

Introduction to The Surviving Object by Jan Abram

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WHY WINNICOTT?

...it's only what you create that has meaning for you...

(Winnicott 1968)

Let me begin by offering the reader a short account of why, for me, Winnicott's work has become the most meaningful of all psychoanalytic authors – except perhaps for Freud. Without Freud's work there would be no Winnicott. But it is also true that without Winnicott's dialogue with Melanie Klein very many of his revolutionary concepts may not have evolved. It is the Kleinian development that was taking place alongside Winnicott's evolving theories (1934 - 1971) that both intrigued and frustrated him. Beyond those factors it was inevitably Winnicott's character that led him to use his own language as he delved into the details of clinical work to discover precisely what psychoanalysis meant for him. Unashamedly, in 1945 he starts his paper Primitive Emotional Development by saying that the way he has to work is to gather 'this and that' followed by 'settling down' to clinical work. Subsequently he looks to see what he stole from where.¹ The final outcome, something that perhaps even he did not intend, constitutes a new clinical paradigm for psychoanalysis that both amplifies and extends Freud's work. This was my main argument for the collection of chapters in Donald Winnicott Today (2013). This present collection continues that line of argument in the context of my clinical work.

At the beginning of working psychoanalytically in private practice I joined a one-year course run by The Squiggle Foundation² entitled Original Themes in the Work of Donald Winnicott. Its aim was to explore Winnicott's work over the course of an academic year on 30 Saturdays (11am - 1pm). At 1pm participants were offered a 3-course lunch. It was a convivial and

welcoming atmosphere in which to hear a lecture once a week on Winnicott's themes and writings. The participants were a collection of beginners, like me, and experienced therapists and analysts. Marion Milner, who was in her late 80s at that time, attended every Saturday without fail. After completing one year of the course Nina Farhi who was about to become the director of the Foundation, invited me to join the teaching team. This was the beginning of my study and sojourn with Winnicott. The first lecture I gave was on the concept of Holding. For the next eleven years I was responsible for giving a lecture once a term alongside offering workshops, conferences and creating new courses.³

In those early years of my clinical practice alongside studying and teaching Winnicott's work with Squiggle participants and teachers, I became conscious of two contradictory facts.

Firstly, it was becoming clear to me that Winnicott's contribution to the development of psychoanalytic theory was not just substantial but radical. In the initial part of my research I had not realized the full extent of his originality, but I was increasingly finding Winnicott's distinctive rendering of psychoanalysis deeply resonant.

Secondly, I was puzzled as to why Squiggle had come into being - why was it necessary to have an organization that was set up exclusively to focus on Winnicott's work? It became clear that although Winnicott's reputation was well known in the field of psychoanalysis, it was also apparent that his work was at best underestimated, and at worst, seriously marginalized, and/or misunderstood.⁴ Why was this the case?

In the initial years of working for the Squiggle Foundation it was clear that it was not easy to access Winnicott's concepts, let alone to see a clear picture of his theoretical matrix. I came to attribute this problem to two main reasons - 1 his style of writing and 2 the way in which his books had been published.

Winnicott's writing style

Winnicott's independent way of thinking was intensified by his disillusionment throughout the Controversial Discussions.⁵ His paper 'Primitive Emotional Development' of 1945 marks the beginning of his concerted effort to form his own ideas from his clinical experience.⁶ His deliberate use of the English vernacular interspersed with the technical language of Freudian and Kleinian psychoanalysis, can lend itself to misunderstanding and even confusion as to the meaning of the texts. In addition, Winnicott's spontaneous, conversational style⁷ (that was freer in his later work and when addressing a non-psychoanalytic audience), can evoke an intuitive understanding of the essence of his communication but, on occasions, this can be problematic because it tends to obscure the new theory that he was in the process of formulating. This may also have been due to Winnicott's reluctance to disagree with Freudian principles.

Winnicott's publications 1931 - 1971

Winnicott's 22 books, many still in print, constitute collections of papers. Winnicott had been involved with the publication of the first eleven books up until his death in 1971. Clare Winnicott then set up a Publications Committee to publish the remaining unpublished papers. With the exception of the two main volumes,⁸ the books are presented according to themes rather than in chronological order. This was a deliberate decision by the Winnicott Publications Committee (Davis 1987). However, the result creates a fragmented picture of the writings which, although individually valuable, tends to detract from the overall matrix of his theory.

In 1989, when I began working for Squiggle, there were few books that offered a comprehensive outline of Winnicott's theories. In 1991, Madeleine Davis published *Boundary and Space* which to this day offers an excellent concise introduction to Winnicott's thought. But I was looking for a kind of lexicon or dictionary similar to *The Language of Psychoanalysis* by Laplanche and Pontalis. I wanted to find a book that would clearly translate Winnicott's use of language. I started to work on creating a synopsis for such a work. 'The Language of Winnicott' seemed the appropriate working title. My desire was to concentrate on Winnicott's word usage and to mine the texts as deeply as possible. It was through this research process that I came to discover that some of Winnicott's concepts are not only new in psychoanalysis but also his thought offers a clear and new theoretical matrix that is predicated on the classical Freudian paradigm. Alongside his dialogue with Freud is his discourse with the Kleinian development of his epoch which further extended his thought (see Abram & Hinshelwood 2018).

The Language of Winnicott was first published in 1996⁹ and a second edition was published in 2007. The 2nd edition comprises of 23 Entries (chapters) which are titled with a word or phrase frequently used by Winnicott. Each Entry begins with a brief definition of the word or phrase and is followed by a number of subsections with subtitles. The subsections guide the reader to the salient excerpts of the relevant papers. Thus, each Entry takes the reader on a journey through the themes and illustrates the evolution of Winnicott's thought traversing more than forty years of his working life. At the end of each chapter there is a reference list of the papers that relate to the main Winnicott bibliography that is presented chronologically and alphabetically.¹⁰ *The Language of Winnicott* illustrates the extent to which Winnicott's concepts have, by some sections of the psychoanalytic community, been underestimated, misunderstood, marginalized, idealized, oversimplified or simply ignored as irrelevant.

In 2015 the *Collected Works of Donald Winnicott*¹¹ was published incorporating all the previously published papers as well as many unpublished papers and correspondence from the

archives. That the publication is online and still being added to when new writings are found makes the access to Winnicott's work even more facilitated than ever. However, the development of Winnicott's work, like Freud's, will continue to be realized as more secondary source books are published. My overall aim in this book is to illustrate how I make use of Winnicott's concepts in the clinical situation which I trust will show, why, for me, it is Winnicott's clinical paradigm that amplifies the Freudian project.

Prelude to the chapters

The Ariadne thread running through this collection is the dual concept of an intrapsychic surviving and non surviving object. These ideas began to take shape when I was preparing a keynote paper for a Winnicott Centenary Conference in 1996. That paper has been revised for Chapter 1 of this book because it illustrates how the notion of a surviving object is predicated on Winnicott's core concept psychic 'survival of the object' in his late paper, 'The use of an object' (1969). The chapter starts with a reflection on Winnicott's concept of the Self and how it comes into being through the parent-infant relationship. This is followed by a consideration of Winnicott's theory of communication in which he introduces the human need for an incommunicado self. These themes relate to his focus on the environment's responsibility for the formation of the psyche, the sense of Self and the potential problems related to 'violation of the self'.

The clinical example depicts a specific situation in the therapeutic relationship that alerted me to the patient's experience of psychic violation. In identifying my affect as a countertransference response, I was gradually able to make a reflective interpretation to the patient that instigated a traumatic memory of an event in her childhood. This memory illuminated an intense maternal transference and in my Discussion, I refer to how the subsequent incremental working through of early environmental and Oedipal elements led to the patient's psychic change.

To complete Chapter 1 I return to Marion Milner's challenge to Winnicott about his concept of an incommunicado self, and I reflect on their different perspectives. In my conclusions I argue that Milner follows Freud in disagreeing with Winnicott on the notion of an incommunicado self and I suggest that Winnicott offers a different perspective which has implications for technique in clinical work.

Chapter 2 is my early attempt to deepen the notion of an intrapsychic surviving object related to working with a patient who struggled to survive psychically. Over the course of several years' analysis at 4 x weekly I highlight the way in which the patient's screen memories depicted an oscillation between psychic survival and non survival in her childhood and how this was manifested in the transference.

In the Discussion to Chapter 2 I make reference to André Green's work especially his concept of the 'dead mother complex' that resonated strongly with the patient's history. In my conclusions I show how I link Green's dead mother complex with non survival of the object.

Instigated by a clinical experience of almost total non survival when working with a patient who became violent in the 2nd year of analysis, in Chapter 3 I develop further the notion of the intrapsychic non surviving object which I proposed was the outcome of non survival of the object. In that analysis I was taken to an extreme countertransference reaction that made me question the value of psychoanalysis as a treatment. The sense of dread and terror experienced by both patient and analyst led me to consider terminating the treatment. But a turning point arose which changed the course of analysis. In Chapter 3 I propose that the roots of terror are founded in the early parent-infant relationship in which the m/Other has not survived (psychically) the infant's raw needy communications. Thus, an intrapsychic non surviving object is necessarily ignited in the transference of the analyzing situation.

In the Discussion of Chapter 3 I refer to the theories by early female analysts on the dread of women, the perforation complex and the maternal erotic transference. While some of these theories assisted in understanding what had occurred in the transference the main theme again centres on Winnicott's notion of psychic survival and how non survival has to occur in any given analysis before there is a chance of working through the early environmental failures. Some questions on Winnicott's perspectives concerning Freud's concept of the Oedipus complex as a developmental achievement are also included showing that for Winnicott the Oedipus complex is not a given in human development. The issue of the 'turning point' in this chapter was explored a few years later as can be seen in Chapter 7.

In Chapter 4 the attempt is to examine the ways in which Winnicott's emphasis of psychic survival extends while not negating Freud's core theory of psychosexuality¹². The inspiration for the paper came from work with a female patient whose fear of analysis was inextricably linked with her fear of dependency in the analytic work. Very similar to the patients discussed in Chapters 1 & 2 (Faith and Jill) the central anxieties emerging in the transference were wholly caught up with the developmental step of becoming a woman. The fear of Lisa's hidden feelings of (Oedipal) desires led to my reflections on the concept of desire in Winnicott's work.

The paper proposes that there is an implied theory of desire in Winnicott's work in which he distinguishes between needs and wishes. Winnicott had latterly proposed that the fear of WOMAN was rooted in the fear of dependency. In reference to the patient's wish to hide her desire from her analyst, for fear of envy and rivalry, I try to illustrate the way in which psychic survival operates in analysis. While Oedipal development in the context of the transference is a given, my attempt is to show how prior to Oedipal issues being addressed the patient has to evolve further an intrapsychic surviving object.

In the Discussion I elaborate on Winnicott's late ideas about the fear of WOMAN and try to elaborate my proposal of 1996, that here lies the roots of misogyny in both men and women. This is finally linked with a concept of desire to illustrate how Winnicott's ideas build upon Freud's classical paradigm.

Chapter 5 traces Winnicott's clinical approach in his 1963 paper 'On the aims of psychoanalysis' and draws attention to some of his major clinical innovations that extend and elaborate Freud's metapsychology.

To this end I draw on the French author René Roussillon, who shows how Winnicott made Freud's concept of narcissism a clinical concept by introducing how the mother's role in the formation of the Self is intrinsic to primary narcissism. This is in contrast to Freud's concept of narcissism as solipsistic. I also refer to the work of Haydée Faimberg who argues that Winnicott's concept 'fear of breakdown' intuited Freud's concept of *nachträglichkeit* (Faimberg 2009 in Abram 2013).¹³

A specific clinical example from Winnicott's late work is examined to illustrate the way in which he conceptualized and applied his countertransference with the meaning of *nachträglichkeit*. Following on from the themes of temporality in Winnicott's work Chapter 6 examines Winnicott's reflections on the necessity for the early experience of formlessness. The Discussion questions Winnicott's technique related to the analytic frame and paternal and maternal functions. The notion of an 'integrate' from Winnicott's very late paper, 'The use of an object in the context of Moses and Monotheism' (Chapter 13 in *Donald Winnicott Today*), starts to take shape and was developed later.

Chapter 7 proposes the notion of a 'paternal integrate' that interprets and extends Winnicott's very late proposal of the father as a whole object from the start of psychic life. Following Winnicott's 'there's no such thing as a baby', André Green suggested 'there's no such thing

as a mother and baby' and proposed the notion of the 'other of the object' in the mother's mind. In Chapter 7 I argue that the 'other' is de facto 'paternal'.

With reference to Chapters 2 & 3 in which I first proposed the dual conception of an intrapsychic surviving and non surviving object, I suggest in Chapter 7 that the concept of a paternal integrate reinforces the notion of the surviving object. Conversely, the non surviving object indicates paternal integrate deficiency.

At the centre of Chapter 7 I re-visit a phase of analysis with a patient who became violent in his second year of analysis. This clinical work is the same as introduced in Chapter 2 with a focus on the turning point when a significant change occurred. It is that turning point in the treatment that I show was related to the analyst's psychic work. I argue that it was the paternal factor that instigated psychic change.

In my conclusions I explore the notion of the third in the analyst's mind, that stems in origin from the analyst's paternal integrate. Drawing on Strachey's well-known concept of the mutative interpretation I go on to suggest that the analyst's third constitutes an essential ingredient of psychic survival and the mutative process. Thus, I aim to illustrate the role of the paternal integrate in the analyzing situation.

Chapter 8 explores Winnicott's psychoanalytic theory of madness that proposes madness is firmly located in the earliest psychic environment in which the infant suffered unthinkable anxiety due to deficient ego protection from the m/Other. This is the 'fact' of the patient's history and it is this fact that has to emerge and be lived through in the transference of the analyzing situation. Winnicott's term 'breakdown' essentially refers to the deconstruction of a fragile defence that has been enlisted by the traumatized infant and only thinly covers the underlying 'madness.' Madness is a state of mind in which nothing can be comprehended

because the subject has no ego functioning due to a lack of ego protection from the psychic environment. This is the distinction between psychosis and psychotic defences.

Emanating from work with a patient whose fear of death, murder and madness was a predominant feature, the psychoanalytic notions of *nachträglichkeit* and the negative therapeutic reaction were invoked. Drawing on Freud's concept of the negative therapeutic reaction and Riviere's extension of that concept I explore the recent work of Haydée Faimberg where she makes a plea for a broader conceptualization of *nachträglichkeit*. Chapter 8 offers some of my reflections on Winnicott's late theory of madness. While Winnicott's thesis has its roots in Freudian thought I propose that his specific psychoanalytic advances concerning the 'psychology of madness' argues against the notion of a death instinct.

Thus, I wish to propose that Winnicott's contribution to the concept of breakdown and madness in psychoanalysis offers a significant dimension that constitutes the essential hallmark of his work i.e. the vicissitudes of the parent-infant relationship. And it is this hallmark that illuminates how his innovative contributions to psychoanalysis are radical – in practice and in theory - and are still in the process of being expanded.

Instigated by the commission from the German journal *Psyche* on the dating of Fear of Breakdown (and its twin paper The Psychology of Madness) work in the archives brought me to a different conclusion than that of both Clare Winnicott and Thomas Ogden on the dating of Fear of Breakdown. This is explicated in Chapter 9. Interestingly, my findings about Winnicott's final preoccupations correlate with André Green's comments in his Discussion on The Surviving Object in 2003. In that Discussion he stated that he thought it was The use of an object that preoccupied Winnicott's final years. It seems that this conundrum on Winnicott's final work may have to remain a mystery although in Part 1 of Chapter 14 in *Donald Winnicott Today* I argue how my archival findings offer some important evidence of Winnicott's final preoccupations (Abram 2012 in Abram 2013).¹⁴

Notes

¹ In fact, it was not until 23 years later that he attempted to correlate his work with notable others (see Chapter 13 in Donald Winnicott Today).

² The Squiggle Foundation was set up by Alexander Newman in consultation with Clare Winnicott, and became a registered charity in 1981. The Foundation's aims are to study, disseminate and cultivate the work and tradition of D.W. Winnicott.

³ In 1992 I became an assistant director and in 1996 I began a four year term as director. In 1999 I started the analytic training at the Institute of Psychoanalysis.

⁴ At the same time I was commissioned by Free Association Books (FAB) to produce a guide to trainings in psychotherapy. Between 1989 and 1990 I met with 15 analytic training committees of psychoanalytic psychotherapy trainings and 11 humanistic psychotherapy trainings. Winnicott's work was rarely on the curriculum, though his work was taken more seriously by the Lacanian and Jungian trainings. Nevertheless, it was possible to follow any of the trainings without any knowledge of Winnicott's work. Although this has been changing in recent years, and Winnicott is now on the curriculum at the Tavistock's courses as well as most of the analytic trainings (UKCP & BPC), it continues to be the case that many people qualify as psychotherapists and psychoanalysts, in this country at least, without any in depth study of Winnicott's work. Consequently there continues to be an insufficient recognition internationally as to the value of his thought.

⁵ Between 1941- 45 discussions were held in the BPaS that came to be known as the Controversial Discussions (King & Steiner 1991). In 2015, seventy years after the so-called 'gentleman's agreement' between Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, I presented a paper on the work of Marjorie Brierley who had been one of the early female analysts whose efforts had contributed to the Controversial Discussions (see Abram 2015 on the EPF website).

⁶ There is evidence from reading Winnicott's correspondence that Winnicott was also fuelled by the sense that something had not worked in his personal analysis with both James Strachey and Joan Riviere.

⁷ From 1947 onwards Winnicott dictated his papers to his secretary Joyce Coles. This accounts for the conversational style as well as the minor errors.

⁸ Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis (1958) and The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment (1965).

⁹ In 1997 the board of editors for 'Choice', (a magazine for libraries in North America) awarded the first edition 'Outstanding Academic Book of the Year'. Since 2000 it has been translated into several languages (see Abram Bibliography).

¹⁰ The bibliography of Harry Karnac, that had been completed as I began my research, is included in the 1996 British (Karnac's) and American (Aronson's) editions. This bibliography, although the best available at the time, has now been superseded by a more scholarly bibliography created by Knud Hjulmand at the University of Copenhagen, that lists 50 more publications. This has been published in the French translation of *The Language of Winnicott* (2001). Hjulmand's bibliography was published for the second edition of *The Language of Winnicott* published in 2007.

¹¹ This was a project initiated by Christopher Bollas in 1991. The first synopsis was started in 1998 and completed by 2002 funded by The Winnicott Trust (Abram 2002; 2008).

¹² In André Green's Discussion of The Surviving Object in 2003 he criticized the lack of psychosexuality in Winnicott's theory and my clinical example of Jill. But my argument, following Winnicott, is that psychosexuality does not dominate the infant's growing psyche but rather a good enough psychic environment.

¹³ Both Faimberg's and Roussillon's papers were included in Donald Winnicott Today (2013).

¹⁴ Chapter 14 of Donald Winnicott Today examines Winnicott's notes for a lecture he was preparing for the IPA Congress to be held in Vienna in 1971. These notes are evidence I suggest that his final preoccupations before dying were related to the 'fate of aggression' in the human psyche in which he expands on his concept the use of an object.