difference. Mrs. Klein for me was somebody who taught me so much, and she would talk it over at any length, and hold her own views, and I still feel I have a tremendous amount to learn from Melanie Klein.'

Winnicott here took his Los Angeles audience right into the acrimony that surrounded his well-known differences with Klein. Winnicott's major difference with Klein drew upon a new set of empirical data, that of the *observed* infant interacting with its mother. By contrast, Klein continued to use her child and adult psychoanalytic work to infer dynamic mechanisms, such as envy, but again Winnicott differed and accentuated the importance of direct observations of the mother-infant dyad. These were two such different methodologies that they were for all practical purposes virtually irreconcilable.

Winnicott had crossed the Rubicon. In his prolonged, spirited and often tactful disagreement with Mrs. Klein and members of her London group, he opened up fresh research avenues that have led to decades of fruitful mother-infant studies about what really facilitates or hampers the infant's psychological development. Winnicott's pioneering efforts inspired others, like fellow Independent John Bowlby, (1951) and succeeding generations of infant/mother researchers, such as Daniel Stern, (1988) and Björn Salomonsson, (2014) in the ever-fascinating quest to understand and explicate the infant's psychological mind.

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