

BETWEEN COMFORT AND DISILLUSIONMENT

Becoming a Self at Play

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Psychoanalysis tells a particular story about the development of a self: the psychoanalytic self is formed in a crucible of anxiety, sexuality, and fantasy, in and through an originary and absolute state of dependence and vulnerability. Building on this narrative, this paper develops an instructive parallel between the formation of subjectivity in early infancy and the development of subjectivity in education, conceived of here as both an institution and a human condition. In other words, education, inflected psychoanalytically, is an experience that hearkens back to infancy. To this end, this paper sets out from two broad research questions: why might education look back to infancy, and how might a psychoanalytic theory of human development open into a theory of developing pedagogy? Keeping an eye on describing how psychoanalysis might meaningfully inhabit the scenes of teaching and learning, my argument is that the psychoanalytic self offers insight into the dynamics of pedagogical relations, the development of pedagogy, and the development of the educational subject.

I will focus here on the theoretical contributions of one psychoanalyst in particular: D. W. Winnicott. Specifically, I investigate the ways in which Winnicott describes the materialization of the self within broader developmental processes, which are animated by inter-dependence, integration, and differentiation—processes that from the earliest moments of life include both a social relationship and a facilitating environment. For the sake of clarity, I will mention here that psychoanalytic theory makes an important distinction between the self and the ego; the “self” refers to the subject of organizational and integrative mechanisms in the psyche, whereas the “ego” refers to the organising mechanism itself of psychic processes in the mind. That is, *the self is the subject who comes to feel integrated and whole*, whereas *the ego is the psychic*

organisation of the self. This paper will treat self and ego together, following Winnicott's own theoretical model. The proximity of these concepts in the present discussion is not meant to suggest that they are interchangeable, but rather simply to emphasize a conceptual variability in the representation of what are essentially correlative, inter-animating, and continuous points of reference in the development of the individual subject.

I will mention two further points here in order to signal the logical and methodological orientation of the following paper. First, at the crux of both my argument and the intellectual point of convergence between psychoanalysis and pedagogy is the developmental paradox Winnicott develops in *Playing and Reality*:¹ during the development of the self in early infancy, the infant—not yet differentiated from its relational position amidst parental and environmental provisions—must *simultaneously* both *discover* and *create* the object of its desire. In addition, as Winnicott notes, the parent must never ask the infant to resolve the question as to whether the object itself was *found* or *created*. My suggestion here is that this paradox reveals an essential element linking psychoanalytic theory to pedagogical practice, an element that offers a means for how education might begin to rethink, rather than resolve, the emotional situations of teaching and learning. Later, this paradox will lead us into a theory of play, and provide a scene for making explicit the role and value of two further concepts, which serve as experiential signposts within experiences of teaching and learning.

The second anticipatory remark I will make concerns methodology. Throughout the paper I draw several comparisons between Winnicott's theory of the development of the self and certain phenomenological articulations that treat a similar subject matter. My aim in this is not to distract from the details of Winnicott's work, but to suggest ways we might open our thinking about selfhood to significations outside psychoanalytic theory. My purpose is to disrupt the common assumption that psychoanalysis offers a *world-view*, and to contribute instead to the characterisation of psychoanalysis as a *style of thinking*. We will find repetitions, and therefore necessarily also differences, between Winnicott's developmental schema and Jean-Paul Sartre's and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's schemas. Whatever else they might signify, these repetitions remind us that there is something universal about the subject of the self, something always-already prior to any theoretical

1 D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock, 1971).

lens we might employ to bring it into view. In this sense phenomenological echoes of psychoanalytic theory will also structure how I envision education, which might be said to betray its most revealing symptoms not in its institutional form but as part of the human condition, constituted in the early and most vulnerable stages of human development.

Education and human development will therefore be treated together here as unresolved theoretical projects raising problems of reference, and I will draw on theories of the mind, to the self and ego, to the acquisition of language, to object relations, etc. In so doing I will alternate between describing an educational environment that comforts and one that also disillusion, and that if all goes well, might also re-illusion. The word “illusion” derives from the Latin *ludere*, meaning play, and so doubles as an etymological root for the theory of play that will round out my discussion. With an eye to this and to its various other associations, this paper carefully examines the realities and fantasies of selfhood within Winnicott’s work in the interest, not only of tracing an image of the self that is satisfactorily profound and recognisable (yet still enigmatic and incomplete), but also of speculating in what ways this psychoanalytic conception of selfhood—along with the developmental paradox—might articulate a theory of play as a pedagogical object. The self, as Winnicott beautifully describes, hazards its first tentative bid at realization from the sensation of being held together by an environment of good-enough provisions. From this claim concerning selfhood we might begin to conceive of teaching and learning less as a question of tolerating the privacy of knowledge’s impressions upon singular consciousnesses, and more as a question of how individuals are held together—and also come apart—in educational environments. The question is also one concerning how individuals learn to live creatively together, and to play, after all, with others. Play, finally, will be our most illustrious means, as teachers and learners, of conceiving of a world that must be felt as intractably and unremittingly shared in order to be objectively perceived.

Theory in pursuit of self

Winnicott begins his story of the development of the self with the suggestion that “*I am* means nothing unless *I* at the beginning *am along with*

another human being who has not yet been differentiated off.”² He claims elsewhere, in this line, “there is no such thing as a baby.”³ At the earliest stages of life, the concept of the self carries little in the way of existential substance. Between infant and parent there is the kind of relating that not only calls into question the stringency of the division between them, but one that also places the world in and within the vicissitudes of subject formation. Self, Other, and environment circulate, for Winnicott, between and on either end of the infant’s first instinctual explorations. The presumed centre of this scene, what will later be known as the self, is therefore in the baby constantly displaced. Or rather, and more basically, the centre is precisely that imperceptible displacement that might be referred to as growth, or perhaps even as education—the first stirrings of integrational intentionality.

The psyche becomes the seat of the self but begins, in Winnicott’s developmental narrative, “as an imaginative elaboration of physical functioning, having as its most important duty the binding together of past experiences, potentialities, and the present moment of awareness, and expectancy for the future.”⁴ Body becomes psyche in the imagination of the infant, and these imaginative fantasies inaugurate the life of the mind. It is through the exploration of these fantasies, says Winnicott, that “the self comes into existence.”⁵ The body is held together by the parent’s touch and is extended in space and time by the infant’s fantasies, which issue from the earliest sensations of inner life toward what will eventually be called external reality. In the beginning, these fantasies concern the feeling of dwelling, gathered in a body that is held. But rapidly, as Winnicott observes, the baby’s fantastical ideas become more consuming, pervading its environment. The baby feels anxiety over a world that might be lost, or destroyed, if its needs are not met. These fantasies are the psychical representatives of what Winnicott, following Melanie Klein, calls original aggression. It is this aggression that gives rise to both love and hate, coming from the outside in and from the inside out. We might hypothesize that the ambivalence of this early scene conditions the very dynamics of learning, in its broadest

2 D. W. Winnicott, *Winnicott on the Child* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2009), 17.

3 D.W. Winnicott, *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* (Harmondsworth, Eng: Penguin Books, 1964), 88.

4 D. W. Winnicott, *Human Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1988), 18.

5 *Ibid.*

and most universal sense. The infant learns simultaneously of and from its existence, learning to take itself as the object of its own thinking at the same time that it learns to feel that everything, world and existence, are at stake in its learning anything at all. Indeed, love and hate might be said to found the educational subject. Deborah Britzman, introducing Freud to educational theory, compares the nature of subjectivity in family and in school life, “where we love before we learn and learn before we understand.”⁶ From what Winnicott describes as the feeling of falling forever, of destroying the world and of consuming what is loved for the sake of loving, the infant’s capacity for imagining an outside beyond its bodily limits is the fundamental condition for the development of the self, and may also be the prototype for the emotional situation of becoming a subject who learns.

There is here a correspondence between Winnicott’s speculations and certain claims made by Jean-Paul Sartre in his own book on the nature of the ego in relation to consciousness. There, Sartre asserts: “the ego is neither formally nor materially in consciousness: it is outside, in the world. It is a being of the world, like the ego of another.”⁷ For Winnicott, the ego will through natural human development be securely fastened to the structural interiority of the individual, but the notion—that the ego be found outside in the world, accessible as the ego of another—resembles his theory of how self and ego are built up in the first place. Sartre’s assertion points us toward another of Winnicott’s important concepts: the transitional object. The transitional object is an object that the infant feels to be at the same time both “me” and “not-me,” an object that nourishes ego differentiation. The infant takes the subjective object (for instance, the breast) for itself, and imagines the object as an extension of her embodied instincts. The subjective object is a transitional phenomenon; it marks a point of departure from infancy, one that grounds the formation of the ego, inaugurates thinking, and impels the coming into existence of the self. Thus the notion of the transitional object seems already to carry a certain pedagogical sway. Further, we might ask: does the transitional dynamic Winnicott describes condition the affective tenor of those educational objects (novels, textbooks, essays, lectures, etc.) of which the self must make elaborate use later in the course of its development?

6 Deborah P. Britzman, *Freud and Education* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 82.

7 Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), 31.

In this way, Sartre's view of the ego as of the outside world is the primordial fantasy the child must have in order to take its ego inside itself, in order to think itself thinking in the first place. The ego itself, as organizational phenomenon, is part and parcel of the transitional exchange through which Winnicott imagines the debut of the self. Differentiation between self and other is here for the infant a matter of creative imagining, of the fantasy of being something more than a psyche dwelling in a body or a ghost in a machine. This is Winnicott's contention—a paradox that we must accept rather than resolve: the self comes to selfhood from an outside that it must take inside itself. This claim is comparable to the relationship we come to expect between teachers and learners. The educational subject must similarly relate to pedagogical material, imagining a self that participates in the construction not only of knowledge and ideas, but of the world itself as well, of external reality as something knowable. My suggestion is that we take this parallel as more than a convenient metaphorical or phenomenological repetition, that we recognize it as a fundamental and structural feature of how the self relates to its own learning, and, further still, to its learning alongside others.

Experiences in learning, then, are particularly reminiscent of our earliest encounters with the unknown in infancy, and of the immense value, at the start of life, of our imaginative capacity. Winnicott speculates that there is something particularly generative for selfhood “when the psyche and the body have the same places in space, so that the limiting membrane is not only metaphorically a limit to the psyche, but also it is the skin of the body.”⁸ The infant *is* its skin, and at the same time it is the skin it has discovered in being held by the parent. The inside of the child literally leans over against its environment. Winnicott here deftly gestures toward the philosophical problem at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, where “the problem of the world and, to begin with, that of one's own body, consists in the fact that it is *all there*.”⁹

The sense of self, then, “comes on the basis of an unintegrated state.”¹⁰ But the “all there” that is a problem for both infant and world is not simply a matter of the extension of the body, it is also a matter of its

8 D. W. Winnicott, *Deprivation and Delinquency* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 164.

9 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 230.

10 Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 61.

reflection. In Winnicott's theoretical system the infant's transitional state is "lost unless observed and mirrored back by someone who is trusted and who justifies trust and meets the dependence."¹¹ The problem of the world is that for the infant it is at a certain point *both* "me" and "not-me" and will, while remaining always there, begin to fail in its ability to meet the infant's needs. By trust, then, Winnicott here refers to the good-enough provisions of an environment that meet enough of the infant's first instinctual strivings to provide it with the sense that the world has survived its earliest aggressive urges. This, of course, also means *failing to meet enough* of the infant's needs so as to help disillusion its omnipotent fantasies, initiating the separation of some of the "me" aspects of world and body from the "not me" aspects. This way the infant can also learn to feel that it survives changes in its environment.

The parallel between psychoanalysis and pedagogy can here be re-emphasized. Engendering a "sense of trust" similar to the one Winnicott assigns at the constitution of selfhood might be projected among the responsibilities appointed to education, where a student might equally be encouraged to learn to distinguish between those changes that do and those that do not threaten the existential integrity of the self. For instance, a student who learns to enact enough separation between herself and the essay she produces such that criticism of the latter does not so deeply become criticism of the former might be said to trust the educational environment into which she has committed her ideas. In other words, trust, in teaching and learning, as it was first in early infancy, is a relationship centered around the limits between self and other, conditioned at the threshold between the comforting and disillusioning of one's (social) environment.

Sounding surprisingly phenomenological, Winnicott proposes that the infant sees itself in the face of the parent, and that it is in this reflection that the infant begins to have a self. "What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother's face?" asks Winnicott. "I am suggesting," he answers, "what the baby sees is himself or herself."¹² Echoing Sartre's theory of being, which makes use of a similar specular turn, Winnicott holds that "being seen is at the basis of creative looking."¹³ In the face of the parent

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 112.

13 Ibid., 114.

the infant identifies a self, and then sets out on the royal road to integration; which is to say, it begins to distinguish between what is subjectively felt and what is objectively perceived. The other, at this early stage, is a trajectory upon which selfhood also appears, a trajectory that leads the subject to objects that might begin to be differentiated off. In psychoanalytic theory, it is precisely upon this ambivalent trajectory that the ego's development and the development of a sense of self begin. Freud summarizes the nature of these reversals: "there is no difference in principle between an instinct turning from an object to the ego and its turning from the ego to an object."¹⁴ It is the turning that makes the self. We might also include education in this fundamental intersubjectivity: turning between "me" and "not-me" might well be what makes, and also breaks, the educational subject.

The self in psychoanalysis lingers in these recourses between integration and intersubjectivity, fantasy and external reality, the comforting of what is created and the disillusioning of what is found. Education reanimates the affective intelligibility of these earliest encounters between what is subjectively conceived and what is objectively perceived. We might here reiterate Winnicott's paradox: "the paradox is that the environment is part of the infant and at the same time it isn't[...]. We know that we won't ask the baby, 'Did you create that object or did you find it?' because we know that the two things are true and that he wouldn't have created it if it hadn't been there."¹⁵ For Winnicott, this paradox has "importance to the whole of object-relating where objects can be seen creatively."¹⁶ It is a question of creativity, and of how pedagogy might begin to conceive its own development as inextricably linked to the development not just of its subject matter, but of its subjects too.

If we are tempted to describe the self as something that comes together in and through a distinctly human development, psychoanalysis proposes that we first accept the reality of a self that comes apart, and that "comes" precisely from having been apart, literally from having been parts. Melanie Klein makes much of the split-off aspects of the subject and its objects. She contends, "the ego builds itself up from the beginning of post-

14 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Bantam Books, 1959), 96.

15 D. W. Winnicott, *Psycho-Analytic Explorations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 580.

16 Ibid.

natal life by its internalized objects; and [...] splitting processes of the ego are bound up with split-off aspects of the object.”¹⁷ The infant internalizes parts of the parent through a feeling of being reflected, in part, by them. And while it would perhaps be going too far to claim that there is an identical process at work in the construction of the educational self, I propose that we are justified in maintaining that the self within pedagogical relations is prescribed by emotional processes that can be treated as qualitatively akin to, and derivative of, those impressed in early infancy.

The most remarkable outcome of the splitting processes of the ego is precisely the self’s sense of being a self—that is, the infant’s sense that something survives its splitting. Here the infant gains the feeling of having postulated the self—imagined imagining. This gain, for Winnicott, requires preceding feelings both of being split and of being reflected in the face of the parent. “Only if reflected back,” he argues, can the subjective object become “part of the organized individual personality.”¹⁸ The reflection of the infant by the face of the parent conditions a human quiddity: to describe the place of ego-life from its genesis is always-already to describe a relation; to describe the awakening of the self to itself is thus always-already to describe a reflection. It is precisely from the vantage point of these two claims that the field of education might begin to look back to infancy.

Self in pursuit of play

By play Winnicott means an individual’s ability to live and experience both the subjective and objective as oscillatory *and* conciliatory; both provide opportunities for self-expression, self-discovery, and encounters with others. In other words, the ability to play reflects an individual’s capacity to be comfortable with both the separation and the conflation of the “me” and “not-me” aspects in the world. Therapy, for Winnicott—and my argument is that this holds true for pedagogy as well—is made possible when two (or more) individuals can play together.

Winnicott notes that in his paradox of human development he is “linking apperception with perception by postulating a historical process (in

17 Melanie Klein, “Narrative of a Child Analysis: The conduct of the psychoanalysis of children as seen in the treatment of a 10 year old boy,” *The International Psycho-Analytical Library* 55 (1961): 1-536.

18 Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 64.

the individual) which depends on being seen.”¹⁹ So, before turning more directly to the concept of play, let us imagine a theoretical frame around the psychoanalytic self: perceived as apperceiving, apperceiving as perceived, held so as to come apart, and in parts so as to come together. Our theoretical frame, then, is a border traced by the other. What we can know about the self is situated in fundamental relief by an originary otherness.

Britzman gestures towards the strangeness of this uncanny intuition—also insisted upon by Emmanuel Levinas²⁰—where knowledge of the self can be made only through a distancing sparked by alterity. She affirms that “somewhere between the tenderness of comforting and the distancing of disillusioning, knowledge of the self and other is made.”²¹ We have already made much of Britzman’s terminology, where comforting and disillusioning have been presented as elemental to both psychoanalysis and education, and in the constitution and development of subjectivity. In a developmental sense, comfort and disillusionment are primary responsibilities of the parent, who is, after all, the obverse side of his or her infant’s selfhood. The question here is, to what extent are these duties appropriately shared by the teacher?

To approach this question, we might examine conflicts in teaching and learning as subsidiaries of the conflicts of infancy, of our developmental beginnings. The pedagogical relation finds teachers and learners at odds, having already loved and lost before either has learned or understood the meaning of these losses, entangled within experiences of the pleasures of reality, the anxieties of fantasy life, and the recuperative possibilities of a desire to know (the other). My argument is that Winnicott’s paradox provides a point of entry, that it offers insight into these conflicts and gives us a way of representing the uneven terrain of intersubjectivity in the development of a self.

In Winnicott’s psychoanalytic narrative of development, comfort and disillusionment become the contours of selfhood and place the other (and an environment of otherness) at the self’s gravitational centre, offering a clue as to what might be an auspicious pedagogical attitude for educa-

19 Ibid., 114.

20 See, for example, Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

21 Deborah P. Britzman, *After Education: Anna Freud, Melanie Klein and Psychoanalytic Histories of Learning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 48.

tional subjectivities. The broader theme I have been signaling, then, is a fundamental and instructive parallel between three meaningful contexts in human life and development: the formation of the subjective self in early infancy, the development of subjectivity in and through something we call education, and the treatment of subjectivity in and through something we call psychoanalysis. These concepts, comfort and disillusionment, reference the facilitating environments of all three contexts, supplying teacher and learner with an insight, and a way to begin thinking the nature of education's conflicts: what is discovered in education always reflects a capacity also to *create* it. In other words, perception invokes at the outset the perceiver's ability to creatively imagine itself as both object and subject, and so, more simply, to live in a way that is playful.

According to Winnicott's developmental temporality, a world that is objectively perceived is a world that is first subjectively conceived, a world that evinces both the subject's creativity and the creativity at the foundation of subjectivity. Creativity here is the play between the "me" and the "not-me," conditioned by trust in an environment that does not attempt to resolve the question of whether its objects, including objects of knowledge, were created or discovered. Play, in other words, exists where the desire to know becomes also a desire for implication in the construction of what is knowable. At stake, then, when it comes to education, is what to make of the relationship between the self's desire to know and its ability to be at play.

To return to Winnicott's self, we have seen that, at least in infancy, "what is desirable is part of the self [...]. It makes an appearance as if created out of the infant's need."²² Knowledge of the self is desirable, firstly, because it is part of an instinctual venture through which the infant meets the subjective object, an object that can be both "me" and "not-me" simultaneously. Knowledge begins for the infant in relation to the meeting of needs and the building of trust in its environment, and includes the feeling that what is needed can be created. This feeling, along with the anxiety of not knowing either the self or the other, and the fear of loss of what is known of both self and other, inaugurate the self's status as an object of knowledge. The desire to know, I am arguing, is a desire for the comfort and disillusionment that are originally indissociable between the vulnerable self and the giving other. That is, learning asks of its teachers and learners

²² Winnicott, *Winnicott on the Child*, 52.

a degree of undifferentiation, a return to the transitional state in which the desire to know began. Supposing that such a degree of undifferentiation contains the capacity for play, it is also a question of envisioning pedagogical practices that linger creatively at the borders between the “me” and “not-me” of educational subjects.

Sartre reformulates the above proposition: “the me seeks, then, to procure the object in order to satisfy its desire. In other words, it is desire [...] which is given as end, and the desired object is the means.”²³ The desired object is imagined so as to be discovered. Key, where development is concerned, is the desire to know, rather than the specificity of what is known. Winnicott’s theory of play also invokes this privileging of the relation over the object itself. In this way, the desire to know provides recourse perpetually back to its own departure. Knowledge of the self is imaginative play that posits a self so as to become a self; it is inherently creative. Without ever arriving, the self is constantly both coming and going. The same is true of the other, and of the otherness of knowledge. My suggestion for education is that we imagine all learning as fundamentally involving the approach and reproach of self and other, and therefore as being a matter of engendering, and then managing, the desire to know. Knowledge itself is creative, and will be created, perpetually and interminably, out of the subject’s desire.

I want to return to Winnicott’s comments about the role of play in psychotherapy, and to suggest here that a similar understanding of play can be productively applied to the realm of pedagogical relations. The aims attributed to psychotherapy should diverge from those associated with pedagogy, but the common point of the treatment of subjectivity, on the one hand, and the development of subjectivity, on the other, is their interest in establishing an environment in which an individual can feel supported enough to come together or come apart in relation to her knowledge of self and/or others. Winnicott writes: “*Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together. The corollary of this is that where playing is not possible then the work done by the therapist is directed towards bringing the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play.*”²⁴ Pedagogy also has to do with people playing together, for learning of any kind is founded upon the capacity for

23 Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 55.

24 Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 38.

play between the “me” and “not-me” aspects of existence. For this reason, it might make sense to concern oneself less with what can be known in and through pedagogical relations, and more with how knowing references the knower’s ability to feel and live creatively. If teaching and learning are actions with actors, selves, and others, then their exchanges are never without multiple affective pasts and wished-for futures, and therefore never without the emotional layering of countless and contradictory reactionary postures. Further, if emotional health might be said to begin with the individual’s ability to play, and if, as I have been arguing following Winnicott, a sense of self is established in the infant’s first imaginative attempts at creative play, then learning too requires an environment in which each self learning to live with others is able to play, with meaning as much as with the comfort of selfhood and the disillusionment of others.

It must be acknowledged that for education these claims devitalize the content of what is learned, that they devalue the explicit subject matter of institutionalized categories of thought; but this is done in favour of an increased preoccupation with the emotional valence of tolerating desire in the first place. This is not to say that one should ignore or deem irrelevant the specificity of certain subject areas, especially in those areas where it is precisely the technique of a craft that is being elaborated. The more modest point I am making here, in proposing that education should look back to infancy, is to insist that learning of any kind involves an emotional relationship enervated by experienced in early infancy, and that the dynamics of learning must be attended to with a sensitivity to development as influenced by affective life.

Winnicott observes that “the precariousness of play belongs to the fact that it is always on the theoretical line between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived.”²⁵ The self, with its desire to know, approaches what is unknown, and in the absence of an ability to play risks succumbing to dangerous feelings of omnipotence, or, at the other extreme, of objectification. To learn, in this context, is a question of recognition, of being able to recognize otherness, which means being able to find a form of expression for one’s formlessness within the abyssal precarity between self and other, between subject and object. To learn also means to be able to create what is found. Winnicott explicitly delineates the implications of play

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

for the self: “It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self.”²⁶ One of the aims of education is the expansion and proliferation of selves, which is to say of others as well, selves and others that are discovered and discoverable by individuals learning to live together. Play, therefore, is necessary for learning. Play orients the self which, like the other, is only a horizon at the vanishing point of a desire to know.

Conclusion

Play guides Winnicott’s arrangement of his therapeutic procedures—play with toys and drawings as much as with words and dreams—and my argument is that pedagogy, too, must arrange itself around these skeletal recommendations, like the skin’s tissues around the appetites of the impressionable self. For Winnicott, therapy affords opportunities for “formless experience, and for creative impulses, motor and sensory...and on the basis of playing is built the whole of man’s [sic] experiential existence.”²⁷ In much the same way, the self develops, not by adding bits of knowledge to a cumulative depository, but by finding itself reflected—formless, creative and vulnerable—in the other—partial, discovered and imagined—and in creating what is found. From here we might begin to imagine pedagogical practices that can also afford opportunities for experiences of formlessness or constructing representations of such experiences, where undifferentiation and re-differentiation, comfort and disillusionment describe or rather reflect the emotional situation of teaching and learning. This situation does not suggest a strategy for forming and maintaining independently sufficient selves, as the neoliberal model might promulgate. Rather, it questions how one might appreciate what is gained and also sometimes lost when individuals are able to play at knowing and not knowing, and to play with others they might wish to know.

Fundamentally, what a psychoanalytic theory of the self offers education is a claim about the specular nature of subjectivity, that selfhood opens a recursive space between the self we discover in the other and the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

one we must create in ourselves. Britzman sees this space signaled in Freud's psychoanalytic theory, where he "tried to allow for the gap between observable phenomena and theoretical constructs because we are more than the sum of our appearances."²⁸ Education, too, might do well to think of itself as more than the sum of its appearances—that is, as accommodating selves, others, and environmental provisions that are not easily standardised precisely because they are difficult to differentiate when teachers and learners are at play.

²⁸ Britzman, *After Education*, 51.