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Chardin's Lesson

Robin Tipple

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Abstract

In this essay I show how looking at two paintings by Jean-Simeon Chardin (1699-1779) in the National Gallery encouraged me to revisit the experience of providing art therapy for people with learning difficulties¹. In reflecting on my experiences, both of the paintings and of providing art therapy, I began to develop my thinking in relation to emotion and self-expression. My reading of art therapy literature, philosophy (Hegel 1977 and Butler 1987 & 1997), semiotics (Jakobson 1960) and neuroscience (Damasio 1999), then gave me the confidence to make a definitive statement in relation to 'self-expression'. In presenting my arguments to readers I hope I will have encouraged art therapists to give attention to the cultural and social situation which facilitates the use of art materials to provide transformative experiences and support the development of relationship and self-awareness.

Key words: Chardin, Art Therapy, Learning difficulties, emotion and feeling, self-expression.

Introduction

There has developed a tradition within the British art therapy literature of exploring art works in order to gain further understanding of the nature of art making and its use value as therapy. This is best exemplified by an early volume of essays 'Pictures at an Exhibition – Selected Essays on Art and Art Therapy' eds: Gilroy & Dalley (1989). More recently Gilroy (2014) gives an account of her experiences of viewing Piero De La Francesca, which led her to reflect on the social production of art, but also to argue for the necessity of taking time to look at art in order to renew our understanding of the visual culture we inhabit as therapists. This essay is within that tradition, and hopefully it adds to the debate around the production of art and the use of art materials in the art therapy setting.

After providing a brief account of my descriptive methodology I begin this paper with the thoughts and associations that arose from the study of two Chardin paintings.

¹ In the current nosological discourse, in DSM V under the heading Neuro-developmental disorders, 'intellectual disability' is the preferred term although, learning disabilities, global developmental delay, or mental retardation is still in use, but individuals themselves to whom the labels are applied, in general appear to prefer 'people with learning difficulties' and it is this term I shall use although it may cause confusion on occasions.

The paintings promoted reflections on the cultural and the social, which gave rise to a consideration of the structures that facilitate communication. This, along with the subject matter of the painting, prompted memories and thoughts about the provision of art therapy for people with learning difficulties. After a case vignette emotion and feeling are explored, and this exploration is related to the idea of 'self expression'.

Chardin

I am not sure that I can remember my first encounter with a Chardin painting. I think it would have been some still life that I first saw and this encouraged me to attend the large retrospective exhibition of Chardin's work held in the Royal Academy in March 2000. The exhibition was impressive. As an occasional painter and lover of painting, Chardin's steady non-judgemental gaze and the careful sensitive application of his hand, I found enviable and inspiring. But perhaps more importantly, something deeply affective in his communication emerged for me when he represented others engaged in ordinary domestic and social activities.

I am not in this essay going to give much space to the context in which Chardin painted, but it is worth noticing in relation to my own responses, that Chardin did receive support from important contemporary critics, notably Diderot and Cochin, but they both reported difficulty in explaining the power of his work. Diderot did say that Chardin himself 'spoke brilliantly about his art.' (Rosenberg 2000, p33) and Cochin reports Chardin as saying he painted 'not with colours but with feeling' (Demoris 2000, p109).

Description and Interpretation

Some years after the RA exhibition I found myself looking at Chardin in the National gallery and in this essay I begin by presenting the reader with responses in relation to two paintings, recently revisited and subject to a 'long look' (Gilroy 2014). In describing my experience of these paintings I have made use of the Art Historian Baxandall's approach to the description of visual experiences (Baxandall 1991). Description, I feel, is never free from interpretation, but what I have tried to do is to group my words according to the loose and 'general classification' Baxandall outlines (see op.cit. p69-70). Firstly, in Baxandall's schema there are words which point to 'visual interest', for example, I refer to geometry ('diamond shaped') or

some other characteristics of design, then secondly, and linked to the first category, might be comparative words which might suggest that objects were actually present, for instance, 'the flat stiff armoured bodice' (see below). Baxandall would use the term 'matter of representation' (p70), for this group of words. Here I am also using metaphor. A bodice is not *really* armour but in using this word I am responding to the way the bodice looks and impresses me, stiff, if not metallic. But 'Armoured' suggests a more personal response and this fits a further third of Baxandall's categories – namely the 'subjective' (p70). As can be seen phrases and words themselves can fall into more than one category simultaneously. Some words refer to the agency of the painter, for instance, 'sharply delineated', and Baxandall uses the term 'the maker' (p70) for this fourth group of words. Importantly I hope that there is an appreciation that my description, like the descriptions that Baxandall explores, is ostensive, that is, it points towards what can be seen in the reproductions, and that readers will gain some sense of how my thought processes have developed through looking.

First Painting



Fig. 1: Jean-Simeon Chardin. The Young Schoolmistress. Oil on Canvas – 66.1cm x 66.7cm. © The National Gallery, London. Bequeathed by Mrs Edith Cragg, as part of the John Webb Bequest, 1925.

Chardin painted 'The Young Schoolmistress' in 1737. He presents us with a picture of an encounter. A situation familiar to Chardin's 18th Century audience and still, I feel, accessible and readily understood from our 21st century, Western, neo-liberal perspective. Recognition is related to the role of the protagonists, the child learning, the adult, or in this case adolescent, teaching. If we have a remembrance of a similar situation, it is of receiving and giving instructions, this may give the picture some 'charm', but not all memories of receiving, or of giving, instructions are of a happy experience.

The material elements, objects represented in the scene, are important. The blurred images in the book, the pointer and the cabinet that acts as a desk, are central to the exchange between the schoolmistress and the small child. The book is placed near to the centre of the composition as is the teacher's hand and pointer and the child's pointing finger. Bodies interact here through gesture and proximity. In the book are signs to be interpreted. The child's pointing finger indicates the direction of his attention and effort. In reaching the surface of the cabinet, he has to bring his arm up over the back board of the cabinet and he is just able to rest his arm at shoulder height – in this way his size and his effort in relation to the schoolmistress and her demand, is accentuated. The schoolmistress occupies the right of the picture.

The schoolmistress's dress attracts my attention. The sensuous blue sleeves contrast with the flat stiff armoured bodice, the crisp treatment of her cap and the clear unambiguous profile of her face. The child's bonnet is softly painted. The light is carefully controlled in the picture, as is the focus which moves from sharp to diffuse. The small, sharply delineated profile eye of the schoolmistress contrasts with the child's less defined features and clouded full face. In relation to the child, I imagine his face clouding over with the effort to understand. He seems to be about to speak, perhaps name the item in the book that has been identified. In relation to the teacher I see her gaze as penetrating, sharing something of the pointer, accentuating demand. The child's blurred look generates sympathy in me, especially as I remember difficulties in learning.

The cabinet has diamond shaped locks, and on the side of the schoolmistress it has a key inserted which projects towards the viewer and produces a shadow. It is the closest part of the depicted scene to the viewer and there is a suggestion of trompe-l'oeil. The power relation in the situation is clearly articulated. Through the key, the pointer and the direction of the schoolmistress's gaze and firm closure of her lips, we become aware that there is one who knows, who has access to the key, who presents the other with a task, and exacts a performance. The other, the child, has to demonstrate his attentiveness to the task and prove his understanding of the requirements of the situation.

Second Painting



Fig. 2: Jean-Simeon Chardin. The House of Cards. Oil on Canvas – 60.3cm x 71.8cm. © The National Gallery, London. Bequeathed by Mrs Edith Cragg, as part of the John Webb Bequest, 1925.

The second painting is 'The House of Cards' or M. le Noir's son. M. le Noir was Chardin's neighbour and friend. He was a joiner. Chardin's father was also a joiner who specialised in making billiard tables. This painting was thought to have been hung with the schoolmistress.

This painting sits between categories. The French academy, on whom Chardin depended for his livelihood, would see this as an example of 'petit genre' – a presentation of a scene from everyday life. In petit genre it is not usual to give any identity to the figures and often the scene was intended to impart some moral lesson. This picture was reproduced and circulated through etchings and engravings. In the etchings and the engravings the large French cuffs have disappeared and M. Le Noir's son looks much older. Windows with a large sash curtain were added to the engravings and etchings which were accompanied with a verse: 'You are wrong to mock this adolescent/ And his useless creation/ Subject to ruin at the first breeze/ Fogey's in the very age when you ought to be wise/ Yet more ridiculous castles/ Often issue from your heads' (Scott 2000, p66 & 75).

Although I thought that play must be the subject of the painting I also felt it was reasonable to approach the painting as a portrait. Looking closely I saw that M. le Noir's son had been carefully dressed and prepared for the painting. His hair carefully curled and arranged, tied with a beautiful black bow at the back. A soft velvet collar is attached to his coat which has large fashionable French cuffs. His three cornered hat with the gold trim and the care he appears to have taken in his appearance suggested to me that he was turned out in his 'Sunday best'. In terms of his attire and presentation very little is left to chance. He even seems to have some rouge applied to his cheeks. His large hooded eyes show him to be focussing on the placement of his next card. Captivated by the constructive challenge, he is concentrating on the careful use of fingers and hands. His lips just faintly parting suggest a smile. This quiet smile to himself may well be related to the tricky moment, the balancing act in the building activity, but I felt that he was also expressing his pride at being the subject of this painting by his father's friend – who would be studying him during the painting. Posing for this portrait/picture must have surely been affirming for M. le Noir's son. Is he ten or maybe eleven?

The joinery in the picture is very carefully painted; see for instance the reflected light along the edge of the table at bottom right. The open drawer acts as a kind of bridge and invitation for the viewer. The knob on the drawer casts a shadow as it pushes out into the viewers' space like the key in the previous painting. On the right side of the picture the tabletop does not follow the perspective suggested by the

corner near the young person's sleeve on the left. The distortion suggests that Chardin was keen to bring the surface of the table and the contents into view on the right of the picture. The cards seen on the right seem to echo the careful attention given to the geometry of the drawer. There are some bent cards which cast a shadow. The bent cards indicate that to play the building game some modification of the cards is necessary. But notice that a token and a coin are present on the table referencing gambling – another kind of play, the play of adults for which the cards were designed. The focus on geometry and the material elements used in play is broken in the centre and on the left of the composition by the flowing line of the gold on the three cornered hat and in the cascading hair.

The cultural and the social

Both paintings can be seen as a representation of the cultural and the social. We are reminded that there is a particular instrumental use of material and a particular use of signifying or symbolic systems in a society, and both these aspects of social life reflect our ideas about development and what it is to be culturally adept (Williams 1981 & 1983).

I have stressed in my description of 'The Young Schoolmistress' the power relations that can be seen, and for Foucault it is the power that is transmitted by practices and discourses that 'brings into play relations between people' (Foucault 2002, p337). Butler (1997), argues that the subject is attached to the external power through desire, but is able through an iterative process that is performative, to gain agency, that is to say contest the power relation. For instance, the child who has been obliged to learn to say "please" and "thank you" will soon be saying to the parent "Say please Mummy". Butler's thinking about desire led her to hypothesise that desire is centred on the continuous search for affirmation (Butler 1987).

M. le Noir's son in *The House of Cards* is not a pupil, at least not in this picture, but the subject of a portrait which is intended, in part at least, through reproduction, to communicate a moral lesson to adults. He is entitled to play and has been granted some autonomy in relation to his use of cultural material. He is properly and fashionably attired and enjoying the approval of the painter, joining him, as he does, in his enterprise. Compared to the 'schoolmistress' we can say that this painting

shows another situation that relates to the development of identity, social and cultural competence. M. le Noir's son, is further on than the pupil in the 'schoolmistress', he is moving towards that place that society regards as adulthood. In sitting for the picture he gains some affirmation from others. Here, I think, we can assume that 'self consciousness' exists. Butler's thinking about the desire for affirmation is derived from Hegel. In Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit 'Self consciousness exists in and for itself as it exists in and for another, i.e. in as much as it is *acknowledged*' (Findlay 1977, p178 p520 - italics in original). The schoolmistress's demand in relation to the pupil or the learning child, requires acknowledgement, as does the child's attempt to respond to the imposed task, for self-consciousness to develop for *both* protagonists in the situation. In acknowledgement some affirmation is given.

Semiotics

It is in social and cultural situations that we communicate, and we can map this diagrammatic outline of communication from Roman Jakobson (1960) on to Chardin's painting.

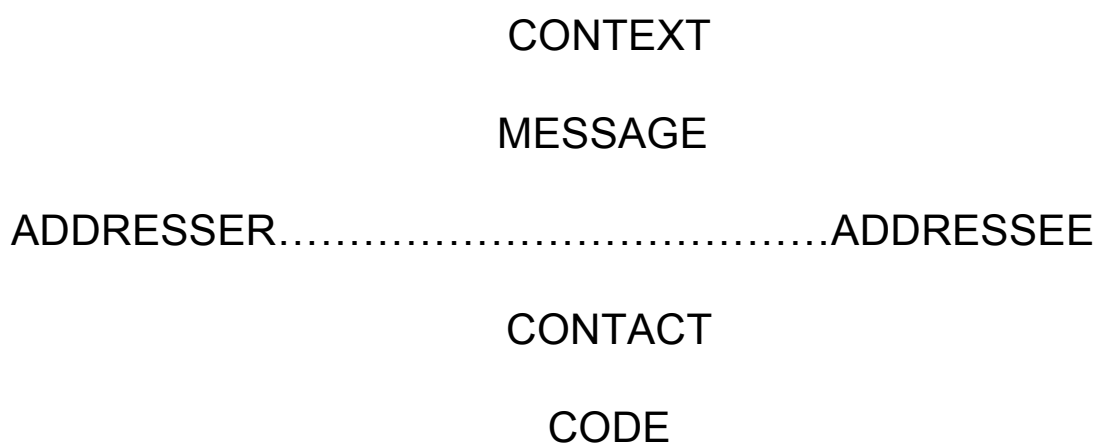


Fig. 3: Diagram from Jakobson 1960

Jakobson is concerned with verbal communication and poetics; he regards this diagram as an outline of the 'constitutive factors in any speech event'. 'The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE.' There is a requirement, if the message is to be operative, for a 'CONTEXT referred to....seizable by the addressee.' A 'CODE' is usually in use... 'at least partially, common to the

addresser and addressee', that is to say common to the one that encodes and the one that decodes the message. The necessary CONTACT is represented by a physical or material channel and 'psychological connection between the addresser and addressee' which enables them to 'enter communication and stay in communication' (Jakobson 1960, p150).

We can imagine the schoolmistress initiating a communication, being the addresser and creating a message. The context is teaching and reference would be to the book and the symbol or picture in the book. The words that she speaks must have meaning or partial meaning for the child. The child must decode the sound sequences she produces as words and sentences that have reference. The book, as well as providing context also, along with the sounds of the words and the schoolmistress's gesture with the pointer, provides contact. The child needs to be attentive to the actions of the schoolmistress, that is remain psychologically attuned. He initiates a communication when he points and speaks in response. His finger then supplements his speech. As well as decoding the words of the school mistress the child in this situation appears to be required to understand the meaning of the symbol or picture in the book and a further effort in decoding is then needed. Coding is the 'process of representing meanings systematically.' Addressers 'encode their meanings into particular sequences of signs... sounds, marks on paper or visible gestures' for instance. Addressees, as we have learned, decode 'meanings from the sign sequences' they can access (Cobley 2001, p170-171). Without an understanding of the code used by the addresser some messages remain obscure for the addressee. In this instance we can think of the code as a key. As I have shown, in the first painting discussed, the key is on the side of the schoolmistress who embodies the cultural understanding and cultural advantages that development through education achieves. Coding, however, is a more variable and fluid process than models suggest and 'meaning making is more of an inferential process than a coding process' (Cobley 2001, p172). Speakers use signs, words and gestures on the understanding that addressees will find them relevant (Sperber & Wilson 1995). This is certainly true for gesture, which sometimes appears to fit a cultural code, but often remains informal and ambiguous if removed from the situation in which it was produced.

This digressive and tentative exploration of semiotics, gives us an indication of the many things that can go wrong in communication. For example there can be a failure to remain in contact with the addressee and then the message is not seen or heard; or there can be a different understanding in relation to context and the relevance of the signs are not appreciated or shared; and there can be a lack of understanding and/or knowledge in relation to the code. Given the possibilities it is sometimes surprising that the message does reach the addressee.

Learning Difficulties and Art Therapy

As can be seen, the paintings encouraged in me the development of reflections on social being, on cultural understanding and communication, and that recognition and affirmation which provides support for the formation of relationships and self-awareness. More subjectively, thinking about my own personal difficulties in remaining attentive and learning in the school situation, I then began to remember aspects of my work in art therapy with people who have learning difficulties.

Language and communication immediately came to mind when reflecting on my work with people who have learning difficulties; all forms of communication represent a real difficulty in art therapy with this client group, see Gilroy (2011) who suggests that addressing the difficulties of communication becomes 'a central task and the main difficulty in art therapy with this client population' (p181).

Art therapists working with people who have learning difficulties, as we would expect, have focussed on the art production in art therapy as a resource. Stott & Males (1984) suggested that there was some direct benefit from using art materials, and Wilson (1985), for example, anticipated the development of ego functions through their use. From here, the idea of art making as *communication* takes shape and Stack (1996), for example, using a psychoanalytical frame, described how an individual with severe learning difficulties used art making to *communicate* and develop relationship, but he also used 'masturbatory' production to block relationship and thinking. More recently Caven (2012) has argued that it was her more able client's relationship with objects or things, images and ideas, and with the therapist, that made thinking possible. Images, as Caven shows, are clearly seductive on one level, especially when identification with a powerful or sexually

charged image arises, but the attitude of the other towards the art object can enable thinking in relation to self and other to emerge. Bull (2008) provides a similar understanding, and here we start to gain a clear sense of the mediating role of materials, objects and images in developing communication and relationship.

In relation to the therapist's experiences when undertaking this work, Rees (1998) reminded other therapists of the feelings of inadequacy, uselessness and boredom that often haunted the countertransference. Ashby (2012), Goody (2012) and Storey (2012) all describe experiences which centre on the difficulty of establishing relationships of mutuality. These therapists often found themselves at cross purposes, in conflict, or facing an impasse with the client. What appeared to be clear was that clients were sensitive to the power relation present in the therapeutic situation. Foucault (2002) suggests that where there are power relations there is always resistance. However, Ashby, Goody and Storey do show how the power relation can be negotiated and modified over time, but the work requires patience and a willingness on the part of the therapist to explore her own subjectivity.

I stressed, in my reflections following my account of the paintings, the importance of recognition, acknowledgement and affirmation in the development of relationships and self-awareness and something of this theme is explored in the art therapy literature by O'Farrell (2017) in his exploration of 'feedback'. O'Farrell is aware of the social isolation experienced by people who have learning difficulties and the lack of opportunity in developing relationships over time. He suggests that 'positive statements' are required to 'empower' and 'foster self-identity' and that therapists should offer 'friendship-like caring' (p67). But we might ask, can this approach address the difficulty that is essentially cultural social and political, which involves a power relation that impacts on the *therapist* as well as the client in the art therapy situation?

The importance of the material environment in facilitating development, especially of symbolic understandings and communication, is explored in depth by Isserow (2013) who suggests that a 'primary – although not exclusive' role is played by 'visual joint attention' both in facilitating self-awareness and 'symbol formation' (p122). Isserow argues that 'sharing of attentional focus and affect around a common object' (p125)

enables the individual to relate and communicate. He describes 'Tom' a 14 year old boy with Autism using water and string in his play which is seen as 'ritualistic and repetitive' to a degree that suggests he is struggling to tolerate the anxiety aroused by the existence of the 'other'. Isserow then experiences 'frustration and exasperation'. But when, after persistent reminders that the water is hot, 'Tom' attends to the actions of the therapist he uses the word "hoh" and a pointing gesture to refer to the hot water, then experience becomes shared. Isserow argues that it is this 'sharing of attentional focus and affect around a common object' (p125) that enables the individual to 'separate *from*' and 'identify *with*' a care-giver (p127, italics in original).

But it is not just the object or material (water) here that is important, the use of the word "hot" ("hoh") relates the therapist and the client to another third, as it were - the code which is culturally determined. Muller, (1996) suggests that it is *this* third, which is required to frame the dyad, which enables 'partners to relate without merging' (p61), and that it is present for the infant at the beginning of life.

It is interesting how closely this theme mirrors Jakobson's (1960) stress on the importance of that material element that provides contact and relevance in the context of verbal and gestural communication. But also Isserow shows, perhaps inadvertently since this is not developed in his paper, that there is a power relation at work in this situation, where he is obliged to protect 'Tom' from the too hot water, and is frustrated in this by 'Tom's' actions. This, of course, affects the communication. What is 'relevant' for the therapist is that the water is *hot*. But there are other properties to the water that 'Tom' is interested in, and I want to suggest that the conflict of interest was as important as the therapist's attunement in establishing communication in this instance.

Isserow (op. cit.) stresses in his paper the importance of the transmission of, or communication, of feeling and I now want to look at this aspect of my experiences.

The communication of feeling

The vignette that follows is constructed from the memory of working in a large institution, an institution that Goffman (1961) would describe as a 'total institution',

where many 'patients' (later to be called 'residents') had lived for a large part of their adult life. In this institution I was one of two art therapists serving, in theory, just under a thousand patients. The institution, at the time of my employment, was embarked on a closure programme and was seeking to place 'residents' in homes, in the community.

Vignette

I was asked to see Richard who was 45 years old. The nursing staff wanted me to help Richard to venture beyond the ward environment and access day-care. Richard habitually placed himself in the dayroom near to the nurses' office. He stood and did not move from this spot. If approached, he extended his arm, his palm open and his hand raised; as he rolled his head forwards and backwards, he made noises that emerged from the back of his throat. The gesture, head movements and noises, their increase and decrease, taken together gave form to an anxiety that appeared to decrease as the other moved away.

Richard appeared to be tied to the nurses in the office through a perpetual panic, and although the nurses had tried, they were unable to help him to make use of any of the day centres that other residents in the ward attended. The nurses were worried about Richard's lack of activity and interaction with others.

After discussing the referral with the nurses there was an agreement that we should try to persuade Richard, in a graduated way, to leave the ward and to go to the art therapy department. We agreed that we would not be panicked by his expressions of anxiety, an anxiety which was very contagious, rather we would learn from it and help Richard tolerate his feelings. I emphasised that my contact with him should be regular and consistent and that the nursing staff that were to help in escorting, might need to stay quietly with him for the first few sessions, if and when, we reached the department. We could assess the situation as we progressed, or failed to progress. With the more familiar nursing staff and myself, Richard did make it, first to a playing field near the ward and then gradually to the department.

When in the department I introduced him to art materials beginning with crayons. These he slowly and tentatively rolled across the surface of the paper when I gently

prompted him. Judging by his vocalisations and gestures he grew more confident in relation to my presence. I often sat close to him when I introduced materials and this bodily proximity seemed to help with his anxiety. Eventually I escorted Richard to the department alone and I was able to persuade him to explore paint which he used to make small patches or puddles of colour. Having reached this stage I introduced him to a group of other's with learning difficulties and this seemed to enliven him, seeing others sat at the table marking, his own marking increased. Had I photographs of his work it would be easy to demonstrate the increase in his confidence in marking over time, as well as the impact of the presence of others on his production. We could say, that through the intervention, the patient had become part of the social world. He was acknowledged by others and was thereby gaining in self-consciousness.

Neurology and Kleinian Theory

If Richard's noises and gestures are the expression of feeling how should we think about his awareness of feeling or emotion? First let's consider some neurological theory in relation to feeling and emotion.

In the journal 'Subjectivity' Johnston (2010) explores Antonio Damasio's (1999) neuroscience theory of emotion. Damasio defines emotional processes in this way:

'a state of emotion, which can be triggered and executed nonconsciously; a state of feeling, which can be represented nonconsciously; and a state of feeling made conscious, i.e. known to the organism having both emotion and feeling.' (Damasio 1999, p37, italics the author).

Emotions are expressed through 'physiological processes' and are 'manifested by the body'. Such processes could include 'heart rates, adrenalin releases, blushes and sweating' (Johnston 2010, p79), remaining unconscious to the individual but visible to others. Emotions in this sense are public.

These processes can then be 'cognitively mapped' or given a representational form spontaneously by the brain which 'is truly the bodies captive audience' (Damasio 1999, p150). These representations, or images, still remain unconscious and this

stage corresponds to Damasio's notion of 'having a feeling'. Just as there was a gap between emotion and having feeling, there is then a gap between having a feeling and being conscious of having a feeling. When attended to by a consciousness it then becomes a feeling known. It can then be 'misfelt' in the sense that there is a mistranslation, for instance a variety of 'affective excitation' could be translated variably as anxiety, guilt, or some physical problem, in a conscious reflection. 'There inevitably are absences of translations or distorting mistranslations within and between emotions, feelings-had and feelings known' (Johnston 2010, p83).

Damasio argues that there is a 'large domain of mental life that isn't conscious' which 'contains not only motivational energies and impulses but also cognitive images and representations' (Johnston 2010, p79).

This suggestion of Damasio's (1999) has its parallel in Kleinian theory, where phantasy emerges from an unconscious border between the body and the mind (see Klein 1921 and Isaacs 1952). What is stressed in the Kleinian account is the role of phantasy life, which unconscious and laden with affect, seeks expression, often in the form of a projection, in order to communicate and achieve an integration and/or to rid oneself of unwanted anxiety or pain.

We can relate Richard's noises and gestures described above in particular to the form of projection Klein had identified as 'projective identification' (Klein 1946 and Bion 1967). Both Klein and Bion describe a preverbal or non-verbal mode of communication which could be regarded as normal or pathological. In normal projective identification there is a desire to 'introduce into the object a state of mind as a means of communicating' (Hinshelwood 1989, p184) whereas a more pathological projective identification would be excessive, in the sense of being particularly sadistic or destructive, which, in seeking omnipotence, results in a loss of awareness. Richard's expression of feeling did impact powerfully on those present and attentive to his gestures, movements and noises but I am not sure that Richard was violently intrusive in relation to others, or that he sought some symbiotic relationship with the other in denial of separation (Hinshelwood 1989). His form of projective identification seemed to be prompted by the situation he found

himself in, feeling threatened without the resource of verbal language to communicate. What was required was help with the feeling.

Here I would like to acknowledge, that other therapists working with people who have learning difficulties, have made use of Bion in understanding unusual and sometimes aggressive behaviours, especially in appreciating the importance of the containment of feeling to communication and thinking – for example see Stack (1996) and Ashby (2012).

As can be seen from the vignette, I responded to Richard, and the referral it should be noted, by engaging the nursing staff, feeling that through working together, the social world could be mobilised to provide containment or support for Richard, to help him experience the world differently, other than in terms of threat. This intervention in the larger environment can be important. See Dee (2014) who uses her relations with other staff and careers to help a client who is grieving.

Self Expression

At the time that I was working at the hospital where Richard lived, psychiatrists sometimes asked me what my aims were. I used to respond by saying, “to promote self-expression” and this seemed to satisfy. Then I would go away and wonder what did I mean by ‘self-expression’? I think that I had then a crude idea that self-expression could be thought of as a projection from the inner world on to the outer material reality presenting, or realising in some form, that which lies within. This image, I now think, represents a particularly impoverished view of self-expression.

Volosinov (1973) refers to this view of expression as ‘Individual subjectivism’. Expression is, from this perspective, ‘Something which, having in some way taken shape and definition in the psyche of an individual, is outwardly objectified for others with the help of external signs of some kind’ (Volosinov 1973, p51). In this account of expression the outer is presented ‘as passive material’ shaped by the inner element. Volosinov rejected this view and instead argued that an utterance is ‘determined by’ its ‘*immediate social situation*’ (p52, authors italics). He stressed that language is shaped towards the other. ‘A word is a bridge’ (1973, p53) he

writes, and the situation determines the utterance. The 'cry of a nursing infant is 'oriented' toward it's mother' (p54).

With Richard, we are in one sense back to the cry of the infant that Volisinov identifies, but the cry appears in a more elaborated social context which shapes the form and relevance of the sound, movement and gesture, and also its interpretation as expression by others.

'Self' is a problematic word. Jung and Klein are both popular with art psychotherapists. In Jung, self is seen as an archetype exemplifying wholeness, which drives 'individuation' or self-realisation (Granot, Regev and Snir 2018). Self in the Kleinian metapsychology also covers the whole and includes the ego and instinctual life – the id in Freudian terms (Hinshelwood 1989). 'Ego' is an English translation of 'Ich' ('I' or 'me'). Entering language we learn how to use the 1st person pronoun where an *I* can only exist if some other 'reciprocally' becomes a 'you in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as *I*' (Benveniste 1956, p222). This exchange is constitutive of persons and demonstrates the practical need for a word like 'self' but it also brings us back to Hegel and Butler cited above.

Recently art therapists have given more importance to the bodily 'self' that is 'sensorially' linked to the world, to materials and objects, and exploration via the body that is particularly transformational in infancy and childhood as Meyerowitz-Katz and Reddick argue (2017, p180). Damarell (2011) understands the importance of *hands* to art therapy and his researches of the use of the hand in art therapy with people who have learning difficulties demonstrates that the hand is productive cognitively as well as being important to communication.

'The hand manipulates, the hand knows and the hand communicates' argues Tallis, (2003, p31). The hand relates us to objects and materials and opens up possibilities, but it also teaches that 'my body is a thing among things' as Merleau-Ponty suggests (1964, p164). Radman (2013, p386) argues that we are not 'masters of what the making does to the mind' but through our actions we change ourselves 'making transforms the makers themselves'.

Skaife (2001) draws on Merleau-Ponty and proposes that 'what is made in art therapy derives its meaning from the intersubjective space within which it is made' and 'the inner image is shaped by what it is we make and is entirely dependent on it' (p46). Here we begin to see that the 'self', which seeks affirmation and recognition, is performed in the social and cultural environment, through the use of the body when relating to material and to others in the production of mind. This is like the social self of Goffman (1955) who perceives the 'self' as 'an image pieced together from the expressive implications of the full flow of events' (p31).

One way of thinking about the art therapy situation could be in terms of 'assemblage' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) 'where multiple forces negotiate and collide' (Fenner 2017). Fenner in referring to art therapy space describes the space as a 'sensory affective meaning-filled site or placeworld' (2017, p1) where matter carries affective agency in the production of 'zones of intensity'. The art therapy space, of course, is nested in larger spaces, or territories, and we should bear in mind that 'territory and boundary are processes' and 'always 'in the making': physically, socially, culturally,...' (Pile 2008, p208).

In my pursuit of 'self-expression', of which this essay may be considered as an example, I am now tempted to formulate it as 'expression-self' since it seems to be that it is the self in a social and cultural situation that emerges from expression, rather than existing prior to expression. In the vignette, Richard is engaged in a process. He moves from that distressed being that attempts expression, to that being that is responded to by others (the therapist and nursing staff). Their response facilitates the emergence of a fresh self in relation, which is a different kind of self. All of this is assisted by the social and cultural environment. It's hard to imagine a being without a prior self, if only in terms of a being haunted by an uncertain past, but we could say that we are not that far away from the notion that the self is a 'postulate' that emerges in a setting. This proposition, perhaps we should say 'performance' as 'proposition', (for example, Richard's raising of his hand), *is* that self that now seeks affirmation from the other².

² This notion of the postulate, in relation to psychotherapy, can be found in *Playing and Reality* where Winnicott (1971) describes a patient who is searching for her 'self'.

In conclusion Chardin again

At the beginning I suggested that I was envious of Chardin's 'steady non-judgemental gaze' and the sensitive application of his hand. In many respects Chardin's painting reminds us of the best of photography. However unlike photography the pictures are constructions, they are analytical; distilled observations rendered into sensitive brush strokes, edits which are carefully composed. Maybe they present a frozen moment, as representations they remain *still* lives. But a future is implied, the conclusion of the lesson, or the collapse of the house of cards. If we accept this, what is transmitted is the vitality of the everyday where emotional encounters are performed in a social setting using cultural tools, where the self is in a continual process of production. Chardin, we could argue, has identified 'zones of intensity' in both of the paintings that we have been discussing. This analytical clarity in relation to the social and cultural, which holds emotional awareness as critical, is, I am suggesting, desirable to the art therapist, whoever one chooses to work with, in whatever situation.

I would like to give special thanks to the National Gallery for allowing me to include the Chardin reproductions.

Biography

Robin qualified as an art therapist in 1985. He has worked with adults who have learning disabilities, with children and adolescents in a paediatric disability service and with children in therapeutic community who were recovering from neglect and abuse. Robin was a member of the editorial board of *Inscape* from 1995 to 2007. He completed his PhD research exploring art therapy assessment with children who have developmental disorders (principally Autism and Aspergers Syndrome) in 2011. He is an editor for ATOL and recently retired from lecturing at Goldsmiths, University of London. He is interested in exploring how subjects are produced in Art Psychotherapeutic practices.

Email: robin@ratipple.plus.com

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