

# Creativity: A New Paradigm for Freudian Psychoanalysis

René Roussillon

## Introduction

Before I deal with the main points of this presentation of and commentary on the question of creativity in Winnicott's book that we are being asked to analyse, I feel it necessary to say a few words about the state of mind that lies behind this analysis and structures it. I would like to begin by emphasizing something that is true of all authors, but even more so of Winnicott: every "reading" of his work is an interpretation of the text and as such involves not only the reader's own particular parameters, but also those of the period in which that particular reading is taking place. The value of any book to which several authors have contributed lies in the fact that it offers not only several "points of entry" into the reading of it, but also different points of view, different "interpretations" of the papers of which it is made up.

I would like to begin by emphasizing the fact that, although Winnicott's book contains papers all of which were written before 1970 – i.e. more than 40 years ago now – and even if the reader attempts to reconstruct the metapsychological context in which they were written, he/she remains nonetheless influenced by the situation of the questions raised in it at the time when the book and its impact on current thinking are being analysed.

That is one difficulty, and, in my view, another must be added to it: the necessity for any analysis that is being put forward to respect the "spirit" of the author whose work is being examined. That requirement has, for me, several implications. First of all, we cannot attempt to analyse the question of creativity by doing what Winnicott himself saw as a kind of plagiarism or paraphrasing of his work; that would amount to a form of betrayal. It was never Winnicott's intention to "acquire a following", and in my view what he wanted above all to hand down to us was the absolute necessity to be ourselves creative when reading or commenting upon his work – in other words, to go on developing whatever contribution he had made. We must therefore think not only "with" Winnicott, but also "beyond" Winnicott – make use of his writings and of what inspired them as a springboard in order to think, in the present time, about the issues that he raised.

Winnicott emphasized, too, that we can be original in our thinking only in so far as we are also part of a tradition. In psychoanalysis, that tradition is first and foremost Freud's metapsychology and clinical contributions. I have the impression that there is room for a "reading" of Winnicott's work that would attempt to show how closely its more significant aspects relate to Freud's metapsychology. Obviously, no one could argue that Winnicott's thinking lies outside of that metapsychology; he was very familiar with Freud's work and took care to link his own ideas with those of the inventor of psychoanalysis, although it was never Winnicott's intention to try to establish any particularly strong metapsychological connection between them.

There were several reasons for that. The first is linked to the traditional way of thinking in Britain, a tradition to which he belonged; the feeling one has is that this approach gives pride of place to clinical aspects without going too deeply into the mysteries of Freudian metapsychology, which, in its detail, is often highly complex. For example: although Winnicott put forward a theory of process and processing – hence the frequent use of the present participle/gerund in his writings – he never linked it in any very specific way to Freud's theory of mental processes: primary and secondary. It is quite true, of course, that such a perspective was never completely absent from his thinking, but the way in which he developed it never reached the degree of sophistication that can be found in the French or German tradition, to mention only those that are European.

However, that factor in itself does not tell us everything about why Winnicott was so undoubtedly hesitant as regards a more determined metapsychological approach. My impression is that we can find in the very object of his explorations another source of that disinclination. I mention this because it seems to me that it has to do with the threat that hangs over every attempt to link his contributions too closely to the Freudian tradition *stricto sensu*. Winnicott explored – and insisted that psychoanalysis explore – what human beings actually experience, and that perspective is not a core concept in Freud's thinking, even though it is not completely foreign to it: "I am the breast" are Freud's own words, expressed towards the end of his life in his description of the infant's earliest identifications. Any metapsychology of what people actually "experience" undoubtedly runs the risk of diminishing the intensity of the new developments and proposals that emerged from his research.

The unique qualities of Winnicott's approach have often been emphasized – it adapted itself quite remarkably to its object, and in itself it contained the essence of what he was contributing to the clinical work of psychoanalysis. He agreed completely with Buffon's famous remark, according to which "the style is the man himself" – I am tempted to paraphrase that comment and say that "Winnicott's style is his work itself", because in my view his style of writing tells us just as much as the actual content of what he was helping us discover. In his writing, Winnicott's style bears witness to a step-by-step approach, which in itself expresses a clinical standpoint at the same time as he is describing it. Although that deceptively simple style of writing – it would be a mistake were we to let ourselves be taken in by what appears to be simple and perfectly clear – is undoubtedly one of the keys to his success, it is also – the price of fame – a kind of writing that does not fit in well with the rough and even at times "arduous" character of Freudian metapsychology.

Freud had his own style, the sheer quality of which earned him the Goethe prize; his art lay in creating a style of writing that was both elegant and compatible with the rigour of his metapsychology. Winnicott's style was not on the same scale – his aim was to create a kind of "atmosphere of being", with the idea of taking on board experiences which, most of the time, are buried in the depths of mental life and which cannot become manifest unless certain very specific conditions are met.

The metapsychological perspective does not offer that kind of condition; issues concerning being and the paradoxes inherent in transitional processes are more a matter of formulations that are potentially paradoxical or even "shocking" than of clear and explanatory rationality. In order for thinking to offer a space in which formlessness and the eventuality of "what has not yet come to fruition" can find accommodation, a place in which they can feel at home, there needs to be the kind of security offered by tolerance of paradoxes, putting completely on hold any judgements that involve knowledge of manifest concrete reality.

That said, more than 40 years after some decisive ideas put forward by Winnicott – and this is one of the points that I intend to emphasize – brought about a new and paradigmatic shift in psychoanalytical clinical thinking, the time has perhaps come to take the risk of losing some of the substance and poetry of his contribution in an attempt to relate it more closely to the fundamentals of Freudian metapsychology. Some of

Winnicott's critics – and indeed some of those who praise him highly, because they all find themselves in this respect in complete agreement with him – are tempted, firstly, to argue that he led psychoanalysis to a point far removed from the direction in which Freud had propelled it, and, secondly, to ignore the epistemological developments and evolution that Winnicott brought to contemporary psychoanalytical thinking. It is only by doing our best to show how his thinking is in fact an extension of Freud's, while at the same time preserving all of its richness, that we have any hope of convincing people that it cannot be divorced or cut off from that tradition first set up by Freud.

I am now in a position to explore what seems to me to be fundamental concerning the question of creativity in Winnicott's work; I would argue that it amounts to a paradigmatic development in psychoanalytical thinking.

### **Creativity, the drives, and the sexual dimension**

The first question that we come up against is that of the articulation between creativity, the sexual dimension and sublimation of the drives in Freud's thinking. Winnicott goes out of his way to emphasize that his thoughts on creativity do not correspond to what Freud described as a process of sublimation involving the drives. It is true that in Freud's theory sublimation is one possible outcome in the life of the drives, whereas, for Winnicott, creativity represents an absolutely fundamental aspect of mental life. Obviously, these two processes do not take place on the same level: one of them appears to be "regional" as it were, involving only part of mental functioning, while the other could be seen as lying at the very heart of the structure of the psyche, defining the relationship between the individual and his/her internal and external worlds.

Therein lies one of the difficulties that we encounter in attempting to relate Winnicott's ideas to Freud's metapsychology, a difficulty that cannot be ignored. On several occasions, Winnicott emphasized that, in his view, the processes involved in the creative impulse have nothing to do with drive-related urges or the sexual dimension as such.

For Freud, the fundamental touchstone of psychoanalysis lies in the role it gives to the sexual dimension in the individual's unconscious mental life – it is one of the "shibboleths" which he defined as contributing to the very identity of psychoanalytical theory. For Winnicott, it is creativity that plays that fundamental role, so that the question of the

relationship between creativity and the sexual dimension must be examined if we are to see Winnicott's thinking as part of "traditional" psychoanalysis. However, in this particular instance, Winnicott's position is much less clear than it would seem to be at first sight. He often argued that there is no drive-related activity in transitional phenomena, in playing or in the process of creativity. Yet at other times he spoke in this context of hallucinatory processes and even of a kind of "ego orgasm", the sexual connotation of which cannot be denied. How, then, are we to understand Winnicott's desire to draw a distinction between what he was trying to define and the theory of the drives? I would interpret that reluctance in terms of the "theory of the drives" to which he himself subscribed.

Winnicott's writings and developments belong to an epistemological context in which the drive is taken to be a kind of excitation that is more or less overwhelming and disruptive – in other words, something that is unbound and unintegrated, "attacking" the ego in order to find a place for itself in the ego, a place which hitherto it has not been allotted. For example, when Winnicott speaks of playing and of the presence of the drives in that activity, he sees the drive as disrupting play, not as its mainspring. In that way of looking at it, the drive is not "introjected" into what the individual is doing and is not conducive to it – it is seen as being "out of play", "offside" as it were. The question of the driving force behind play and playing is not taken into account in terms of an activity arising from the need to integrate the drive. In Freudian terms, we could say that Winnicott sees drives only in terms of the id, not as being integrated to and within the ego. Does creativity therefore depend on the drive being brought into the ego, introjected and placed in the service of the ego?

One major element involved in the introduction of the concept of narcissism in Freud's metapsychology has to do with the relationship between the drives and the ego, and the manner in which they cathect the ego: either the drive takes the ego as its object – the classic way of looking at narcissism – or it integrates with the ego, in such a way that it is transformed by and through that integration and becomes structured by it.

In *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott seems at times to be referring to drives which are not integrated and which therefore pose a threat to playing and creative activity, while at other times what he says seems to imply a momentum integrated with the ego and working at its behest. Yet he says nothing about the nature of the impulse that incites someone to

make use of his/her creativity – how is this to be thought of independently of the life of the drives? From what other elements could the creative process take support?

Winnicott was perfectly correct when he argued that unrestrained and overwhelming drive-related excitation is a threat to creativity, to playing and to transitional processes. However, the epistemological context in which he was developing his ideas did not enable him to imagine that drives and the sexual dimension are not merely disruptive; if they are in the service of the ego, they can also be the source of a creative impulse. Drives that are overwhelming and disruptive have never been able to be bound by the ego's activity, they have never succeeded in being integrated and introjected, and they therefore appear to be foreign bodies that must either be expelled or brought under control.

On that basis, I would argue that the momentum that is required for any creative activity to occur must be looked for in the integration of the drives within the ego, in their introjection. There is another key argument that I shall explore later, when I discuss the process that governs the found/created element, the key process in transitionality: hallucination.

This initial overview has led us to the question of drive integration; this in turn quite naturally leads to that of how such integration comes about, and opens on to another major issue when we explore the connection between Winnicott's thinking and Freud's metapsychology: that of the role and place of the object.

### **Creativity and the object**

One of Freud's fundamental endeavours was to try to free psychoanalysis and psychoanalytical theory of the threat that the accusation of "suggestion" could have represented for its epistemological and therapeutic significance. That threat was present from the outset, and psychoanalysis was created in such a way as to differentiate it from therapeutic procedures based on suggestion. The threat was still present in 1937, when Freud was writing "Constructions in Analysis", through the accusation that psychoanalysis was a matter of "Heads I win, tails you lose". Initially, Freud led psychoanalysis towards a theorization of the individual as such, looked upon simply in terms of his/her intrapsychical functioning, outside of any external influence or suggestion; more than play

or artistic activity, dreams seemed to him to be the model *par excellence* on which to base his metapsychology.

Dreams are "narcissistic" and appear to be immune to all external influence. It was only quite late in his work, in the aftermath of his paper "On Narcissism: An Introduction", that Freud came really to acknowledge the fact that, in human beings, psychology is also a "group psychology" (Freud 1921). He was by then sufficiently reassured as to the coherence of the psychoanalytical approach that he could, without too much apprehension, confront the issue of the influence that individuals have on one another. However, the idea of taking into account the fact that the object of a drive is also a subject in his/her own right, with his/her own wishes and impulses, never became for him a major theme of his theorization, even though the issues that thereby arose were never neglected in his actual clinical work (cf. the idea of seduction and, more generally, questions involving traumatism and narcissistic disappointments). For such an important place to be given to that aspect in his metapsychology, it would have to have been linked to a fundamental theme in metapsychology, that of hallucination. It was only in 1937, towards the end of his life, that Freud began to realize that hallucination and perception are not mutually exclusive – indeed, they may accompany each other and combine together as in, for example, a delusion.

From the very outset in Winnicott's thinking – the first article that attracted a great deal of attention had as its subject matter manic defences and the denial of both internal and external reality – the role of external reality and its connection with psychical reality were seen to be important elements. However, as soon as he set out the problem, it took on a more complex aspect because of what he saw as an intermediate state that mixed together psychical reality and external reality, and therefore hallucination and perception. In that sense, Winnicott's thinking is completely in line with Freud's ultimate idea concerning the structures that superimpose perception and hallucination. What Winnicott called the found/created process – a key element, and I shall come back later to that fundamental point – implies that the "created" breast – and how could it be created other than through some kind of hallucinatory process? – is simultaneously placed by the mother at the very spot where her infant creates it. The infant can therefore find, through perception, an

external object sufficiently similar to the one that he/she was able to create in a hallucinatory way.

The key issue here – without which Winnicott's contribution would be inconceivable – is to identify the necessary conditions under which the adjustment between what the infant creates and what he/she finds in the relationship with the mother is good enough, to the extent that the infant can have the illusion of having created what he/she finds. It is also the necessary condition for the infant to be able to integrate – through primary "omnipotence" as Winnicott would say – what is found. The intermediate structure that brings together the created object and the one that is found, in creating a third mental category, also sets up a bridge and an element of continuity between internal and external reality, thereby avoiding what, in Winnicott's view, was the fundamental danger in all development: that of dissociation.

Indeed, the found/created process must operate in both directions: the infant has to find what he/she is able to create, and be able to create what he/she finds. This implies a properly constructed environment, one that does not confront the infant with the impossibility of integrating what he/she finds. That is precisely what is involved in the traumatism of failed creativity: being faced with a situation that cannot be integrated, a situation *per se*, "in itself", that cannot be turned into one experienced as "for oneself". The failure of that process will result in an increase in destructiveness, the intensity of which appears to be a direct consequence of the traumatic character of the failure. On that point, Winnicott crossed swords with the concept of primary envy put forward by Melanie Klein; in Winnicott's view, envy and envious attacks are a reaction to early trauma, and are directly related to a failure in the processes of integration to which they bear witness and therefore to an inadequate mothering environment.

In Winnicott's thinking, setting up the found/created process is initially made possible through the mother's perfect adaptation to the situation – thanks to that fundamental kind of primary maternal empathy that he called the "primary maternal preoccupation". Later, a gradual gap between what is created and what is found becomes tolerable in so far as the infant is able to accomplish the work required to narrow that gap while continuing to maintain the creative illusion. At that point, the infant will be able to create what he/she finds, as long as what is found is sufficiently adapted. The found/created dimension is thus

preserved throughout the entire process of development, thanks initially to the mother's adapting herself to her infant's needs and then to the child's own psychical work when he/she becomes able to carry it out.

Before attempting to take a look step by step at what is involved in the process that underlies creative activity, I would like to mention two elements that will help me to do so.

### **Two complementary elements: hallucination and the malleable medium**

The first comment that I would like to make has to do with hallucination and its relationship to the sexual dimension and creativity. I mentioned earlier the nature of the process through which the "breast" is created, and I shall come back later to the complex issues to which this process gives rise as far as theorization is concerned. For the moment, I would like to emphasize the fact that, in "traditional" psychoanalytical thinking, that process becomes intelligible only when it is related to hallucination. That is why the connection between creativity and the sexual dimension, with which I began this exploration, is so fundamental. Hallucinatory satisfaction of a wish – which in my view is brought into play in the "created" process as described by Winnicott – is a process typical of the drives and of the life of the drives. At the very beginning, the sexual dimension and creativity go hand in hand: the sexual aspect lies at the very root of creativity, and creativity gives expression to the action of the sexual dimension when it comes to fruition in the service of the ego.

The theoretical problem arises from the fact that initially the hallucinatory process was described by Freud – in a manner similar to the model of dreams – as being linked to "object-less" narcissism and auto-eroticism, a process that is set up when the object is absent, precisely in an attempt to compensate for its absence. The hallucinatory process, however – and this is clear in Freud's last writings on the subject and appears to a considerable extent to be confirmed by recent research in the neurosciences – always occurs when there is an increase in drive-related tension; it is probably an "automatic" phenomenon, linked to the basic functioning of the human psyche, its very momentum.

When, thanks to hallucination, the process finds the object that it has created, there follows an illusion of self-satisfaction that is fundamental for the construction of narcissism. When the process does not find the object that it has created, this gives rise to

auto-eroticism in so far as there has been a sufficient number of early experiences of creative illusion, and that these have left enough traces for them to be preserved "in memory" and activated in a sufficiently-realistic way, so as to produce a kind of consolatory illusion. But, as Freud never stopped pointing out, auto-eroticism is ultimately always unsatisfying; it can never be more than a consolation.

The idea of hallucination being brought about by the absence of the object can still be found in many contemporary psychoanalytical papers – the work of the mind is seen as being based on absence or on a representation of the absent object. That conception is based on the contrast between perceiving and hallucinating, which in turn considers the process of perception to be relatively passive in nature and not, as all the research being done at present in the neurosciences never fails to demonstrate, a highly structured one. It implies that reality is a "given", not that it is gradually constructed as a psychical category and progressively enriched by experience. It conflates the moment when the process of symbol-formation becomes manifest and the point at which it is created – it confuses, as it were, the second phase of the process with the process as a whole.

Hallucination is a perception-based representation of the object that is waited-for, expected, desired, hoped-for; it has to be able to fit into a present perception in order to "become real" and be fulfilled, i.e. it has to find a sufficiently-structurable perception in the individual's present time in order to be part of it. The *sumbolon* is this primary "putting together", this first reuniting of an internal process and an external "locality". If no encounter is possible, the result is a state of narcissistic disappointment and a feeling of distress. If that feeling persists, it will produce the kind of agony and a reaction of destructiveness which, for Winnicott, constitutes the fulcrum of pathological processes; it is only later, after there has been a sufficient number of experiences of fulfilment, that auto-eroticism will become a possibility.<sup>1</sup>

The second comment that I would like to make concerns the role and place of the object in setting up and maintaining the found/created process.

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<sup>1</sup> I am not referring here to the kinds of auto-sensuality that may be set up initially in order to compensate for the early absences of the object or for any lack of satisfaction.

In many of his earlier writings, Winnicott focused above all on how the mother took care of her infant – mainly in terms of her holding, handling, and presenting the object – and on the way in which these various elements of maternal care contributed positively to the infant's mental development. In what he was saying at that time, it was already possible to sense that, over and beyond physical care in the strict sense of the term, Winnicott was attempting to define the mother's cathexis of her infant and the way in which she attunes to the needs of his/her ego. It is, of course, in those very early days of the baby's life, through the body and its sensoriality and sensorimotricity, that the earliest forms of communication are established; it is very much to Winnicott's credit that he was sensitive to that dimension, as we see in his various studies of the primary conditions required for a relationship to be set up. However, it was when he suggested that the mother's face played the part of a mirror that a watershed was reached in his theorization of the overall meaning of primary communication.

Winnicott's hypothesis was that the function of the mother's face and of what it expresses in relation to the infant is that of reflecting back to the child his/her own internal states or at least some message to do with these. When we read the chapter that Winnicott wrote about the function of the mother's face, it becomes obvious that, if the face as such plays indeed a very important part in this "mirror" role that he sees in the child's mother, it is above all her whole manner of "being present" that acts as a mirror for her infant. That is a variation on the idea of the found/created process – the infant has to see him/herself in the mother's face and in the way her body is physically present – but a variation that is one of the key elements of the process itself.

Classically, what is emphasized is the projective process: the infant finds what he/she created projectively. Winnicott, however, emphasizes the complementary importance of the "feedback", the "return" processes through which the infant internalizes the reflection that he/she perceives in the way in which the primary objects respond to his/her own movements and states of being. In pointing this out, Winnicott made a major contribution to the theory of narcissism through his description of the fundamental intersubjective vector that is present in that situation. Infants see themselves as they are seen; they "create" themselves as they are seen, experienced and reflected by the mothering environment, and they identify with what is being reflected back to/of themselves. I think it appropriate at

this point to relate this to what Marion Milner described in terms of the malleable (or pliable) medium. It is no doubt difficult to know exactly what each of them owes to the other; the ways in which they see the primary role of the mothering environment are very similar to each other.

Milner emphasizes the fundamental part played, in the emergence of the process of symbol-formation, not only by illusion – as illustrated in the eponymous title of her most famous paper – but also, for this to be properly set up, by an encounter with an object that is a sufficiently pliable medium, in other words, with an object that can let itself be transformed in accordance with the requirements of the infant's creative process. It is thanks to that good-enough malleability that the mothering environment can fulfil its role as "mirror"; by making itself malleable so as to respond to the infant's internal states and impulses, it can make adjustments to the reflection that gives substance to that narcissistic function.

I am now in a position to attempt to give a metapsychological description of the process of creativity – i.e. to follow, step by step, the various phases and problems that arise in setting it up and allowing it to develop.

### **A metapsychological analysis of the process of creative activity**

For Winnicott, this process originates in the hypothesis of the “theoretical first feed” and early traces of satisfaction. In the light of what we now know about the infant's innate skills, it could be said that he/she is born with some preconception (to use Bion's term) of the objects and encounters that are necessary for his/her development; the infant therefore has from the outset a kind of expectation as regards the primary environment. But that preconception is – to use a word that Winnicott himself very much appreciated – only "potential", and its hallucinatory activation – the way in which the infant begins to "present" to him/herself what is waited-for – must encounter an object sufficiently similar to the one that is expected for the primary found/created process to be set up. Conversely, if indeed the experience is sufficiently satisfying, the potential element will take on an initial shape that depends on what has been found. Here we have to suppose that the preconception is to some extent malleable and that it can adapt itself to what the mother offers, if this is close enough to what her infant needs – in other words, if she is "good-

enough". It is probable, too, that, although initially a significant level of adjustment is required of the maternal environment, with the repetition of such an experience and the infant's ongoing development, he/she becomes able to tolerate a less than perfect degree of adaptation and to do whatever is necessary for there to be a "good-enough" response to what is expected. There is therefore some leeway, some "play" in this process, even though this may be to a limited extent; a certain degree of psychological work is thus demanded of both participants.

One of the distinguishing features of this primary mode of relating is that it is "ruthless", as Winnicott put it. In other words, if it is to unfold properly, the infant should not have to take into account any specific characteristics of the state in which the mother finds herself. That particular aspect of the primary relationship can be understood in several ways. One would be to say that the baby is in an "object-less" state, i.e. the presence of the external object is not acknowledged as such. The infant is therefore "ruthless" because of this non-acknowledgement of the object's existence. I am not sure that this is a correct interpretation of what Winnicott was saying, because it does not seem to correspond to the idea of ruthlessness. I would tend to say that the infant has to encounter a malleable-medium environment that adapts to his/her needs; at birth, the baby does have such a preconception, i.e. that of an object able to put to one side (to sacrifice) its own wishes and states of being. To some extent, for the infant, that is one characteristic of the primary "breast", of the creativity that is reverberated by the primary breast. It is more an encounter with an object that wants to be made use of ruthlessly, one that wants to adapt to the infant's needs. This no doubt has some relationship to what Winnicott called the "pure female" element, which could be seen as a characteristic common to both the feminine and the maternal dimensions.

I spoke earlier of Marion Milner's idea of the "pliable medium", an object that can take on any form or shape since it has no particular one of its own. In my opinion, the logic underlying Winnicott's thinking has as its necessary complement the idea that the primary breast has to be a malleable/pliable medium.

Conversely, primary identification – the basis for the feeling of self-identity, and what Freud saw in the idea "I am the breast" – sets up within the infant a space for creativity built on the introjection of that characteristic of the early encounter with the object, with

the object's "pure female" element, its pure female or "pure maternal" aspect. Primary potential creativity, female element, pliability and malleability of the responses – these combine and link together in the experience of being.

### **Formlessness and creativity**

I would argue that the connection that I have just suggested between several of Winnicott's ideas is justified by what he said about the importance of the feeling of formlessness in the primary relationship with the mothering environment. The experience of the found/created breast does not account for creativity in its entirety; it is simply a starting-point, one that is programmed more or less biologically if my hypothesis about the existence of an innate preconception of a breast that is adapted/adapting to the infant's needs is correct. True creativity implies that the infant can take possession of that primary experience so as to turn it into something that is appropriated, under his/her control, and not seen as a more or less automatic occurrence.

In 1920, Freud emphasized that the psyche must first of all make sure that it controls what it feels; to use a favourite metaphor of his, it has to "tame" what it experiences. He emphasized also the fact that the individual has to have a representation of that tamed experience in order for it to be truly appropriated. In France, André Green insisted on the fact that the moment at which an experience occurs is not the point at which it becomes meaningful.

Winnicott added to the metapsychology of the process of integrating a subjective experience through his fundamental idea according to which the infant has to experiment with formlessness. These situations occur when babies have no internal constraints – they are neither hungry nor tired, there is no threat of an internal need arising, they are not under the pressure of external demands coming from the environment; they can just let themselves be and allow the traces of earlier experiences, the integration of which is so important, to come back inside themselves. Here, formlessness does not imply states in which any form or shape has been lost – situations that have lost all structure and are felt to be chaotic; it is a kind of receptiveness towards what is taking place or coming back into that state of internal relaxation. For such a situation to exist, the mothering environment must be both "containing" and "holding".

For Freud, the initial phase was one of "taming" the experience and the drive-related impulses that are part of it; that "tight grip" on the experience is, however, only a preliminary to the process of appropriation, a condition for its taking place. The infant then has to abandon any control over the experience and represent to him/herself what had earlier been lived through; in this way, the child can "give" it to him/herself and appropriate it more fully. In this second phase, the experience is brought back into play, and symbolization can then emerge thanks to the reflexive processes that this implements. However, that phase is possible only if the infant has some space – receptiveness – for taking in that earlier experience (indeed, all earlier experiences), a space that is sufficiently formless for all of these experiences to be potentially taken in.

I can now link this to what I said earlier concerning the pure feminine element: this formless space is the result of the apperception of the capacity for pliable adjustment characteristic of the mothering environment, the outcome of the encounter between the infant's need to find a tailor-made environment that can adapt to his/her needs and impulses and one that is sufficiently pliable and malleable. Although at the outset the mothering environment must adapt itself almost perfectly to the baby's needs, it is also absolutely necessary for the infant to have some experience of an environment that is not instantly perfect, one that has some tension to it, one in which some effort towards adaptation and adjustment is necessary. The experience of the mothering environment actually endeavouring to adapt is just as important, if not more so, than the outcome itself – in any case, more important than any adaptation that is immediately and "magically" granted to the infant. This is necessary for the experience of potential transformation to be set up, with the idea that a suitable environment can gradually be created. This is a decisive moment in the establishment of hope. As Winnicott often said, once some degree of development has occurred, a "magical" environment is of little use to the infant. There is no contradiction between what Winnicott proposes here and Freud's very important idea of the work of the psyche; for Winnicott, however, that mental work is above all characterized by its "playing" aspect.

That work, in turn, also demands an adjusted/adjusting environment; there must once again be a degree of empathy in the mother with respect to the development of her infant's needs.

### **The capacity to be alone in the presence of the object**

Another fundamental contribution that Winnicott made was his introduction of the idea that, between presence and absence, there lies an intermediate phase, one that is essential for the development of creativity.

As I pointed out earlier, the experience of formlessness is not one of disorganization or of chaos. If formlessness is to be experienced from the very outset in a positive manner, this can happen only in the presence of the object, i.e. with the help of the security guaranteed by the presence of the mothering environment. In Freud's famous description of the little boy playing with the reel, the child's grandfather was present and paying close attention to the boy's throwing the reel and pulling it back – but without intervening actively in the play itself. That play was "addressed" to him, but it took place with the little boy being "alone in his presence". This is a situation with which psychoanalysts are very familiar: during a session, the play of free associations takes place "in the presence of the analyst", that presence being a fundamental requirement for the play to occur, even without any direct intervention on the analyst's part.

When infants are playing alone in the presence of the object, they are reproducing in their play some detail or particularity of what they experience in their encounter with the object; their play is about playing with the object while the object itself is present. In this way, infants create the "mother" object within themselves. In their play, there is an internal representation of the object, which becomes the object in their play; from time to time, however, they have to turn towards the object that is actually present, as though to verify the impact produced on the object by playing with their internal representation of that object and the process of appropriation that this implies. In this way, they make sure that the object "survives" the appropriation that is present in their play; this potentially enables the internal representation of the object to be detached from its perception, as long as the object which is present allows this to take place. I shall explore *infra* some issues concerning the survival of the object with respect to the child's mental processes – this was the key question that, in *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott called "the use of an object"; I would all the same like to say a few words about what this "survival" implies in the context of being alone in the presence of the object.

First of all, following on from what I said in the preceding paragraph, the object must allow that experience to take place – in other words, it has to let the infant have some experience of formlessness without intervening or de-cathecting this. The object must also allow the play to be carried out while being present, once again without intervening or de-cathecting that playing. For example, the object – the child's mother, let us say – can read a magazine or, as in Winnicott's famous example, go on with her knitting; she can focus primarily on an activity linked to her own feminine dimension without becoming completely carried away by it or paying no attention whatsoever to her infant, and at the same time without becoming completely absorbed by what he/she is doing.

### **The survival of the object and the dialectics of creativity/destructiveness**

The idea of the "survival" of the object is fundamental to the articulation between creativity and destructiveness in Winnicott's work. Every theory of creativity must take into consideration something to do with the role of destructiveness. In Winnicott's writings, that issue is a crucial one for the process of disillusionment, which itself lies at the heart of the acknowledgement both of dependence and of love.

Once the object is found/created, the infant has an experience of a primary illusion that goes to the very heart of the beginnings of narcissism: the illusion that the object which is in fact "found" externally is the fruit of his/her own internal creation. That illusion is productive in so far as the illusion of creation contributes to the establishment of a nucleus of self-confidence that combines with the infant's trust in life and in the surrounding world, but it is based on an illusion that has gradually to be overcome without the capacity for illusion itself being destroyed in the process. Winnicott described one particular way in which this can come about – the name that I would give to it, by analogy with the experience of found/created, is that of "destroyed/found" or perhaps "destroyed/lost/found".

As I have pointed out, the perfect adaptation of the mothering environment, which is so typical of the earliest days of life, cannot last forever. Although continuing to be "good-enough", it has gradually to give way to a more approximative adjustment that necessarily and inevitably will at times be incomplete.

When this occurs, the infant experiences a kind of failure, a setback that weakens his/her capacity for creative illusion; the impression is that he/she has destroyed this. This in turn gives rise to an experience of despair mingled with helpless rage: an experience of destructiveness. The outcome of that experience depends on the mothering environment's response to the destructive anger that the infant expresses. This is where Winnicott's concept of the "survival of the object" (in the chapter on the use of the object) becomes most meaningful. The object must "survive" the manifestations of destructiveness – in other words, as Winnicott points out, it must not "retaliate" either actively or through some kind of emotional withdrawal. I would add something that seems to me to be implicit in Winnicott's thinking here (because he spoke only of negative characteristics): the object must show that it is still alive, i.e. that it remains creative. To survive does not mean not being touched or affected by what the infant is communicating about his/her distress and helpless anger – it implies maintaining or re-establishing the relationship that existed previously.

If the object survives, the infant has the experience that what was thought to have been destroyed in fact has not been; the object thus lies beyond the infant's omnipotence, it can withstand that omnipotence – the object is another-subject, whose way of being present, whose desires and whose internal impulses are not dependent on the infant even though they have something to do with him/her. Although the object can "mirror" the infant's internal states, it can also break free of that mirroring/mirrored relationship.

At this point, I would like to say something about the discovery of the object. All the work that is at present being done on the early phases of child development shows that the infant very quickly perceives that his/her mother and other people in his primary environment have their own separate existence – there is in fact no "pre-object phase", as was thought at one point to be the case. The issue is not one of "perception" but of "conception"; perceiving the object as separate is not at all the same thing as conceiving of it as "another-subject", i.e. as having its own wishes, experiences and impulses. What is at stake in the experience of the survival of the object does not (indeed cannot, for this would be meaningless) have to do with the perception of the object but with how the object is conceived of. Experience enables the infant to discover that the object is external, external to him/her as a subject; it is therefore – a term that I have devised in order to emphasize

this point – another-subject. Since both of these elements are connected together and emerge through the same movement, it would perhaps be clearer were I to say that conceiving of the object as another-subject implies the conception of the subject also, i.e. the conceiving of oneself-as-subject. Subject and other-subject no doubt both have their roots in the same movement; they are "the subjects of "-- neuroscientists prefer the term "agents" – and arise from situations that are experienced.

Winnicott made a highly significant comment on this when he emphasized that, having gone through the experience of the object surviving his/her destructive anger, the infant becomes capable of a whole new set of subjective processes. The infant, says Winnicott, can distinguish between destroying the object in fantasy and its actual destruction in reality; this enables the infant to realize that he/she can be the subject of some internal momentum or other that is quite different from its external effect. In this way, conceptual categories can begin to be constructed, thereby making perceptions, sensoriality and even drive-related activity meaningful.

Another major consequence that Winnicott noted was the emergence of love as such. His way of describing this movement, in *Playing and Reality*, is worth quoting in full:

‘Hullo object!’ ‘I destroyed you.’ ‘I love you.’ ‘You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you.’ ‘While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) fantasy.’ Here fantasy begins for the individual.

As we can see, it is the individual's entire topographical structure that depends on being able, in a good-enough way, to have the experience that I call destroyed/lost/found (or found again).

That experience also has a significant impact on several aspects of creativity. First of all, primary creativity was "automatic" in the sense that it was not the work of any individual/subject acknowledged as such; it was experienced, but its basis lay in an illusion. Once the self-as-subject and another-subject have emerged, creativity becomes "purposeful"; it can be carried along by drive-related impulses that are "subjectivized", and matters relating to the introjection of the creative process can thereupon be explored.

## **Creativity and creation**

Creativity is not creation; creativity is a potentiality, while creation implies the actual production of something. Creativity implies some aptitude for creation, an aptitude that is supported by a facilitating environment; creation implies the implementation of a process of creating that requires a structured ego, one that becomes structured through the mobilization of the drive-related energy required by what is being undertaken.

That said, creation should not be thought of as being completely independent of the environment, which is and will remain a vital element for the individual throughout a significant part of the development of introjection and structuring of the drives. Between creativity and creation Winnicott set up some intermediate forms that I shall mention in these final paragraphs. There are two domains in which creativity opens on to a kind of creation: that of dreams and that of play.

In so far as dreams give some shape, "materialized" by the hallucinatory process, to psychical processes, creativity and the subjective appropriation that it includes as a potentiality are to some degree actualized when dreaming takes place. As Freud never failed to point out, dreams are "work", a work of creation, one that calls upon the putting into practice of a series of processes that have to do with primary symbolization. Dreams bring about a movement in which the raw psychical material described by Freud becomes a scenario and takes on a poetical and rhetorical value expressed through the dream (in the widest sense), involving a relatively-organized construction that can be narrated to another-subject and have some effect on him/her. Dreams act not only upon the dreamer but also upon the person to whom they are addressed; that is why, in Winnicott's view, dreams lie on the side of reality.

Play also offers the creative potential a kind of realization when it is played out, represented or "materialized" in the "*objets*"/objects it makes use of; this depends also on the individual including the idea of giving shape to a part of his/her raw psychical material which requires some degree of symbolization and integration.

There are therefore three scenarios involving creativity that emerge in Winnicott's work. The first emphasizes creativity in its relationship with objects becoming other-subjects – this depends to a considerable extent on the responses of the objects involved, and no doubt influences the quality of the other two scenarios. The second is playing

"alone in the presence of the object", which begins to break free of the impact of the object's response as long as the process of play is sufficiently adhered to by the object. The third is that of the dream stage, which, in its construction, is completely free of objects/other-subjects – its umbilicus, however, requires that it be taken up again in a relationship with another person.