Drawing Cure: Children’s Drawings as a Psychoanalytic Instrument

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Abstract
This essay deals with the special case of drawings as psychoanalytical instruments. It aims at a theoretical understanding of the specific contribution made by children’s drawings as a medium of the psychical. In the influential play technique developed by Melanie Klein, drawing continuously interacts with other symptomatic (play) actions. Nonetheless, specific functions of drawing within the play technique can be identified. The essay will discuss four crucial aspects in-depth: 1) the strengthening of the analysis’s recursivity associated with the graphic artifact; 2) the opening of the analytic process facilitated by drawing; 3) the creation of a genuinely graphic mode of producing meaning that allows the child to develop a “theory” of the workings of his own psychic apparatus; and 4) the new possibilities of symbolization associated with the latter. In contrast to classical definitions of the psychological instrument, the child’s drawing is a weakly structured tool that does not serve to reproduce psychic processes in an artificial, controlled setting. The introduction of drawing into the psychoanalytic cure is by no means interested in replaying past events, but in producing events suited to effecting a transformation of the synchronic structures of the unconscious.

With his eye on Freud’s famous likening of the psyche to a toy that most of us know as a “Magic Slate,”¹ Jacques Derrida in 1966


raised the question of the theoretical relationship between the graphic trace and the psychic apparatus, thereby drawing attention to a fact that conspicuously contradicts the complicity of psychoanalysis with linguistics, or more generally, its “congenital phonologism”: “It is no accident that Freud, at the decisive moments of his itinerary, has recourse to metaphorical models which are borrowed not from spoken language or from verbal forms, nor even from phonetic writing, but from a script which is never subject to, never exterior or posterior to, the spoken word. Freud invokes signs which do not transcribe living, full speech, master of itself and self-present.”

When Derrida subsequently asks “What is a text, and what must the psyche be if it can be represented by a text?” it becomes clear that he is immediately betraying his concept of graphie as an autonomous area of graphic record antecedent to the differentiation of text and image. However it may be articulated, that which is conventionally referred to as “text” is in no way identical with a conception of writing; just as the much wider field of graphie cannot be taken as a synonym for “scripturality,” but instead precedes it logically—and presumably historically as well.

In this essay I will modify the problem by displacing the object of investigation from the metaphors and theoretical models of psychoanalysis to tangible inscriptions that are produced during the psychoanalytic session. What happens when one conceptualizes psychoanalysis not as a talking cure, but in its essential—practical and theoretical—dependence on scriptural and pre-scriptural techniques used in obtaining data?

From the Talking Cure to a Technique of Play

I would like to gain a theoretical understanding of the specific contribution made by children’s drawings as a medium of the psychical that ties in directly with the investigation of the technical framework within which psychoanalysis operates. What children do not say posed a technical problem to which the first-generation psychoanalysts began to devote close attention in the 1920s. The psychoanalytic cure operates under the assumption that the patient is in full command of spoken language, which is used during the treatment to verbalize childhood wishes and conflicts that retreated from immediate verbal expression at the time they arose. There is clearly an iconoclastic element to this process, as Sigmund Freud already observed in the 1895 *Studies on Hysteria*: the patient tears

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down, as it were, the image that has surfaced from memory by putting it in words.3

Faced with the child patient, the classic talking cure is doomed to fail, because the two most important techniques of analysis—free association and dream interpretation—are rooted in this logic of verbalization.4 The extent to which children can be induced to associate is limited and dependent on the analyst’s cunning. The second technique, dream interpretation, also proved to be of little use, since children’s dreams are generally simple and literal, expressing themselves directly and overtly and making verbalization superfluous. Thus the practical difficulty posed by child-analysis is rooted in the problem of obtaining data. The founding mothers and fathers of child analysis—Hermine von Hug-Hellmuth, Anna Freud, and especially Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott—confronted this problem by introducing special techniques suitable for children, whereby the use of toys and the interpretation of children’s drawings were doubtlessly the most noteworthy developments.5 Thus child analysis, in contrast to the treatment of adults, is more or less media-based, whereby this primary technical problem has direct consequences for the theory of the object of investigation.

In a 1955 article on the play technique she had developed, Klein even related all of her contributions to psychoanalytic theory to this method.6 What are we dealing with here? The backbone of the procedure, as in adult analysis, is the separation of the patient from the domestic setting and the establishment of the consulting room or playroom as a space with only one prohibition—namely, that


5. In the literature, the first publication of a child analysis is generally considered to be Sigmund Freud’s 1909 study on the phobia of “Little Hans,” although the analysis was neither conducted by Freud himself (he served rather as an advisor to the boy’s father) nor was a technique differing from that of adult analysis used; see Claudine Geissmann and Pierre Geissmann, A History of Child Psychoanalysis (1992) (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 16–22.

against physically attacking the analyst. An entire arsenal of toys can be used in the analysis: wooden men and women in two different sizes, little vehicles, animals, and trees, as well as paper, scissors, pencils, and arts-and-craft materials (fig. 1). All of the drawings and other items produced by the child during the course of treatment are not to be taken home. For each child, there is a drawer in the consulting room in which the toys selected by the little analysand are stored at the end of the session. This drawer is an important element in the new setting, serving at least three purposes: first, the analyst’s interpretive sovereignty over the drawings is ensured, while the interference of parents, relatives, and others is prevented. Second, a little collection is formed, a sort of storehouse of motifs and symbols, which later can be used both in creating new drawings and in interpretation. And finally, the accumulated drawings promote the process of transference, and especially of positive transference, strengthening the bond between analyst and patient.

Children’s Drawings as Paper Tools

In comparison to conventional methods of obtaining visual data, drawing and projective tests in psychology usually represent intersubjective practices, which to a certain degree resemble parlor games. As a psychoanalytic instrument, the child’s drawing involves in equal measure both the observing scientist and the analyzed child, and, strictly speaking, this tool exists neither before nor outside of the psychoanalytic cure; every child develops it individually in communication with the analyst. In view of the purpose of the psychological tool as proposed by Horst Gundlach a few years ago, the specificity of the drawing cure becomes clearer. He understands the psychological instrument, whereby he is thinking both of psychophysiological apparatuses and psychometric tests, as “associations” or constellations “of some material object and a process-generating rule.” Here, he does not accord any significant role to the materiality and mediality of the object, since he identifies a contingent relationship between the apparatus and the process-generating rule. The essential function of the instrument is to give

rise to the objects of psychological research, which Gundlach categorically identifies as “processes.”

The way that psychoanalysis uses children’s drawings and play in general goes against the grain of Gundlach’s definition in several respects. First, in analysis a combination of things and modes of use is also in operation though here there can certainly be no talk of a set “process-generating rule,” but rather of a process open to occurrence, which is unfolded and developed through the acting child and the observing analyst. Second, the relationship between this process and the instruments of its realization is anything but contingent, with the medium of pencil and paper uniquely facilitating and limiting that which is made visible. Last, the drawing does not reproduce any process within the framework of the psychoanalytic cure that could be considered to precede it; instead, it transforms (unconscious) structures into (graphic) events, making visible—and in the best case also transforming—these structures. Like all of the media used in child analysis, drawing has both a diagnostic and a therapeutic function: therapeutic, because the self-

9. Ibid., p. 216.
discovery and symbolization involved in drawing are an essential aspect of the psychoanalytic cure; diagnostic, because the drawing event becomes readable as a symptom under certain circumstances.

Already, in the early analyses of “Ilse,” “Grete,” and “Egon,” which were conducted in Berlin, drawing was only useful as an instrument inasmuch as it manifested itself as a (neurotically compulsive) symptom: the children monotonously and unimaginatively repeated the same subjects or formal structures, at times for months on end. These analysands reverted, although they were already of school age, to scribbling or staging little regressive scenes in which destructive treatment of the medium directly led into aggression against the analyst. According to Freud—and at least here Klein follows him uncritically—the neurotic symptom has the character of a trace. However, it is not understood (only) as a genuine index, but rather as a symbol formed unconsciously by the individual that is produced by at least three of the four rudimentary mechanisms of symbol formation also determining dream work: displacement, condensation, and symbolic representation.10 Like Freud, Klein is primarily interested in a narrative deciphering of the symptoms, whereby her interpretations also revolve around the tiresomely monotonous question: “If it were a sexual phenomenon, what would it be?”11

And yet there is a decisive difference with regard to the focus of Klein’s attention to a particular drawing. Her interest is primarily aroused by its frequency and by the rhythm with which it is drawn, or by the insistence with which the urge to draw imposes itself on or is refused by the patient, with refusal manifesting itself in destructive actions toward the drawing, such as crossing it out or riddling it with holes (fig. 2). For it to be subsequently interpreted symbolically within the horizon of the analysis, the drawing must first have elicited attention as the trace of a psychic energy, which Klein almost exclusively identifies as anxiety.12 Thus graphic activity does not occupy any independent position within treatment: it obeys the same logic as other symptomatic (play) actions, often only becoming readable in conjunction with them. Nonetheless, specific functions of drawing within the play technique can be identified. Below, I will

discuss four crucial aspects: 1) the strengthening of the analysis’s recursivity associated with the graphic artifact; 2) the opening of the analytic process facilitated by drawing; 3) the creation of a genuinely graphic mode of producing meaning that allows the child to develop, or at least adopt, a “theory” of the workings of his/her own psychic apparatus; and 4) the new possibilities of symbolization associated with the latter.

Figure 2. Drawing of a figure by “Richard” (spring/summer 1941). (Source: Wellcome Trust, London, Melanie Klein Papers, file PP/KLE/B.47.)

Drawing and the Future of the Analysis

With regard to the first aspect, recursivity: child analysis, especially Klein’s technique, is characterized by the analyst’s much more active relationship to the analysand than in the classic Freudian treatment of adults. The impersonal attitude of “evenly-suspended attention,”13
which Freud recommended to his students in order to make them more receptive to their patients’ transferences, is clearly not applicable to the child. Klein engages the children in play and interprets what is happening from the very beginning, whereby a problem of interference between material and interpretation inevitably arises. Especially in the case of play, the analyst often lags behind the events of the analysis, at times even having to ignore certain aspects of the material so as to be able to act on others. Drawing has the advantage of immediately fixing the material; not only can that which is graphically preserved be referred to in the further course of the treatment, but it can also be expanded upon, altered, or reinterpreted by the child. The drawings produced by Klein’s patients often form a spatialized Magic Slate, an ever-changing residue of the analysis in which the child’s private iconography unfolds. This Magic Slate can—a further advantage of the instrument—be directly written on, commented, or ordered by numbering and dating, as is shown by the notes on many of the children’s drawings preserved in Klein’s papers (fig. 3).

Significantly, Klein almost always had her patients draw on little notepads like those used by the analyst herself for recording the course of talk and play after the session. The combination of the child’s direct production with the analyst’s organizing notations works toward the homogenization, temporal structuring, and development of a psychoanalytic narrative. The accumulation and collection of the drawings give rise to aspects of recursivity, making the history of the analysis available for further work. What is more, it creates this history: it is the recurrence of motifs and situations that makes it possible to select them from the profusion of events, with additional factors like sequence of themes, choice of material, change of media, and duration of play providing clues on the material’s narrative coherence. This creation of coherence is what facilitates the discovery of the discontinuous, the significant trace of the symptom, of which Lacan cogently states: “The symptom initially appears to us as a trace, which will only ever be a trace, one which will continue not to be understood until the analysis has gone quite a long way, and until we have discovered its meaning.”


14. Like Sigmund Freud, Klein, in her technical writings, also stated that the analyst should not take notes during the analytic session. However, she contradicted this principle insofar as she made notes directly on scribbles and cutouts for the purpose of identifying their motif(s).
The meaning of the symptom can only be understood from the perspective of the analysis’s end. In this sense, Klein’s drawer (where the drawings are kept) stores an archive of conserved traces, making available something that can later be (re)constructed as the “truth” regarding the subject.

Beginning with Deferment

Klein’s analyses of children often began with drawing or writing as the sole means of communication. For example, the analyst notes in the case of the prepubescent boy known as “H.,” who after a pause of three-and-a-half years was sent back for further analysis in the late 1940s: “On the 1st day he begins to draw. I dare say partly from embarrassment and to get away from talk.”16 Here, drawing represents a mode of getting started—to be exact, avoidance as a beginning. Generally, such cases display a shyness or a manifest inhibition to speak on the part of the little patient, with the child seeing graphic communication as a deferment of verbal dialogue. For the analyst, opening this threshold can serve as a means of gradually breaking down inhibitions and engaging the patient in conversation via drawing.


In other analyses, drawing appears as one mode of expression among others; often, it represents a moment in which the process changes course and is opened. The ten-year-old boy known as “Richard,” whom Klein treated during the midst of World War II in a Welsh village, began his analysis by discussing political geography and the lines of battle in 1941 with the analyst for ten whole sessions. In the first session Klein had, as usual, spread out toys, paper, and pencils before him. Initially, Richard showed absolutely no interest, devoting his attention instead to a map hanging upon the wall and discussing primarily the statuses of the small, neutral, or allied countries like Switzerland and Portugal.\(^\text{17}\) Klein relates the boy’s entire phobic topography to a splitting of the parent imago into good and bad personifications that are projected onto the events of the war. After the tenth session, she relates how the patient’s deeper fears began to surface, leading to a decrease in verbal communication and a stagnation of the analysis.\(^\text{18}\) At the beginning of the twelfth session, the analyst again put a notepad and pencils before her analysand:

Richard asked eagerly what they were for, whether he could use them for writing or drawing. Mrs K. said he could do whatever he liked with them. . . . Richard stopped when he had finished the first two drawings [see figs. 4–5]. Mrs K. asked him what they were about. Richard said there was an attack going on, but he did not know who would attack first, *Salmon* or the U-boat. He pointed at U 102 and said 10 was his own age; and to 16 he associated the age of John Wilson [another patient of Klein whom Richard knew]. He was very surprised when he realized the unconscious meaning of these numbers and extremely interested to find that drawing could be a means of expressing unconscious thoughts.\(^\text{19}\)

The rather unspectacular description of the first drawing scene is significant in many ways. The reference to the first session, in which the child had already been confronted with drawing materials, indicates that the change of medium was intended to bring about a new beginning. It is apparent that Klein’s children always began drawing after reacting to the interpretation of play by displaying strong resistance. Subsequently, Richard regularly stopped playing and began drawing with great zeal in order to provide new material “which went back to even more fundamental emotions.”\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{18}\) Ibid., pp. 4:52–55.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., pp. 4:56–57.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 4:67.
At moments when the participants’ possibilities for action had been dangerously reduced, drawing effected a new opening of the process, with the prospect of an increase in complexity brought on by new material.

And yet this increase in complexity should not be attributed merely to the change of medium: it also relates to the fact that uncertainty is returned to the process through the child’s drawing, which the child’s play threatened to absorb all too quickly. Drawing
disturbs a relationship of meaning reproducing itself from the narrative linking of the wooden toys as an imitation of the (adult) world. Although the little human figures, vehicles, and animals do not posit any particular rules, their selection is Oedipally charged (consider the assumptions made in providing two different scales of figures), whereby the tendentious selection anticipates typical courses of play (cars and trains collide, parental couples are locked up or destroyed) that Klein had plenty of opportunity to study in her many years of practical experience.

Figure 5. Submarine battle drawn by “Richard” (10 May 1941). (Source: Melanie Klein, Narrative of a Child Analysis [London: Hogarth Press, 1961], tables 1–2.)
In the case of Richard as well, the issue at hand is basically one question asked in many variations: namely, that of what objects and figures represent, as a whole or a part object—which parent, at times circuitously via brothers, nannies, and friends. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have reduced this process to the terse formula: “Say that it’s Oedipus, or you’ll get a slap in the face.” However, the implicit terrorism that Deleuze/Guattari identify in the demand that all material coming to light in the analysis be brought into relationship with the etiology of the Oedipus conflict stands in contrast to the means with which it is to be achieved. Kleinian child analysis does not follow the rules of bourgeois or authoritarian child rearing, although the cure is based on the demand that the child learn to think about all of his/her fears and conflicts in relationship to the bourgeois nuclear family. Klein understood analysis—distinctly in opposition to Hug-Hellmuth and Anna Freud—as a process, clearly differentiated from pedagogy, that does not appeal to the child’s conscious ego, but rather seeks access to his unconscious in order to activate his anxieties and affects and thus to expand the ego’s range of activity. Structurally, however, Klein’s activity is hardly to be differentiated from conventional disciplinary interventions: as Jacques Lacan notes in “The Topic of the Imaginary,” there is “nothing remotely like an unconscious in the subject. It is Melanie Klein’s discourse which brutally grafts the primary symbolizations of the oedipal situation onto the initial ego-related [moïque] inertia of the child.”

In this sense, play and drawing are more or less forcibly grafted onto the child, with the analyst’s words being joined onto the child’s actions and drawings. As is the case with many pedagogic manipulations (and one must concede this to Klein), the child is not only restricted, but a new space of opportunity is also opened. The child learns the technique of constituting meaning, which, to paraphrase Lacan, sets the world in motion, begins to structure the imaginary and the symbolic, and “develops successive investments, investments which delineate the variety of human, that is nameable, objects.”

23. Ibid., p. 87.
Thus it should come as no surprise that, as her critics also noted with astonishment, a “real communication” develops between Klein and her patients.24 Although she is always looking for confirmations of the psychic structures of her theory, this theory is not a mere preexisting collection of algorithms. Moreover, the analyst can only interpret the material that the child delivers; the motifs of the children’s drawings are, in contrast to wooden toys, not predetermined or limited. This gives the child a brief opportunity to break the analyst’s interpretive sovereignty, since every new drawing catches her unprepared. Thus drawing gives rise to a moment of disempowerment, of surprise, and of interrupted interpretative terrorism that, of course, is well calculated but nevertheless uncontrollable.

Drawing as a “Theory” of the Workings of the Psychic Apparatus

On what basis does this process function? Presumably, it is facilitated by a cunning circumvention of the conventional structures of pictorial-meaning production, to which drawing is particularly suited. As Richard Wollheim outlined in *Painting as an Art*, the constitution of meaning in painting, or in pictures in general, always occurs in a tripartite relationship comprising the beholder, the surface of the picture, and the artist.25 In order to be meaningful, the specific formal and contentual appearance of the painted or drawn surface must be traced to the creator’s intention, whereby it seems decisive that a given picture cannot have any meaning, even to the artist himself, if the artist does not take the position of a beholder tracing his own intentions. It is precisely this somewhat paranoid structure of pictorial-meaning production that is subverted by Klein’s play technique, which opens a pathway to a temporary regression into a weak form of intentionality.

This weak form of intentionality certainly is part of the typical creative development of every child: it makes possible the discovery of mimesis. Klein’s child analyses promote the discovery or, in the case of older analysands, the regressive rediscovery of this mechanism. Here, the dozens of clumsy arabesques produced by the ten-year-old Egon in 1925 during the course of his analysis provide an excellent example (figs. 6–7). They display a form of automatic drawing or doodling that initially separates gesture from

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interpretation, in that the boy merely leaves graphic traces of his motor activity on the paper. Later, crayons were used to develop outlines from the confusion of looping curves drawn in pencil—simple, stylized heads in profile, which are overlapped, turned, mirrored, and interlocked.

The analyst noted the development of this process early on, writing her initial observations on the paper next to her analysand’s first scribbled circles and lines on 25 February 1925: “The first drawing attempts in the analysis; the pencil being turned back and forth between both hands without knowing what will happen. Then

Figure 6. Series of drawings by “Egon” (June 1925). (Source: Wellcome Trust, London, Melanie Klein Papers, file PP/KLE/B.14–17.)
his spontaneous association of what it means.”26 Subsequently, Egon hesitantly began to scribble, and to associate on the basis of his scribbles, with Klein meticulously recording the child’s associations or the absence thereof. As she noted, Egon had heretofore barely drawn or had not drawn at all, and thus the urge to draw and the technique selected can be understood as a regressive acquisition of an experience missing from early childhood.27 From this first unsystematic attempt, the child eventually developed a veritable

serial method, which opened an avenue toward the ability to verbalize. This occurred as the boy developed the attitude of a reader of his own traces, searching in his own material for what is significant and asking what could be serving as a sign for what.

If one were to apply Wollheim’s model of the artistic production of meaning to drawing in the context of the psychoanalytic cure, one might conjecture that the child’s drawing can only acquire meaning in the analysis when the child himself takes the position of a privileged beholder (namely, that of the analyst) who is hunting for symbols and symptoms that undermine his intention. The little analysand develops or adopts a practice of drawing, and with it a “theory,” of the workings of the psychic apparatus. This theory implies a space between drawing and the naming or identification of what has been drawn—a space in which the child can, with the analyst’s help, recognize the effects of an unconscious separated from the voluntary act of drawing.

It also implies that the visual imagination of the unconscious can be brought into consciousness through its “translation” into language, and that this mechanism facilitates the expression of psychic reality within the horizon of a logic of representation. Recall Richard’s surprise at discovering that “drawing could be a means of expressing unconscious thoughts.” With or without the analyst’s help, Klein’s analysands discover (or rediscover) a specific method of producing and interpreting images. In many cases the analysis depends on this (re)discovery: without it there is no association to the drawings and thus no interpretable material. Often, the introduction or strengthening of a “weak-intentional” method of meaning-production opens a space for action after previous stagnation—at the point, namely, when a child suddenly proposes a

28. Here, I follow the observation made by Richard Wollheim and Jonathan Lear that even the “archaic” psychic functions (such as those of the unconscious) are accompanied by a “theory” of their own workings. As an example, Lear cites the theory of catharsis that Josef Breuer’s famous patient “Anna O.” developed in the course of her treatment. The concept of the talking cure goes back to this analysand, and with it the idea of “emotional discharge” through verbalization. Thus Freud took up a theory formed by a hysteric about the psychic mechanisms activated during the cure. See Jonathan Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 35–36.

29. See also a similar remark made by Klein regarding “Richard’s” drawing technique: “In the course of his treatment Richard produced a series of drawings. The way he made them was significant: he did not start out with any deliberate plan and was often surprised to see the finished picture” (Klein, “Narrative of a Child Analysis” [above, n. 17], p. 4:17).
new identification for a drawing that has already been interpreted, thus revising the course of the analysis.

“Symbols Grow”

Until now, I have outlined three characteristics of the specific function of drawing in child analysis: its strengthening of recursivity; its potential for opening the analytic process (with an accompanying raising of complexity and the opening of new opportunities for action); and, finally, its special form of meaning-production. One last characteristic remains to be investigated, which is directly linked to the aspect of recursivity and engenders a process of the overlapping of various signs, especially of symptoms in the narrower sense of the word and unmotivated signs.

In Klein’s treatment practice, children’s drawings, as I have already stated, express meaning in two very different ways. First, the act from which they emerge is in itself meaningful: the way in which the analysands put lines on paper is related by the analyst to libidinous, aggressive, and even sadistic tendencies in the psychic economy. And second, the motifs chosen, the way in which they are represented, and their interpretation by the child point toward unconscious wishes and especially fears. In psychoanalytic terms drawing is a substitutive formation, but by no means does the psychic energy at work dissolve symbolically in this product.

In the eighty-third session, shortly before the end of his analysis, Richard drew a nude portrait of “Mrs. Klein” (fig. 8). He then scribbled on for three further pages, his rage growing, his face red, his eyes gleaming:

from time to time he ground his teeth and bit the pencil hard, particularly when talking about breasts or drawing circles representing them. He tore one page after another from the pad. . . . About one of the scribbles he said that it was also Mrs K. and that she was in bits. In Drawing 69 he pointed out that (a) was Mrs K.’s ‘lovely eyes,’ (b) her nose, (c) her tummy and her breast, and (d) the other breast [fig. 9]. The third scribble he described as a code letter from Bomber Command, thanking Fighter Command for having won the Battle of Britain. This letter consisted of dots and dashes, and had a number of ‘V’s for Victory.30

Klein interpreted this battle of scribbles as a gesture of victory over the analyst, who as a result of negative transference (in view of the approaching end of the analysis and the boy’s accompanying rage at the analyst) stood as a hostile foreigner for the bad, split-off part of the mother imago. That which Richard’s drawings make readable in the course of the analysis is not only the training of the

30. Ibid., pp. 4:21–22.
child to project and interpret, but the success of his interpretive efforts also depends on achieving the densest possible interference among the drawings. In order for the drawing of the sea battle or the portrait of “Mrs. Klein” to not be primarily interpreted as representations of something, but rather as motivated indices for the subliminal functioning of censorship, a more than arbitrary relationship must be discovered among the symptoms in the classic sense and the material that is revealed in the analysis, but whose meaning is based on similarity or convention (like the drawings). Iconic/symbolic signs can only achieve the authority of motivated signs when they appear in connection with a symptom, an index.\(^31\)

31. Uwe Wirth, “Zwischen genuiner und degenerierter Indexikalität: Eine Peircesche Perspektive auf Derridas und Freuds Spurenbegriff,” in Spur. Spurenlesen als Orientierung-
Drawing gives rise to this relationship in its twofold manifestation as action and product; it gives rise to a movement: the opening of a pathway from motivated though inscrutable symptoms, to a conventional symbolization of these symptoms. Kleinian child analysis depends on this movement, since, in contrast to adult analysis, the finding and interpretation of symptoms do not serve to illuminate experiences or fantasies of earlier phases in the patient’s life. Even if the symptoms of children, like those of adults, generally have a regressive character, they do not really point toward the past, but toward current weaknesses in the mechanisms of anxiety defense;

they provide a clue about where symbol formation must start in order to prevent the continuation or development of a childhood neurosis into an adult neurosis. Here, we are dealing with symptoms that point less toward the past than toward the future. Since Klein numbers symbol formation among the essential mechanisms of psychic energy discharge, making the symptoms unmotivated is not a technical byproduct of the analysis, but one of its key endeavors.

Thus Kleinian child analysis is not a talking cure, but rather, more generally, a symbolization cure that eventually should lead to the strengthening or acquisition of the ability of verbal expression. Its irreducible achievement could be said to be the investigation and strengthening of the mechanisms of meaning-production, regardless of how one evaluates the effects of psychoanalytic interpretation on the development of the child’s psyche. In the course of analysis Klein’s patients develop a strikingly independent and diversified symbolic repertoire, whereby their pleasure and fascination seems to grow just as much from the form and manifest content of their play and drawing as from interpretation, be it their own or that of the analyst. The child still shows—recall young Richard—the awe of the first moment at which he discovers “that drawing could be a means of expressing unconscious thoughts.” In other words, the discovery of the graphic production of meaning connects to awe as an expression of wonder, but also of the improbable. The mechanisms and vocabulary of symbolization do not yet have any binding force and thus they are so attractive to the child, because they stimulate the desire to investigate their functioning. This is also the way in which one should understand the drawing child’s recurring questioning of the mechanisms of meaning-production: on 26 May 1926 Egon, who independently discovered a method of automatic drawing during the course of his analysis, drew a curiously enigmatic, key-like figure intentionally designed to thwart interpretation, as the question written next to it clearly indicates: “What is that?? Please answer!” (fig. 10). Here, the child is imitating the analyst by reversing the question game and highlighting the inquisitorial nature of analysis; the obstructive drawing is intended to be perceived as an object, but one that cannot be directly named or understood.


Looking back to my initial question regarding the child’s drawing as an instrument and its (implicit) interpretation of the psychic apparatus, the following answer can be given: in contrast to classical definitions of the psychological instrument, the child’s drawing is a weakly structured instrument that, compared to the apparatuses of experimental psychology or psychometric tests, does not serve to reproduce psychic processes in an artificial, controlled setting. Klein is by no means interested in replaying past events, but in transforming the synchronic structures of the unconscious into diachronic sequences and producing events suited to effecting a transformation of these structures.

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