Play at Your Own Risk: Games, Play & Intimacy

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ABSTRACT: *This paper explores the possibility of "play" being identified as the seventh form time structuring, situated between games and intimacy. Winnicott's theories of the capacity to play as both a developmental achievement and a central function of the therapeutic process is then described. Play is presented as a therapeutic alternative to game analysis. Case vignettes are offered.*

Introduction: Games as time structures and enactments

Eric Berne (1964) placed games within the overall context of his theory of structuring time through patterns of social contact. He argued that while "the solitary individual can structure time in two ways: activities and fantasy" (p.18), a person, as a member of "a social aggregation" (p.18), has several options for structuring time: withdrawal, rituals, activities, pastimes, games and intimacy. He listed these patterns of structuring time in the order of increasing complexity, risk, and satisfaction. For Berne, the human need for social contact was essential for the maintenance of "somatic and psychic equilibrium" (p.19), which he saw as providing: ""(1) the relief of tension (2) the avoidance of noxious situations (3) the procurement of stroking and (4) the maintenance of an established equilibrium" (p.19). He saw games and intimacy as the most gratifying forms of social contact, but thought "prolonged intimacy was rare …[so] significant social

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discourse most commonly takes the form of games" (pp.19-20). Berne devoted far more of his writing to the discussion of games, their meanings, and their treatment than he did to intimacy.

By the time of Berne's death, a lexicon of more than 40 games had been identified (Stuntz, 1971) in the TA literature. In treatment, games were dealt with transactionally with the therapist in the driver's seat choosing to either play the game, ignore the game, diagram and analyze the game, confront the game, switch to a less destructive game (as determined by the therapist), switch to a different role in the drama triangle, or shift to a lesser degree of the game. Games were understood to be primary forms of emotional and interpersonal defense and dealt with accordingly. In the classical TA theory, the interventions of the therapist were conscious and intentional, aimed primarily to promote change at cognitive and behavioral levels. There were, however, times when the identification and analysis of a game could elicit the experience of the less conscious (dare we say "unconscious") conflicts, motivations, losses, or trauma that underlay the game.

In the more contemporary TA literature, game theory has been increasingly reconfigured as periods of mutual impasse (Cornell & Landaiche, 2008) or as unconscious enactments (Hargaden & Sills, 2002; Gowling & Agar, 2011; Stuthridge, 2012; Shadbolt, 2012). Seen from these perspectives, the professional partner of the "working couple" (Cornell & Landaiche, 2008, pp.27-29) in a game process is a participant/observer:

> The therapist was required to *play* game…and not confront it at this stage of therapy. …when the therapist allows himself to be moulded by the interpersonal pressure, and if he is able to observe the changes, this is a rich source of data about the patient's internal world. (2002. P. 80)

Seen is this way, games are *meaningful,* and the professional's willingness to experience the impact—the pull and molding—of the game is deeply informative to both participants. In framing games in terms of TA impasse theory or the more psychoanalytically based theories of enactment, the place of unconscious disturbances and communication comes more to the foreground. At the point of impasse or enactment, both the professional partner and the client something is entering an arena of unconscious trouble that cannot yet be *spoken.* Conscious, cognitive reflection is not readily available. From the perspectives of enactments, the working couple must *do,* i.e. *enact,* something together before being able to speak and reflect about it.

Play as a time structure

Laura Cowles-Boyd and Harry Boyd (1980a,b) addressed what they saw as a significant gap between games and intimacy, wondering if there might not be another form of social interaction that provided a transition between games and intimacy. They argued that the nature of interpersonal games is antithetical to the essence of intimacy, so how was it that one made the leap from games to intimacy? They proposed "play" as a time structure that fosters an intermediary function between games and intimacy. They offered a formal definition of the characteristics of play:

> In transactional analysis terms, we give the formal definition and characteristics of play as: 1) as series of ongoing transactions, 2) which has no concealed motivation, 3) in which a predominantly continuous positive stroke value is maintained, 4) which pays off in positive feelings, 5) is carried out by the Free Child, and 6) which occurs in Adult awareness with P2 permission. (1980a, p.6)

They further delineate a comparison of the structure and functions of play in contrast to those of games. For example, while games are seen as confirming script and archaic world-views in enacting P1 belief systems, play is seen as

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allowing experimentation with new options and the development of new P2 belief systems that facilitate change. Playing a game is held in contrast to actual play.

The Game/Play Shift

In an accompanying article, the Cowles-Boyd and Boyd outlined the technique of the "game/play shift" (1980b, p.8) through which "the game is more gently and pleasantly brought into the patient's awareness" (pp.8-9) through a series of playful, typically unexpected transactions that knock the predictable unfolding of the game off course. Games, in Berne's accounting, were structured and predictable (rather like playing a board game or a sport), following unconsciously derived rules. They suggested that in making the shift to play, an element of unpredictability is introduced, creating interactions that are closer to the spontaneity of intimacy. In the game/play shift, the therapist matches the psychological energy typically brought to a game and seeks to foster intellectual and emotional insight with a positive feeling pay-off. They stress that "safe play presupposes the presence of an appropriate limit-setting Parent" (p.8) and that the therapist must intervene "*before* the patient takes the negative-stroke payoff" (p.9). The shift to play is an effort to capture the intensity and stroke value of the game while introducing a positive interaction in place of a negative payoff. They described exaggeration, imitation, derailing, and mirroring as interventions that shifted games into play. Viewed through a more contemporary lens, these interventions could be seen to likely trigger shame, but the authors stressed that play always needs to come from an OK/OK position. The game/play shift seems to capture Berne's own observation, "Experience has shown that it is more useful and enlightening to investigate social transactions from the point of view of the advantages gained than to treat them as defensive operations" (1964, p.19). In *Principles of Group Treatment*, Berne discusses the place of humor in psychotherapy in which he characterizes the "Adult laugh" as "the laugh of insight, and [which] arises from the absurdity of circumstantial predicament and the even greater absurdity of self-deception" (1966, p.288).

Game/Play vignette

It was our first session, and Kurt was not happy about seeing me. Referred by his wife's psychotherapist, Kurt was cuttingly skeptical about the usefulness of psychotherapy, declaring that all his wife's years of psychotherapy hadn't seemed to do a damned bit if good. Head of a major law firm in the city, he let it be known that he was accustomed to being in the leadership role. As he spoke about the relentless misery of his marriage, I wondered aloud if he had some sense of how it was that his leadership skills fell short at home. Although I thought I was opening up an interesting line of inquiry, Kurt did not follow *my* lead. He quickly took back the lead, in a move that I thought heralded the future of our relationship. As he described the state of his marriage, it struck me that the relationship had been a decade of mutual character assassination. I found myself silently relieved that they had not had children, each of them being too career driven to have made space for kids. My standard first session inquiries into his childhood or the nature of his parents' relationship were dismissed as irrelevant. As the session neared its end, Kurt asked me my fee, and when I told him, he told me it was absurdly low, adding, "I hope you don't have a family to support with fees like that." My head was full of a catalogue of the games and power plays that loomed in our therapeutic future, but I found myself quite liking Kurt and looking forward to our working together. I enjoyed his aggressiveness and found an opportunity to join it as our first session came to a close.

When I asked if he would like to schedule another session, he said he'd think about it and asked for a business card.

"I don't have cards," I replied.

"What kind of a therapist doesn't have cards?" he asked with an edge in his voice.

"The kind who doesn't have cards," I replied.

"What a way to run a business," he replied, "So just send me a statement, and I'll send you a check for today."

"I don't send statements."

"What the fuck kind of therapist doesn't send statements?"

"The kind of therapist who doesn't send statements."

"How do you get paid?"

"By check most often. People pay me when they come to sessions. I expect them to keep track of their own bills. Are you telling me that you are the head of a major law firm, and you can't keep track of a simple bill? If we work together, this will be a personal relationship, not a business relationship."

Long pause

"Well, fuck it, let's schedule another appointment," he said with a slight grin. This was, perhaps, what Berne would have considered an Adult smile of recognition.

Our closing interactions are an example of the game/play shift. This first session introduced a wealth of possible games—NIGYSOB, Blemish, Corner, Courtroom, Let's You and Him Fight, as first named by Berne. If Kurt were to continue working with me, I was already imagining ongoing power plays for leadership and authority between us, as well as his repeated discounting of my competence. In this initial session it seemed to me to be essential that I demonstrate my capacity to match Kurt's directness and energy and introduce some pleasure in a vigorous give and take. I shifted from the edge of the incipient games that ran throughout our first session into a playful mode of holding on to my own way of doing things, which seemed to engage Kurt's curiosity and perhaps garner a bit of respect.

My replies to Kurt were quite conscious and focused in intent. Kurt did continue, and we rarely had a session in which he did not comment, usually as a joke, on my not sending statements. He wondered what I did when clients didn't pay me. I told him that in 40 years of practice, I only had two clients stiff me—a minister and a psychotherapist. He found this amazing. Each time he mentioned my not

sending statements I found myself wondering what this meant to him. We were stumbling into the underworld of games. So I wondered aloud with him about what it meant that he kept mentioning my not sending statements. He, of course, dismissed my inquiry, denying that it meant much of anything, closing the space. Without telling him, I decided to send him a statement of our sessions and fees, even though he had already paid me. He was touched and delighted, saying, "You changed your mind. I'm so used to everyone, me included, digging into their positions and never wavering. I actually admire the way you run your practice. It takes balls. You go your own way. But this means a lot to me." A different kind of space opened up between us—and to our mutual enjoyment our joking about statements continued (as I continued to send the statements on a highly irregular basis).

Winnicott's Playing and Reality

Cornell (2000) took up the Cowles-Boyd and Boyd articles on play, linking them to Winnicott's emphasis on the centrality of play in psychoanalysis. He observed that for Winnicott "play was crucial to emotional development and to the creative and ongoing unfolding of life's learning" (p.274). In their account of play they situate the function of play squarely within the interpersonal realms that are at the heart of Berne's theory of structuring time, defining play in transactional terms, i.e., the actual, specific interactions between participants. Winnicott's theory of play is more complex, seeing it first and foremost as a means by which we develop creativity, subjectivity and selfhood, while seeing the interpersonal and communicative functions of play as secondary. Games can be seen as the arena for mutual *enactment*; play, as described by Winnicott, is the terrain of mutual *exploration*.

The capacity to play, for Winnicott, is a developmental accomplishment in which the young child begins to realize that it is possible to discover one's own mind and imagination through experimentation and manipulation of the physical and

human environments that surround him/her. Freud foreshadowed Winnicott's understanding of play when he observed:

> Might we not say that every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, rearranges things of his world in a way which pleases him? It would be wrong to think that he does not take that world seriously; on the contrary, he takes his play very seriously and he expends large amounts of emotion on it. The opposite of play is not what is serious but what is real. In spite of all the emotion with which he cathects his world of play, the child distinguishes it quite well from reality. (1908, 143-144)

While there is a nearly automatic association of "play" with "fun," what Freud and Winnicott convey in their understandings of play is quite something else, as Winnicott makes explicit:

> Playing involves the body: (i) because of the manipulation of objects; (ii) because certain types of intense interest are associated with certain aspects of bodily excitement. …Playing is inherently exciting and precarious. This characteristic derives *not* from instinctual arousal but from the precariousness that belongs to the interplay in the child's mind of that which is subjective (near-hallucination) and that which is objectively perceived (actual, or shared reality). (1971, p.52, emphasis in the original)

Although Freud never seemed to link his observations about the importance of play into his analytic work with adult patients, Winnicott certainly did, acknowledging, "Whatever I say about children playing really applies to adults as well, only the matter is more difficult to describe when the patient's material appears mainly in terms of verbal communication" (1971, p.40). In his work with babies and children, Winnicott devised the spatula (1941/1958) and squiggle (1968/1989) games to proved nonverbal, sensori-motoric ways of offering exploratory spaces to his young patients. While much of his work was deeply

informed by his pediatric and educative work with children and their mothers, his writing about mothers and children were often metaphors for his work with his adult patients. His reflections on mothers and babies and analysts and their patients regularly appeared in the same articles, sometimes in the same paragraph. Winnicott gave attention to the importance of play from his earliest work as a pediatrician, throughout the course of his work, culminating in *Playing and Reality* (1971), which was published posthumously.

When casting play in the context of Berne's theory of time structure, as did Cowles-Boyd and Boyd, the understanding of play is in interpersonal and communicative realms. For Winnicott the primary function of play is in the child's exploration of his relationship to his/her *own mind* by pushing "reality," both internal and external, around into different shapes and possibilities.

Play, Reality, and intimacy

At the surface, the word "play" suggests something pleasant, fun, a phenomenon of childhood with the quality of playfulness that is put forth in the articles by Cowles-Boyd and Boyd. Play permeates not only childhood, but our adult lives as well. Play, as understood by Winnicott, is not inherently pleasant or reliable, as *play* necessitates *interplay* and in so doing is inherently precarious:

> The thing about playing is always the precariousness of the
> interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of the
> control of actual objects. This is the precariousness of magic itself,
> magic that arises in intimacy, in a relationship that is being found to
> be reliable. (1971, p.47)

These two sentences evoke worlds of the possibilities and risks engendered through play. Here in these two sentences we can sense the gap between games and intimacy that Cowles-Boyd and Boyd questioned and filled with play, which they deemed to be an expression of the "free Child" (1980a, p.6). But play is not all fun (and games). While Berne suggested that since intimacy was so

hard to sustain, "significant social discourse most commonly takes the form of games" (1964, pp.19-20), Winnicott here links play and intimacy. The "actual objects" to which he refers are both the concrete realities of the physical environment, which afford variable malleability, *and* objects as other people who have minds of their own, which also afford varying degrees of malleability. While Winnicott's primary focus was on the function of play in the discovery of self, he recognized, too, the gradual unfolding of self in relation to others. Play plays out over the course of a lifetime and in so doing, there is a constant interplay and replay between self and other. It is the precariousness of play that gave rise to the title "Play at Your Own Risk".

For Winnicott play is not simply about pleasant periods of time during childhood, but a way of potential being that permeates all aspects of our lives, conscious and unconscious, a place/space for experimentation and imagination. A quick look through an English language dictionary illustrates the complex and multiple meanings of play:

-- a "Bernian" psychological game of ulterior communications, with the rules hidden from view

-- or "child's play," suggesting something easy and perhaps a bit foolish

-- or play a game, as in a board game or sport, following shared rules

-- or play up, to emphasize, publicize

-- or play down, to minimize or dismiss

-- or play a joke

-- or play with an idea so as to explore its possibilites

-- or play at, i.e. pretend, deceive

-- or play with someone as a form of engagement

-- or play a role

-- or the plays of theatrical performances

-- or play music

-- or the interplay of one thing with another, one person with another

-- or played out, as in exhausted

-- or play it by ear, improvise

-- or play with fire, court danger

-- or playing for keeps

-- and, of course, sex play: foreplay, playing with yourself, playboy, be a player, make a play for, playing around, playing the field.

As one sees in these common phrases, sex is not inherently tender or intimate; it can be quite an impersonal or tricky pursuit. It is rather remarkable that it is in *Playing and Reality* that Winnicott offers a rare comment on sexuality, emphasizing the fusion of aggression with sexuality:

> In adult and mature sexual intercourse, it is perhaps true that it is
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> not the purely erotic satisfactions that need a specific object. It is
>
> the aggressive or destructive element in the fused impulse that
>
> fixes the object and determines the need that is felt for the partner's
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> actual presence, satisfaction, and survival. (1950/1958, p.218)

In these many variations of the meanings of "play," it is abundantly clear that play is not only "playful," fun, and constructive but can be deceptive, impersonal, and/or destructive—the border between games and play is a permeable one.

Play in psychotherapy

Winnicott had a fundamental confidence in the hope patients brought to treatment, seeing even the problematic symptoms as unconscious expressions of hope (1984), if what these symptoms were seeking to communicate could be heard rather than "cured". Embeddedness in games may well be the result of the blunting of hope. There is the sense of hopefulness in the game/play shift developed by Cowles-Boyd and Boyd. Winnicott felt strongly that "a patient— child or parent—will bring to the first interview a certain amount of capacity to *believe* in getting help and to trust the one who offers help (1968/1989, p.299, emphasis in the original). It is then incumbent upon the helper to provide "strictly

professional setting in which the patient is free to explore the exceptional opportunity that the consultation provides for communication" (p.299).

For Winnicott play is the primary form of unconscious communication, identifying psychoanalysis as "a highly specialized form of playing in the service of communication with oneself and others" (p.41). The phrase "in a relation that is being found to be reliable" (p.47) is crucial to the understanding of the nature of play in our professional work. Winnicott calls attention to the constant, shifting tensions between the precarious and the reliable. He does not suggest that the therapist *provides* a reliable relationship but rather affords patients the space and time within which to *find* the therapeutic relationship to *be reliable*. Agency is returned to the patient. Play is an aggressive act, the effort to *discover, to find out* by *doing*—"To control what is outside one has to *do* things, not simply to think or to wish, and *doing things takes time*. Playing is doing" (p.41).

Embedded in much of Winnicott's writing was a critique of the heavily interpretive and analytic techniques of classical and Kleinian psychoanalyses, a critique that I find highly relevant for the practice of transactional analysis as well. While rarely directly questioning the work of his mentors, Winnicott shifted attention away from interpretative/cognitive interventions to those more exploratory and experiential. In *Playing and Reality* he states explicitly:

> Interpretation outside the ripeness of the material is indoctrination and produces compliance. …Interpretation when the patient has no capacity to play is simply not useful, or causes confusion. When there is mutual playing, then interpretation according to the accepted psychoanalytic principles can carry the therapeutic work forward. *This playing has to be spontaneous, and not compliant or acquiescent*, if psychotherapy is to be done. (p.51, emphasis in the original)

> …*psychotherapy is done in the overlap of the two play areas, that*
> *of the patient and that of the therapist.* (p.54, emphasis in the
> original)

For Winnicott, it was essential that the analyst *not be an intrusive presence* in the psychotherapy, and it is in this particular territory of his writings where I learned a great deal. Reading Winnicott here I was able to begin to play with, and challenge, some of the core tenets of my training as a TA psychotherapist and group therapist. Seen from the perspective of Berne's conceptualization of the degrees of games, Winnicott is describing a mode of listening and relating that opens a space for the exploration of fantasies, wishes, absences, trauma, and intrapsychic conflicts that often foster second and third degree levels of defense. Winnicott seeks to provide a therapeutic *space* "to afford opportunity for formless experience, and creative impulses, motor and sensory, which are the stuff of playing" (1971, p.64). He saw it essential to the therapeutic process that there is an openness to un-integrated experiences that underlie second and third games and scripts. It is the defensive function of games and script to rise above these realms of fragmentation and uncertainty and enforce more predictable patterns for living, even if these patterns end up ultimately deadening and unsatisfying. Winnicott argued that only by welcoming and accompanying (*and not interfering with*) the un-integrated areas of the personality does one discover one's creativity and one's true self.

Winnicott emphasizes that the heart of play is the search for the self. For this search to be alive and deeply creative for a child or a client, the presence of the parent or the therapist needs to be reliable, curious, and *quiet*. He cautions therapists not to move to quickly to make sense of nonsense—that the field of nonsense, no-sense, and uncertainty is rich with potential discovery of glimmerings of an emergent self. Winnicott's accounting of the responsively receptive and un-intrusive attention of the therapist has come to be taken by

other contemporary psychoanalysts (Milner, 1987; Davis & Wallbridge, 1990; Bollas, 1999; McLaughlin, 2005; Ogden, 2009). While it is outside the scope of this paper to explore these other authors, readers who are interested in this perspective will find a rich feast in these books.

He argues that the therapeutic setting--which interestingly he describes as "analytic, psychotherapeutic, social work, architectural, etc." (p.55)—must provide an atmosphere in which it becomes possible for the patient to speak nonsense without having to organize the nonsense into some form of sense for the benefit of the therapist. It is incumbent upon the professional listener to allow space for nonsense, for both professional and client alike. Winnicott bemoans the fact that all too often, "the therapist has, without knowing it, abandoned the professional role, and has done so by bending over backwards to be a clever analyst, and to see order in the chaos" (1971, p.56). Winnicott's audience was his psychoanalytic peers, for whom interpretation was the primary mode of intervention, as is the case in classical TA's interpretive interventions of game and script analysis. It is important to note that therapeutic styles overly invested in empathy and the provision of corrective experiences also foreclose the freedom of the therapeutic space.

Winnicott's language is rarely proscriptive or literal (Abram, 1997). His use of words is often idiosyncratic. It is intentionally vague, evocative, rather elusive, so as to leave the reader often to wonder, "What is he talking about? Now what does he mean?" In years of reading Winnicott I have come to the understanding that he does not want the reader to know exactly what *he* means, he wants the reader to wonder what *the reader* means. We can see in Winnicott the writer, a glimpse of Winnicott the therapist, creating a play space between his mind and that of the reader. In the introduction to *Playing and Reality*, he states that he was reluctant to provide clinical examples, worried that these "can start to pin down specimens and begin a process of classification of an unusual and arbitrary

kind" (p.xii). When I first read this statement, I found it both startling and enlivening. It stood in such a stark contrast to our tendency in TA to categorize, label, and enumerate—thereby creating an illusion of predictability and knowingness that in fact defies the realities of human life and relating. Winnicott suggests we throw our arms and minds open to unknowing and play with the possibilities that can emerge. His is an attitude of discovery and creativity--play.

In his theory of play, Winnicott's language was filled with notions of intermediate areas of experience, *environments* that hold and facilitate, transitional space, potential space, and "the place where we live". It was as though he was trying out different phrases and concepts to find one (or several) that best conveyed what he was trying to communicate. He was not offering his patients a relationship so much as the space, an environment, within which they could begin to find and articulate themselves. He called this "potential space," which we might say is a space with the freedom to discover one's potential. This potential space is an area of *experience* between the individual and the world around him/her, and in this space the individual *both joins and separates from* others. Winnicott saw this as very delicate terrain. Writing about the child's world, he observes that "in favorable circumstances the potential space becomes filled with the product's of the baby's own creative imagination" (p.102). And then, as was so often the case in his writing, in the very next paragraph he is writing about the analyst and patients:

> It seems that whatever is in this space that comes from someone
> else is persecutory material, and the baby has no means of
> rejecting it. Analysts need to be aware lest they create a feeling of
> confidence and an intermediate area in which play can take place
> and then inject into this area or inflate it with interpretations which in
> effect are from their own creative imaginations. (p.102)

Viewed through the lens of TA theory, the persecutory material in Winnicott's language is that of the script injunctions in Berne's language. At the level of

second and third degree games and scripts, the growing child does not have the psychic strength or personal freedom to reject these messages. They are introjected, internalized as script injunctions, and then made manifest in games. As I read, reread, and gradually incorporated aspects of Winnicott's style, I saw repeatedly how often my haste to make game or script interpretations closed the potential space between myself and the client or group. I imposed my imagination (in the guise of a competent and confident knowing of my client's mind) upon that of my client. Playground closed.

At play in psychotherapy: A case vignette

Andre Green (2005), while deeply influenced by and respectful of Winnicott's work, argued that Winnicott's view that play and transitional phenomena were all rooted in the mother/child relationship was "mad" (p.9), that he could not free himself of viewpoint as a pediatrician in working with his adult patients. He challenged Winnicott's systematic lack of attention to the centrality of sexuality in the maturation of the adult psyche and his tendency to valorize health over the realities of human sickness and violence:

> Here I am afraid that on this occasion, as on many others, we meet Winnicott's idealization and his refusal to consider play as part of sickness. …But what I am sure of is that it is not enough to incarnate the good-mother to cure a patient, to vanish when she acts out her destructivity, or to accept passively with the patient's destroying the setting. Sometimes the analyst cheats, lies, acts out violently. In none of these instances is play absent; it is in fact provocative. (p.11)

Green's appreciation and critique of Winnicott came to my mind as I decided what vignette from my own clinical work to present as an example of therapeutic play.

Simone tells me in our first session that she has spent every day since her adolescence wishing to be dead. I believed her. As I sat with Simone in our first session, I thought to myself, "Her wish has come true. She is far more dead than alive." And I felt a nearly unbearable deadness between us. Simone had been told by her psychiatrist that she needed to be in therapy. Simone told me that she had been referred to me by her mother, who after some inquiries, had been told that I would not be unnerved by the depth of Simone's suicidality. Normally, I do, in fact, feel quite at ease and engaged by suicidal wishes. For the most part, I think few or us get through life without occasionally wishing to be dead, or wishing someone else dead. But something else seemed to be happening here with this young woman that I found hard to bear. I was not channeling Winnicott. Perhaps Andre Green (1997), "dead mother, dead child"? Green's powerful essay ran through my mind. The session was marked by long periods of silence, which I experienced as deadening and deadly.

But I had a job to do, so I said, "I am trying to imagine what might have happened to a young girl such that by 13 she'd rather have been dead. Did something happen to you?" Simone had not yet made eye contact with me, but I as I asked this question, she lifted her face, looked me "dead" in the eye, and replied, "I started to think." Great. I could *not* think. I really, really do not like not being able to think. I wanted her gone: "Who the hell are you to wander in here and disturb me so?" Not a good start. Playground closed? Or maybe this was to be our playground. And maybe Kurt was right after all--my fee is too fucking low for all of this. In my mind I fled into a decidedly anti-Winnicottian reaction—it was time for a diagnosis, a category—*this* was a form of thinking after all. Though I knew even as I tried it, this was a desperate and irrelevant form of thought. Sometimes, write Green, the analyst cheats, lies, acts out violently. In the face of my anxiety and bewilderment, I was about to cheat, to exit the picture so to speak, and act violently by dehumanizing Simone with a diagnosis of a character defense. By the end of our first session, I had no doubt but that Simone's games

and script were in the realm of the third degree and that the work we were embarking upon was deadly serious. Was Simone consciously "playing a game" with me? Most certainly not. She was bringing herself to me in the only way she knew how, but in that way of being was profoundly defensive and distancing; I in turn felt the pressure to distance myself from her, as had so many others. If we moved in this direction, we would begin a deadening, and possibly deadly, game.

In the earlier case vignette with Kurt, I could think. I knew, more or less, what I was doing during those closing comments and challenges of the game/play shift. I spoke with a quiet sense of strength, warmth toward him, and humor. Here with Simone, I could not think in any meaningful way until after the session. I had the vague sense, as I sat with my reactions after Simone left my office, that there was something dangerous and informative in my impulses to create distance, and, perhaps, there was something important in my association to Andre Green and the dead mother.

I (mistakenly in retrospect) started the second session with an effort to establish some sort of narrative history. She could recall no events of any significance to explain how she feels. I asked if she enjoyed her work. "No." So I asked her why she did it. "Because that's what adults do. They go to work. But I don't know anybody who enjoys their work." She first sought therapy in college because her suicidal thoughts were so intense that she couldn't concentrate. The therapist had her see a psychiatrist who placed her on medication. When I asked if it helped, she said, "No," and after a pause, added, "I think they wanted me to have a different mind." "And do you want a different mind?" I asked. "No," was her one word reply. Her one word answer struck me as a very important communication, that as much as she was suffering, she was not about to give up her mind. She was not about to turn her mind over to someone else to repair or change. Here was the first clue of my job description, and a bit of space opened up for me.

She then told me that she had had a series of therapists, none of whom she had found useful. When I asked her how she understood the problem with her previous therapists, she replied simply, "They were stupid." Her last therapist had "fired her," and when I inquired as to why, Simone replied, with a slight smile, "I guess she wasn't comfortable with silence." Our second session, like the first, was marked by no eye contact and long periods of silence. Needless to say, I then asked why she was willing to see yet another therapist. She explained that she didn't want her mother to worry so much, and her mother had sought me out. After another long period of silence, as the session neared the end, Simone asked me, "What kind of therapist do you think I need?" I sat with my experience of our first session and how it was to be with her in the second. After a while I replied:

1. Someone who finds pleasure and meaning in the work
2. Someone smart
3. Someone who doesn't particularly care of you're dead or alive but who wants simply to get to know you
4. Someone who is comfortable with having his thoughts shredded, dissembled, discarded as soon as they leave his mouth
5. Someone who is comfortable with silence

There was a long silence. Finally, she said, "Well, you've got smart down for sure, maybe a couple of the others on the list, too." We rescheduled.

Now we had a contract of sorts, and I felt some space to breathe and think. I now had an inkling of the terrain in which we would need to play and work. My reply to Simone opened our field of play—a field in which we would be living for many months to come. In my answer to Simone's question, she could see that I had been listening carefully and could make some meaning of what had happened between us. It's important to note here, and this is characteristic of what Winnicott means to convey in his understanding of play, that the meaning I

found and articulated in my list was not based primarily in what was *said* between us (which was actually very little). My list brought meaning to *how* we had been together in the first two sessions, what Simone was *showing* me in her way of being. This is what fostered enough understanding for me that I could provide a description of the "kind of therapist" she needed. My list made it clear that I didn't expect Simone to be or do anything differently from what she was already doing. It was my job to listen, to be receptive (consciously and unconsciously) to the impact of her ways of being with her self and me, to hold on to my own mind and imagination, and to stay alive—to not become yet another "stupid" or dead therapist. It hasn't been easy for either of us.

And so, in closing

How do I come to a closing in writing something that is intended to create an opening? It is my hope that this article may facilitate an incorporation of Cowles-Boyd and Boyd's recommendation of the recognition play as having a place in the theory of the structuring of time and relationships within the TA lexicon. It is my hope that this article and the others for this special issue of the *Transactional Analysis Journal* devoted to game theory will raise more questions than provide answers. And it is my hope that although the concept of games as Berne originally defined it is rarely used in the TA literature now, transactional analysts have continued to evolve their understanding on this fundamental, problematic aspect of human relating that Berne first sought to articulate and render meaningful.

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