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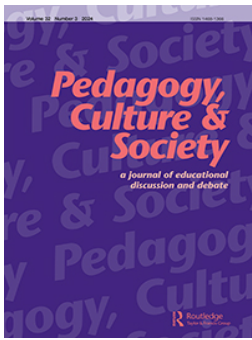
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Troubling and diffracting Winnicott's pioneering approach to playing through Deleuze's ontology for early childhood education

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Troubling and diffracting Winnicott's pioneering approach to playing through Deleuze's ontology for early childhood education

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ABSTRACT

This paper diffracts Deleuze and quantum physics through Winnicott's work to argue for an enrichment to playing. The roots of the play-cognitive hierarchy in Freudian psychoanalysis makes visible that progression and the stages that a child must pass en route to rationality continue to feed educational assumptions that a child must leave playing behind in order to learn. Addressing critiques of Freud's psychosexual theory of child development, I introduce Winnicott's work on playing as creative activity and transitional phenomena which cast playing in a positive light. I then turn to Deleuze's critique of Freud's foundational concepts of child development influenced by Newtonian physics to argue that a Deleuzian concept of energy aligns with quantum physics, which unsettles the binary play-cognition hierarchy. I introduce a vignette to illustrate a rich array of concepts involved in playing that are read through Winnicott. In the final step, I argue that Winnicott's transitional object provides a juncture with Deleuze's concept of the partial/virtual object paving the way to graft an alternative and more processual ontology onto Winnicott's work on playing that acts beside cognitive connections in ways that bring learning alive and liberate teachers to enter less constrained relationships with children.

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Introduction

In the field of early years education, Donald D. Winnicott (1896–1971) and specifically his book 'Playing and Reality' (1971) has been a pioneer for the importance of play in early childhood (S. Alcock 2013, 2017; Arnold 2009). Yet, references to play are scarce in government guidance on the early years curriculum (e.g., DfE 2023). Playing tends to be associated with fun, sensory or embodied connections and subjectivity. Learning tends to be associated with work, cognitive connections and objectivity. In the early years, play is generally considered good in and of itself, yet there is an expectation that it will become more purposeful as children get older and later becomes a reward for succeeding in formal learning and is often viewed as time-out. While 'Playing and Exploring' is one of the

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three modes of early learning, in the early years foundation stage in England (EYFS) it continues to be seen as inferior to the development of a child's critical and rational thinking. This hierarchy is still deeply embedded in EYFS guidance documents (Wood 2020).

Winnicott's work is also referenced by educators in relation to the role of teachers such as his insistence on consistency, being actively present and being kind (Stearns 2016). Currently professional burnout and attrition are urgent problems for the teaching profession yet early years practitioners are expected to be unerringly caring in ways that are not expected of teachers of older students. Winnicott directly addressed teachers by pointing out that although they are not their students' mothers, they are required to show elements of maternal care.

In this paper I start by investigating the roots of the play-cognitive hierarchy in the psychoanalytical canon inherited from Freud. This representation of progression and the stages that a child has to successfully negotiate *en route* to rationality continue to feed the educational assumption that a child has to leave playing behind in order to learn. Next, I point to some of the many critiques that trouble Freud's psychosexual theory of child development. Then I introduce Winnicott's work on playing as creative activity and his innovative concepts of transitional phenomena which cast playing in a positive light while acknowledging Winnicott's debt to Melanie Klein's Object Relations theory. I then turn to Deleuze's critique of Freud's foundational concepts of child development influenced by Newtonian physics to introduce the argument that a Deleuzian concept of energy aligns with quantum physics which unsettles the binary play-cognition hierarchy. I then introduce a vignette, 'The loose parts play area' that illustrates a rich array of concepts involved in playing that are then read through concepts from Winnicott and Deleuze. In the final step, I argue that Winnicott's transitional object provides a juncture with Deleuze's concept of the partial object paving the way to graft an alternative and more processual ontology onto Winnicott's work on playing. An enriched notion of playing, as the forging of a multiplicity of connections, can support teachers to get beyond the playing-cognition hierarchy and widen understandings of children's challenging behaviours. Playing can be seen to work beside cognitive connections in ways that bring learning alive and hopefully liberate teachers to enter into less constrained relationships with children to enhance learning.

The troubled history of the concept of playing

Within a Freudian framework playing comes out badly, associated with a range of negative connotations such as illusion, subjectivity, the unconscious and hence, the unruly. In contrast, Winnicott's theory associates playing with creativity and inventiveness. In this section I suggest how playing came to be seen as a developmental stage that has to be suppressed before learning can take place. A staged theory of child development rooted in Freud is an extremely influential model that is difficult to dislodge from mainstream thinking (Wood 2020). Winnicott's psychoanalytical account of development retains some elements of Freud's staged theory although he deviated from Freud significantly, informed by his clinical work with children and Melanie Klein's Object Relations approach, which modified and nuanced Freud's theory. The intention of this section is to introduce some of the metaphorical language that Freud drew on as he invented his

theory of psychoanalysis and specifically that of Newtonian physics. Next, I outline how Newtonian physics gave Freud concepts to devise his model of psychic functioning.

Freud trained as a medical doctor specialising in neurology and was highly influenced by 19th century Newtonian physics. Isaac Newton imagined the universe was a well-oiled machine that obeyed laws. He believed that physics could discover those laws. In the spirit of scientific enquiry, Freud set out to discover the laws of the nervous system with a view to explaining how the self emerges without recourse to something outside the system such as Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am). The Cartesian model of the self as rational, bounded and autonomous relies on a *cogito* that is made up of active matter that controls the inert, organic matter of the body. In effect, the mind was considered to be alive; the active agent or engine that drove the mechanics of the bodily systems. In contrast, Freud wanted to explain how the body functions without recourse to an external agent, such as the *cogito*.

Thinking with Newtonian physics Freud imagined the nervous system as a closed system, which obeys laws such as thermodynamics. As in a Newtonian model, energy is preserved but can be transformed from one state to another, such as when heat is added to water, the extra energy transforms water into steam. Freud's first law contends that the main driving force of the psychic system is to maximise pleasure. It should be recognised that later Freud modified the pleasure principle recognising that it was inadequate and developed a counter principle called the death drive. However, aspects of the pleasure principle remained. For example, Freud argued that when infants play with their body parts, such as placing fingers, thumbs and knuckles into their mouths, they are stimulating themselves to feel pleasure. These movements create energy, libidinal energy, which later Freud characterised as sexual energy. When libidinal energy increases in the body through, for example, stimulating the mouth, the excess has to go somewhere. With the notion of the body as a closed system, Freud maintained that unconscious libidinal energy could be transformed into consciousness via representations and specifically words. Words belong to language and languages are viewed as objective as they belong to the external world. This aligns with a much older model of the human as having an unceasing desire for pleasure which has to be curbed in order to accept the rule of law. Accordingly, desire was seen as excessive sexual energy in need of control. The process from unconscious to conscious, characterised as a transformation from subjective illusion to objective reality, underpins the view that playing is largely an unconscious, subjective activity that has to be transformed into conscious, rational thinking. In this model learning is about mastering desire. In turn, playing, associated with a lack of control, has to be transformed into rational thought to foster learning.

According to Freud the child finds pleasure in different ways across phases of development; first through oral stimulation such as sucking and putting the fingers in the mouth and then through the anal, phallic, latency, and genital orientations. If a child does not successfully transform libidinal pleasure through the reality principle, then the child can get stuck with unresolved tensions that present as perverse behaviours later in life. For Freud, the pleasure principle comes first and the infant's life is dominated by the instinctive desire to maximise pleasure. The reality principle comes later and is the ability of the mind to accept that an external world exists separate from, and outside, the self and brings the ability to act in accordance with the rule of law. Educationalists who are suspicious of playing are perhaps still being influenced by a staged view of development

in which pleasure and reality are oppositional and incompatible states. This kind of thinking extends to other binaries such as illusion or reality, internal or external, subjectivity or objectivity and by extension playing or learning. Winnicott, however, did not accept this binary view and later I describe his transitional phenomena, which introduced an intermediary space in which illusion and reality co-exist. In the next section I briefly touch on some of the criticisms levelled at Freud's theory of development.

Troubling the Freudian representation of child development

Most criticisms of Freud revolve around his model of the human person that reflects a bourgeois, white Western man dominated by rationality. Feminist scholars have been troubling this and the normalising of heterosexuality that this model entails (e.g., Swartz 2019). One of Freud's most controversial laws is the Oedipal complex related to the phallic phase when the child is said to be obsessed by genital body parts. Up to this phase a child has what Freud termed 'polymorphous perversity' – a non-specific sexual identity. During the phallic phase, libidinal energy focuses on fantasies about relationships with the parents. As in the Oedipal myth, the boy imagines sleeping with the mother and then has to confront the disciplining authority of the father. A successful resolution enables the boy to dis-identify with the mother and adopt a male sexual identity. This leaves girls with a problem. Girls cannot fully dis-identify from the parent because they share similarities with the mother. Accordingly, women and girls are reduced to a 'series of naturalised, unconscious, defensive and damaging bourgeois myths about the nature of femininity' (Austin 2005, 203). Black scholars have called this model of the human a colonial project which ensures that different groups are hierarchised and treated differently (Wynter, cited in McKittrick 2015). To colonise a space, an institution has to construct the colonised as less than fully human and psychoanalysis lends terms to imagine the colonised as primitive, childlike, exotic or sexually promiscuous.

This bourgeois myth lingers in Winnicott's work, which adheres to Freud's Oedipal complex and systems of instinctive forces. Feminists have argued that Winnicott is over optimistic about the mother's capacity for maternal care, although his thinking on this is complex. He attends to feelings of aggression, although arguably downplaying women's needs in favour of emphasising their capacity for 'attachment, bonding and nurturing' (Walkerline 1990, 73). Winnicott's emphasis on the specific features of maternal care does little to challenge early years education as a feminine realm.

Nonetheless, I value Winnicott's work for rescuing the concept of playing from the negative connotations inherited from Freud. Building on Melanie Klein's Object Relations theory and her more complex account of development, he expanded the concept of a transitional object and introduced an intermediate space in which the self is not an entirely closed system. I next go on to describe Winnicott's transitional phenomena.

Playing reimagined by Winnicott

Winnicott did not fully accept Freud's account of the transformation of energy and, influenced by Klein, he created a more complex picture of child development and the role of playing in this. Like Freud, Klein and Winnicott note that new-born infants soon use fists, fingers and thumbs to stimulate themselves (Winnicott 1971, 1). Klein

paid attention to the role of the mother in the developmental process. A good-enough mother starts off with an almost complete adaptation to the infant's needs, providing food, warmth and comfort as if by magic from the perspective of the infant. Klein took Freud's work on instincts such as the instinct to seek pleasure, to argue that the infant has a preconscious, internal object of, for example, the pattern of the experience that has been encountered previously, such as the maternal breast. Her concept of an internal object did not exist in Freud's theory (Odgen 1992). The child does not have a concept of the breast at this point, yet can recognise when it is encountered, as it is familiar and part of the infant's 'psychological deep structure' (Odgen 1992, 119). This adaptation gives the infant an illusion of omnipotence, for example, that the breast appears exactly when the infant needs it. If the mother is well enough attuned to the infant's need the breast is given before need turns to desire. Feelings of frustration can often lead to the infant fighting the mother for failing to provide instant gratification.

Winnicott suggests that the child's ability to conjure the maternal breast is a kind of creativity. He argued that the infant-mother pair takes part in a process of weaning (Odgen 1992). It is the mother's task to gradually 'disillusion the infant' (Winnicott 1971, 15) of her or his sense of omnipotence. The adaptation is removed progressively such that the breast appears when convenient to the mother. If the timing is right, the infant comes to conjure the image or shape of the mother's presence just as the need arises. There is a transition from hallucination to a more complex object with elements of fantasy and reality, referred to as a transitional object. This transitional experience builds the basis for being able to tolerate reality.

The difference between Klein and Winnicott is that Klein rooted internal objects in the biological substrate of instinct, while Winnicott created a new area of experience that spanned body and environment – a potential space between the mother and the infant. Winnicott attributed new qualities of experiences to this space to create a psychic matrix that could not have arisen either from instinct or the environment alone. Sally Swartz suggests that the infant's 'full throated demand' when expressed also 'embodies a vigorous act of trust' (2019, 7). It is usually the mother who is expected to maintain the infant's trust through her constant presence. Trust and the intermediate space is where 'strong feeling has both to be contained and kept alive' (Swartz 2019, 8). Winnicott argued that relief from the strain of working out what is illusion and reality comes in the form of a 'neutral area of experience' (Winnicott 1971, 16). Winnicott's psychic matrix challenges binary thinking by introducing transitional phenomena that are neither internal nor external and the intermediate space provides the potential for inventive and creative activities, which he calls playing.

Next, I explore how Deleuze challenged Freud's concepts of the unconscious and the conscious. He dismantles the idea of the body as a closed system and shifts the focus from subjects and objects to dynamic forces in alignment with quantum physics. I argue that this move is required to fully realise the dynamic and creative aspect of playing introduced by Winnicott.

Deleuze troubles Freud's unconscious

In his early book 'Difference and Repetition', Deleuze (1994) engaged closely with Freud's theory. Deleuze argued that because Kant's philosophy and specifically his distinction

between passive and active synthesis inspired Freud's concepts of the unconscious and the conscious, this was a fruitful place to launch his critique. What follows is a simplified version of a more complex analysis (see Somers-Hall 2017).

Freud invoked Kant's distinction between passive and active synthesis to refer to unconscious and conscious connections respectively. One way to understand passive synthesis is to imagine how animals navigate their territories, sense danger and survive without conscious thought. In contrast, active synthesis requires an act of judgement and the intervention of cognition. Kant described active synthesis as:

The act of putting different representations together, and grasping what is manifold in them in one cognition. (Kant 1929: A77/B103, cited in Somers-Hall, 315)

Active synthesis presupposes a subject or mind to undertake the synthesis. Deleuze argues that there cannot be a pleasure principle or a reality principle that acts on corporeal matter because the 'acting on' would require something not found inside the human. He uses an example of an animal seeking water to dismantle Freud's theory of drives. According to Freud the animal's thirst is driven by the pleasure principle (to not be thirsty) and this directs actions to find water. Deleuze says this is wrong. He says the thirst does not drive the search for water, but that the feeling of thirst is a sensation that happens to accompany the instinct to find water.

The signs by which an animal senses the presence of water do not resemble the elements which its thirsty organisms lack. (Deleuze 1994, 97)

So, the conscious (active) feeling of thirst is not the same as the animal's ability to sense water. At a primary level, animals undertake passive synthesis instinctively or unconsciously. At the same time the animal may register a feeling of thirst. The doing and the feeling belong to two separate orders, each of which belongs to a different sphere of functioning. There is no part of the self that actively *causes* the search for water. Animals are equipped with instincts that make them able to navigate their environments without going through cognition. In a philosophically complex way, Deleuze suggests that there are instead multiple being/environment entanglements. In place of a drive, he instates a teaming multiplicity of ways of being fused with a multiplicity of environments and the fusions are passive syntheses in Kant's terms. Being and feeling operate in *different* universes and each universe functions according to its own logic. Accordingly, there is no object or environment that is stable across time. He invokes Henri Bergson's theory of time to suggest that the 'lived present constitutes a past and a future in time' (Deleuze 1994, 96–97). He imagines the human cell as an organism that encompasses a kind of repetition of the past that becomes sediment in its structure. Cellular heredity (Deleuze 1994, 97) means that humans retain traces of the past and anticipate the future as a primary vital sensibility before or without the need for representational memory or cognition.

Instead of the body represented as a closed Newtonian system with pressures and compartments, Deleuze imagines the body as an ecology of multiple systems with traffic flowing between organs that have layers of semi-permeable membrane that enable connections between insides and outsides. The saying 'we are what we eat' captures the sense of the environment as a constituent of organic matter. Later, Deleuze (1993) invoked the concept of a fold to overcome the subject-object binary. A fold is a crease in

a material in which the same material is folded over itself. This enables a binding to take place, not by an external agent, but according to the properties already present in the matter. This binding metaphor of self to self creates an affective intensity analogous to excitation such as when fingers touch mouth. The bindings of flesh to flesh and flesh to surface bring with them traces of previous experiences of excitation. These ways of becoming involve affective connections that are non-conscious.

Instead of Freud's Newtonian concept of energy as competing forces of life and death inside a closed system, Deleuze conceives of energy in terms of the body making connections. While Freud placed rationality (active synthesis) above passions, Deleuze reverses this. Passive syntheses are made below conscious awareness as affects. They are not internal objects because they 'exceed the limits of the subject' (Deleuze 1994, 130). They are not external objects because they cannot be perceived from multiple perspectives. For Kant, active syntheses require connections controlled by reason. Yet, Deleuze argues that because conscious connections are dominated by language they come already tainted with Western histories of capitalism and imperialism. Accordingly, conscious connections are in danger of reproducing dominant social norms. In contrast, passive syntheses are subjective and make connections between seemingly incompatible elements giving them the power to create something new.

Next, I introduce a vignette to take a deeper look at playing. It focuses on playing that took place between the headteacher, Mr R and a seven-year-old boy, Suraj in the 'loose parts play area' in a primary school.

Vignette: the loose parts play area

The school was an exceptional primary school in Australia where the author had undertaken fieldwork (note 1). It is situated in an area where families live with multiple challenges related to intergenerational poverty. Two loose parts play areas had been created and designed with the children on the school grounds and they accordingly they felt a great sense of ownership towards them. The initial rationale was to address frequent low-level behavioural issues arising at break times. The teachers decided that their children needed a rather more wild and risky form of play than is usually available in urban primary schools. We came to view the loose parts play areas as an intermediate space in which the usual social and school rules were suspended. Below we encounter a teacher, Mr R, who was on break-time duty in the loose parts play area. His account illustrates facets of rationality such as the mixing of fantasy and reality.

'The area had been buzzing for around a year' according to Mr R who wrote:

The Loose Parts Playground is a mad wonderland of discarded junk. Every play-break around kids spill into its freeform jumble of wooden pallets, truck wheel arches, cable reels and miscellaneous other objects. The kids are all intent on continuing or commencing a play/building project. I am still a little terrified about handing over the supervision entirely to others, but there have been no major injuries and the bumps and scratches that do occur usually result in the child deciding to continue with play rather than get a band-aid or ice from the office. (resilience)

One thing that has struck me while sipping my coffee and listening to, and seeing the seriousness of play in Loose Parts, is the fact that we adults don't actually want to be rescuing kids from themselves, we don't, or shouldn't want to be needed by them. This is a space

where we should retreat and almost disappear before their energetic advance. This is not to say that we are without purpose. We are the quiet experts - the teacher who allows some independence by our conscious and careful withdrawal.

Mr R's musings above hint at the capacity to see the other, to experience the other as separate from oneself. He continued:

One morning recently, around 10.30am, I was standing on a small, irregular triangular patch of brown sand between two branches of the tiny playground delta. In ordinary Australian Primary School parlance - I was on duty. But I didn't feel at all military, on-guard or on-patrol. Rather, I felt, if anything, a bit whimsical and honestly quite remote from the play occurring around me; just glad to be out of my office, and looking down like Gulliver on the mini forks in the river, the unfolding, scaled-down, natural reproduction of a river landscape that flowing water always re-creates in dusty sand, and looking up occasionally through the eucalypts to the clear sky.

Children were digging channels, creating dams, even installing underground pipes to divert water to new lakes. Some were building a goodly dam to bust triumphantly when the next bell rang. One student had found a steel pipe that could unclog pipes if rammed up enthusiastically into the recent plumbing. This little worker was in very great demand. 'James, here ... unblock this one!'

I was lost in a muddled reverie - tangled up with my own memory/experience of adventure, nature, and my ever-circling, and aching doubts about the strong, technical shape of education/learning ...

Suraj, aged seven (certified dam buster), laughed in my direction, with his favourite chrome kitchen spatula digging tool in hand.

'What are you doing over there Mr R

'I'm just having a coffee in Mesopotamia Suraj'. I looked back up at the sky and sipped my warm coffee.

'What's Mesopotamia', he asked squintingly, not realising that he was going to get an unwanted lesson in ancient Greek that ended predictably with the very standard etymology of the word Hippopotamus.

'We do live between two rivers don't we?' he responded. 'We don't really live in Mesopotamia though'.

'Nah, its Twin-Rivers' (the local council name ...)

The school bell hoots, the dam is magnificently busted. The children upstream leave after a few shouted reminders from me, but those downstream wait to watch the muddy carnage of sludge descend and engulf all.

A group also gathers outside the lower end of the playground where the pumped water finally exits below the rustic pallet fence and makes its way towards a nearby drainage pit. They follow it, watch it disappear into the nether-world of storm water pipes. They then run urgently down the path ten metres or so to another grate and watch this silent Styx pass by in the under-ground gloom. The water, its wildness and dance with gravity has passed the liminality of the playground and taken play/science/imagination/freedom outside into the wider spaces of the school and perhaps the world.

Being on playground duty provides Mr R with a brief respite from the demanding schedule of running a busy school, which he says, at times, is almost overwhelming. Imagined pleasures of adventure jostled with circling worries. Perhaps Suraj is noticing Mr R's present-absent state? A connection is made across their separate engrossed reveries when Suraj says: 'What are you doing over there Mr R?' Mr R's response perhaps intuitively attunes to the affective tonality of 'over there' when he echoes back 'Mesopotamia' signalling a far-away, exotic, 'Other' place. This seems to spark Suraj's curiosity. An interplay of the whimsical and the real ensues. Mr R admits to rifting off the 'feeling' of the opening exchange to tutor Suraj on the Greek origin of names, including hippopotamus – horse of the river. The exchange seems to be carried along by a shared sense of playful, imaginative flights that emanate from within and outside their fantasy worlds. Perhaps trying to draw Mr R back to his teacherly role, Suraj tilts the affective tonality towards reality with 'We don't live in Mesopotamia'. Mr R concurs – yet points out that they do inhabit a piece of land that happens to be between two rivers. As they crisscross back and forth, they create a shared intimate space where they are at once separate and connected, related yet independent, weaving a dream space between the fantastical and real; Winnicott's 'intermediate area of experience'. So, what holds this space in place? It is not Mr R as he is as much part of the space as Suraj is. The loose parts play area can be read as an intermediate space created by an intricate dance between Mr R and Suraj. They each oscillate between dependency (or connection) and demonstrate the 'capacity to see the other, to experience the other as separate from oneself' (Swartz 2019, 8). Mr R attunes to Suraj's moments of dependency/connection with him and also distances himself. We might see this as an echoing of Winnicott's appropriately timed weaning process between the mother-infant pair.

Winnicott (1971) argued that children only truly play when they feel safe. He insists that playing with transitional objects requires trusting that the ground will hold you, while you let down your guard. Playing requires a kind of openness, a kind of unintegration. This does not mean that playing is conflict free, it means that the environment feels secure enough to be able to lose themselves in make-believe. Yet, playing is always precarious:

The thing about playing is always the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects. This is the precariousness of magic itself, magic that arises in intimacy, in the relationship that is being found to be reliable. (Winnicott 1971, 64)

Winnicott suggests that the infant is free to float through many states of being as there is no hardened sense of a bounded self to interrupt this.

The self is formed and found through 'desultory formless functioning' (Winnicott 1971, 64) – recursive unplanned flow from unintegration through dissociation to relative integration (and back again). (Goldman 2016, 99)

Indeed, the capacity to play requires a normal kind of unintegration and Winnicott suggests that a healthy state of being '*includes the relative freedom from needing to prematurely integrate*' (Goldman 2016, 98 italics in original). It is the capacity to dissolve into the world, to align with it, to grasp it, that provides a sense of aliveness, intensity and agency. This is what Mr R did, as he entered into the loose parts play area and when he

interacted with Suraj. In the next section I suggest that Deleuze's processual ontology can be grafted onto Winnicott's work on playing to enrich it.

Winnicott's transitional object meets Deleuze's partial object

I exploit a juncture between Deleuze's partial object and Winnicott's transitional object to argue that a processual ontology can be grafted onto Winnicott's theory of playing. Drawing on Klein's internal object, Winnicott developed the transitional object, which is neither internal nor external. Deleuze referenced Winnicott's transitional object in his discussion of the 'partial object' (1994, 130). Deleuze argued that passive synthesis involves partial rather than real objects. He outlined the difference between real/actual and partial objects as follows. A real object can be regarded from many perspectives. He uses the example of a house. If the house is real, a person can walk round it, and view it from the sides and the back. The real of a house is perceived both as an ideal and as capable of being viewed from multiple perspectives. This is not how the baby experiences the fingers in the mouth or the mouth on the nipple. In placing the finger in the mouth, the baby is trying to feel again, a pleasurable sensation. The aim is not to create the object, whether that is finger, mouth or mother, but the feeling that accompanied the object, such as a feeling reminiscent of the pleasure of the nipple in mouth. The baby does not experience the thing in her/his mouth as a real object, but only the part that is of interest: a partial object with only one perspective – that which elicits pleasure. Pleasure can be found across a multiplicity of territories yet only belongs to a part of any object that is being appropriated or used. Accordingly, a partial object belongs to a universe in which multiple connections can be made through passive synthesis or affects experienced below conscious awareness. In this theory, pleasure is valued for its ability to make generative connections and not as excess that has to be controlled. Next, I return to the vignette to explore a transitional object as a Deleuzian partial object. I take water, an already fluid phenomena, as a transitional object.

Water as a Winnicottian transitional object and a Deleuzian partial object

Water crosses multiple material and mental boundaries. In the vignette, materially it bursts out of the gullies and pipes built by the children in the loose parts play area, it crosses the play area fence and the school's territorial perimeter and joins the underground sewage system. Mentally it takes both Suraj and Mr R into different worlds of reverie. Mr R uses water to conjure multiple affective tonalities such as excitement, risk, adventure, movement and expansiveness all of which relate to playing. He describes how the water pumped by the children escapes the playground and drains into the nether-world of underground storm water pipes beyond the school grounds.

Winnicott noted that timing was crucial in the mother-infant weaning process. The mother has to withdraw her actual presence only at the point when the child can spontaneously conjure the mental nexus that includes a feel for the mother's presence. Deleuze would refer to this as a refrain that has elements of the unconscious and conscious – perhaps as thought-feelings. Mr R's writing plays with water as an element fused with Suraj who is intensely absorbed through his actions of digging, pumping water and dam building. Digging and pumping involve processes of repetitive action that

generate energy. In pumping Suraj does not seek only water, he repeats an action that may bring multiple sensations and not only pleasure. Deleuze argues that affective states such as soothing, pleasure and distress *accompany* an action, they do not *cause* it. Accordingly, Freud's desire is reworked not as a search for a past that has been lost but as a forward facing arc.

Energy is also alluded to in the flow of water into makeshift pipes laid across the muddy ground. Mr R recognised Suraj's beingness in the term 'certified dam buster'. This is one of a multiplicity of ways that Suraj might be recognised, and it is noteworthy that his teacher (who is also a traveller, one caught in reverie, a worrier) simultaneously sees him as a dam-buster and a student. Mr R and Suraj have more than one identity; they are both plural and are engaged in dynamic actions and thoughts that make multiple connections with water, mud, each other and words. There is the foray into an impromptu Greek language and a history lesson, which illustrates the rich potential of the loose parts play area to intermingle playing with learning.

Winnicott's transitional object and Deleuze's partial object can be found anywhere and entail a multiplicity of possible connections. Deleuze doubles the object into a virtual part that can potentially connect with anything, and a real or actual part that is like the house that can be walked around. Connections between virtual objects are made through affects and feelings that are registered in our bodies as intensities before they can be brought to conscious awareness as emotions such as anger or pleasure. Accordingly, affects can be imagined at casting nets across all manner of matter travelling transversally. Affective resonances may or may not enter our conscious awareness, but they can pass into and through our bodies making us feel a shift in mood. Mr R's description casts water as a net to conjure affects of risk, escape, freedom, creativity and playfulness, within an environment where the adults wait to be invited into children's imaginative spaces.

Enriching playing for early years

I have argued that Winnicott's work on playing is where he distances himself the most from the Freudian psychoanalytical canon and its normative, staged representation of development. Winnicott generated new concepts: potential space and the transitional object. I argue that in the hybrid space between mother and child, Winnicott began to disrupt the binaries such as subject-object, interior-exterior, and mind-body inherited from Freud. I developed the argument by referring to Deleuze's critical engagement with Freud's theory in his book 'Difference and Repetition' that critiqued Freud's formulations of the unconscious and the conscious via Kant's concept of synthesis. Deleuze critiques Freud's model of the human as a closed system and shifts the emphasis from depth to surfaces; that is, from biological structures and instincts to a model of the human as expanding by creating generative connections both inside and beyond the body. Pleasure is valued for its capacity to connect yet is only one of many sensations that bodies register as shifts in intensity. Deleuze does not solve the problem of how the self emerges. Instead, his ontology posits a multiplicity of smaller selves that connect with parts of the environment in ways that both change the world and change the awareness of being in the world. Accordingly, who we feel we are cannot be disentangled from the various environments we encounter and seek out. In his processual ontology, beingness and environment constitute dynamic, interpenetrating milieux.

I have argued that Winnicott's transitional object creates a juncture with Deleuze's partial objects. Deleuze's emphasis on multiple connections enriches Winnicott's notion of playing by inserting a view of development as a body creating increasing and multiple connections with the world, where the world is not separate from the body, but is entangled with it. In processual ontologies, the body can be imagined as an ecology of multiple systems (nervous, endocrine, reproductive, pulmonary, skeletal, muscular and so on). Traffic flows between organs and between inside and outside without our conscious awareness. Bodies are entangled with forces such as gravity, water, light and so much more. I argue that a potential space can exist without the need for an adult to guarantee it, instead a nexus of human and more-than human elements can constitute *potential spaces*. Deleuze created a different model of the self, which implies an alternative account of development and learning that privileges creativity.

An enriched view of learning and playing

By grafting a processual ontology onto Winnicott's concept of playing we can give playing new life and relevance. While humans do not have direct perceptual access to the forces of the quantum universe, they experience waves of intensity running through their bodies as affective connections made below consciousness. When children and humans unconsciously make connections through partial objects, playing is often afoot. Learning, like playing, is about making connections. To bring learning alive requires affective as well as cognitive connections, passive as well as active syntheses. Winnicott's potential or hybrid space of playing enables children and adults to shelter from dominant social expectations and slip into other, more whimsical ways for being where the imagination can take flight. They become engrossed with water, mud, paint, worms, spiders, ropes, pallets and tyres as in the loose parts play area in states that we might call awe and wonder. Teachers are invited to observe children differently and recognise that *holistic* learning requires the kinds of connections that children make while playing. Indeed, as Winnicott advocated, we invite teachers to play with children, as Mr R played with Suraj.

Winnicott's belief in the importance of play for artistic creativity takes on new urgency when read beside Deleuze's concerns with capitalism. Humans, like all living creatures, are at the mercy of natural forces such as floods, dams bursting, extreme weather as well as nature's nurturing influences. We humans are having to shift our sense of who we are: we are no longer the superior species capable of mastering nature but are part of the quantum cosmos, just one post-human fold among the many that occupy a fragile planet. Thinking differently is what might enable us to keep on living, yet this involves a radical re-imagining of human development and learning. Playing just might be a serious business.

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