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MOTILITY, AGGRESSION, AND THE BODILY I:
AN INTERPRETATION OF WINNICOTT

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Among the central ideas associated with the name of Winnicott, scant mention is made of motility. This is largely attributable to Winnicott himself, who never thematized motility and never wrote a paper specifically devoted to the topic. This paper suggests both that the idea of motility is nonetheless of central significance in Winnicott's thought, and that motility is of central importance in the development and constitution of the bodily I. In elaborating both these suggestions, the paper gives particular attention to the connections between motility, continuity, aggression, and creativity in Winnicott's work.

INTRODUCTION

“The I,” Freud (1923) famously taught us, “is first and foremost a bodily I” (or bodily ego, in Strachey’s translation; p. 26). In his own elaboration of this idea, Freud tended to focus on the bodily origin of the I in terms of *sensations*: “The ego [*Ich*] is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body” (p. 26n). In contrast, Freud tended to treat bodily *movement* not as constitutive of the ego, but as one of its *functions*. It is among the “principal characteristics of the ego” (1938, p. 145), he wrote, that it “has

voluntary movement at its command” so that it “controls the approaches to motility.” (1933, p. 75).

Two beliefs underlie the present paper. The first is of the indispensability of Freud’s general insight: to understand the I, it is essential to understand its bodily origins. The second belief is of the necessity to go beyond an understanding of this insight in terms of sensation, and to comprehend as well under the general statement the central role of movement in the development of the I; that is, to see movement not only as a function of the developed I, but as (partly) *constitutive* of its origin.

Attending to the constitutive role of movement---or, more specifically, as the term will be used here, of motility---has fundamental implications for our understanding not only of the origins of the I, but also of its processes; that is, (in different language) for our understanding of (certain kinds of) ego processes. While our ordinary tendency is to understand the ego as a kind of *container* (or, when understood in its agential sense, as a custodian of the container)---in relation to which we can talk, for example, about processes such as introjection and projection---the central pursuit of this paper is the idea that the self or ego needs *also* to be comprehended *as* movement. (In focusing here just on the significance of motility to the ego, I shall naturally be leaving aside a great deal that is also central to ego development, including the role of perception, affects, drives and erotogenic zones, and object relations.)

I have mentioned the term *motility*, and I need to say now how I shall be using it. Although motility is sometimes used to refer to the autonomic movement of particular organs (such as, notably, peristalsis), I shall use it here (as it is commonly used, including by Freud [*Motilität*], e.g., 1923, 1933, 1938) in a more restricted sense. The specific sense in which I shall use the term can be stated briefly as follows.

At the beginning of life, even of a life that is not yet that of a person, and even of a life that will never be that of a person, there is movement. And very early on, perhaps marking the very emergence of life as an organized entity, there is a kind of movement that we as observers will commonly regard as not merely the movement of this or that component system within the organism, but of the organism itself. (It does not matter for our purposes whether this arrives at one moment or in phases over time.) This is the kind of movement that we think of as the movement of an individual being---the kind of movement that, in the case of a person, when it ends, we commonly regard the life of the person as having ended (there are exceptions). It is this kind of movement that is comprehended in what I shall refer to as *motility*. I add the following paragraph, though this gets further into the substance of the paper and cannot be *decided* as a matter of terminological usage.

At some point quite early on in the development of a human infant, there can be said to be, along with the purely somatic aspect of motility and bound together with it, a psychic component; and with respect to the psychic as with respect to the somatic, we may reasonably think that there is a stage (or a series of stages) in the development of motility that marks the emergence of an individual.

In the present paper, I shall pursue the issue of motility in relation to the I through an interpretation of the work of Donald Winnicott. To some, this may seem surprising, for while there are many terms and ideas that have commonly come to be associated with Winnicott, motility---and its relation to the self---is not usually among them. There is good reason for this. Although Winnicott discussed motility, it was not a concept that he explicitly relied on in organizing his thought, and it does not have the same pronounced presence as a trope in his work as do other ideas---such as the *facilitating environment*, the *good enough mother*, the *transitional*

object, creativity, play, and so on. Part of the suggestion of this paper, however, is that motility is nonetheless a crucial idea connecting various strands within Winnicott's work, and that some of his most important ideas must be understood through the idea of motility if their significance is to be fully appreciated.

So I shall explore here the issue of motility in relation to the self as an interpretation and a reflection of a strand---what I shall claim is a central strand---within Winnicott's thought. Nonetheless, it is important, I think, to describe this paper in terms of a substantive question with Winnicott as the primary source, rather than first and foremost as an interpretation of "Winnicott's view." The difference, though one of emphasis, is significant. While the account that I shall offer here---speculative in places---is (as I see it) drawn entirely from Winnicott, it is the substantive question that concerns me; and because of this I shall not hesitate in pursuing that question to cull ideas from throughout Winnicott's work, to set them out and to organize them in a way that is sometimes different from the way in which he himself did, and to extend those ideas beyond his own explicit statement of them.

In the case of Winnicott, there is a special need for interpretation, and a special kind of interpretation that is needed. For he was not himself a writer who took pleasure in working his ideas into a systematic form or who took pains to do so. Though his writing is hardly the "chaos" that he reportedly warned his students they would find in his lectures (Milner 1987, p. 246), it is sufficiently allusive, pregnant, and even aphoristic at times that we can see what he meant by that. This was partly a matter of personal style. Winnicott often seemed to be most comfortable working out the details of his ideas in phrases and fragments. In his papers, we can experience a mind on the move---pointing to this, teasing at that, basking in a provocative phrase, experimenting with neologisms, sometimes seeming (or not just seeming) to contradict himself

within the same essay, all the while leaving the reader---one can say inviting or abandoning, depending on one's preference or mood---to put the ideas together, or to test whether, how, and to what degree they fit together. But beyond, and in part behind, matters of style, there is the matter of substance. Throughout Winnicott's work, one can feel the exploratory drive of a clinician and theorist pressing against the limits of what he knows and of what has yet been conceptualized, striving to give expression to what he himself has not fully grasped and what cannot yet easily be said---"stammer[ing] towards grasping the facts," as Khan (1975) described him (p. xi)---and refusing to be more definitive than was justified. As his ideas developed, Winnicott rarely felt the need to revisit earlier ideas in the wake of new ones, instead focusing now on this side of things and now on that, without worrying too much about how or whether this and that could stand together. The result of this is a body of work that is richly layered, but only partially integrated. I do not say this as a criticism (or commendation), only as a fact.

All of this is reflected in a striking characteristic of much of the secondary literature on Winnicott. Perhaps more than is the case with any other psychoanalytic writer, there is in this literature a heavy reliance on direct quotation, and often long quotations. This is sometimes explained as necessary to capture his style; and this is understandably so, for his was indeed a unique voice. But one may also sense in this a fear (justified, I think) that to try to restate Winnicott in one's own words is almost of necessity to take a position on it, to have to recast this in order to make sense of that, to highlight not only the aporias and paradoxes to which Winnicott himself meant to draw attention, but also the gaps and inconsistencies in his account that did not much concern him. It is necessary, that is, to move from exposition down the road of interpretation. Because of this, Winnicott is often, quite literally, given the last word.

I am inclined to think that Winnicott got the last word (and the last laugh) in a different respect as well. For him, the act of thinking was a creative process, and he himself expressed an inability to read others except creatively (e.g., Khan 1975; Winnicott 1953, 1970b). And though he may not have set out to do so (quite) intentionally, he left a body of work that is, as it were, booby-trapped against attempts to describe it without at the same time continuing it. For me, then, his work is best read as an open invitation to continue along a path not yet fully cleared and in some cases only dimly perceived.

My intention here is to pick up that invitation, at least in a limited way---limited in that I will remain largely within the terms that he set out. But at the same time, I shall press these ideas, and in a direction and in a manner that may or may not correspond to what he might have said, had he been willing to press them further and more concertedly himself. Despite this, I shall venture to claim that the interpretation I shall offer is Winnicottian in several respects.

First---at least for me---everything I will say comes out of Winnicott's writing. Second, in pulling on strands of his thought from different points in his work and at times reformulating them, I shall try to treat his work with just the kind of respect that he himself showed to it. And third, Winnicott himself seemed to wish to be used---and as he well insisted, in using an object, there is both a destructive and a creative aspect.

The interpretation I shall give is of his work, which is to say that it is my way of understanding an aspect of his thought. It is implicit, I think, in this that I hope he would have agreed with it. But I shall use him in the only way in which I can use him---that is, without worrying too much at each step precisely how far he might have gone along.

BEING AND CONTINUITY

Winnicott will not use the *term* motility in his writings until 1955. When he does come to use it, it is in the context of a discussion of aggression. But before this, Winnicott had begun to write about movement in the earliest states of the individual---late fetal and early neonatal life---from a different angle, in which the focus was on what he called *continuity of being*. This earlier strand of thought was never abandoned; it is “earlier” only in the sense that the original formulation was earlier, while the basic idea would be restated in a number of forms again and again. Yet this strand of thought was never more than partially integrated with Winnicott’s thinking about aggression. I shall read these two strands together and suggest that they are usefully read as a progression of ideas---*not* in the sense that the work on aggression *replaced* the earlier strand of thought, but that it added an important dimension to it.

So I shall begin with the general idea that Winnicott came to first. In doing so, I shall feel free to take a number of interpretive liberties: restating ideas in my own way, interspersing interpretation with quotations, combining various of Winnicott’s statements, and---where I quote Winnicott at length---reordering passages so as to bring out certain ideas more clearly.

We cannot say just when motility begins. Like most early processes, it “does not arrive at a certain time on a certain day” (Winnicott 1950--1955, p. 205), and yet there is a moment in which we can say that it has definitely arrived, such as at that point in which we can describe “babies [as] hav[ing] certain movements in the womb which at first are rather like the swimming movements of a fish” (1988, p. 127). This early motility is, first and foremost, bodily: it is the movement of a body through space, the movement that an observer can note and that a mother will feel.

Yet there is early on a psychic component to this physical movement as well, a psychic component that is immediately bodily: early on, the psyche is “not felt . . . to be localized”

(1949b, p. 244), but is “at first fused” (1949a, p. 191) with soma---indeed, hardly “to be distinguished [from it] except according to the direction from which one is looking” (1949b, p. 244), and only “gradually becoming distinguishable the one from the other” (1949a, p. 191). So there is the physical movement that an observer can record, and there is also what is “both physical and non-physical,” the experience of movement (1950--1955, p. 205). There is physical movement through space, and there is the experience of movement through space and in time. And when the environment is good and accommodating, the experience of movement through space in time is continuous and is felt as such. If “things are going well” (1949a, p. 182), even “before birth it can be said of the psyche (apart from the soma) that there is a personal going-along, a continuity of experiencing” (1949a, p. 191), and there is a “personal development of the infant ego . . . undisturbed in its emotional as in its physical aspect” (1949a, p. 182). This “continuity of being is health” and is a “state of being [that] belongs to the infant and not to the observer” (1988, p. 127).

If one takes the analogy of a bubble, one can say that if the pressure outside is adapted to the pressure inside, then the bubble (1988, p. 127). . . that is to say, the infant’s self (1949a, p. 188). . . has a *continuity of existence*, and if it were a human baby, this would be called “being” (1988, p. 127). . . [This] experience of being . . . [is] the simplest of all experiences. (1971a, p. 80)

In order to preserve the personal way of life at the very beginning, the individual needs a minimum of environmental impingements producing reaction. (1949a, p. 182)...[However], this continuity, which could be called the beginnings of the self, is periodically interrupted by phases of reaction to impingement (1949a, p. 191). . . . Here it may be observed that the infant that is disturbed by being forced to react is disturbed out of a state of “being,” . . . [for] when reacting, an infant is not “being.” (1949a, p. 185]

At its origin, *being is continuity is the self*, and what “interference with the personal ‘going along’” produces is a break in being, “a temporary loss of identity” (1949a, p. 184). Such “interruption of . . . continuity by reactions to impingement” need not be traumatic for the infant,

so long as the interruptions “are not too severe or not too prolonged” (1988, pp. 128-9). And through “the experience of a natural return from reacting to a state of not having to react,” (1949, p. 183) the infant can begin “to organise a way of dealing with [impingements]” (1988, p. 129). But where impingement becomes the dominant pattern, there is, by contrast, a “snapping of the thread of continuity of the self” (1949a, p. 184) and a break-up of “that very thing which would have formed itself into the ego of the differentiating human being” (1955--6, p. 296). Because the early self *is* continuity of being, impingements that are extreme pose for the infant nothing less than a “threat of annihilation” (1956, p. 303).

What, then, is the relationship between motility and this early state of continuity of being? We need not say that they are merely one and the same. In addition to motility, there is also---for instance, and notably---“the sensory side,” and Winnicott suggests that, for example, *in utero*, the infant will have experienced temporary “interruptions of continuity” from “changes of pressure and of temperature” (1988, p. 129). Yet these sensory experiences are themselves intimately bound up with the experience of movement, and if motility is not the whole of the continuity of being, it is central to it. Indeed, what distinguishes *being* from *reaction* most fundamentally is what Winnicott refers to as *personal impulse*, and this immediately refers us back to the significance of movement, and of a certain quality of movement. Let us call it *free movement* (my term) or *primitive motility* (Winnicott’s term): movement that is uninhibited, nondefensive, and that originates “in the centre” (1950-5, p. 211) or core of the individual. (See, e.g., 1950-5, 211-214; 1963a, pp. 184; 1959, pp. 49-52).

It is in relation to this kind of movement through space and in time that the language of impingement is most meaningful. In relation to this kind of personal impulse, changes in pressure or temperature may be experienced not only as a change, but as an interruption. And it

is because of the centrality of motility to the early experience of continuity that, in his speculative account of birth, Winnicott suggests that what distinguishes traumatic birth from normal birth, which is not traumatic, is that in the former there is “the feeling of being in the grips of something external, so that one is helpless.” (1949a, p. 184) In contrast,

. . . in the memory trace of a normal birth there [need be] no sense of helplessness. The infant would feel that the swimming movements of which we know a foetus is capable, . . . the movements that . . . [can be] referred to under the word reptation, produce the forward movement. The actual birth can easily be felt by the infant, in the normal case, to be a successful outcome of personal effort owing to the more or less accurate timing. [1949a, p. 186]¹

Over time, the *experience of continuity* will take on a more distinctly psychic character, still tied to the body but less directly bound up with physical movement. But first and foremost, early on and at the core of the healthy self, psyche and soma are bound together in free bodily movement in time.

What is true for the fetus is true as well for the newborn: that “health . . . entails continuity of being” and “early psyche-soma proceeds along a certain line of development provided its continuity of being is not disturbed” (1949b, p. 245). In the period immediately after birth, “the healthy development of the early psyche-soma” requires an environment that “actively adapts to” protect “the newly formed psyche-soma” (1949b, p. 245) against impingements, and that allows “for the infant to experience spontaneous movement” and thus to “become the owner of the sensations that are appropriate to this early phase of life” (1956, p. 303). Where “the environment impinges, . . . motility is . . . only experienced as a reaction to impingement” (1950-1955, pp. 211-212). And so a central task of the facilitating environment must be to prevent

¹ "Reptation, n. The action of creeping or crawling. [1842] ... A mode of progression by advancing successively parts of the trunk, which occupy the place of the anterior parts which are carried forward, as in serpents" (Oxford English Dictionary, p. 672).

impingements from overwhelming the infant's own activity, to keep the environment from pressing against the infant's free movement through space and time, so that there is "a good basis for the building up of a body-ego," (1963b. p. 86) "a continuity of being which is the basis of ego-strength" (1960b, p. 52).

The key ideas here---that the I begins in the experience of movement through space and time (continuity), that the quality of the core self comes out of the quality of this movement (i.e., the extent to which it is free or defensive), and that environmental adaptation is crucially important---will all remain central to Winnicott's thinking about motility. But in the early 1950s, he began to focus on an additional dimension of primary motility and its relation to the environment: aggression.

MOTILITY AND AGGRESSION

One way of describing the shift in Winnicott's thinking is this. In the earlier line of thought, the emphasis was on the free movement of the infant *in* an environment and on the *inconspicuous* adaptation of the healthy environment to the infant's needs. And insofar as we are concerned with the role of the "environment"---that is, the facilitating environment, or the good enough mother or other caregiver---in protecting the infant against impingement, this is so. But what is missing from this statement and mostly absent from the earlier account is attention to the quality of the infant's encounter *with* the environment.

Put more starkly, in the earlier statement, the inclination was to see opposition in relation to the environment primarily in terms of opposition *from* the environment and the danger of impingement. What Winnicott later came to emphasize, however, was that what mattered was not *whether* there was opposition between the infant and the environment, but the *direction* of it.

Opposition is indeed a characteristic of impingement---the environment forcing itself on the infant and requiring it to react. But it does not follow from this that opposition *in general* is a danger for the incipient self. Indeed, what Winnicott came to see was that, if some kind of opposition was a threat to health, there was a different kind of experience of opposition that was *necessary* for health, and that what distinguished these kinds of opposition was the relationship of each to personal impulse and primitive motility. What he came to see, that is, is that, *from the beginning* (or practically so), *motility itself, at the core of the developing self, has a quality of aggression.*

This key insight represented not only a development in Winnicott's thinking about motility, but also a development in his thinking about aggression. In his early work on aggression, he saw it as originating in the primitive love impulse: "originally a part of appetite, or of some other form of instinctual love. It is something that increases during excitement and the exercise of it is highly pleasurable" (c. 1939, pp. 87-88). Once again, the evolution in Winnicott's thought did not consist in his abandoning this earlier account of aggression: indeed, in one of the very papers in which he offers a new account of the relation between motility and aggression (and on which I shall focus presently), he repeats the idea that "aggression is part of the primitive expression of love" (1950--1955, p. 205). We find this language appearing again in subsequent work (e.g., 1963c, p. 79; 1968c, pp. 315-316).

But at the same time, Winnicott came to see that aggression had roots that were not "instinctual" or drive-based---at least not in the way in which drives had been classically understood. Whereas drives in the classical conception involve an endogenous stimulus or force exerting pressure, one "that allows of . . . rising tension of general and local excitement, climax and detumescence or its equivalent, followed by a period of lack of desire" (1950--1955, p. 215),

the root of aggression in motility has the continuous character of activity. It aims *not at the release of tension, but at the experience of a certain kind of tension: the experience of opposition.*

As Winnicott noted, while there is an “erotic experience [that] can be said to exist in the muscles and other tissues involved in effort, . . . this erotism is of a different order from that of the instinctual erotism associated with specific erotogenic zones” (ibid).

The relationship between motility and aggression, as Winnicott came to understand it, is double-sided. On the one hand is the idea that the root (or at least *a* root) of aggression is motility.² But on the other is the idea that primitive motility itself has a quality of aggression. Insofar as commentators have taken up Winnicott’s account of motility in relation to aggression, it is the first of these that has been emphasized. But for the central issue that we are concerned with here---the relationship of motility to the self---it is the second idea that deserves more of our attention. *This is the idea that free movement is not to be understood as movement that is unencumbered, but as movement that is free (uninhibited) to discover the resistance of the world and to press against it.*

² Winnicott will generally say *the* root. But it remains an important question how aggression that is based in motility comes to be related to drives. I do not believe that Winnicott ever fully resolved this question in his own mind. In “Aggression in Relation to Emotional Development,” and in a number of later papers, he suggests that there is a “pre-fusion era,” and that part of healthy development concerns “the task of fusion” in which the “infant must be able to pour as much as possible of primitive motility into the id experiences.” (1950-55, p.214) This could be taken to suggest that it is motility that lends to id impulses their active quality. But late in his life, after writing “The Use of an Object,” Winnicott suggested “that the first drive is itself *one* thing, something that I have called destruction, but I could have called it a combined love-strife drive. This unity is primary.” (1969, p. 245) This can be taken to imply rather that there is no era of “pre-fusion,” and that from the beginning, as Freud put it, “[e]very instinct is a piece of activity” (1915, p. 122). (Freud wrote this before allowing the existence of a separate aggressive drive. And once he did recognize this in the form of a death instinct, he, too, left open the question whether “the two kinds of instinct. . .[ever] appear in isolation from each other.” [Freud, 1930, p. 119]) It is plausible to think that aggression, though it has an origin in motility, is not *only* an outgrowth of motility. It is also plausible to think (these are not mutually exclusive) that motility (which, as we are using that term, is already a fairly advanced development) and erotic impulses share a common root. These are important questions well beyond the scope of this paper.

Winnicott discusses the relationship between motility and aggression in a number of places. However, to my mind, the key text is his “Aggression in Relation to Emotional Development” (1950--1955)---a paper, I think, that has been unjustly neglected.³ Perhaps one reason that it has not been given more attention is that it not an easy read. It bursts with ideas and with the evident excitement of a writer who feels he is onto something quite significant. At the same time, it is very much a work in progress. There is more than a little internal messiness, and this, combined with the fact that it is actually three papers consolidated for publication---written over a particularly generative five-year period in Winnicott’s development---gives the impression of an account that is, let us say, richly stammering. With respect to a work such as this, there are two alternative approaches: either one can leave it behind, or one can walk with it. I shall try the latter. But in discussing this paper, I shall again be very much offering an interpretation of it. I shall take parts of it, and I shall not hesitate to cut out parts of it that (to my mind) gum up the account. (Some of these are directly contradicted by other passages in the same consolidated paper; some are remnants of earlier formulations and ways of thinking.)

I noted earlier that those commentators who have paid any attention at all to Winnicott’s account of the relation of motility and aggression have tended to focus on the motility roots of aggression rather than (also) on the aggressive character of primitive motility. One reason for this may have to do with Winnicott’s own shifting terminology. Particularly in the earliest of the three papers that make up “Aggression in Relation to Emotional Development” (“Contribution to Symposium,” written in 1950), Winnicott often uses the term *aggression* in a broad sense: to refer to the whole history of the impulse from origin onward. For example:

³ A recent search of the Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing database found that, of almost 9,000 papers citing Winnicott, only nine discussed his “Aggression in Relation to Emotional Development,” and only five referred to it in relation to motility.

Prior to integration of the personality there is aggression. [In a footnote inserted after 1955, he adds, "I would now link this idea with that of motility."] A baby kicks in the womb; it cannot be assumed that he is trying to kick his way out. A baby of a few weeks thrashes away with his arms; it cannot be assumed that he means to hit. A baby chews the nipple with his gums; it cannot be assumed that he is meaning to destroy or to hurt. At origin, aggressiveness is almost synonymous with activity A complete study would trace aggressiveness as it appears at the various stages of ego development: Early (Pre-integration . . .), Intermediate (Integration . . .), Total Personal (Inter-personal relationships . . .). [1950--1955, pp. 204-206]

And yet, even in this early paper, Winnicott sometimes uses *aggression* in a more restricted sense to refer to a later development: "It is these part-functions that are organized by the child gradually, as he becomes a person, into aggression" (1950--1955, p. 205).

By the time he wrote the second of the three papers that formed "Aggression in Relation to Emotional Development," almost five years later, Winnicott was becoming more inclined to speak of the original and general impulse in the language of motility, and to reserve the term *aggression* for the more specific impulse that occurs with integration. The adoption of the term *motility* to cover what was once described in the language of early aggression is indicated by the later addition of the footnote in the passage that I quoted earlier. Similarly, in the second paper, Winnicott writes:

Our task is to examine the pre-history of the aggressive element We have at hand certain elements which date from at least as early as the onset of foetal movements---namely motility To get to something in terms of aggression corresponding to the erotic potential it would be necessary to go back to the impulses of the foetus, to that which makes for movement rather than for stillness, to the aliveness of tissues and to the first evidence of muscular erotism We need a term here such as life force [Subsequently, there is] the conversion of life force into aggression potential. [1950--1955, pp. 211, 216]

The shift in terminology is understandable: there is surely a form of aggression, more determinate and in time more intentional, that comes only with integration, and it is sensible

enough to use different terms to refer to the more basic impulse and to the later form of it. But there are two potential dangers that come with the change in terminology.

The first is that reserving the term *aggression* for the later development may tempt one to read Winnicott's account as offering simply a theory of the origin of *this thing we call aggression*. In contrast, the advantage of the earlier language was to draw attention to the quite significant claim that was being offered: that what we tend to think of as aggression is a particular development of a deeper and broader impulse, and that to understand aggression is to continually insist that it be "link[ed]" with the basic "life force" (1950--5, pp. 204, 210) of motility. That link is crucial, and it is a point on which Winnicott would insist for the rest of his life: that to understand the nature of aggression, it is necessary to "dissect down" (1950--5, p. 210) below the ordinary understanding of it---beneath "reactive aggression," beneath "hate" (1950-5, p. 210) and beneath "jealousy, envy, anger at frustration, the operation of the instincts that we name sadistic" (1970b, p. 287). Winnicott *is* offering an account of the roots of aggression. But in doing so, he is *also*, and more fundamentally, offering a different account of aggression.

A second potential danger, which brings us to the main point, is that distinguishing *between* aggression and motility may incline us to lose sight of the kind of aggressivity that Winnicott will insist is a fundamental characteristic of motility itself: namely, the pleasure in, and the eventual seeking of, opposition. In healthy development, "opposition" in this very early stage is not opposition or encroachment from the environment (impingement), *but rather the opposition that is the existence of an environment itself*---that which is met up against, that which we as observers would call (and what the infant will come in time to experience as) an *outside* and that, because it resists, can be pushed *against*.

Perhaps the first experience of this, in utero, is accidental: “The foetal impulses bring about a discovery of environment, this latter being the opposition that is met through movement, and sensed during movement” (1950--1955, p. 216). But very early on, this experience of opposition becomes part of the experience of motility and of its pleasure. As Winnicott puts it in a later paper:

If we look and try to see the start of aggression in an individual, what we meet is the fact of infantile movement. This starts even before birth, not only in the twistings of the unborn baby, but also in the more sudden movement of limbs that make the mother say she is feeling a quickening A part of the infant moves and by moving meets something In every infant there is this tendency to move and to get some kind of muscle pleasure in movement, and to gain from the experience of moving and meeting something. [1964c, pp. 233-234]

Indeed, the motility impulse cannot “give any satisfactory experience *unless* there is opposition. The opposition must come from the environment, from the Not-Me which gradually comes to be distinguished from the Me” (1950--1955, p. 215, italics added).

Because of the aggressive quality of early motility, Winnicott will occasionally---even in the latter two of the consolidated papers---use the term *aggression* to refer to the very early impulse, as well as to its subsequent development. This can produce some confounding passage, such as this one:

It is true that to some extent aggressive impulses can find their opposition without external opposition; this is displayed normally in the fish movements of the spinal column that date from prenatal life In spite of those considerations can one not say that in normal development opposition from outside brings along the development of the aggressive impulse? Opposition affects the conversion of life force [that is, the original motility impulse] into aggression potential. [1950--1955, pp. 215-216]

So *aggression* here is used first to refer to early movement that must “find [the] opposition” it needs, and then also to that impulse (or form of impulse) that comes later, and that is produced in

part *through* opposition. We could dismiss this as terminological confusion. But it is better seen, I think, as a reflection of the phenomenon itself: that although one may wish to reserve the term *aggression* for the more particular impulse that develops through the experience of opposition, there is also a kind of aggression that characterizes the root motility impulse itself: that which finds satisfaction in encountering resistance and pressing against it. “*It is this impulsiveness,*” as Winnicott puts it, “*and the aggression that develops out of it, that makes the infant need an external object, and not merely a satisfying object,*” that “*needs to find opposition . . . something to push against*” (1950--1955, pp. 217, 212, italics in original).

From the beginning, then, or very nearly so, motility is bound up with aggression. First, this is so in that---in an idea that has by now become rather common, concerning the root of aggression---“[a]t origin, aggressiveness is almost synonymous with activity” (1950-5, p. 204). But it is also so in a second sense, one which I am wishing to highlight here, one that is less familiar and perhaps more extraordinary in its implications: that not only is aggression at origin activity, but that activity is, almost from its origin, aggressive, that the basic motility impulse needs (or very early on, comes to need) a world to press against; that at a fundamental level, there is a need for, and pleasure in, opposition, and that this need for and pleasure in opposition is not born of hatred and hostility, but is prior to them.

MOTILITY, AGGRESSION, SELF

How is this early motility/primitive aggression related to the emerging self? I have noted one connection already: that with integration of the self, early forms of motility are consolidated into “aggression” in the more usual and determinate sense of the term. But the relation among these goes in the other direction as well. As Winnicott saw, it is the experience of meeting and

pressing against the environment (primitive aggression) that itself helps to *establish* the distinction between a Me and a Not-Me that is central to integration of the I. So, if on the one hand it can be said that “prior to integration of the personality” (1950-5, p. 204), there is motility-aggression---and that this comes to be “organized by the child gradually, as he becomes a person” from part-functions into more integrated patterns of aggression (1950-5, p. 205)---on the other hand and more foundationally, *it is motility/primitive aggression that helps to organize part-functions into a person. It is through the experience of moving against, of finding opposition and pressing on it*, that there arises a feeling of unity in the relation to an (incipient) outside, and “an early recognition” of the “distinction between what is the self and what is not the self” (1964c, p. 234). It is not only, then, that the motility impulse cannot “give any satisfactory experience unless there is opposition . . . from the environment . . . which gradually comes to be distinguished from the Me” (1950-5, p. 215), but also that, as Winnicott adds just further on, it is precisely as the *result* of this opposition that there develops “an early recognition of a Not-Me world, and an early establishment of the Me” (1950-5, p. 216). Of course, any such experience of a self can only be very incipient and very transient. (“In practice these things develop gradually, and repeatedly come and go, and are achieved and lost” [1950--1955, p. 216].) But the important point is not the precise timetable. It is Winnicott’s recognition of a fundamental link between the experience of pressing against a world and the development of a self.

What is at stake, however, is not only the development of a self, but the *kind* of self that develops---not just motility, but the character of motility and the experience of opposition. “The question,” as Winnicott puts it, “is *how* will contact [with the environment] be made? Will it be part of the life-process of the individual, or will it be as a part of the restlessness of the

environment?” (1988, p. 127, italics added). What are “the patterns that evolve round this matter of motility”? (1950--1955, p. 211).

There are, of course, many patterns and variations, but in the “pattern . . . we call healthy,” “the environment is constantly discovered and rediscovered because of motility” (1950-5, pp. 211-2). So we are brought back again to the idea of free movement---but now as the movement of an emerging *Me*. At first, there is “perhaps . . . [a] movement of spine or leg in the womb” (1988, p. 128); after birth, perhaps a movement of the head that finds a breast, or the flailing of an arm that comes up against the skin of the one holding it, eventually a more definite reach and push against a mouth or an eye, a touch, a pressing of legs into the stomach or chest or legs of another, a pushing up against, a feeling of (as it comes gradually to be felt) an outside, a Not-Me, a resistance that can hold the pressure against it. There is pleasure in this meeting an outside, in pressing against an otherness that, through a combination of yielding and resisting, can receive it. Here, because it is the infant’s “own movements . . . [that] discover the environment” (1988, p. 128), “each experience” of this kind “emphasizes . . . that it is in the centre that the new individual is developing” (1950-5, p. 211). “This, repeated, becomes a pattern of relationship” (1988, p. 128) for an “individual [who] can enjoy going around” discovering and rediscovering a Not-Me world and “looking for appropriate opposition” (1950-5, p. 212).

All this requires, of course, what Winnicott calls a proper holding environment, one

. . . with love expressed (as at first it can only be expressed) in physical terms. The mother holds the baby (in womb, or in arms) and through love (identification) knows how to adapt to ego needs. Under these conditions, and under these alone, the individual may start to exist. [1950--1955, p. 212]

To be held is, in part, to feel the pressure of the environment; and the holding environment and the capacity of the individual to emerge (in health) is defined (in part) by the quality of physical

pressure, the quality of “contact . . . [and] movement” (1948, p. 161) between mother (or other caretaker) and baby. For the baby to *make contact* with the environment depends on its *being already in contact* with it; the possibility of its *pressing against* depends on its *being pressed against* (in the right way); the possibility of discovering the environment depends on being contained. “The emerging self requires a combination of resistance and reception, a Not-Me strong enough to withstand the baby’s pressure and pliant enough to receive the spontaneous gesture” (1963c, p. 73). And in addition to all that is entailed by physical holding, the word *holding* carries the sense (etymologically, its original sense) of guarding, preserving, or defending---in this context, holding *back* or “ward[ing] off” (1960b, p. 46) those “movement[s] from the environment” (1988, p. 127) that interfere with the capacity of “the infant [to] dominate” (1948, p. 161), to discover on its own and “at the baby’s rate” (1947, p. 201) the “external shared world” (1948, p. 161). For it is only when impingements are sufficiently managed that “the infant starts living a personal and individual life” (19, 0b. 31).

In the “less fortunate case,” the primary experience of opposition is of aggression from the other direction, and rather than the experience of meeting up against a world, moving and pressing against an outside, “the pattern of relationship is based on a movement from the environment” (1988, p. 128) in on the infant. In this case, “instead of a series of individual experiences,” “[m]otility is then only experienced as a reaction to impingement” (1950-5, pp. 211-12).

In ill-health at this very early stage it is the environment that impinges, and the life force is taken up in reactions to impingement---the result being the opposite to the early firm establishment of the Me. In the extreme there is very little experience of impulses except as reactions, and the Me is not established. Instead we find a development based on the experience of reaction to impingement, and there comes into existence an individual that we call false because the personal impulsiveness is missing. [1950-5, pp. 215-16]

Where this pattern dominates, the individual must remain in a state of dependence on environmental action: “To a lesser or a greater degree, the individual *must* be opposed Environmental impingement must continue,” for “only if opposed does the individual tap the important motility source.” Indeed, “since the individual cannot develop a personal pattern,” “environmental impingement must continue . . . [and] have a pattern of its own else chaos reigns” (1950-5, p. 212).

What is at stake here in the *quality* of motility is nothing less, then, than the constitution of the self. In the character of motility, in the particular pattern of movement in relation to an environment, the I develops. How will this occur? Will the encounter be on the infant’s own terms? Will the environment allow itself to be discovered and probed and pushed up against by the infant in her own way, out of her own impulses? Can it receive the infant’s movements, its gestures and forays? Can it hold itself and the infant as the infant presses against it, flailing, stretching, reaching, attacking? Or will the environment insist on being the dominant force, making demands on the infant, disrupting the infant’s own movement and forcing it into reaction? Will the aggression come from the infant or will it come from the environment? So central is the importance of the infant’s own “impulses [in] bring[ing] about a discovery of environment,” so significant is the feeling of “position that is met through movement,” so crucial is the growth of aggression that has its “root in personal impulse, motivated in ego spontaneity” (1950-5, pp. 216-17), that Winnicott will characterize the *true self* just in terms of this kind of movement. Only through this kind of movement, as Winnicott will sometimes put it, does the *individual*, in the full sense of the term, start to exist at all. By contrast, “[w]here impingement is too overwhelming, the result is a failure . . . to evolve an individual” (1950--1955, p. 212).

Whether we use that language, or whether we use the term *individual* more inclusively (as Winnicott sometimes does as well), while distinguishing between *health* and *ill health*, the basic idea is the same: that through (in part) aggressive motility (in the sense that I have described), the self is born and takes shape.

PSYCHIC MOTILITY AND OBJECTS

I have been focusing thus far on the experience of early physical movement, an experience that is both physical and psychic---two sides of the same coin, hardly to “be distinguished except according to the direction from which one is looking.” But, “gradually, the psyche and the soma aspects of the growing person” “become distinguishable” (1949b, p. 244). What then becomes of the primitive motility impulse on the psychic side? Must it be understood as still restricted to the experience of physical movement? Or can we not also speak of a kind of psychic motility that goes beyond the experience and imaginative elaboration of physical movement?

One way of approaching these questions is by inquiring into the *negative* or *interruption* of free movement---or, in Winnicott’s language, *impingement*. Impingement includes, perhaps most basically, restrictions on free physical movement, and we have discussed it thus far in those terms. Even with respect to *in utero* sensory impingements, I earlier suggested that, to the extent that “changes of pressure and temperature” (1988, p. 129) are experienced as interruptions, it is likely because of their connection to personal impulse, and that this in turn is originally bound up with the experience of physical movement.

But Winnicott also talks about such sensory impingements on neonatal activity as the sound of “low-flying aircraft” (1948, p. 161) or “the door banging as the baby goes to the breast”

(1970a, p. 86), and this suggests something else. What is the nature of these impingements? Or, to put it from the other direction, what is the nature of the personal impulse or movement that is being impinged? In response to these noises, the mother may not turn away at all, and the breast may be no less physically available; yet there is (or may be) still an interruption. So if the baby's physical movement of going to the breast is indeed interrupted, this must be as a consequence of (or part and parcel of) a different kind of interruption. Or, to say the same thing from the other side again, it is an interruption to a different kind of movement. That this is so is suggested by Winnicott's apt phrase *going to the breast*. What is entailed in this *going to*? There is an *inclination toward*, an *impulse from here to that*. This impulse, though bound up with the body, is distinguishable from physical movement and may or may not actually be completed in physical movement. It is in reference to this kind of movement that a term such as *psychic motility* seems appropriate (though Winnicott himself does not use it).

Now, the aircraft and door-banging are what we (the observer) will take to be external impingements. However, for the infant who has not yet "separated off what is not-ME from what is ME" (1968b, p. 90), impingements on psychic motility are not limited to "external" (as we know them to be) events. There is also, as Winnicott writes, the sudden arrival of "instinct tension," and this---particularly when there has been scant memory of the experience---can be felt no less, and often much more, as a shock and an impingement: like "a clap of thunder or a hit." "Instinctual demands can be fierce and frightening and at first can seem to the infant like threats to existence. Being hungry is like being possessed by wolves" (1964d, pp. 80-81).

Another task of the holding environment, then, is to "hold the situation in time" (1988, p. 155), so that the infant can learn to assimilate instinctual events into the personal movement that is at the core of the healthy self. From an "ego [that] is not yet able to include" "id-excitements" and

for which such excitements “can be traumatic,” there can thus develop “a personal ego . . . [that can] ride instincts” and “integrat[e] . . . quiet and excited types of relationships” (1988, p. 69). And in this way, “a rapidly increasing amount of” what once experienced as impingement “becomes expected and allowed for” without “disturbing [the] continuity of psyche-soma” (1949b, p. 247). Here, then, we have, once again, a kind of motility that is bound up with the body, but that is not as directly fused with physical movement. Instead, it is to be understood in terms of the baby’s own continuous sense of movement through time.

I have come at the idea of what I am calling *psychic motility* from the perspective of impingements because, as with the associated concepts of the *true self* and *false self* (1960a, p. 148), it is perhaps most easily understood in relation to its disruptions. But we can come to psychic motility (and the true self) from the positive side as well. Psychic motility is, for instance, at the heart of what Winnicott calls the *creative gesture*, such as the “gesture of a baby who reaches out for the mother’s mouth and feels her teeth, and at the same time looks into her eyes, seeing her creatively” (1971b, p. 106). It is through this creative gesture, as Winnicott describes it, that the infant imaginatively produces early objects.⁴ In the passage that I quoted of the baby “go[ing] to the breast” (1970a, p. 86), the point of view is of the observer: the view of the breast as already in the world and external to the baby. Elsewhere, however, Winnicott will offer an account from the perspective, as he imagines it, of the very young infant, and from that point of

⁴ For reasons of space, I shall leave for elsewhere a discussion of the relationship of psychic motility and the true self. I shall also leave aside the question of the connection, which I think is quite significant, between psychic motility and the baby’s need to “look round” and see “the mother’s face” looking back, and in that special way to get “something of themselves back from the environment” (1967, p. 112). Is not looking around and being seen back a form of healthy “opposition” (involving, as I have said, a combination of yielding and resisting) toward, and of, the environment? We well know from the more recent literature on early mother--child interaction how much depends on the quality of what Beebe and Lachmann (1988) call kinesic interaction---that is, “movement [that includes] specifically . . . changes of orientation, gaze, and facial expression” (p. 318).

view, *going toward* has a far more creative character.

“Let us imagine,” he writes, “a theoretical first feed,” meant to capture what is “represented in real life by the summation of the early experiences of many feeds” (1988, p. 106).

Imagine a baby who has never had a feed. Hunger turns up, and the baby is ready to conceive of something; out of need the baby is ready to create a source of satisfaction [1964a, p. 90] I would say that the infant is ready to believe in something that could exist; i.e., there has developed in the infant a readiness to hallucinate an object; but that is rather a direction of expectancy than an object in itself [1948, p. 163] If at this moment the mother places her breast where the baby is ready to expect something, and if plenty of time is allowed for the infant to feel round, with mouth and hands, and perhaps with a sense of smell [1964a, p. 90] . . . the baby begins to have material with which to create [1988, p. 106] At the start the mother allows the infant to dominate [1948, p. 163] [and if all goes well] [g]radually it can be said that the baby is ready to hallucinate the nipple at the time when the mother is ready with it [1988, p. 106] The baby eventually gets the illusion that this real breast is exactly the thing that was created out of need, greed, and the first impulses of primitive loving A thousand times before weaning [this will be repeated] A thousand times . . . the feeling has existed that what was wanted was created, and was found to be there [1964a, p. 90].⁵

Winnicott does not describe this explicitly in the language of motility. But what is happening here? The impulsive gesture, at first almost wholly taking the form of physical movement, now involves a more distinctly psychic reaching out, “a gesture that [arises] out of need, the result of an idea that [rides] in on the crest of a wave of instinctual tension” (1988, p. 110), a gesture that involves a creation of “nipple and . . . milk,” and everything else that is entailed by what we shall call “breast for simplification of description” (1948, p. 163). So there is the physical reach---for the actual breast that, we know, has been presented---but there is also, from the perspective of the baby, a creative movement, a psychic reach: from the *here* of immediacy of need to the *there* of an otherness that can satisfy it.⁶ The primitive spontaneity of

⁵ I have taken the liberty of combining several different statements that Winnicott offers of this early object relating.

⁶ There is no need here, Winnicott cautions, to postulate an originary preconception of a physical breast. The actual breast may in reality first be found by the infant, who imagines having created

the physical gesture is now elaborated as a creative psychic gesture, one that is capable of finding a breast out of need.

I earlier emphasized Winnicott's key insight concerning the particular aggressive character of primitive motility: the pleasure of discovering an environment and pressing against it. At the "early stage," writes Winnicott, "when the Me and the Not-Me are being established, it is the aggressive component that more surely drives the individual to a need for a Not-Me or an object that is felt to be external," "an external object and not merely a satisfying object" (1950--1955, p. 215). Is it not precisely this aggressive component that we can understand to be at the core of the creative gesture? For what is imaginatively produced in the creative reach but an incipient otherness---not merely relief of instinctual tension, but an object that can be found in being made, that can receive the infant's pressure and its pressing need? What is produced in the creative reach is the beginning of a world. This psychic motility is a direct descendant of physical motility, still unmistakably bound to it but nonetheless distinguishable from it. Where the aggressiveness of physical motility finds pleasure in a world that resists and that can be pressed against---the experience of physical body pushing against physical body---the aggressiveness of this psychic motility takes the form of an imaginative reaching or pressing out that produces a world that can be pressed against. Thus "starts off the infant's ability to use illusion, without which no contact is possible between the psyche and the environment," and through which the "environment is discovered without loss of sense of self" (1952b, pp. 222-223).

Eventually, "through the living experience of a relationship between the mother and the baby," "the capacity for illusion" will permit "gradual disillusioning" (1948, p. 163). But it is

it. But having "found" it, there is, then, in subsequent feeds the "material with which to create" it (1988, p. 106).

from this early experience of imaginative extension, of pressing toward a world that can meet the pressure, of producing a world that can be found, that there “develops a belief that the world can contain what is wanted and needed” (1964a, p. 90), and that “lay[s] down the foundation” for “reach[ing] to the world creatively, . . . enjoy[ing] and us[ing] what the world has to offer” (1968a, p. 25). From this, there develops the “ability to create the world” (1970c, p. 40), even if in a different way we also know that we can “only create what we find” (1970c, p. 53).

I have used the term *psychic motility* here, and it may well be asked: is such talk just a metaphor? The answer depends on what we mean by this, and the simplest answer is yes *and* no: if we should call it a metaphor, we should not call it *just* a metaphor. At its origin, motility is directly concerned with physical movement---just as, at first, *incorporation* is directly concerned with the “ingestion of food” and bound up with oral libidinal pleasures (Freud 1905, p. 198). For both, there is always a psychic aspect, but they are at first so connected to the immediate bodily processes that they elaborate that we can properly say they are first and foremost *bodily*: bodily movement and bodily incorporation. Over time, however, incorporation will become the model or *prototype* (in Strachey’s translation of *Vorbild*) “of a process which, in the form of identification” and psychic incorporation of objects “is later to play such an important psychological part” (Freud 1905, p. 198)---such as, for example, in Freud’s (1925) account of judgment:

Expressed in the language of the oldest---the oral---instinctual impulses, the judgement is: “‘I should like to eat this,’ or ‘I should like to spit it out’; and, put more generally: ‘I should like to take this into myself and to keep that out.’ That is to say: ‘It shall be inside me’ or ‘it shall be outside me.’” [p. 237]

Similarly, we can say that physical movement through space and in time becomes the model or prototype for psychic motility, including the experience of psychic continuity. Eating,

chewing, sucking, devouring, and such; forward movement, “going-along,” reptation, pressure, impingements, and such---these are all, it could be said, metaphors of psychic life. But if they are metaphors, they do not merely describe psychic life; they organize it. In this sense, they are metaphors that thinking makes actual.⁷

CONCLUSION

The idea that the self is formed in relation to an *other* or to a world---the *Me* as distinct from a *Not-Me*---has long been a truism, too trite to bear repetition. Psychoanalysis did not discover this idea. But central to psychoanalysis’s contribution to our understanding of human beings has been its exploration of the dynamics of this process, its pursuit of questions such as: *how* does the self emerge in relation to an environment; *what* comes to be felt as a part of the self and *why*; how is the self (or aspects of the self), as it comes to be organized at a particular moment, *related to* what is taken to be “the world” (or aspects of the world); and what determines the character of this relationship?

When we use the term *ego* to refer to a kind of “agency,” what we are referring to *in part* is the self from the perspective of the active and continuing processes of organizing or constituting itself in relation to the world.⁸ One important aspect of this is that which is captured in the language of introjection, identification, incorporation, projection, and such: the complex processes by which the contours and boundaries of the self are articulated and fantasized. I

⁷ That metaphors can be made literal by the way they organize our understanding is not limited to these kinds of intrapsychic metaphors. “[O]nce upon a time,” the late philosopher Donald Davidson observed, “rivers and bottles did not, as they do now, literally have mouths.” (1978, p. 37).

⁸ I have placed the familiar word “agency” in scare quotes here because there is a danger of thinking of the ego as a kind of active subject that produces an object-self. We must always remember that the self is produced, *reproduced*, and *reconstituted* in part *through* these processes, not as a passive consequence of them.

referred to these earlier as involving the idea of the self as a kind of container, and this important way of understanding the self is not only from the perspective of an outside observer, but is a self-conception.

A general aim of this paper---its substantive aim---has been to suggest that, *in addition* to these processes, there is another set of dynamics that is central to the development and organization of the self; it is these that I have discussed under the general heading of *motility*. (How these two sets of dynamics interact is a large and important question that deserves further inquiry.) While for the idea of the self as container, it is characteristic to think of the ego as a secondary process, concerned with organizing both primary impulses and objects, in the case of motility, the self and ego begin directly in impulse. Motility, that is, is not to be conceived in the first instance as an impulse *of* the self to be managed, but as at the core of the primitive self. The central or *true self*, in Winnicott's words, begins as "the inherited potential which is experiencing a continuity of being" (1960c, p. 46), and from "the summation of motility experiences . . . the individual . . . [can] start to exist" (1950--1955, pp. 213-214).

The second general aim of this paper---the interpretive aim---has been to suggest the significance of motility within Winnicott's thought. In examining the place of motility in the emerging self, I have focused on several key ideas of his work. Most broad is the idea of what I have referred to as *free movement*. This includes, naturally, movement in space that is uninhibited and unencumbered by environmental impingement. But it also includes two characteristics that are less intuitive and therefore in need of emphasis. The first of these is the experience of movement through time. Although here I have touched only briefly on this, I have wanted to suggest, following Winnicott, that our understanding of ego development and the organization of the self is lacking unless we give an adequate place to the question of time. How

does an individual experience time---how does she live in time? It is one implication of the discussion here that for an infant whose pattern of motility is dominated by the need to react to impingement, time will likely be experienced much more as a series of discrete moments than as a continuity. These important matters deserve more attention.

The second, less obvious aspect of free movement that I have meant to emphasize, and to which I have given here the greater share of attention, is the centrality of a primary form of aggression. This aggression refers to the pressure exerted against an otherness, and the pleasure of meeting (which includes creating) a world that can receive this pressure and hold it, without being destroyed and without retaliation: an environment that offers resistance without impingement. Again, there is more to be said about this, which must be left for a different occasion.⁹ The general point, however, is this: that we cannot adequately understand ego development or the constitution of an individual without attending to the significance of patterns of aggressive-motility experience, and that what distinguishes healthy motility from an unhealthy pattern is not the existence of resistance, but the relation to it.

How will the self come to be organized? To what extent will it be along the lines of “personal impulse, motivated in ego spontaneity,” 217) “impulse-doing” (1970c, p. 39), with an emphasis on the pleasures of probing, pressing, discovering, and creating a world in and out of fantasy? To what extent will it be organized, instead, “on the pattern of reacting to stimuli” (ibid.), “dependent on the experience of opposition” (1950--5, p. 217) from without, or even “persecution” (217): “reactive-doing” (1970c, p. 39)?

What will be the response to the experience of “objects that get in the way” (1970c, p. 42)? Will there be a disposition to “reach[] out in some way so that if an object is in the way there can be a relationship” (1970c, p. 41), and will this encounter “feel like a part of life and real”

⁹ In particular, I shall take up elsewhere the relationship of the motility impulse to destruction.

(1988, p. 128) and bring about a feeling of being alive? Will the individual “experie[n]c[e] reaching out and finding an object as a creative act” (1970c, p. 42)? Or will the individual experience the world as demanding compliance, and the resistance of objects that “get in the way” as “detract[ing] from the sense of real living, which is only regained by return to isolation in quiet” (1988, p. 128)? Will the need be felt to “develop a technique of withdrawal,” lest the individual be “stifle[d] . . . and . . . cease to be” (1970c, p. 52)?

Will life be led on the maxim: “Reach out and it shall be there for you to have, to use, to waste,” to create? Or on the basis of a feeling that nothing means anything: “I couldn’t care less”? (1970c, p. 50) Can the individual live creatively, feeling pleasure in creating a world while in relationship with “all that exists already” (1970a, p. 53) and engaging “collectively . . . with others” (1970c, p. 50)? Or will the individual, “in the guise of being creative and having a personal view of everything,” retain the need for constant “omnipotence . . . and control” (1970c, p. 50)? “When seeking a reassurance that life is worth living,” will a “person go out for experience or withdraw from the world” (1988, p. 128)? Will the individual, even with the arrival of “an intellectual understanding of the fact of the world’s existence prior to the individual’s,” still be capable of “feeling . . . that the world is personally created” (1988, p. 111)? Will otherness be experienced as a threat to the self or as enlivening? Will aggression be experienced as destructive only, or as destructive-creative?

For Winnicott, early motility experiences are pivotal in constituting core patterns of the self and, by virtue of this, basic dispositions toward the world.¹⁰ In the common state of affairs, these patterns will be sufficiently complex and multiform that they can, alongside and in relation to other ego processes, continue to develop over a lifetime. Yet here as elsewhere, it is those

¹⁰ There is an apt analogy here with the view that early affective experience is pivotal in shaping id impulses. Here Kernberg’s work has been central; for a summary of this, see Kernberg (2001).

“basic patterns . . . laid down . . . near the beginning . . . [that will] have the greatest influence”

(1970c, p. 39). These are ideas vital to Winnicott’s thought, and in no area are his contributions more vital to ours.

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