

ERIK H. ERIKSON

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BY ERIK H. ERIKSON

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TO OUR
children's children

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only betray in more malignant form a frailty of affective contact which already exists in the parent(s), although in them it may be compensated for—at least in other relationships—by a special character make-up or by superior intellectual endowment.

As to the procedure described in this chapter, it should be clear that Jean's mother was capable of that exceptional curative effort which is a prerequisite for all experimentation on this frontier of human trust.

Toys and Reasons

PARAPHRASING Freud, we have called play the royal road to the understanding of the infantile ego's efforts at synthesis. We have observed an example of a failure of such synthesis. We shall now turn to childhood situations which illustrate the capacity of the ego to find recreation and self-cure in the activity of play; and to therapeutic situations in which we were fortunate enough to be able to help a child's ego to help itself.

1. PLAY, WORK, AND GROWTH

Let us take as our text for the beginning of this more reassuring chapter a play episode described by a rather well-known psychologist. The occasion, while not pathological, is nevertheless a tragic one: a boy named Tom Sawyer, by verdict of his aunt, must whitewash a fence on an otherwise faultless spring morning. His predicament is intensified by the appearance of an age mate named Ben Rogers, who indulges in a game. It is Ben, the man of leisure, whom we want to observe with the eyes of Tom, the working man.

He took up his brush and went tranquilly to work. Ben Rogers hove in sight presently—the very boy, of all boys, whose ridicule he had been dreading. Ben's gait was the hop-skip-and-jump-proof enough that his heart was light and his anticipations high. He was

following an apple, and giving a long, melodious whoop, at intervals, followed by a deep-toned ding-dong-dong, ding-dong-dong, for he was personating a steamboat. As he drew near, he slackened speed, took the middle of the street, leaned far over to starboard and rounded to ponderously and with laborious poomp and circumstance --for he was personating the *Big Missouri*, and considered himself to be drawing nine feet of water. He was boat and captain and engine-bells combined, so he had to imagine himself standing on his own hurricane-deck giving the orders and executing them:

"Stop the stabboard! Ting-a-ling-ling! Stop the labboard! Come ahead on the stabboard! Stop her! Let your outside turn over now! Ting-a-ling-ling! Chow-ow-ow! Get out that head-line! *Lively* now! Come--out with your spring-line--what're you about there! Take a turn round that stump with the bight of it! Stand by that stage, now--let her go! Done with the engines, sir! Ting-a-ling-ling! *Sbt! sbt! sbt!*" (trying the gauge-cocks).

Tom went on whitewashing--paid no attention to the steamboat. Ben stared a moment, and then said:

"Hi-ya! You're up a stump, ain't you! . . . You got to work, hey?"

My clinical impression of Ben Rogers is a most favorable one, and this on all three counts: organism, ego, and society. For he takes care of the body by munching an apple; he simultaneously enjoys imaginary control over a number of highly conflicting items (being a steamboat and parts thereof, as well as being the captain of said steamboat, and the crew obeying said captain); while he loses not a moment in sizing up social reality when, on navigating a corner, he sees Tom at work. By no means reacting as a steamboat would, he knows immediately how to pretend sympathy though he undoubtedly finds his own freedom enhanced by Tom's predicament.

Flexible lad, we would say. However, Tom proves to be the better psychologist: he is going to put Ben to work. Which shows that psychology is at least the second-best thing to, and under some adverse circumstances may even prove superior to ordinary adjustment.

In view of Ben's final fate it seems almost rude to add interpretation to defeat, and to ask what Ben's play may mean. I presented

this question to a class of psychiatric social-work students. Most of the answers were, of course, of the traumatic variety, for in what other way could Ben become accessible to "case work"? Ben must have been a frustrated boy, the majority agreed, to take the trouble to play so strenuously. The possible frustrations ranged from oppression by a tyrannical father from whom he escapes in fantasy by becoming a bossy captain, to a bedwetting or toilet trauma of some kind which now made him want to be a boat drawing nine feet of water. Some answers concerned the more obvious circumstance that he wanted to be big, and this in the form of a captain, the idol of his day.

My contribution to the discussion consisted of the consideration that Ben is a growing boy. To grow means to be divided into different parts which move at different rates. A growing boy has trouble in mastering his gangling body as well as his divided mind. He wants to be good, if only out of expediency, and always finds he has been bad. He wants to rebel, and finds that almost against his will he has given in. As his time perspective permits a glimpse of approaching adulthood he finds himself acting like a child. One "meaning" of Ben's play could be that it affords his ego a temporary victory over his gangling body and self by making a well-functioning whole out of brain (captain), the nerves and muscles of will (signal system and engine), and the whole bulk of the body (boat). It permits him to be an entity within which he is his own boss, because he obeys himself. At the same time, he chooses his metaphors from the tool world of the young machine age, and anticipates the identity of the machine god of his day: the captain of the *Big Missouri*.

Play, then, is a function of the ego, an attempt to synchronize the bodily and the social processes with the self. Ben's fantasy could well contain a phallic and locomotor element: a powerful boat in a mighty scream makes a good symbol. A captain certainly is a fitting father image, and, beyond that, an image of well-delimited patriarchal power. Yet the emphasis, I think, should be on the ego's need to master the various arcas of life, and especially those in which the individual finds his self, his body,

and his social role wanting and trailing. To hallucinate ego mastery and yet also to practice it in an intermediate reality between phantasy and actuality is the purpose of play—but play, as we shall see presently, is the undisputed master of only a slim margin of existence. What is play—and what is it not? Let us consult language, and then return to children.

The sunlight playing on the waves qualifies for the attribute "playful" because it faithfully remains within the rules of the game. It does not really interfere with the chemical world of the waves. It insists only on an intermingling of appearances. These patterns change with effortless rapidity and with a repetitiveness which promises pleasing phenomena within a predictable range without ever creating the same configuration twice.

When man plays he must intermingle with things and people in a similarly uninvolved and light fashion. He must do something which he has chosen to do without being compelled by urgent interests or impelled by strong passion; he must feel entertained and free of any fear or hope of serious consequences. He is on vacation from social and economic reality—or, as is most commonly emphasized: he *does not work*. It is this opposition to work which gives play a number of connotations. One of these is "mere fun"—whether it is hard to do or not. As Mark Twain commented, "constructing artificial flowers . . . is work, while climbing the Mont Blanc is only amusement." In Puritan times and places, however, mere fun always connoted sin; the Quakers warned that you must "gather the flowers of pleasure in the fields of duty." Men of equally Puritan mind could permit play only because they believed that to find "relief from moral activity is in itself a moral necessity." Poets, however, place the emphasis elsewhere: "Man is perfectly human only when he plays," said Schiller. Thus play is a borderline phenomenon to a number of human activities and, in its own playful way, it tries to elude definition.

It is true that even the most strenuous and dangerous play is by definition not work; it does not produce commodities. Where it does, it "goes professional." But this fact, from the start, makes

the comparison of adult and child's play somewhat senseless; for the adult is a commodity-producing and commodity-exchanging being, whereas the child is only preparing to become one. To the working adult, play is re-creation. It permits a periodical stepping out from those forms of defined limitation which are his social reality.

Take *gravity*: to juggle, to jump, or to climb adds unused dimensions to the awareness of our body. Play here gives a sense of divine leeway, of excess space.

Take *time*: in trifling, in dallying, we lazily thumb our noses at this, our slave-driver. Where every minute counts, playfulness vanishes. This puts competitive sports on the borderline of play: they seem to make concessions to the pressure of space and time, only to defeat this very pressure by a fraction of a yard or of a second.

Take *fate* and *causality*, which have determined who and what we are, and where. In games of chance we re-establish equality before fate, and secure a virgin chance to every player willing to observe a few rules which, if compared with the rules of reality, seem arbitrary and senseless. Yet they are magically convincing, like the reality of a dream, and they demand absolute compliance. Let a player forget that such play must remain his free choice, let him become possessed by the demon of gambling, and playfulness vanishes again. He is a gambler, not a player.

Take *social reality*, and our defined cubicles in it. In playing we can be what in life we could not or would not be. But as the play-actor begins to believe in his impersonation he comes closer to a state of hysteria, if not worse, while if he tries, for purposes of gain, to make others believe in his "role" he becomes an impostor.

Take our *bodily drives*. The bulk of the nation's advertising effort exploits our wish to play with necessity, to make us believe, for example, that to inhale and to eat are not pleasurable necessities, but a fanciful game with ever new and sensuous nuances. Where the need for these nuances becomes compulsive, it creates a general state of mild addiction and gluttony, which

ceases to transmit a sense of abundance and, in fact, produces an undercurrent of discontent.

Last but not least, in *love life* we describe as sex play the random activities preceding the final act, which permit the partners to choose body part, intensity, and tempo ("what, and with which, and to whom," as the limerick has it). Sex play ends when the final act begins, narrowing choice, dictating tempo, and giving rein to "nature." Where one of the preparatory random acts becomes compelling enough to completely replace the final act, playfulness vanishes and perversion begins.

This list of playful situations in a variety of human endeavors indicates the narrow area within which our ego can feel superior to the confinement of space and time and to the definitiveness of social reality—free from the compulsions of conscience and from impulses of irrationality. Only within these limitations, then, can man feel at one with his ego; no wonder he feels "only human when he plays." But this presupposes one more most decisive condition: he must play rarely and work most of the time. He must have a defined role in society. Playboys and gamblers are both envied and resented by the working man. We like to see them exposed or ridiculed, or we put them to worse than work by forcing them to live in luxurious cages.

The playing child, then, poses a problem: whoever does not work shall not play. Therefore, to be tolerant of the child's play the adult must invent theories which show either that childhood play is really work—or that it does not count. The most popular theory and the easiest on the observer is that the child is *nobody yet*, and that the nonsense of his play reflects it. Scientists have tried to find other explanation for the freaks of childish play by considering them representative of the fact that childhood is neither here nor there. According to Spencer, play uses up *surplus energy* in the young of a number of mammals who do not need to feed or protect themselves because their parents do it for them. However, Spencer noticed that wherever circumstances permit play, tendencies are "simulated" which are "usually ready to act, unusually ready to have their correlative

feelings aroused." Early psychoanalysis added to this the "cartastic" theory, according to which play has a definite function in the growing being in that it permits him to work off pent up emotions and to find imaginary relief for past frustrations.

In order to evaluate these theories, let us turn to the game of another boy, Tom's junior. He lived near another mighty river, the Danube, and his play was recorded by another great psychologist, Sigmund Freud, who wrote: ¹

Without the intention of making a comprehensive study of these phenomena, I availed myself of an opportunity which offered of elucidating the first game invented by himself of a boy eighteen months old. It was more than a casual observation, for I lived for some weeks under the same roof as the child and his parents, and it was a considerable time before the meaning of his puzzling and continually repeated performance became clear to me.

The child was in no respect forward in his intellectual development; . . . but he made himself understood by his parents and the maid-servant, and had a good reputation for behaving "properly." He did not disturb his parents at night; he scrupulously obeyed orders about not touching various objects and not going into certain rooms; and above all he never cried when his mother went out and left him for hours together, although the tie to his mother was a very close one: she had not only nourished him herself, but had cared for him and brought him up without any outside help. Occasionally, however, this well-behaved child evinced the troublesome habit of flinging into the corner of the room or under the bed all the little things he could lay his hands on, so that to gather up his toys was often no light task. He accompanied this by an expression of interest and gratification, emitting a loud, long-drawn-out "O-o-oh!" which in the judgment of the mother (one that coincided with my own) was not an interjection but meant "go away" [*fort!*]. I saw at last that this was a game, and that the child used all his toys only to play "being gone" [*fort sein*] with them. One day I made an observation that confirmed my view. The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string wound round it. It never occurred to him,

¹Sigmund Freud, *A General Selection*, edited by John Rickman, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London, 1937.

for example, to drag this after him on the floor and so play horse and cart with it, but he kept throwing it with considerable skill, held by the string, over the side of his little draped cot, so that the reel disappeared into it, then said his significant "O-o-o-oh" and drew the reel by the string out of the cot again, greeting its reappearance with a joyful "Da" [there!]. This was therefore the complete game, disappearance and return, the first act being the only one generally observed by the onlookers, and the one untiringly repeated by the child as a game for its own sake, although the greater pleasure unquestionably attached to the second act. . . . This interpretation was fully established by a further observation. One day when the mother had been out for some hours she was greeted on her return by the information "Baby o-o-o-oh" which at first remained unintelligible. It soon proved that during his long lonely hours he had found a method of bringing about his own disappearance. He had discovered his reflection in the long mirror which nearly reached to the ground and had then crouched down in front of it, so that the reflection was "fort."

To understand what Freud saw in this game we must note that at the time he was interested in (and, in fact, writing about) the strange phenomenon of the "repetition compulsion"—i.e., the need to re-enact painful experiences in words or acts. We have all experienced the occasional need of talking incessantly about a painful event (an insult, a quarrel, or an operation) which one might be expected to want to forget. We know of traumatized individuals who, instead of finding recovery in sleep, are repeatedly awakened by dreams in which they re-experience the original trauma. We also suspect that it is not so innocently accidental that some people make the same mistakes over and over again; that they "coincidentally" and in utter blindness marry the same kind of impossible partner from whom they have just been divorced; or that a series of analogous accidents and mishaps always must happen just to *them*. In all of these cases, so Freud concluded, the individual unconsciously arranges for variations of an original theme which he has not learned either to overcome or to live with: he tries to master a situation which in its original form had been too much for him by meeting it repeatedly and of

his own accord.

As Freud was writing about this, he became aware of the solitary play described and of the fact that the frequency of the main theme (something or somebody disappears and comes back) corresponded to the intensity of the life experience reflected—namely, the mother's leaving in the morning and her return at night.

This dramatization takes place in the play sphere. Utilizing his mastery over objects, the child can arrange them in such a way that they permit him to imagine that he is master of his life predicament as well. For when the mother had left him, she had removed herself from the sphere of his cries and demands; and she had come back only when it happened to suit her. In his game, however, the little boy has the mother by a string. He makes her go away, even throws her away, and then makes her come back at his pleasure. He has, as Freud put it, *turned passivity into activity*; he plays at doing something that was in reality done to him.

Freud mentions three items which may guide us in a further social evaluation of this game. First, the child threw the object away. Freud sees in this a possible expression of revenge—"If you don't want to stay with me, I don't want you"—and thus an additional gain in active mastery by an apparent growth of emotional autonomy. In his second play act, however, the child goes further. He abandons the object altogether and, with the use of a full-length mirror, plays "going away" from himself and returning to himself. He is now both the person who is being left and the person who leaves. He has become master by incorporating not only the person who, in life, is beyond his control, but the whole situation, with *both* its partners.

This is as far as Freud goes with his interpretation. But we may make a point of the fact that the child greets the returning mother with the information that he has learned to "go away" from himself. The game alone, as reported by Freud, could have become the beginning of an increasing tendency on the child's part to take life experiences into a solitary corner and to rectify them

in fantasy, and only in fantasy. Let us assume that at the mother's return the child were to show complete indifference, extending his revenge to the life situation and indicating that he, indeed, can now take care of himself, that he does not need her. This often happens after the mother's first excursions: she rushes back, eager to embrace her child, only to be met by a bland face. She may then feel rejected and turn against or away from the unloving child, who is thus easily made to feel that the vengeance in the game of throwing away and his subsequent boast has hit its mark too well, that he has indeed made the mother go away for good, whereas he has only tried to recover from being abandoned by her. Thus the basic problem of being left and leaving would not be improved by its solution in solitary play. Our little boy, however, told his mother of his play, and we may assume that she, far from being offended, demonstrated interest and maybe even pride in his ingenuity. He was then better off all around. He had adjusted to a difficult situation, he had learned to manipulate new objects, and he had received loving recognition for his method. All this is in "child's play."

But does the child's play—so a frequent question goes—always "mean" something personal and sinister? What if ten children, in horse-and-buggy days, begin to play with reels on strings, pulling them behind themselves and playing horsie? Must it mean anything to one of them over and beyond what it seems to mean to all?

As we have said already, children, if traumatized, choose for their dramatizations play material which is available in their culture and manageable at their age. What is available depends on the cultural circumstances and is therefore common to all children who share these circumstances. Buns today do not play steamboat but use bicycles as more tangible objects of co-ordination—which does not prevent them from imagining, on the way to school or the grocery, that they are flying through the air and machine gunning the enemy; or that they are the Lone Ranger himself on a glorious Silver. What is manageable, however, depends on the child's power of co-ordination, and therefore is

shared only by those who have reached a certain level of maturation. What has a *common meaning* to all the children in a community (i.e., the idea of having a reel and string represent a living thing on a leash) may have a *special meaning* to some (i.e., all those who have just learned to manipulate reel and string and may thus be ready to enter a new sphere of participation and communal symbolization). Yet all of this may have, in addition, a *unique meaning* to individual children who have lost a person or an animal and therefore endow the game with a particular significance. What these children "have by the string" is not just any animal—it is the personification of a particular, a significant, and a lost animal—or person. To evaluate play the observer must, of course, have an idea of what all the children of a given age in a given community are apt to play. Only thus can he decide whether or not the unique meaning transcends the common meaning. To understand the unique meaning itself requires careful observation, not only of the play's content and form, but also of accompanying words and visible affects, especially those which lead to what we shall describe in the next chapter as "play disruption."

In order to approach the problem of anxiety in play, let us consider the activity of building and destroying a tower. Many a mother thinks that her little son is in a "destructive stage" or even has a "destructive personality" because, after building a big, big tower, the boy cannot follow her advice to leave the tower for Daddy to see, but instead *must* kick it and make it collapse. The almost manic pleasure with which children watch the collapse in a second of the product of long play labor has puzzled many, especially since the child does not appreciate it at all if his tower falls by accident or by a helpful uncle's hand. He, the builder, must destroy it himself. This game, I should think, arises from the not so distant experience of sudden falls at the very time when standing upright on wobbly legs afforded a new and fascinating perspective on existence. The child who consequently learns to *make a tower "stand up"* enjoys causing the same tower to waver and collapse: in addition to the active mastery over a previously

passive event, it makes one feel stronger to know that there is somebody weaker—and towers, unlike little sisters, can't cry and call Mummy. But since it is the child's still precarious mastery over space which is thus to be demonstrated, it is understandable that watching somebody else kick one's tower may make the child see himself in the tower rather than in the kicker: all fun evaporates. Circus clowns later take over when they obligingly fall all over the place from mere ineptness, and yet continue to challenge gravity and causality with ever renewed innocence: there are, then, even big people who are funnier, dumber, and wobblier. Some children, however, who find themselves too much identified with the clown cannot stand his downfalls: to them they are "not funny." This example throws light on the beginning of many an anxiety in childhood, where anxiety around the child's attempt at ego mastery finds unwelcome "support" from adults who treat him roughly or amuse him with exercises which he likes only if and when he himself has initiated them.

The child's play begins with and centers on his own body. This we shall call *autocosmic play*. It begins before we notice it as play, and consists at first in the exploration by repetition of sensual perceptions, of kinesthetic sensations, of vocalizations, etc. Next, the child plays with available persons and things. He may playfully cry to see what wave length would serve best to make the mother reappear, or he may indulge in experimental excursions on her body and on the protrusions and orifices of her face. This is the child's first geography, and the basic maps acquired in such interplay with the mother no doubt remain guides for the ego's first orientation in the "world." Here we call as a witness Santayana:²

... Far, far in a dim past, as if it had been in another world or in a pre-natal condition, Oliver remembered the long-denied privilege of sitting in his mother's lap. It had been such a refuge of safety, of softness, of vantage: You were carried and you were enveloped in

²George Santayana, *The Last Puritan*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1936.

an amplitude of sure protection, like a king on his throne, with his faithful bodyguard many ranks deep about him; and the landscape beyond, with its messengers and its motley episodes, became the most entertaining of spectacles, where everything was unexpected and exciting, yet where nothing could go wrong; as if your mother herself had been telling you a story, and these pictures were only the illustrations to it which painted themselves in your listening mind.

The *microsphere*—i.e., the small world of manageable toys—is a harbor which the child establishes, to return to when he needs to overhaul his ego. But the thing-world has its own laws: it may resist reconstruction, or it may simply break to pieces; it may prove to belong to somebody else and be subject to confiscation by superiors. Often the microsphere seduces the child into an unguarded expression of dangerous themes and attitudes which arouse anxiety and lead to sudden play disruption. This is the counterpart in waking life of the anxiety dream; it can keep children from trying to play just as the fear of night terror can keep them from going to sleep. If thus frightened or disappointed in the microsphere, the child may regress into the atmosphere, day-dreaming, thumb-sucking, masturbatory. On the other hand, if the first use of the thing-world is successful and is guided properly, the pleasure of mastering toy things becomes associated with the mastery of the traumata which were projected on them, and with the prestige gained through such mastery.

Finally, at nursery-school age playfulness reaches into the *macrosphere*, the world shared with others. First these others are treated as things, are inspected, run into, or forced to "be horsie." Learning is necessary in order to discover what potential play content can be admitted only to fantasy or only to autocosmic play; what content can be successfully represented only in the microcosmic world of toys and things; and what content can be shared with others and forced upon them.

As this is learned, each sphere is endowed with its own sense of reality and mastery. For quite a while, then, solitary play remains an indispensable harbor for the overhauling of shattered emotions after periods of rough going in the social seas. This, and

the fact that a child can be counted upon to bring into the solitary play arranged for him whatever aspect of his ego has been ruffled most, form the fundamental condition for our diagnostic reliance on "play therapy," which will be discussed next.

What is infantile play, then? We saw that it is not the equivalent of adult play, that it is not recreation. The playing adult steps sideward into another reality; the playing child advances forward to new stages of mastery. I propose the theory that the child's play is the infantile form of the human ability to deal with experience by creating model situations and to master reality by experiment and planning. It is in certain phases of his work that the adult projects past experience into dimensions which seem manageable. In the laboratory, on the stage, and on the drawing board, he relives the past and thus relieves leftover affects; in reconstructing the model situation, he redeems his failures and strengthens his hopes. He anticipates the future from the point of view of a corrected and shared past.

No thinker can do more and no playing child less. As William Blake puts it: "The child's toys and the old man's reasons are the fruits of the two seasons."

2. PLAY AND CURE

Modern play therapy is based on the observation that a child made insecure by a secret hate against or fear of the natural protectors of his play in family and neighborhood seems able to use the protective sanction of an understanding adult to regain some play peace. Grandmothers and favorite aunts may have played that role in the past; its professional elaboration of today is the play therapist. The most obvious condition is that the child has the toys and the adult for himself, and that sibling rivalry, parental nagging, or any kind of sudden interruption does not disturb the unfolding of his play intentions, whatever they may be. For to "play it out" is the most natural self-healing measure childhood affords.

Let us remember here the simple, if often embarrassing, fact that adults, when traumatized, tend to solve their tension by "talk-

ing it out." They are compelled, repeatedly, to describe the painful event: it seems to make them "feel better." Systems designed to cure the soul or the mind make ritual use of this tendency by providing, at regular intervals, an ordained or otherwise sanctioned listener who gives his undivided attention, is sworn not to censure arbitrarily or to betray, and bestows absolution by explaining how the individual's problem makes sense in some larger context, be it sin, conflict, or disease. The method finds its limitations where this "clinical" situation loses the detachment in which life can be reflected, and itself becomes a passionate conflict of dependence and hostility. In psychoanalytic terms, the limitation is set by the tendency (especially strong in neurotics) to transfer basic conflicts from their original infantile setting into every new situation, including the therapeutic one. This is what Freud meant when he said that the treatment itself, at first, becomes a "transference neurosis." The patient who thus transfers his conflict in all its desperate immediacy becomes at the same time resistive to all attempts at making him see the situation in a detached way, at formulating its meaning. He is *in resistance*; in a war to end all wars, he becomes more deeply embroiled than ever. At this point, non-psychoanalytic therapeutic efforts often end; the patient, it is said, cannot or does not want to get well or is too inferior to comprehend his obligations in treatment. Therapeutic psychoanalysis, however, begins at this point. It makes systematic use of the knowledge that no neurotic is undivided in his wish to get well and of necessity transfers his dependences and hostilities to the treatment and the person of the therapist. Psychoanalysis acknowledges and learns from such "resistances."

This phenomenon of *transference* in the playing child, as well as in the verbalizing adult, marks the point where simple measures fail—namely, when an emotion becomes so intense that it defeats playfulness, forcing an immediate discharge into the play and into the relationship with the play observer. The failure is characterized by what is to be described here as *play disruption*—i.e., the sudden and complete or diffused and slowly spreading inability

ity to play. We saw such play disruption occur, on my provocation, in Ann's case, when she had to leave me and my tempting toys in order to rejoin her mother. Similarly, we saw Sam trapped by his overpowering emotions in the middle of a game. In both cases we used play observation as an incidental diagnostic tool. I shall now introduce a little girl who, although she came for diagnostic purposes only, led me through a full cycle of play disruption and play triumph, and thus offered a good example of the way in which the ego, flooded by fear, can regain its synthesizing power through playful involvement and disengagement. Our patient is Mary. She is three years old. She is a somewhat pale brunette, but looks (and is) intelligent, pretty, and quite feminine. When disturbed, however, she is said to be stubborn, babyish, and shut-in. Recently she has enriched her inventory of expression by nightmares and by violent anxiety attacks in the play group which she has recently joined. All that the play group teachers can say is that Mary has a queer way of lifting things and has a rigid posture; and that her tension seems to increase in connection with the routines of resting and going to the toilet. With this information at hand we invite Mary to our office.

Maybe a word should be said here about the thoroughly difficult situation which ensues when a mother brings a child for observation. The child has not chosen to come. He often does not feel sick at all in the sense that he has a symptom which he wishes to get rid of. On the contrary, all he knows is that certain things and, most of all, certain people make him feel uncomfortable and he wishes that we would do something about these things and people—not about him. Often he feels that something is wrong with his parents, and mostly he is right. But he has no words for this and, even if he did have, he has no reason to trust us with such weighty information. On the other hand, he does not know what the parents have told us about him—while God only knows what they have told the child about us. For the parents, helpful as they may wish to be and necessary as they are as initial informants, cannot be trusted in these matters: the initial history given is often distorted by the wish to justify

(or secretly punish) themselves or to punish (and unconsciously justify) somebody else, perhaps the grandparents who "told you so."

In this case, my office was in a hospital. Mary had been told that she was coming to discuss her nightmares with me—a man whom she had never seen before. Her mother had consulted a pediatrician regarding these nightmares and Mary had heard the mother and the doctor argue over the possible indication for a tonsillectomy. I had hoped, therefore, that she would notice that the appointments of my office indicated a strictly non-medical affair and that she would give me a chance in simple and straightforward terms to acknowledge the purpose of her visit, to tell her that I was not a doctor and then to make clear that we were going to play together in order to get acquainted. Such explanations do not quite settle a child's doubts, but they may permit him to turn to the toys and do something. And as soon as he does something we can observe what he selects and repudiates in our standard inventory of toys. Our next step, then, will be guided by the meaning thus revealed.

Mary holds on to her mother as she enters my office. When she offers me her hand it is both rigid and cold. She gives me a brief smile, then turns to her mother, puts her arms around her, and holds her close to the still open door. She buries her head in her mother's skirt as if she wanted to hide in it, and responds to my advances only by turning her head to me—now with tightly closed eyes. Yet she *had* for a split moment looked at me with a smile that seemed to convey an interest—as if she wanted to see whether or not the new adult was going to understand fun. This makes her flight to her mother seem somewhat dramatic. The mother tries to encourage her to look at the toys, but Mary again hides her face in her mother's skirt and repeats in an exaggeratedly babyish voice, "Mommy, mommy, mommy!" A dramatic young lady: I am not even quite sure that she is not hiding a smile. I decide to wait.

Mary does make a decision. Still holding on to her mother, she points to a (girl) doll and says several times quickly and

babyishly, "What that, what that?" After the mother has patiently explained that it is a dolly, Mary repeats "Dolly, dolly, dolly," and suggests in words not understandable to me that the mother take off the dolly's shoes. The mother tries to make her perform this act herself, but Mary simply repeats her demand. Her voice becomes quite anxious, and it seems that we may have tears in a moment.

Now the mother asks if it is not time for her to leave the room and wait outside as she has told Mary she would. I ask Mary whether we can let her mother go now and she, unexpectedly, makes no objection, not even when she suddenly finds herself without anybody to lean on. I try to start a conversation about the name of the doll, which the mother has left in Mary's hand. Mary grasps it firmly around the legs and suddenly, smiling mischievously, she begins to touch various things in the room with the doll's head. When a toy falls from the shelf, she looks at me to see whether she has gone too far; when she sees me smile permissively she laughs and begins to push smaller toys, always with the doll's head, in such a way that they fall too. Her excitement increases. With special glee she stabs with the doll's head at a toy train which is on the floor in the middle of the room. She overturns all the cars with growing evidence of a somehow too exciting kind of fun. As the engine overturns she suddenly stops and becomes pale. She leans with her back against the sofa, holds the doll vertically over her lower abdominal region, and lets it drop on the floor. She picks it up again, holds it over the same region, and drops it again. While repeating this several times, she begins first to whine and then to yell, "Mommy, mommy, mommy."

The mother re-enters, sure that communication has failed, and asks Mary whether she wants to go. I tell Mary that she may go if she wishes but that I hope she will be back in a few days. Quickly calmed, she leaves with her mother, saying good-by to the secretary outside as if she had had a pleasant visit.

Strangely enough, I too felt that the child had made a successful if interrupted communication. With small children, words

are not always necessary at the beginning. I had felt that the play was leading up to a conversation; and at any rate the child had conveyed to me by counterphobic activity what her danger was. The fact of the mother's anxious interruption was, of course, as significant as the child's play disruption. Together, they probably explain the child's babyish anxiety. But what had she communicated with this emotional somersault, this sudden hilarity and flushed aggressiveness, and this equally sudden inhibition and pale anxiety?

The discernible mode content had been *pushing* things, not with her hand but with the doll as an extension of her hand; and then *dropping* the same doll from the genital region.

The doll as an extension of the hand was, as it were, a pushing tool. This suggests that she may not dare to touch or push things with her bare hand and reminds me of her teachers' observation that she seemed to touch or lift things in her own special way. This, together with the general rigidity in her extremities, suggests that Mary may be worried about her hands, maybe as aggressive tools.

The transfer of the doll to the lower abdominal region followed by her strangely obsessive and repetitive dropping leads to the further suggestion that she was dramatizing the loss from that region of an aggressive tool, a pushing instrument. The attack-like state which overcame her at this point reminds me of something which I learned long ago: severe hysterical attacks in adult women have been interpreted as dramatizations representing both partners in an imagined scene. Thus, one hand in tearing off the patient's dress may dramatize an aggressor's approach, while the other, in clutching it, may represent the victim's attempt to protect herself. Mary's attack impressed me as being of such a nature: by dropping the doll several times, panicky and yet as if obsessed, she seemed to be inexorably driven to dramatize both the robbed and the robber.

But what was to be stolen from her? Here we would have to know which meaning is more relevant, the doll's use as an aggressive tool—or the doll as a baby. In this play hour the dropped

doll had first been the prolongation of an extremity and a tool of (pushing) aggression, and then something lost in the lower abdominal region under circumstances of extreme anxiety. Does Mary consider a penis such an aggressive weapon, and does she dramatize the fact that she does not have one? From the mother's account it is entirely probable that on entering the nursery school Mary was given her first opportunity to go to the toilet in the presence of boys and visits to the toilet were said to be occasions for anxiety.

I am thinking of the mother when she raps on the door. She has left the child, now quite composed, outside to come back and add something to Mary's biography. Mary was born with a sixth finger which was removed when she was approximately six months old; there is a scar on her left hand. Just prior to the outbreak of her anxiety attacks, Mary had repeatedly and urgently asked about this scar ("What that, what that?") and had received the routine answer that it was "just a mosquito bite." The mother agreed that the child when somewhat younger could easily have been present when her congenital anomaly was mentioned. Mary, the mother adds, has recently been equally insistent in her sexual curiosity.

We can now understand better the fact that Mary feels uneasy about the aggressive use of her hand, which has been robbed of a finger, and that she may equate the scar on her hand and her genital "scar," the lost finger and the absent penis. Such an association would also bring into juxtaposition the observation of sex differences in the play school and the immediate question of a threatening operation.

Before Mary's second visit, her mother offered this further information: Mary's sexual curiosity had recently received a specific blow when her father, irritable because of a regional increase in unemployment which threatened his means of livelihood, had shown impatience with her during her usual morning visit to him in the bathroom. In fact, he had shoved her out of the room. As he told me later, he had angrily repeated the words, "You stay out of here!" She had liked to watch the shav-

ing process and had also on recent occasions (to his slight annoyance) asked about his genitals. A strict adherence to a routine in which she could do, say, and ask the same thing over and over again had always been a necessary condition for Mary's inner security. She was "heartbroken" over the consequent exclusion from the father's toilet.

We also discussed the fact (which I have already mentioned) that Mary's disturbed sleep and foul breath had been attributed by a pediatrician to a bad condition of the tonsils, and that the mother and the physician had engaged in a discussion in front of Mary as to whether she needed an immediate operation or not. *Operation*, then, and *separation* are seen to be the common denominators: the actual operation on the finger, the anticipated operation of the tonsils, and the mythical operation by which boys become girls; the separation from her mother during play-school hours, and the estrangement from her father. At the end of the first hour of play observation, then, this was the closest we could come to meanings on which all of the play elements and biographic data seemed to converge.

The antithesis of play disruption is play satiation, play from which a child emerges refreshed as a sleeper from dreams which "worked." Disruption and satiation are very marked and very clear only in rare cases. More often they are diffused and must be ascertained by detailed study. But not so in Mary's case. During her second appointment she obliged me with a specimen of play satiation as dramatic as that of her play disruption.

At first Mary again smiles bashfully at me. Again she turns her head away, holding on to her mother's hand and insisting that the mother come with her into the room. Once in the room, however, she lets her mother's hand go and, forgetting about the mother's and my presence, she begins to play animatedly and with obvious determination and goal-mindedness. I quickly close the door and motion the mother to sit down, because I do not want to disturb the play.

Mary goes to the corner where the blocks are on the floor. She selects two blocks and arranges them in such a way that she

can stand on them each time she comes to the corner to pick up more blocks. Thus, play begins again with an extension of extremities, this time her feet. She now collects a pile of blocks in the middle of the room, moving to the corner and back without hesitation. Then she kneels on the floor and builds a small house for a toy cow. For about a quarter of an hour she is completely absorbed in the task of arranging the house so that it is strictly rectangular and at the same time fits tightly about a toy cow. She then adds five blocks to one long side of the house and experiments with a sixth block until its position satisfies her (see Figure 10).

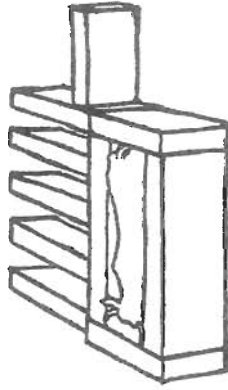


FIGURE 10

This time, then, the dominant emotional note is peaceful play concentration with a certain maternal quality of care and order. There is no climax of excitement, and the play ends on a note of satiation; she has built something, she likes it, now the play is over. She gets up with a radiant smile—which suddenly gives place to a mischievous twinkle. I do not realize the danger I am about to fall victim to, because I am too fascinated by the fact that the close-fitting stable looks like a hand—with a sixth finger. At the same time it expresses the “inclusive” mode, a female-protective configuration, corresponding to the baskets and boxes and cradles arranged by little and big girls to give comfort to small things. Thus we see, so I muse, two restorations in one: The configuration puts the finger back on the hand and the

happily feminine pattern belies the “loss from the genital region” previously dramatized. The second hour’s play thus accomplishes an expression of restoration and safety—and this concerning the same body parts (hand, genital region) which in the play disruption of the first hour had appeared as endangered.

But, as I said, Mary has begun to look teasingly at me. She now laughs, takes her mother’s hand and pulls her out of the room, saying with determination, “Mommy, come out.” I wait for a while, then look out into the waiting room. A loud and triumphant, “[T]ray in there!” greets me. I strategically withdraw, whereupon Mary closes the door with a bang. Two further attempts on my part to leave my room are greeted in the same way. She has me cornered.

There is nothing to do but to enter into the spirit of the game. I open the door slightly, quickly push the toy cow through the opening, make it squeak, and withdraw it. Mary is beside herself with pleasure and insists that the game be repeated a few times. She gets her wish, then it is time for her to go home. When she leaves she looks triumphantly and yet affectionately at me and promises to come back. I am left with the task of figuring out what has happened.

From anxiety in the atmosphere in the first hour, Mary had now graduated to satiation in the microsphere—and to triumph in the macrosphere. She had taken the mother out of my space and locked me into it. This game had as content: a man is teasingly locked into his room. It was only in connection with this playful superiority that Mary had decided to talk to me, and this in no uncertain terms. “[T]ray in there!” were the first words she had ever addressed to me! They were said clearly and in a loud voice, as if something in her had waited for the moment when she would be free enough to say them. What does that mean?

I think we have here the consummation of a play episode by way of a “father transference.” It will be remembered that from the moment Mary came into my room at the beginning of the first contact she showed a somewhat coquettish and bashful curi-

osity about me, which she immediately denied by closing her eyes tightly. Since it can be expected that she would transfer to me (the man with toys) a conflict which disturbed her usually playful relationship with her father, it seems more than probable that in this game she was repeating with active mastery ("That in there") and with some reversal of vectors (out-in) the situation of exclusion of which she had been a passive victim at home ("Stay out of here").

To some this may seem like a lot of complicated and devious reasoning for such a little girl. But here it is well to realize that these matters are difficult for rational thinking only. It would indeed be difficult to think up such a series of play tricks. It is even difficult to recognize and analyze it. But it happens, of course, unconsciously and automatically: here, never underestimate the power of the ego—even of such a little girl.

This episode is presented to illustrate the self-curative trend in spontaneous play; for play therapy and play diagnosis must make systematic use of such self-curative processes. They may help the child to help himself—and they may help us to advise the parents. Where this fails, more complicated methods of treatment (child psychoanalysis)³ must be initiated—methods which have not been discussed in this chapter. With advancing age, prolonged conversation would take the place of play. Here, however, it was my purpose to demonstrate that a few play hours can serve to inform us of matters which the child could never verbalize. Trained observers, in the possession of numerous data, can see from a few play contacts which of these data are acutely relevant to the child, and why. In Mary's case, her play disruption and her play satiation, if seen in the framework of all the known circumstances, strongly suggest that a variety of past and future, real and imagined events had been incorporated into a system of mutually aggravating dangers. In her second play hour, she disposed of them all: she restored her finger, reassured herself,

³Anna Freud, *Psycho-Analytical Treatment of Children*, Imago Publishing Co., London, 1946.

reaffirmed her femininity—and told the big man off. Such play peace gained must, however, be sustained by new insight on the part of the parents.

Mary's parents accepted (and partly themselves suggested) the following recommendations. Mary's curiosity in regard to her scar, her genitals, and her operation required a truthful attitude. She needed to have other children, especially boys, visit her for play at her home. The matter of the tonsils called for the decision of a specialist, which could be candidly communicated to the child. It did not seem wise to awaken and to restrain her during her nightmares; perhaps she needed to fight her dreams out, and there would be opportunity to hold her lightly and to comfort her when she awoke spontaneously. The child needed much activity; playful instruction in rhythmic motion might relax some of the rigidity in her extremities, which, whatever the initial cause, may have been at least aggravated by fearful anticipation since hearing for the first time about the mysterious amputation of her finger.

When Mary, a few weeks later, paid me a short visit, she was entirely at home and asked me in a clear, loud voice about the color of the train I had taken on my vacation. It will be remembered that she overturned a toy engine on the occasion of her first visit: now she could talk about engines. A tonsillectomy had proved unnecessary; the nightmares had ceased; Mary was making free and extensive use of the new play companions provided in and near her home. There was a revived play relationship with her father. He had intuitively made the most of Mary's sudden engaptured admiration for shining locomotives. He took her for regular walks to the railroad yards where together they watched the mighty engines.

Here the symbolism which has pervaded this clinical episode gains a new dimension. In the despair of play disruption, the toy engine apparently had a destructive meaning in some context with phallic-locomotor anxiety: when Mary pushed it over, she apparently had that awesome "Adam, where art thou" experi-

once which we first observed in Ann. At the time, Mary's play relationship to her father had been disrupted, and this (as she could not know or understand) because of his worries over a possible disruption of his work status. This she seems to have interpreted entirely in terms of her maturational state and of her changes in status: and yet her reaction was not unrelated to the unconscious meaning of the father's actions. For threatened loss of status, threatened marginality, often result in an unconscious attempt by more stringent self-control and by purified standards to regain the ground lost or at least to keep from slipping any further. Thus, I believe, made the father react in a less tolerant way to the little girl's exploration, thus offending and frightening her in the general area which was already disturbed. It was, then, this area which appeared in her play in a condensed form, while she attempted, from the frightfulness of isolation, to work her way back to playful mutuality. Thus do children reflect and, where play fails, carry over into their own lives, the historical and economic crises of their parents.

Neither Mary's play nor the insight it provided could change the father's economic worries. But the moment he recognized the impact of his anxieties on his daughter's development, he realized that from a long-range point of view her anxieties mattered much more than the threatened change of his work status. In fact, actual developments did not confirm his apprehensions.

The father's idea of taking walks to the engine yards was felicitous. For the real engines now became symbols of power shared by father and daughter alike and sustained by the whole imagery of the machine culture in which this child is destined to become a woman.

Thus at the end of any therapeutic encounter with a child the parent must sustain what the adult patient must gain for himself: a realignment with the images and the forces governing the cultural development of his day, and from it an increased promise of a sense of identity.

But here, at last, we must try to come to a better description and definition of what we mean by identity.

3. THE BEGINNINGS OF IDENTITY

A. PLAY AND MILIEU

The emerging identity bridges the stages of childhood when the bodily self and the parental images are given their cultural connotations; and it bridges the stage of young adulthood, when a variety of social roles become available and, in fact, increasingly coercive. We will try to make this process more tangible, by looking first at some infantile steps toward identity and then at some cultural impediments to its consolidation.

A child who has just found himself able to walk, more or less coaxed or ignored by those around him, seems driven to repeat the act for the pure delight of functioning, and out of the need to master and perfect a newly initiated function. But he also acts under the immediate awareness of the new status and stature of "one who can walk," with whatever connotation this happens to have in the co-ordinates of his culture's space-time—be it "one who will go far," "one who will be able to stand on his own feet," "one who will be upright," or "one who must be watched because he might go too far." The internalization of a particular version of "one who can walk" is one of the many steps in child development which (through the coincident experience of physical mastery and of cultural meaning, of functional pleasure and of social prestige) contribute on each step to a more realistic self-esteem. This self-esteem grows to be a conviction that one is learning effective steps toward a tangible future, and is developing into a defined self within a social reality. The growing child must, at every step, derive a vitalizing sense of actuality from the awareness that his individual way of mastering experience (his ego synthesis) is a successful variant of a group identity and is in accord with its space-time and life plan.

In this child ten cannot be fooled by empty praise and condescending encouragement. They may have to accept artificial bolstering of their self-esteem in lieu of something better, but their ego identity gains real strength only from wholehearted and consistent recognition of real accomplishment—i.e., of

achievement that has meaning in the culture. We have tried to convey this when discussing problems of Indian education, but try to a more lucid statement:⁴

Dr. Ruth Underhill tells me of sitting with a group of Papago elders in Arizona when the man of the house turned to his little three-year-old granddaughter and asked her to close the door. The door was heavy and hard to shut. The child tried, but it did not move. Several times the grandfather repeated: "Yes, close the door." No one jumped to the child's assistance. No one took the responsibility away from her. On the other hand there was no impatience, for after all the child was small. They sat gravely waiting until the child succeeded and her grandfather gravely thanked her. It was assumed that the task would not be asked of her unless she could perform it, and having been asked, the responsibility was hers alone just as if she were a grown woman.

The essential point of such child training is that the child is from infancy continuously conditioned to responsible social participation, while at the same time the tasks that are expected of it are adapted to its capacity. The contrast with our society is very great. A child does not make any contribution of labor to our industrial society except as it competes with an adult, its work is not measured against its own strength and skill but against high-g geared industrial requirements. Even when we praise a child's achievements in the home, we are outraged if such praise is interpreted as being of the same order as praise of adults. The child is praised because the parent feels well disposed, regardless of whether the task is well done by adult standards or not and the child acquires no sensible standard by which to measure its achievement. The gravity of a Cheyenne Indian family ceremoniously making a feast out of a little boy's first snowbird is far removed from our behavior. At birth the little boy was presented with a toy bow and arrow, and from the time he could run about, serviceable bows and arrows suited to his stature were specially made for him by the man of the family. Animals and birds were brought to his awareness in a graded series beginning with those most easily taken, and as he brought in his first of each species his family duly made a feast of it, accepting his contribution as gravely as the

⁴Ruth Benedict, "Continuities and Discontinuities in Cultural Conditioning," *Psychiatry*, 1: 161-167 (1938).

buffalo his father brought. When he finally killed a buffalo, it was only the final step of his childhood conditioning, not a new adult role with which his childhood experience had been at variance.

It dawns on us, then, that the theories of play which are advanced in our culture and which take as their foundation the assumption that in children, too, play is defined by the fact that it is not work, are really only one of the many prejudices by which we exclude our children from an early source of a sense of identity.

But then, with primitives it is a different matter. Their cultures are exclusive. Their image of man begins and ends with their idea of a strong or clean Yurok or Sioux, in their defined segments of nature. In our civilization the image of man is expanding. As it becomes more individuated, it also tends to include untold millions in new regions, nations, continents, and classes. New syntheses of economic and emotional safety are sought in the formation of new national and social entities based on more inclusive identities.

Primitive tribes have a direct relationship with the sources and means of production. Their techniques are extensions of the human body; their magic is a projection of body concepts. Children in these groups participate in technical and magic pursuits. Body and environment, childhood and culture may be full of dangers, but they are all one world. This world may be small, but it is culturally coherent. The expansiveness of civilization, on the other hand, its stratification and specialization, make it impossible for children to include in their ego-synthesis more than segments of the society which is relevant to their existence. History itself has become a temporal environment to be adjusted to. Machines, far from remaining tools and extensions of man's physiological functions, destine whole organizations of people to be extensions of machinery. Childhood, in some classes, becomes a separate segment of life, with its own folklore, its own literature.

The study of contemporary neuroses, however, points to the significance of this lag between child training and social actuality.

Neuroses contain, so we find, unconscious and futile attempts to adjust to the heterogeneous present with the magic concepts of a more homogeneous past, fragments of which are still transmitted through child training. But mechanisms of adjustment which once made for evolutionary adaptation, tribal integration, caste coherence, national uniformity, etc., are at loose ends in an industrial civilization.

No wonder, then, that some of our troubled children constantly break out of their play into some damaging activity in which they seem to us to "interfere" with our world; while analysis reveals that they only wish to demonstrate their right to find an identity in it. They refuse to become a specialty called "child," who must play at being big because he is not given an opportunity to be a small partner in a big world.

B. SON OF A BOMBARDIER

During the last war a neighbor of mine, a boy of five, underwent a change of personality from a "mother's boy" to a violent, stubborn, and disobedient child. The most disquieting symptom was an urge to set fires.

The boy's parents had separated just before the outbreak of war. The mother and the boy had moved in with some women cousins, and when war began the father had joined the air force. The women cousins frequently expressed their disrespect for the father, and cultivated babyish traits in the boy. Thus, to be a mother's boy threatened to be a stronger identity element than to be a father's son.

The father, however, did well in war; in fact, he became a hero. On the occasion of his first furlough the little boy had the experience of seeing the man he had been warned not to emulate become the much-admired center of the neighborhood's attention. The mother announced that she would drop her divorce plans. The father went back to war and was soon lost over Germany.

After the father's departure and death the affectionate and dependent boy developed more and more disquieting symptoms

of destructiveness and defiance, culminating in fire setting. He gave the key to the change himself when, protesting against his mother's whipping, he pointed to a pile of wood he had set afire and exclaimed (in more childish words), "If this were a German city, you would have liked me for it." He thus indicated that in setting fires he fantasied being a bombardier like the father, who had told of his exploits.

We can only guess at the nature of the boy's turmoil. But I believe that we see here the identification of a son with his father, resulting from a suddenly increased conflict at the very close of the oedipus age. The father, at first successfully replaced by the "good" little boy, suddenly becomes both a newly vitalized ideal and a concrete threat, a competitor for the mother's love. He thus devaluates radically the boy's feminine identifications. In order to save himself from both sexual and social disorientation, the boy must, in the shortest possible time, regroup his identifications; but then the great competitor is killed by the enemy—a fact which increases the guilt for the competitive feeling itself and compromises the boy's new masculine initiative which becomes maladaptive.

A child has quite a number of opportunities to identify himself, more or less experimentally, with habits, traits, occupations, and ideas of real or fictitious people of either sex. Certain crises force him to make radical selections. However, the historical era in which he lives offers only a limited number of socially meaningful models for workable combinations of identification fragments. Their usefulness depends on the way in which they simultaneously meet the requirements of the organism's maturational stage and the ego's habits of synthesis.

To my little neighbor the role of the bombardier may have suggested a possible synthesis of the various elements that comprise a budding identity: his temperament (vigorous); his maturational stage (phallic-urethral-locomotor); his social stage (oedipal) and his social situation; his capacities (muscular, mechanical); his father's temperament (a great soldier rather than a successful civilian); and a current historical prototype (ag-

gressive hero). Where such synthesis succeeds, a most surprising coagulation of constitutional, temperamental, and learned reactions may produce exuberance of growth and unexpected accomplishment. Where it fails, it must lead to severe conflict, often expressed in unexpected naughtiness or delinquency. For should a child feel that the environment tries to deprive him too radically of all the forms of expression which permit him to develop and to integrate the next step in his identity, he will defend it with the astonishing strength encountered in animals who are suddenly forced to defend their lives. And indeed, in the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of ego identity. Deprivation of identity, can lead to murder.

I would not have dared to speculate on the little bombardier's conflicts had I not seen evidence for a solution in line with our interpretation. When the worst of this boy's dangerous initiative had subsided, he was observed swooping down a hill on a bicycle, endangering, scaring, and yet deftly avoiding other children. They shrieked, laughed, and in a way admired him for it. In watching him, and hearing the strange noises he made, I could not help thinking that he again imagined himself to be an airplane on a bombing mission. But at the same time he gained in playful mastery over his locomotion; he exercised circumspection in his attack, and he became an admired virtuoso on a bicycle.

One should learn from such an example that re-education must seize upon the forces mobilized for playful integration. On the other hand, the desperate intensity of many a symptom must be understood as the defense of a step in identity development which to the child promises integration of the rapid changes taking place in all areas of his life. What to the observer looks like an especially powerful manifestation of naked instinct is often only a desperate plea for the permission to synthesize and sublimate in the only way possible. We can therefore expect our young patients to respond only to therapeutic measures which will help them to acquire the prerequisites for the successful completion of their identity. Therapy and guidance may attempt

to substitute more desirable for less desirable items, but the total configuration of the developing identity elements soon becomes unalterable. It follows that therapy and guidance by professionals are doomed to failure where the culture refuses to provide an early basis for an identity and where opportunities for appropriate later adjustments are missing.

Our little son of a bombardier illustrates a general point. Psychosocial identity develops out of a gradual integration of all identifications. But here, if anywhere, the whole has a different quality from the sum of its parts. Under favorable circumstances children have the nucleus of a separate identity early in life; often they must defend it even against the necessity of over-identifying with one or both of their parents. These processes are difficult to study in patients, because the neurotic self has, by definition, fallen prey to overidentifications which isolate the small individual both from his budding identity and from his milieu.

C. BLACK IDENTITY

But what if the "milieu" is determined to let live only at the expense of a permanent loss of identity?

Consider, for example, the chances for a continuity of identity in the American Negro child. I know a colored boy who, like our boys, listens every night to Red Rider. Then he sits up in bed, imagining that he is Red Rider. But the moment comes when he sees himself galloping after some masked offenders and suddenly notices that in his fancy Red Rider is a colored man. He stops his fantasy. While a small child, this boy was extremely expressive, both in his pleasures and in his sorrows. Today he is calm and always smiles; his language is soft and blurred; nobody can hurry him or worry him—or please him. White people like him.

Negro babies often receive sensual satisfactions which provide them with enough oral and sensory surplus for a lifetime, as clearly betrayed in the way they move, laugh, talk, sing. Their forced symbiosis with the feudal South capitalized on this oral-

sensory treasure and helped to build a slave's identity: mild, submissive, dependent, somewhat querulous, but always ready to serve, with occasional empathy and childlike wisdom. But underneath a dangerous split occurred. The Negro's unavoidable identification with the dominant race, and the need of the master race to protect its own identity against the very sensual and oral temptations emanating from the race held to be inferior (whence came their mummies), established in both groups an association: light—clean—clever—white, and dark—dirty—dumb—nigger. The result, especially in those Negroes who left the poor haven of their Southern homes, was often a violently sudden and cruel cleanliness training, as attested to in the autobiographies of Negro writers. It is as if by cleansing, a whiter identity could be achieved. The attending disillusionment transmits itself to the phallic-locomotor stage, when restrictions as to what shade of girl one may dream of interfere with the free transfer of the original narcissistic sensuality to the genital sphere. Three identities are formed: (1) mammy's oral-sensual "honey-child"—tender, expressive, rhythmical, (2) the evil identity of the dirty, anal-sadistic, phallic-rapist "nigger"; and (3) the clean, anal-compulsive, restrained, friendly, but always sad "white man's Negro."

So-called opportunities offered the migrating Negro often only turn out to be a more subtly restricted prison which endangers his only historically successful identity (that of the slave) and fails to provide a reintegration of the other identity fragments mentioned. These fragments, then, become dominant in the form of racial caricatures which are underscored and stereotyped by the entertainment industry. Tired of his own caricature, the colored individual often retires into hypochondriac invalidism as a condition which represents an analogy to the dependence and the relative safety of defined restriction in the South: a neurotic regression to the ego identity of the slave.

I have mentioned the fact that mixed-blood Indians in areas where they hardly ever see Negroes refer to their full-blood brothers as "niggers," thus indicating the power of the dominant

national imagery which serves to counterpoint the ideal and the evil images in the inventory of available prototypes. No individual can escape this opposition of images, which is all-pervasive in the men and in the women, in the majorities and in the minorities, and in all the classes of a given national or cultural unit. Psychoanalysis shows that the unconscious evil identity (the composite of everything which arouses negative identification—i.e., the wish not to resemble it) consists of the images of the violated (castrated) body, the ethnic outgroup, and the exploited minority. Thus a pronounced he-man may, in his dreams and prejudices prove to be mortally afraid of ever displaying a woman's sentiments, a Negro's submissiveness, or a Jew's intellectuality. For the ego, in the course of its synthesizing efforts, attempts to subsume the most powerful evil and ideal prototypes (the final contestants, as it were) and with them the whole existing imagery of superior and inferior, good and bad, masculine and feminine, free and slave, potent and impotent, beautiful and ugly, fast and slow, tall and small, in a simple alternative, in order to make one battle and one strategy out of a bewildering number of skirmishes.

While children may feel that colored people have become dark by a dirtying process, colored people may consider whites a bleached form of colored man. In either case there is the idea of a washable layer.

All folks was born black, an' dem what's turnt white, dey jest had more sense. Angel of de Lord come down an' told de ontire bunch to meet on de fo'th Friday at de dark o' de moon an' wash deyselves in Jordan. He explained to 'em dat dey'd all turn white an' straighten de kinks outen deir hair. Angel kept preachin' an' preachin', but dem fool niggers didn't pay him no mind. Angel can't teach a nigger nothin'. When de fo'th Friday come a mighty little sprinklin' of 'em went down to de river an' commenced to scrub. Water was mighty low. 'Twarn't like Old Missip'—scusin' de Lord's river.—'twarn't no more'n a creek. You jest oughter seed dat crowd o' niggers settin' on de fence snickerin' at dem what went in washin'. Snickerin' an' throwin' slams. More niggers dan you ever see in Vicksburg on circus

day.

Dem what went in de river kept scrubbin' and washin', special deir hair to git de kinks out. Old Aunt Grinny Granny—great-grand-mammy of all dem niggers—she sot on a log all day long, catin' cheese and crackers and lowratin' de m what was washin'. When fust dark come, she jumped up and clapped her hands: "Fore Gawd, dem niggers is gittin' white!" Grinny Granny jerked off her head handkercher an' went tumblin' down de bank to wash her hair, an' all dem fool niggers followed her. But de water was all used up, jest a tiny drap in de bottom, no more'n enough to moisten de palms o' deir hands and de soles o' deir feet. So dat's why a nigger is white in dem places.⁵

Folklore-here makes use of a factor which racial prejudice (shared by black and white alike) has in common with sexual prejudice (also shared, deep down, by man and woman alike). The differentiating factor, whether it is the darker color of the skin or the non-male form of the genitals, is assumed to have *happened* to the less-endowed, in the form of some oversight or punishment; and it is more or less outspokenly treated as a blemish.

The Negro, of course, is only the most flagrant case of an American minority which by the pressure of tradition and the limitation of opportunity is forced to identify with its own evil identity fragments, thus jeopardizing whatever participation in an American identity it may have earned.

What may be called an individual's ego space-time thus preserves the social topology of his childhood surroundings as well as the image of his own body, with its social connotations. To study both it is essential to correlate a patient's childhood history with the history of his family's sedentary residence in prototypal areas (East, in "backward" areas (South), or in "forward" areas (western and northern frontier), as these areas were gradually incorporated into the American version of the Anglo-Saxon cultural identity; his family's migration from, through, and

⁵Members of the Federal Writers' Project, *Phrases of the People*, The Viking Press, New York, 1937.

to areas which at various periods may have represented the extreme sedentary or the extreme migratory pole of the developing American character; the family's religious conversions or digressions, with their class implications; abortive attempts at becoming standardized on a class level and the loss or abandonment of that level. Most important is that segment of the family's history which provided the last strong sense of cultural identity.

All of this impresses us with the dangers awaiting the minority-group American who, having successfully graduated from a marked and well-guided stage of autonomy, enters the most decisive stage of American childhood: that of initiative and industry. As indicated, minority groups of a lesser degree of Americanization are often privileged in the enjoyment of a more sensual early childhood. Their crisis comes when their mothers, losing trust in themselves and using sudden correctives in order to approach the vague but pervasive Anglo-Saxon ideal, create violent discontinuities; or where, indeed, the children themselves learn to disavow their sensual and overprotective mothers as temptations and a hindrance to the formation of a more American personality.

On the whole, it can be said that American schools successfully meet the challenge of training children of play-school age and of the elementary grades in a spirit of self-reliance and enterprise. Children of these ages seem remarkably free of prejudice and apprehension, preoccupied as they still are with growing and learning and with the new pleasures of association outside their families. This, to forestall the sense of individual inferiority, must lead to a hope for "industrial association," for equality with all those who apply themselves wholeheartedly to the same skills and adventures in learning. Individual successes, on the other hand, only expose the now overly encouraged children of mixed backgrounds and of somewhat deviant endowments to the shock of American adolescence: the standardization of individuality and the intolerance of "differences."

A lasting ego identity, we have said, cannot begin to exist without the trust of the first oral stage; it cannot be completed

without a promise of fulfillment which from the dominant image of adulthood reaches down into the baby's beginnings and which, by the tangible evidence of social health, creates at every step of childhood and adolescence an accruing sense of ego strength. Thus, before entering further into identity problems of our time we must now recognize the place of identity in the human life cycle. What follows in the next chapter is a list of ego qualities which emerge from critical periods of development—criteria (identity is one) by which the individual demonstrates that his ego, at a given stage, is strong enough to integrate the timetable of the organism with the structure of social institutions.