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**Title:** "Being carried away. Fink and Winnicott on the locus of playing"

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***Abstract***

The article investigates the question of the experiential *location* of the area of play, comparing the accounts of Eugen Fink and Donald Winnicott. It argues that while Fink builds on the phenomenological distinction between subjective phantasy and external perception, and accordingly introduces the area of play as a hybrid realm, a peculiar combination of the two, Winnicott considers the area of play as something that underlies and developmentally precedes the experiential differentiation between phantasy and external reality. While from Fink's viewpoint Winnicott's model neglects a central phenomenological distinction, from Winnicott's viewpoint Fink's account, in turn, appears adultomorphic. Elaborating on these viewpoints in detail, the article ends up considering the conditions on which the seemingly contradictory accounts of playing could be reconciled. This at once opens a new way to assess the compatibility between phenomenology and psychoanalysis.

***Keywords:*** *play, imagination, perception, creativity, reality-testing, immersion*

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## Being carried away. Fink and Winnicott on the locus of playing

### *Abstract*

The article investigates the question of the experiential *location* of the area of play, comparing the accounts of Eugen Fink and Donald Winnicott. It argues that while Fink builds on the phenomenological distinction between subjective phantasy and external perception, and accordingly introduces the area of play as a hybrid realm, a peculiar combination of the two, Winnicott considers the area of play as something that underlies and developmentally precedes the experiential differentiation between phantasy and external reality. While from Fink's viewpoint Winnicott's model neglects a central phenomenological distinction, from Winnicott's viewpoint Fink's account, in turn, appears adultomorphic. Elaborating on these viewpoints in detail, the article ends up considering the conditions on which the seemingly contradictory accounts of playing could be reconciled. This at once opens a new way to assess the compatibility between phenomenology and psychoanalysis.

**Keywords:** *play, imagination, perception, creativity, reality-testing, immersion*

## Introduction

One of the intriguing features of playing lies in its capacity to *transport* the individual from the actual world into a realm full of wonder, excitement and surprise. While the playing person is all the time physically located in the actual intersubjective world, experientially speaking he or she is elsewhere – carried away, as it were. The present article tackles the locus of playing by posing the following question: *where does playing take us?*

This seemingly simple question is immediately complicated by the extent of the subject matter. Playing is a global phenomenon. It comes in many forms, has various functions, and occurs in all cultures and in all ages – even if in childhood it tends to be particularly highlighted. Playing has been characterized as a *voluntary, spontaneous, immersive, often surprising, and joyous activity, which is done for its own sake*, and which tends to have *positive psychological and social effects* (see, e.g., Huizinga 1949, 13-28; Piaget 1951; Caillois 2001 [1958], 3-10; Panksepp 1998, 291). Yet, the phenomenon is rich enough to escape comprehensive definitions. When examining the topic of playing, therefore, I will make the following caveats. First of all, I will be primarily focusing on *solitary playing*, and leave the topic of playing together for further studies. Second, I will focus on *free or spontaneous playing*, thus omitting forms of playing that involve preset rules, a pre-given dramaturgy, and so on. Third, I will focus on cases of playing that involve a relatively high degree of *immersion*, thus leaving aside the question of whether or not temporary interruptions ought to be understood as part of the overall process of playing. Fourth, I will be focusing on forms of playing that make use of *equipment* (toy cars, dolls, etc.), thus omitting role-playing for instance. Fifth, I will focus on playing in *human* beings, leaving

unscrutinized playing as it occurs in (other) animals. Sixth, I will focus primarily on playing in *children*: even though I will be touching upon the adult variations of playing, for the time being I leave it open whether my analyses relate to certain age-period in particular. To this last issue, I will come back later on.

With these restrictions, I will focus on *the locus of playing*. When approaching this issue, traditional conceptual distinctions immediately suggests themselves, and one is led to consider whether the world of play can be pinpointed *either* “out there” (in objective reality) *or* “in here” (in the subjective realm of phantasy and imagination). However, both alternatives appear problematic. On the one hand, even if playing were to physically occur on the carpet in the children’s room, and even if the used equipment (e.g., a doll) were physically located there, the area of play is not univocally located in the children’s room. Like an immersed audience member in a theater play, the playing child is temporarily released from the factual setting and transported into a realm where, instead of dolls and play cars, there are persons and their vehicles – and insofar as the latter do not exist from the perspective of an observer, they are not part of objective reality. On the other hand, the playworld is neither located in the mind of the individual: playing is something more than just imagining or day-dreaming. While the latter processes can be conducted in full secrecy, playing, by contrast, is never altogether invisible from the outside: the playing child actually perceives and manipulates actual objects (e.g., dolls), and hence the area of playing is more than a figment of the child’s imagination.

The traditional opposition therefore leaves us puzzled. Rather than being located *in* the objective world or *in* the player’s mind, the playworld seems to be located *between* these realms. The question, then, is how this middle area should be interpreted and

conceptualized. Is the play area some kind of combination of the two or rather a third realm in its own right?

In the available literature, the question of the location of playing has been largely neglected. While empirical research has focused mainly on cultural variations, developmental stages, and various functions of playing, philosophical contributions have primarily elaborated on the general characteristics of playing. Of the few scholars who explicitly discuss the question of the *locus* of playing, I will focus on the accounts by Eugen Fink (1905-1975) and Donald Winnicott (1896-1971). As I will show, while considering the playworld as an ontological realm on its own right, these two thinkers crucially differ when it comes to the question of the suitability of the above-mentioned traditional opposition. My claim can be summarized as follows. Fink sets out with the phenomenological distinction between subjective imagination and external perception, and he locates the playworld as a *middle area where these two spheres overlap*. Winnicott, too, pinpoints the area of playing "between" phantasy and objective reality, as it were, but not in the sense of being comprised of the two. In a rather sharp contrast to Fink, he argues that the area of playing *precedes* the experiential differentiation of subjective phantasy and objective reality, and hence cannot be cashed out in terms of an overlap between the two. Accordingly, from Fink's point of view Winnicott neglects a central phenomenological distinction; from Winnicott's point of view, Fink's account, in operating with the mentioned distinction, is adultomorphic.

The different scholarly backgrounds and contexts of the two thinkers is worth underlining. The approach of Winnicott, a pediatrician and a psychoanalyst, is oriented psychologically, developmentally, and clinically. Fink, again, a philosopher and a long-time associate to Husserl, offers a phenomenological-constitutional analysis. Unsurprisingly,

working in such different fields, these two contemporaries were not familiar with each other's work. Moreover, given these differences, one might wonder whether the two are simply talking about different issues. This conclusion appears hasty, however: despite using different concepts, Fink and Winnicott both offer rich and detailed conceptual descriptions precisely of the locus of playing as it unfurls itself in first-person experience.

In what follows, I will first outline Fink's account of playing (Section 1), and then explicate Winnicott's respective theory (Section 2). Finally, I will suggest a way to reconcile the two accounts (Section 3). While the question concerning the overall methodological compatibility between phenomenology and psychoanalysis naturally stands outside the scope of my article, while focusing on the case of playing I will be illustrating one way in which these remarkably different ways of conceptualization can be viewed as complementing one another.

## **1. Fink's hybrid model**

Fink considers playing as the child's "center of existence" (Fink 2016, 17, 37, 258-259, 264). As such, playing is not categorized, by the child, as a particular form of activity among others: it is rather what the life of a child *consists in* (ibid., 17, 21). Fink elaborates on this issue by arguing that playing has two basic functions. *On the one hand, playing liberates by disconnecting*. When we play, Fink writes, we are temporarily released "from the burdens of existence" (ibid., 20), from the "factual state of affairs" (ibid., 26), "from our predicaments and externally apportioned time" (ibid., 217), and lifted "above and beyond the life that is so thoroughly determined by care" (ibid., 91). In this manner, playing transports us to "a



place where we can freely shape our lives and yet not deprive ourselves of any possibilities with a decision" (ibid., 91, cf. 26), to a place where we can "begin anew" (ibid., 90) and "reclaim a land of free impulses and imaginative fulfillment of dreams" (ibid., 217, 235, cf. 87). Playing "loosens the intentional threads that connect us to the world", as Merleau-Ponty puts it in another context (Merleau-Ponty 2012, lxxvii), and thus makes life seem "lighter, more buoyant, easier" (Fink 2016, 20). *On the other hand, playing re-vitalizes and re-connects.* By distancing the individual from the given actuality and reinstating contact with what is potential, playing portrays the surrounding reality, not rigidly in terms of pre-set and fixed actualities, but more flexibly in terms of contingently actualized possibilities (see ibid., 78). In this manner, playing revitalizes our connection with the shared world and enables a *creative* approach to the given actuality. Fink summarizes: "while it appears to being pulling [us] off [*entziehen*] from the standard flow of life, it pulls [us] toward [*bezieht*] it in a particularly meaningful manner" (ibid., 21; *translation modified*). Corresponding to this two-way movement, playing involves two kinds of pleasure: one owing to the *liberating* withdrawal and the other owing to the *vitalizing* re-connection.

When it comes to the question of locus, Fink initially places the playworld in the realm of imagination. He speaks of the "imaginary character of the playworld" (ibid., 25, 26); he characterizes playing in terms of moving within "the space of the imaginary" (ibid., 90, 91); and he explicitly claims that "the playworld is an imaginary dimension" (ibid., 25, 30). As such, the playworld does not exist for an outside spectator:

"Seen, so to speak, from the outside, that is, observed from the perspective of the one who is not playing, it [sc. the doll] is obviously a part of the actual world. [...] It is a

thing that, for example, has the intended purpose of keeping children occupied. The doll is considered to be a product of the toy industry. It is a piece of material and wire or a mass of plastic, and can be acquired for purchase at a determined price; it is a commodity. But, seen from the perspective of a playing girl, a doll is a child, and the girl is its mother" (ibid., 24; cf. Scheler 2008, 24).

Fink immediately specifies, however, that "it is in no way the case that the little girl actually believes that the doll is a living child. She does not deceive herself about this" (ibid.). Rather, while immersed in playing the child is focally intending the doll *in its imaginary significance* (ibid., 165).

However, playing is full of surprise and wonder, and in this respect it phenomenologically differs from sheer imagination and phantasy. Sartre has argued that in a purely imaginary world, "nothing happens" and hence there are no surprises either. For instance, if I imagine a cube and imagine turning it around, what I thereby "find" on the hither side of the cube does not come to me as a surprise. Regardless of how strange or unlikely the imagined hither side looks like, "there will be never the smallest time-lag between the object and the consciousness. Not a second of surprise": the imaginary object "never precedes the intention", nor the other way around – rather "the intention reveals itself at the same time as it realizes itself, in and by its realization" (Sartre 2004, 11; cf. 155).<sup>1</sup> Perhaps partly owing to such considerations, Fink, too, hesitates in identifying the playworld with an imaginary world. In contrast to something purely imaginary, he argues, the "playworld [...] does not lie before the one who created it like a finished product, but

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<sup>1</sup> We can add here that, surely, one can *imagine being surprised* at what one finds behind the cube, but even here surprise does not touch upon what is then imagined, namely *one's sense of surprise*.

rather 'involves' him, draws him in, and engulfs him sometimes with such an intensity that the player 'gets lost' in his role" (Fink 2016, 241). Rather than resembling traveling to a readily familiar and predictable place, immersion into the playworld stands closer to an artistic process: like a painter who is unsure about where the painting-in-process will end up leading her, as it were, the playing child is equally unable to foresee or fully control what kind of playworld will be created and developed. In this sense, the playworld also bears resemblances to the world of a dream; I will briefly come back to this later on.

Moreover, Fink also hurries to note that, unlike an imaginary world, the playworld is "not nothing" (ibid., 25). He underlines that playing is *doing*: instead of lying quietly and secretly imagining or phantasizing about something, the playing child actually moves and manipulates actual objects, and actually sees, hears and feels the play characters. Therefore, having initially claimed that the playworld is an imaginary sphere, Fink takes a step back and explicitly wonders whether he has "placed too much emphasis on the imaginary aspect of human play, on that which is dreamed up in it, is invented by it, and represents a magical product" (ibid., 244). Fink now specifies:

"The playworld is not suspended in a mere realm of thought; it always has a real setting, but is, however, never a real thing among real things. Yet it necessarily requires real things in order to gain a foothold in them. This means that the imaginary character of the playworld cannot be explained as a phenomenon of a merely subjective appearance, nor determined to be a delusion that exists only within the interiority of a soul but in no way is found among and between things in general" (ibid., 25-26).

Differently put, "playing does not occur within psychological interiority alone and without support in the objective external world"; rather, Fink argues, the playworld "contains" both subjective *and* objective elements (ibid., 28).

Operating with the traditional distinction between subjective imagination and objective reality, Fink thus ends up considering the playworld as a *hybrid* of the two: as an area in which subjective non-actuality and objective actuality overlap, "interpenetrate" (ibid., 25), "pervade" or "entangle" with each another (ibid., 29-30), or become "mixed and blended" (ibid., 208). According to Fink, the playing child is constantly *aware* of both ingredients: the child "simultaneously knows about the doll-figure and its significance in play" (ibid., 24) – correspondingly, in the case of role-play, the child simultaneously knows herself as the real person who is playing and as the imaginary role character (ibid., 24). In this sense, the experience of the playworld involves a "doubling" or a "splitting" (ibid., 24-25): the playing child simultaneously "lives in two dimensions" (ibid., 24), "exists in two spheres" (ibid., 25), and hence occupies a "double ground" (ibid., 78).<sup>2</sup>

Fink describes the degree of immersion in playing in terms of balancing within this "double existence" (see ibid., 25). On the one hand, when awareness of realities is highlighted, the subjective imaginary ingredients become subordinated to it, and playing is interrupted: the doll is then present as a doll. This is why descriptions such as, "the child is playing with a doll", are bound to remain extraneous, objectivistic, and phenomenologically

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<sup>2</sup> In this connection, it might be interesting to build a comparison between the attitude playing and the attitude of the *phenomenological reduction*, focusing particularly on the "splitting of the ego" (*Ich-Spaltung*) and "self-forgetfulness" that Fink and Husserl discuss in this connection (e.g., Fink 1933, 333, 356, 383; Fink 1988, 36; Husserl 1950a, 16, 73; Husserl 1959, 89). Also, it might be interesting to compare the structures of playing with the alleged double intentionality as present in *empathy*, *recollection*, and *time-consciousness*. Developing such comparisons will be a matter for further study.

misguiding: as soon as the child becomes *focally* aware of the doll as a doll, immersion is interrupted. On the other hand, whenever the projected imaginative contents are highlighted, the child "is pulled into", "loses herself in", or "vanishes" into the playworld (ibid., 166-167). The doll is then present as a person or character (e.g., little girl). However, while subjective imagination may rather efficiently outshine one's awareness of objective reality, this focal bias is usually not comprehensive enough to entail a full-fledged delusion. Even the immersed child, Fink argues, is usually able to distinguish between actuality and appearance, (ibid., 25). To be sure, while the child's knowledge of her dual existence is then "strongly reduced" (ibid., 26), Fink argues that the playing child is relentlessly aware not only of the doll in its playworldly significance but also of the doll as a doll. In this sense, regardless of the degree of immersion, the experience of playing proceeds on "two levels" (ibid., 78).

Furthermore, besides lowering one's awareness of external reality (e.g., doll) in favor of the imaginary significance (e.g., the little girl), Fink argues that playing involves one more crucial element: "In the projection of a playworld the one who plays *conceals* himself as the creator of this 'world'" (ibid., 25; *my italics*) and acts "as if it existed" (ibid., 240). That is to say, Fink suggests that it is by holding back the awareness of imaginary projections as such that the individual acts as if the experienced contents were not imaginary but actual features. To avoid misunderstandings, it is worth underlining that the child does *not* conceal her knowledge of her actual surroundings - as already said, according to Fink, this knowledge constantly figures in the background, even while the projected imaginary contents gain prominence. Nor does the child conceal her knowledge of the imaginary projections: this is what she operates with. Instead, what the child conceals is her pre-

reflective awareness that the contents of the playworld are figments of her imagination. Differently put, the playing child is constantly aware of her imaginary projections – but not *as* imaginary projections. Playing, in other words, involves a certain seriousness – as Scheler puts it, “[w]hat is only ‘play’ to the adult is ‘in earnest’ to the child, and at least for the time being ‘reality’” (Scheler 2008, 24; cf. Fink 2016, 25). Yet, “concealing” one’s knowledge of imaginary projections as such does not mean refuting or negating it, and staking a contrary belief that what is experienced is *not* a figment of one’s imagination. Rather, while focusing on the projected imaginary content (e.g., a little girl), the child “conceals” the subjective-projective origins of the playworldly contents, assumes a position where she spontaneously ignores (ibid., 256) the question of whether the little girl is imagined or actually there, and accordingly acts *as if* she was seeing a little girl (see ibid., 256). What we have here is an intermediate position: if the child were to believe in the reality of the girl, she would be delusional, but if she were, on the contrary, to believe in the unreality of the girl, her immersive playing would be interrupted.

The element of “concealment” in Fink’s account enables a phenomenological comparison between *playing* and *image-consciousness*. Arguing for this analogy, Fink suggests that like the concrete painting, photograph, theater stage, or movie screen, the actual setting with visible and tangible playthings functions as a kind of transparent “window” into the playworld (ibid., 113; cf. Husserl 1980, 577-578). The point of this metaphor, I believe, is that one can either look *at* the window or look *out* the window. The former captures the attitude of non-immersed observers, while the latter captures the attitude of the immersed individual. Consider watching Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, for instance. When the murderer enters the scene from behind the shower curtain, you do not call the

police, because you do not believe in the *reality* of what you perceive. On the other hand, when immersed, you neither believe in the *unreality* of what you see and focus on the events as something displayed on a screen. As soon as you are reminded that what you see is nothing more than a group of celebrity actors in a studio, your immersion is interrupted: you will be looking *at* the window, instead of looking *out* the window, as it were. When immersed, the safe sense of excitement and fear is enabled by dwelling in a mode of experience where your awareness of the reality or unreality of what you perceive remains *concealed* - it is "cancelled", "neutralized", or rendered "lifeless" or "powerless" (see Husserl 1950b, 222; Husserl 1980, 442). While temporarily believing *neither* that the murderer is real *nor* that the murderer is unreal, you enjoy the movie with an ontologically neutral attitude of the "as if" (see Fink 2016, 54).

These notes bring us back to the question of locus. When immersed in the film, the murderer is not experientially *in front of* you - you who are sitting on the couch watching the movie. Yet, neither is the murderer *nowhere*, a sheer figment of your imagination: after all, the scene is not just imagined but actually perceived, and even a bystander could verify that you are not just gazing at "nothing" (see *ibid.*, 61, 112, 142, 256, 292). Merleau-Ponty's brilliant note on art-immersion also applies to the locus of playing:

"The animals painted on the walls of Lascaux are not there in the same way as the fissures and limestone formations. But they are not elsewhere. [...] I would be at great pains to say *where* is the painting I am looking at. For I do not look at it as I do at a thing; I do not fix it in its *place*. [...] It is more accurate to say that I see *according to it*, or with it, than that *I see it*" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 164; *my italics*; cf. Husserl 1980, 47).

Likewise, in its playworldly significance the doll is not experientially located *in front of* the playing child, *in* the room where the activity of playing physically takes place – but neither is it merely imagined and hence located *nowhere*. More generally put, instead of being located *inside* objective space and time or *outside* of it, the playworld has its “own inner space and its own inner time” that is found in an *area of overlap* between subjective imagination and objective perception (Fink 2016, 25):

“The ‘scenery’ of play of course always needs actual space and actual time in order to be able to unfurl itself at all, but space in the playworld and time in the playworld never coincide with the surrounding space and time. On the substratum of spans of time and pieces of space functioning as mere bearers of the playworld, the imaginary scene elevates itself with its inner space, which is nowhere and yet here, with its inner time, which is never and yet now” (ibid., 209).

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To sum up Fink’s account, the playing child does not experientially dwell in the world that is perceivable to everyone, but neither is the child altogether withdrawn into the realm of imagination. Rather than creating something *in the mind*, the playing child creates something *in the actual world*. Fink cashes this out by introducing the playworld as a *constitutionally derivative area*: a combination or hybrid of subjective imagination and



objective perception. In his account, the playing individual simultaneously inhabits two worlds, and is simultaneously aware of both, even if to varying degrees:

“The playworld in itself is [...] located in a closed-off space, yet in the midst of this real context as an unreal appearance; it has its real substrate in the [...] material playthings, which function as ‘bearers’, as it were. A playworld can never exist alone by itself; it is always reliant on the simple actuality of players and playthings” (ibid., 113; cf. 256).

Moreover, by suggesting that subjective imaginative contents are projected on what is readily experienced as an external thing, Fink suggests that playing begins from the real world: “We play *in* the so-called actual world but we thereby attain a realm, an enigmatic field, that is not nothing and yet is nothing actual” (ibid., 25; *my italics*); “with human play an ‘irreal’ sphere of sense *bursts into* a total actuality of real things and processes, a sphere that is here and yet not here, now and yet not now” (ibid., 205; *my italics*). That is to say, playing “bestows an imaginary sense *on* entirely ordinary things” (ibid., 165), the actual world is “occupied *by* play activity” (ibid., 240), an imaginary setting it “erected *on*” the actual world (ibid., 240), and so the former finds a “foothold” or “support” in the latter (ibid., 25, 28) – and not the other way around. In this vein, by thinking that subjective imaginative contents are projected *on* the actual world, Fink subscribes a fundamental constitutive status to external reality, to the “ordinary things” that are present to everyone. This also explains Fink’s characterization of the liberating function of playing: it pulls the

individual off from the factual state of affairs and re-vitalizes this fundamentally compliant connection.

In Fink's theory, therefore, the playworld is constituted by a three-step process: (1) the child projects subjective imaginary contents into the objective world; (2) the child gives an experiential emphasis to these projected contents, thereby pushing her knowledge of objective facts into the background; (3) the child conceals her awareness of having projected or imaginatively created the playworld, thereby acting *as if* the playworldly entities were real – yet without believing that they are.

## 2. Winnicott's illusion model

Although coming from a very different direction, Winnicott's account of playing shares several interesting affinities with Fink's. Both situate human life in general "at the wavering limit between sober wakefulness and dream (Fink 2016, 258) or at the "precarious borderline between the subjective and that which can be objectively perceived" (Winnicott 1964, 146). Both argue that the issue of playing has an important role in this demarcation, both consider playing as something "paradoxical" (Fink 2016, 256; Winnicott 1971, 71), and both locate playing "between" the realms of subjective and objective reality. Moreover, like Fink, Winnicott also awards playing the double function of *distancing* and *relating* the individual from/to the actual world. Yet, as will be shown, Winnicott argues that the latter moment is not to be primarily understood in terms of a *re*-connection. In his account, playing is given a more fundamental and global status: it enables a connection with the external world as

such *in the first place*. Whereas Fink's "hybrid model" builds on an experiential distinction between what is subjectively created and what is objectively perceived, Winnicott places the area of playing on a level that underlies the mentioned distinction, and he accordingly refuses to introduce playing in terms of a double existence. This crucial difference introduces an interesting tension between the two thinkers that can be examined once Winnicott's account has been introduced.

In Winnicott's conceptualization, the subjective dimension of imagination, phantasy, and dreaming is discussed in terms of "psychic reality" (e.g., Winnicott 1986, 35). This Freudian term serves to highlight the "effectivity" (Ger. *Wirklichkeit*) of subjective experiential contents (e.g., Freud 1929, 383). Namely, insofar as our needs, wishes, fears, hopes, and expectations contribute to our relation with "external reality", in this effectivity they are something real (*wirklich*) to us. In consequence, our sense of reality is characterized by two opposite tendencies, simultaneously pulling experience into two opposite directions, as it were. On the one hand, we tend to view the environment, other people, and ourselves in the light of our idiosyncratic and situational psychic reality. On the other hand, we are urged to reconcile our subjective grasp with what we take to be the objective, intersubjectively shared reality (e.g., Winnicott 1971, 87ff.). While the former tendency is dominant at the outset of development, it is never left behind, and so the perpetual task of the individual is to balance between these two tendencies in her experiential relationships.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Freud argues that whenever the idiosyncratic psychic reality serves as a full-blown *measure* (*maßgebend*) in the experiential life of an individual, we are thinking of severe psychological problems (Freud 1924, 383). In this regard, Winnicott's central contribution is to emphasize the problems of the opposite end: "To balance this one would have to state that there are others who are so firmly anchored in objectively perceived reality that they are ill in the opposite direction of being out of touch with the subjective world and with the creative approach to fact. [...] These two groups of people come to us for psychotherapy because in the one case they do not want to spend their lives irrevocably out of touch with the facts of life, and in the other case because they feel estranged from dream" (Winnicott 1971, 90, cf. 119-120).

In the mature individual, Winnicott argues, “experience” is matter of an “interchange between external reality and samples from the personal psychic reality” (Winnicott 1971, 176), an “interplay between creativity and that which the world has to offer”: a “constant trafficking in illusion” (Winnicott 1987b, 43).

Winnicott’s theory of playing circles around his concept of illusion (see Taipale 2021; Taipale *forthcoming b*). With “illusion”, he refers to something that is *both* self-created *and* actual. Winnicott conceptually distinguishes illusions from hallucinations and delusions. On the one hand, hallucinations are self-created constructs, “dream phenomena that have come forward into the waking life” (Winnicott 1971, 89-90), and as such they are something merely subjective. Illusions are something more, in that they involve an element of actuality (e.g., Winnicott 1971, 8). Conversely put, without the element of actuality, an illusion would be nothing but a hallucination, something merely subjective (see Winnicott 1988, 102). On the other hand, despite the element of actuality, illusions are not part of *external, objective* reality. While this would make illusions into something straightforwardly shareable, Winnicott considers it a “hallmark of madness when an adult puts too powerful a claim on the credulity of others, forcing them to acknowledge a sharing of illusion that is not their own” (Winnicott 1971, 4). That is to say, whenever something illusory is taken as objective reality, we are talking about a delusion instead. In this sense, illusions are located *between* hallucinations and delusions.

This intermediate position – between something merely subjective and something that insists on being objectively acknowledged – also pinpoints the locus of playing. That is to say, the playing child relates to a realm that she not only subjectively *creates* (e.g., the teddy bear *is hungry*) but also *actually perceives* (e.g., the hungry teddy bear *is actually there*).

Now, it would be tempting to think here that the playing child has a foothold *both* in subjective imagination *and* in objective perception. In this vein, playing would be introduced (like in Fink) as a matter of projecting imaginary contents into the external world – for instance, by attributing an imagined sense of hunger onto an actually perceived teddy bear. However, Winnicott rejects this dual interpretation. Just as illusions are not combinations of hallucinations and delusions, but a third type of experience, the area of playing is not a combination of psychic contents and external reality: aside to subjective imagination and objective shared reality, the area of playing rather marks a *third area* in its own right (Winnicott 1971, 3, 72, 138, 144, 147-148): “this third life [...] cannot be placed in the inner or personal reality, because it is not a dream”; yet, “it cannot be said to be part of external relationships, because it is dominated by dream” (Winnicott 1986, 36).

Winnicott clarifies this statement in his developmental theory. He conceptualizes the infant’s needs – and, more generally, the sphere of psychic reality – in terms of *creative impulses* that seek for fulfilment (see Winnicott 1971, 92; Winnicott 1986, 46). To illustrate, a nascent feeling of hunger awakens the child’s memory traces that are, because of their experiential quality, associated with earlier experiences of need-fulfilment. What is thereby protentionally activated is a rich sensorimotor schema, including not only motor incitements (e.g., the sucking reflex), but also sensory representations (e.g., visual, auditory and tactile sensations) and proprioceptive modifications (e.g., the sense of being lifted, carried or held). In experiential terms, then, the protentionally awakened contents are *phantasized* or – in cases where the infant has to wait long enough and the need intensifies – *hallucinated*. Such phantasies and hallucinations Winnicott interprets as attempts to *create* the need-fulfilling situation (Winnicott 1988, 106; Winnicott 1988, 102; Winnicott 1971, 15).

Here we come to a crucial point in Winnicott's theory. Namely, *taken by itself*, creative impulses naturally are and remain nothing but phantasies or hallucinations – as the external observer well knows, the baby cannot actually create the caregiving situation by herself. Nonetheless, importantly, creative impulses can be *realized*, and hence given a new sense of effectivity, *by the caregiver* who actually fulfills the infant's need.<sup>4</sup> As Winnicott exemplifies: "We have to say that the baby created the breast, but could not have done so had not the mother come along with the breast just at that moment" (Winnicott 1968, 100). In such cases, Winnicott argues, need-fulfilment "comes from without from our point of view, but not so from the point of view of the baby. Neither does it come from within; it is not a hallucination" (Winnicott 1971, 7). By meeting the infant's creative impulse, the caregiver prevents the latter from remaining a mere hallucination and, instead, facilitates in the infant "the illusion that what is created out of need and by impulse has real existence" (Winnicott 1988, 104; cf. 103; Winnicott 1971, 15).

Now insofar as such experiences are frequent, the infant is not initially motivated in differentiating between her (factually subjective) creative impulses and the (factually external) facilitating environment. Whenever there is need (creative impulse), there is need-fulfilment (realization of the impulse) – this connection or "marriage" can be taken for granted (Winnicott 1971, 63; cf. Taipale 2017). To be sure, such "undifferentiation" is bound to remain short-lived. Along with the unavoidable delays and disappointments, the individual is increasingly led to accept that the facilitating environment is not hardwired with her creative impulses, but something external and uncontrollable instead. Yet, owing to her countless experiences of a nearly seamless interplay between creative impulses and

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<sup>4</sup> It might be interesting to structurally compare this experience with the sense of dependence of a praying religious person. This will be a matter for further study, however.

their actualization (Winnicott 1965, 180), the individual has already learned to *rely* on environmental facilitation (Winnicott 1971, 63, 138, 146, 148). Differently put, despite the daily setbacks and delays, the underlying trust on the facilitating nature of the environment abides, and the child feels confident about her creative powers (Winnicott 1987a, 101; Winnicott 1989, 36): "trust in the caregiver forms an intermediate playground here" (Winnicott 1971, 63; cf. Winnicott 1988, 106).

It is here that playing emerges. Whenever a need begins to make itself felt, and the caregiver is not yet available, in waiting, the child's creative impulses find their realization in what happens to be actually available – say, a cloth or a rag. Instead of desperately phantasizing or hallucinating the caregiver, who is in fact unavailable, the child's creative impulses are now spontaneously transferred or redirected to *something else instead*. Importantly, as created "out of need", the cloth is spontaneously invested with a significance that has thus far been actualized by the caregiver. In this sense, the cloth emerges as a substitute for the latter (see Winnicott 1971, 8; Segal 1981). This kind of *replacement activity* marks an important developmental achievement. Namely, the child learns to *self-facilitate* her creative impulses: to establish and maintain an illusory – i.e., self-created yet actual – area of experience *independently of the caregiver*. To be sure, the cloth does not fulfil the need (e.g., rid the nascent sense of hunger), but it does provide a temporary asylum, "a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated" (Winnicott 1971, 3, 146). By claiming control over the cloth *in its cathected significance* (Winnicott 1971, 119, 136), and declaring this object as "mine" (ibid., 2, 19), the child is *symbolically claiming control* over the initial

facilitating environment which increasingly makes itself felt as something external and uncontrollable (cf. *ibid.*, 130; Winnicott 1968, 100).

Here lies the intermediate space, or third area, that Winnicott is interested in. In the psychic reality of the child, the cloth *equals to* the caregiver – *this* is what the child creates, as it were. Likewise, later on, the doll *is* the mother, and the playing child thus secretly enjoys being in control over the latter. Yet, in the register of external perception that is increasingly gaining authority in the child's experience, the cloth *is not* the caregiver – and likewise, later on, the doll *is not* the mother. It might be tempting here to say that while *perceiving* the cloth the child is *emotionally* directed at the caregiver. Yet, while psychic reality and external perception are not readily differentiated, we cannot maintain that the infant experiences the cloth *both* as the caregiver *and* as something that is not the caregiver. For the same reason, the playing child cannot be said to be *both* experiencing the doll as the mother *and* experiencing the doll as a doll. In this connection, Winnicott underlines the "unchallenged" or "uncontested" nature of the area of playing (e.g., Winnicott 1971, 3, 19, 119, 130; cf. Taipale *forthcoming a*). To exemplify, if a playing child is asked, "Do you believe that the teddy bear is *actually* hungry or is this just your *imagination?*", a distorting conceptual distinction is smuggled in that at once shatters the illusion. What the child is thereby forced upon is a kind of *false choice dilemma*, where the range of the pre-given alternatives does not enable answering in a way that would do justice to the phenomenon. Even though from an observer's perspective the child seems to be dwelling in an area of experience where imagination and external perception are mixed together, such distinction is not yet experientially consolidated in the child. And if so, introducing the distinction



while describing the child's experience would be adultomorphic.<sup>5</sup> Rather than experiencing the object in a confused "both/and" manner, the infant dwells in the "potential space" of illusion and playfully operates with the possible (see Winnicott 1971, 17). What is an internally contradictory experience in the eyes of an observer, is an *uncontested experience* for the child (Winnicott 1988, 106; cf. Winnicott 1971, 7).

Winnicott argues that the area of play thus *precedes* the differentiation between psychic reality and external reality (e.g., Winnicott 1971, 144, 150, 175, 183). While *conceptually pinpointing* the area of playing in reference to the two further realms – as indicated by the use of characterizations such as "third", "between", and "intermediate" – he frequently underlines that the area of playing is *not experientially given as a combination of the two*. What is at stake according to him is a *primary* area of experience, an area where the individual feels real and alive (e.g., Winnicott 1986, 39), and moreover an area *out of which* the two realms are gradually differentiated (see Winnicott 1988, 158). Rather than a *thin demarcation line* between psychic reality and external reality, or an *area of overlap* that is *common to the neighboring areas*, we should be thinking of a *wider border zone*: "a no-man's-land between the subjective and what is objectively perceived" (Winnicott 1988, 107), a "neutral zone" (Winnicott 1971, 86, 82, 17) claimed by neither.

And so, rather than performing a reverse movement by cancelling or ignoring a binary division that is allegedly there already, the child holds on to, and inhabits, a neutral zone of experience where such binary structure does *not yet* figure. To illustrate, for the

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<sup>5</sup> This claim finds an analogy in a worry expressed by Merleau-Ponty. He claims that the structure of the world of a congenitally blind person is *qualitatively* (and not just quantitatively) different from that of the so-called "normal person", and if this is not recognized and experiential distinctions drawn from the world of the seeing persons are employed in describing the world of the blind, phenomenological analysis is distorted (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 233). According to Merleau-Ponty, similar problems present themselves easily when categories from the adult world are employed when describing the experiential life of infants and children – this worry is particularly prominent in Merleau-Ponty's critique of Piaget (see e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2010, 143; see also Welsh 2013).

playing child *the hungry teddy bear* is not a two-fold object made out of the actual soft toy, on the one hand, and of the projected subjective content "hunger", on the other. As long as the child's experience remains unchallenged, such distinctions are not operative. Rather, there is, from the word go, a relation with the hungry teddy bear – with no experiential differentiation between what is objectively perceived and what is subjectively projected. Differently put, what the child creates is not just those features of the teddy bear that lie beyond external perception (e.g., the sense of hunger), but the *plaything in its actuality*. Instead of adding a topping or enhancement on an allegedly neutral perception, the child *perceives creatively* (e.g., Winnicott 1986, 49). Again, while the external observer is well aware that the child does not in fact create the teddy bear, but rather finds it "lying around waiting to be found", for the child the teddy bear is nevertheless "created, not found" (Winnicott 1965, 181). That is to say, like with the caregiver case above, *as long as the teddy bear is actually available when needed*, the child finds her creative impulse realized and enjoys an unchallenged illusion of being accompanied by a hungry teddy bear. As Winnicott also puts it: "We know that the world [or the teddy bear] was there before the infant, but the infant doesn't know this, and at first the infant has the illusion that what is found is created" (Winnicott 1988, 111).

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To sum up Winnicott's theory, playing is something "more" than a subjective phantasy or hallucination, and something "less" than a delusion. It lies between that which is merely subjective and that which insists on being objectively acknowledged – yet not in the sense of being a combination of the two. Rather than *creating something in the pre-given world*,

Winnicott argues that the playing child *creates an actual world*. From an external perspective, playing amounts to the former; yet, for the playing child it marks the latter. Despite being conceptually placed "between" subjectivity and objectivity, the area of playing is not experientially founded on this distinction, according to Winnicott. On the contrary, the area of playing *underlies* experiential differentiation between what is subjective and what is objective. Instead of simultaneously inhabiting two worlds, the playing individual inhabits a "third area", an "intermediate area" or "potential space" which precedes the mentioned experiential division.

While discussing the internal relationship between these realms, Winnicott subscribes constitutional primacy to the creative impulse. If this impulse is environmentally facilitated and realized (by the caregiver, by the teddy bear, etc.), then there is illusion; if not, there is (mere) phantasy or hallucination. Accordingly, rather than by projecting imaginary contents *into* a pre-given actual setting as such, and then concealing one's awareness of having created the ensuing area of play, in Winnicott playing amounts to perpetually *holding on* to the creative dimension of experience which emerges already in early infancy and which is retained and cultivated "throughout life" (Winnicott 1986, 41; Winnicott 1971, 13):

"this problem of primary creativity has been discussed as one of the earliest infancy; in point of fact it is a problem that never ceases to have meaning, as long as the individual is alive. Gradually there comes about an intellectual understanding of the fact of the world's existence prior to the individual's, but feeling remains that the world is personally created" (Winnicott 1988, 111; cf. 1971, 18).

Insofar as the individual manages to hold on to this area of experience, she is not compliantly stuck with what is given from the outside – whether “the cloth”, “the pacifier”, “the doll”, or, later on, “a schedule”, or “an ongoing scholarly debate” – but can create the respective object or environment in a personally significant manner.<sup>6</sup> That is to say, playing not only enables a personally significant *re*-connection with the environment, as if it were preceded by a compliant attitude toward the latter: it is what connects the individual with the external world in the first place (Winnicott 1971, 3).

### **3. Reconsidering the effectivity of phenomenological distinctions – a reconciliation**

From the basis of what has been said above, we can now assess the relationship between Fink and Winnicott. While both pinpoint the locus of playing *between* subjective and objective reality – between the purely imaginary realm and the intersubjectively shared world (Fink), or between “psychic reality” and “external environment” (Winnicott) – their theories are crucially different in at least in *three* respects.

(1) Fink adheres to the traditional opposition, takes it for granted, and argues that playing takes place in *an overlapping area between these two dimensions*: building on the mentioned distinction, he phenomenologically interprets the area of playing in terms of a

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<sup>6</sup> Like the child’s playing can be efficiently spoiled by noting that what she is playing with is actually doll that preceded her creative act, an M.A. student’s enthusiasm, eagerness, or zeal can be efficiently spoiled by noting that a viewpoint that she had considered to be her personal invention (or creation) has already been thought through by this or that other thinker. Winnicott’s theory explains why such responses are deadly to a lively discussion, and hence pedagogically unwise.

hybrid. (2) Moreover, by considering playing as a matter of projecting imaginary contents and meanings (m) upon external reality (X), Fink awards the latter a *constitutionally foundational* status. (3) Finally, Fink introduces a *reverse movement*, arguing that while the child is constantly aware of the fact that she is merely playing, she spontaneously conceals this knowledge and thereby acts *as if* the playworldly entities were real – though not believing them to be. (1) By contrast, Winnicott argues that the area of playing *predates* forms of experience that distinguish between subjective-creative impulses and objective perception based on reality-testing (Winnicott 1971, 15). Insofar as the area of play “antedates established reality-testing” (Winnicott 1971, 12), characterizing it as a hybrid would amount to an adultomorphic description. (2) Winnicott accordingly awards no fundamental status to external reality. To be sure, in the observer’s eyes, *the actual teddy bear* [X] was there before the child subjectively created *the hungry teddy* [X(m)] and the child only projectively *adds* the situational meaning (m) on this external object. Yet, as long as reality-testing is not firmly established and the child is not aware of external reality *as such*, her sense of creativity is global: what the child experientially creates is not just *the situational meaning* (m) of an external object [X], but *the meaningful object in its actuality* [Xm]. Whenever the object – or, more generally, the “facilitating environment” – is grasped *as* something external, “non-created”, or “found”, immersive playing has already come to a halt. Rather than *dreaming on top of something that offers itself from the outside*, as it were, playing is closer to a *dream come true*. (3) In Winnicott’s theory, accordingly, to account for the immersive nature of playing, no reverse movement is needed: whereas Fink considers the establishment of the playworld in terms of *holding back (no longer)*, Winnicott considers it in

terms of *holding on* to the underlying sense of undifferentiation (*not yet*).<sup>7</sup> That is to say, playing is a matter of *lingering* in an area of experience that is established already in early childhood and cherished and cultivated along the way.

Regardless of the various points of intersection, the two accounts seem incompatible. From Winnicott's viewpoint, Fink's account is incongruous and adultomorphic; in his eyes, Fink operates with an experiential distinction that is not readily operative in early childhood and affords the playing child a fundamentally compliant attitude towards the external world. From Fink's perspective, again, Winnicott overlooks an undeniable phenomenological distinction: regardless of how small the child, as soon as there is experience, there are phenomenological structures to that experience that can be rigorously spelled out and elaborated, regardless of whether the child herself is already familiar with these or not.

Yet, critical questions can be posed both. For one, Winnicott thinks that area of play is formed already before the establishment of the distinction between subjective imagination and external reality, but this distinction *is* nonetheless established at some point – also according to Winnicott. The question, then, is whether and how this alters the experience of playing. Could we think, for instance, that *once* the phenomenological distinction is experientially integrated, the play area can henceforth be described in Finkian terms? On

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<sup>7</sup> While comparing playing with dreaming, Fink comes rather close to Winnicott. He notes that in playing, "[w]e reclaim a land of free impulses and imaginative fulfillment of dreams" (Fink 2016, 217, cf. 134, 235), a field of "unrestricted wishful thinking", and "produce a dreamed-up condition that suits us" (Fink 2016, 240). While Fink is here thinking of a *reverse movement*, this is not in the sense of *concealing*, but in the sense of a *returning* to a dimension of experience that is constantly there, below the surface as it were. The comparison between playing and dreaming might be interesting at least in two further respects. For one, while the playworld is more controllable than the dreamworld, both experiences are nonetheless disposed to a *sense of surprise* – regardless of the fact that, objectively speaking, in both cases it is the self that creates the setting. Secondly, both modes of experience can be interrupted by intensive exteroceptive or interoceptive stimuli: internal and external stimuli must with remain within certain situation-dependent parameters, and whenever the threshold is exceeded, sleeping or playing is interrupted. Developing this interesting comparison further will not be attempted here. On phenomenological analyses of dreaming and day-dreaming, see Morley 1998; De Warren 2012.

the other hand, Fink builds on phenomenological distinctions, but it is not at all obvious whether such distinctions constantly possess an *effective* role in the life of the individual. In the form of a question: is the intuitive nature of a particular phenomenological distinction a sufficient grounds for assuming that the respective distinction is equally effective or “real” (*wirklich*) in each situation and on every developmental stage? As I see it, one only needs to think of *intense affects* to question this. Just consider the case of a *thirsty* person who “sees” an oasis while wandering in the desert; consider being extremely *tired* and snapping out of what you afterwards realize to having been a half-dream; or consider the experience of *falling in love* and feeling as one with your beloved. In such cases, the different manners of givenness between what is phantasized and what is actually perceived are undeniable *phenomenological facts*, and yet they may remain *experientially ineffective* for the time being. To illustrate, from the viewpoint of a disinterested phenomenological observer, the thirsty wanderer is merely suffering a hallucination, but it would be misplaced to conclude from this that the oasis appears to the wanderer *as something hallucinated*. To be sure, factual phenomenological differences between manners of givenness will sooner or later teach the wanderer that the oasis is not really there, thus actualizing the phenomenological distinction and retrospectively challenging the earlier experience, but before this happens, the distinction remains ineffective and merely potential. Just as it sometimes takes a while to shake off a nightmare, a relatively calm and cognitively oriented attitude – a state of “alert inactivity”, as Daniel Stern would put it (Stern 1985, 38-39; cf. Taipale 2016, 3ff.) – seems to be required for the potential phenomenological distinctions to gain their full experience-organizing power. If this is true, we can only wonder just how constantly and extensively

such distinctions figure in the life of infants, which is abundant of intense affects and rapidly fluctuating moods.

These critical questions reveal two possible ways to reconcile the two theories: a *modest* and an *ambitious* one. For the former, one might suggest that whereas Winnicott's theory of playing suits to infancy and early childhood, Fink's theory suits to older children and adults. In this model, one is led to assume, on the one hand, that Winnicott has it right when claiming that there is a developmental period that precedes the distinction that Fink readily operates with, and, on the other hand, that once this distinction is established, the experience of playing requires a different kind of conceptualization. In this manner, the two theories together account for the full developmental span – until the establishment of the distinction, one uses Winnicott's theory, and from there on, one uses Fink's theory. In this model, the two theories are considered to have *the same topic*, but *different range of application*. To be sure, *as an interpretation* of the two thinkers, this model would undoubtedly be misguided, given that neither Fink nor Winnicott would subscribe to it. While Winnicott primarily focuses on early infancy, he also writes much about how the area of playing is retained and cultivated in adult life, particularly in various societal rituals, artistic creativity, religion, and cultural experiencing (e.g., Winnicott 1971, 7, 69; Winnicott 1986, 35-36, 43-44, 49; cf. Taipale 2021). Fink, in turn, is explicitly wary of the methodological difficulties related to the analysis of infantile experience (Fink 2016, 227) and gives fewer examples from this early period; nonetheless, nowhere does he state that his account only applies to play experiences after early childhood (see Fink 2016, 18, 258-259, 264, 270). As goes without saying, this model could well be developed regardless of what Fink and Winnicott



themselves say, in which case one would only need to underline that the resulting theory is not supposed to be seen as an interpretation but as an application of their thinking.

The second and more ambitious model tackles the issue of psychological “effectivity” and suggests that the two are discussing *partly different matters*. To be sure, Fink and Winnicott both target the locus of playing *as it is experienced* by the one who is playing. Yet, when it comes to the structures of experience, Winnicott exclusively focuses on structures that are effective in the life of the individual, whereas Fink focuses on structures that are there, and potentially effective. That is to say, Fink is not interested in the *psychological position, role, and weight* that the phenomenological distinctions gain in the psychic reality of the subject; what suffices for him is that such structural distinctions *can* be phenomenologically made, as it were – or, as Husserl would put it, it suffices that such distinctions are “intentionally included [*beschlossen*] in [one’s] lived experiences, even if unattended or implicit” (Husserl 1952, 231). Fink’s phenomenological assessment could therefore be said to count as a description of the structures of experience that *could* gain effectivity in the individual in *optimal experiential circumstances* – yet, whether the latter requirement is filled, is something contingent, a psychological issue, and irrelevant from the view point of a phenomenological-ontological analysis that is aiming to unveil essential structures. That is to say, the question of *phenomenological-ontological structures* is one thing, and *how these structures are actualized and effective in the life of a given individual* is another thing – and the two might not coincide.

This viewpoint offers an interesting way to reconcile the two accounts – and in a way that both thinkers might accept. Namely, on the one hand, in interpreted in this manner, Winnicott might well agree with Fink’s claims – it is just that when speaking of “experiential

distinctions”, Winnicott is thinking of experiential structures and distinctions that are not mere phenomenological facts but distinctions that have been psychologically “internalized” as part of the individual’s psychic reality and that have hence gained an organizing role in the life of the individual. Differently put, what Fink writes could be said to be *latently* or *potentially present* already in what Winnicott writes about early infancy. Even if undeniable phenomenological facts, the distinctions that he is talking about might not be *effective* and *actualized*. For instance, the difference in the manner of givenness of what is subjectively imagined, on the one hand, and what is objectively perceived, on the other, is a phenomenological fact, but such a distinction might have a rather marginal or weak effect in the experiential life of the individual, or remain experientially ineffective altogether, something merely potential. On the other hand, reading Winnicott’s claims as having to do with *effective experiential distinctions*, Fink might well agree with him: he might be fine with the suggestion that the structural-experiential distinctions that he is explicating do not constantly play an operative or effective role in the life of the individual – and even that the ineffectivity of the particular distinctions might be rather conspicuous in certain situations and developmental periods.

This latter model for reconciliation appears appealing to me. This is not only because it would more comprehensively save both theories, as it were; it would also make intelligible some of Winnicott’s puzzling notes that seem to contradict his overall claim concerning the foundational status of the area of play. For instance, while repeatedly insisting that the play area is a third realm in its own right, he states that what is at stake is an area “to which” the psychic domain and the external reality “both contribute” (Winnicott 1971, 3; cf. 69). As a description of effective experiences, such characterizations would seem

to render the area of playing *dependent on* the mentioned realms, and Winnicott would seem to fall prey to the very adultomorphism that he tries to avoid. Yet, as a phenomenological-ontological description, the claim makes sense. Therefore, instead of just using terms in a sloppy manner, we could perhaps think that Winnicott is, in such places, speaking from a phenomenological position and hence talking of distinctions that are *not yet effective* but merely *potential*, in the life of the individual (see Winnicott 1965, 25). Moreover, this would also shed light on Winnicott's claims concerning the "paradoxical" nature of playing. Namely, he asserts that the claims, 'the playing child creates the object' and 'the world supplies the object', are "both true" (Winnicott 1990, 160). To be sure, what the infant experiences as a *creation*, the caregiver experiences as a *provision*. However, along with the child's increasing acceptance of the exteriority of the facilitating environment, also the child herself increasingly accepts the fact that what she creates the external environment in fact provides. While at the outset this "double truth" or dual contribution is effective as such only in life of the caregiver, in the course of time it becomes increasingly effective to the developing child as well.

This "ambitious model" for reconciliation is, I think, worth examining further – and not only when it comes to the question of playing. This way of mutually integrating Fink's and Winnicott's accounts of playing by focusing on the factor of psychological effectivity may open new paths to examine the compatibility between phenomenological and psychoanalytic analyses more general. Going into this issue in more detail, however, is a matter for further study.

## **Conclusions**

I have here examined the question of the locus of playing, venturing through the accounts of Fink and Winnicott. I argued that while Fink's analysis of the playworld builds on the distinction between what is merely subjective and what is objective, Winnicott argues that the playworld is present already before this distinction becomes effective in the life of the individual. Assessing these two theories, I ended up suggesting a way to reconcile them. By so doing, I hope to have shown here that rather than a choice between two theories - a phenomenological one and a psychoanalytic one - we have two possible viewpoints that can also be used to complement one another. While it can be expected that particular substantial and methodological differences disable the possibility of a complete reconciliation, I hope to have illustrated how the two theories of playing are interesting not just taken separately, but also in taken together. Whether the question of effectivity opens new ways to assess the compatibility between phenomenology and psychoanalysis in more general, this remains to be seen.

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