

D.E. Harding

# The Face Game\*

## 1. OUR THESIS

This Essay claims that:

- (a) All the 'games people play' arise out of one basic game, which we call the Face Game.
- (b) To be game-free is to cease playing the Face Game, and this (in religious contexts) is variously called Liberation, Self-realisation, Awakening, Enlightenment.

## 2. THE FACE GAME DEFINED

This is the game which almost everyone plays (exceptions include infants, some retardates and schizophrenics, and Seers) in which the player pretends that he has a face where he has no face, that he *is* (at 0') what he *looks like* (at, say 4').

## 3. BEFORE THE GAME

It takes years for the growing child to learn the Face Game thoroughly and to play it with conviction. In the following examples, the lesson has still to be learned: the child is still (momentarily, anyhow) as faceless as at birth.

Carlos (1:7), at a party, is asked to locate various uncles and aunties. He points to each in turn, correctly. Then someone asks him where Carlos is. He waves his hands aimlessly - a gesture which seems to say he is at large. Carlos cannot locate Carlos. Around this time, when rebuked for being a naughty boy, he didn't mind being called *naughty*, but protested he was not a *boy*. (Eventually he told his grandmother that he was a boy.)

Joan (2), is told to go and wash. She proceeds to the bathroom and starts washing her face - the face in the mirror.

Simon (2), asked where Simon is, points straight outwards.

Johnny (2:3) asks mother to make a picture. She draws a circle for a face, and asks: 'What next?' He asks for the trunk, then trousers, feet, hands (but not arms). Then he wants eyes, so mother draws a pair. But he insists on more and more till the whole face is covered with eyes. He then declares the picture finished.

Andrew (3) has an accident. He goes to see his friend, taking along a mirror to show him the stitches in his face.

Stephen (3.6), standing in the bath and looking down at his body, cries out: 'Mum, I haven't got a head!'

George (5), asked whether he has a brother, says: 'Yes'. 'Then *he* has a brother? 'Oh no.'

Mary (5) is in the dentist's chair. Asked where it hurts, she replies: 'At Auntie's.'

Tenniel (5) asks Mother why she and his sister have heads, and he hasn't. Fingering his head, he announced: 'But I don't have a *head* here.'

Asked where they do their thinking, most of the children in the class say: 'In our heads.' Peter (7) says *he* thinks in his arithmetic book.

Susan (8) is a black girl in a white school. Her forearms and the backs of her hands are sore: she has been trying to scrub them white. At this stage her face is no problem.

Caroline (9) is sitting with the family round the table playing cards. She can't make out why her mother insists that she should include herself when she counts the players.

Hakim, writing about himself at 10: 'I knew my arms and body were black, I could see them but I swore my face was white and if the (Shirley Temple) ever met me, she'd return my love.'

John (11) tries - unsuccessfully - to explain to his parents that he is 'the space in which all these things happen'.

Notice that there are, in fact, two very different kinds of facelessness apparent in these examples. The first - mere facelessness - may be called: *overlooking one's presence* (e.g. Caroline). The second - conscious facelessness - may be called: *seeing one's absence* (e.g. Stephen). However brief and spasmodic, this insight is a true preview of the Seer's Liberation or Enlightenment, which is accordingly described as 'becoming like a little child again'.

#### 4. LEARNING TO PLAY

The young child is faceless, and his learning to pretend otherwise is a long and complicated business, starting almost at birth and hardly complete till his teens. There are three ways of learning the Game, and they complement and reinforce one another. All are thoroughly dishonest.

- (i) Building a face here
- (ii) Importing a face from elsewhere
- (iii) Going out to find a face

(i) *Building a face here*

This way is non-visual, and builds on the foundations of touch, muscular activity and tension, sensations of heat, cold, pain, and so on. From birth, baby's face is kissed, patted, fed, washed, and generally worked on and fussed over, as if to make up for its inherent evanescence and to body it forth. In due course there are added various nursery pastimes involving facial manipulation, and deliberately drawing the child's attention to what he looks like - to other people. In school, too, the work goes on. (Teacher: 'Let's pretend our fingers are motor-cars. Then we can take a trip around our cheeks . . .')

As one grows up, the need to body forth one's face increases rather than diminishes. The site gets still more working over: witness the ritual of frequent washing, teeth-cleaning, hair-brushing, putting on and making up and repairing one's face, shaving, fussing with spectacles, smoking. (I *must* have a face here for this great big pipe to be stuck in, for all this smoke to be billowing out of!)

How successful is the method? What sort of features does it produce, not in the make-believe of the Game, but in reality?

Instead of thinking up an answer, why not put the matter to the test? Manipulate your face now anyway you please. Can you build on your shoulders a solid, opaque, coloured globe, such as you find on other people's shoulders? And, having built it, can you take up residence? If so, what's it like in there?

Isn't this first method of trying to build a face, right where you are, a total failure? It is the ploy of the Face Game to pretend otherwise.

(ii) *Importing a face from elsewhere*

What you need but can't make at home, you import. This is where the mirror comes in.

At first, baby ignores the other baby behind the glass. Soon, however, he starts playing with his little friend. Eventually, he learns that that face is 'really' his own face here, in front of the glass. In imagination, he reaches out for it, frees it from the glass, draws it towards him enlarging it as it comes, turns it round, and finally claps it onto his facelessness. What a set of impossible tricks - to play upon oneself!

(To test how efficiently you are playing the Face Game, look in your bathroom mirror. If you see somebody in that second bathroom behind the glass, staring fixedly into your empty bathroom, then you are playing badly or not at all. If you simply see yourself, you are playing well.)

(iii) *Going out to find a face*

If my face is really some way off, and I can neither (if I'm honest) build it up here by feeling it, nor bring it home from elsewhere with the help of my mirror, it seems I must go out in search of it. If I'm in no position to register my face, I must somehow get into the position of those who are.

To begin with, of course, this is impossible. The infant is at first centred wholly upon himself. He takes in the world as it is presented. But his gradual and many-sided development into a mature human means the growth of his ability to shift centre onto other observers and to contemplate himself as their object, from their point of view. This is the crucial move in the Face Game. Growing up is learning to play this Game better, and this is learning to jump further and further out of your skin (imaginary, here) in order to view your skin (real, there).

Consider the following Player's Progress, in six short scenes.

- (a) Baby Carlos at the party cannot pin himself down. Not yet shut up in a body, he is at large, unbounded. Faceless, he has no worries about how he looks to others, so he acts unselfconsciously, spontaneously, and is no respecter of persons.
- (b) But this innocent phase is already passing, as Carlos is made increasingly aware that his parents are looking meaningfully in his direction - looking angrily or approvingly, lovingly or distastefully, *at* something and not at nothing.
- (c) As a boy, Carlos attends another party. It is his turn to be 'it'. This time, suddenly confronted by a circle of faces, he starts blushing and stammering. Those critical, thought-hiding masks - what do they make of him? They make him out to be a crestfallen little boy, and he adopts their view. No longer immense and free and nothing whatever like them, he now sees himself through their eyes as one of them - and a very inadequate one, at that.
- (d) A few years later, a very different Carlos strides into the same room - a Carlos who has learned to play the Face Game with something like enjoyment. This time, he makes his appearance confidently (*who* makes this appearance, *what* it's an appearance of, he doesn't wish to know). Everything he says and does is to impress, not express. For he is right out there being impressed by handsome and charming young Carlos. The others are less impressed. In fact, they are vaguely embarrassed. They sense the falsity of the game. They don't enjoy the spectacle of recognition-hungry young Carlos off-centre and beside himself, in order that he may be turned in upon himself instead of out upon them.
- (e) Now Carlos, quite grown up, is playing the Game harder than ever and on a much larger field. The number of fellow-players to be confronted and impressed has grown vastly. His television face is familiar in a million homes. Even so, he is losing. His appetite for recognition grows faster than the supply. Besides, for all his technique, the discriminating viewer finds him more unreal than ever. In effect he is saying: 'I'm not what I *am*, but what I *look like*.' He is self-alienated.
- (f) He can now play harder still, and go more obviously sick; or ease off the Game and somehow get by till he dies. Let's optimistically suppose he is a moderate player: for society *is* mutual face-making and face-taking. It works, after a fashion.

Yet it is only a game, a pretence, which is kept in full swing by the hidden advantages

it yields. It papers over our dreaded Emptiness; it enables us to avoid the true intimacy and love of which that Emptiness is the ground. But these advantages are illusory: if our Emptiness isn't acknowledged positively, it will make itself felt negatively, and in the end disastrously. Really to grow up, to be free and at ease and natural, to be quite sane, even to be wholly practical, we must stop playing.

## 5. FAILURE TO PLAY

Many never learn to play the Face Game with skill or conviction, and some never get round to playing it at all. Having failed or declined to take themselves at the world's estimate, they are labelled schizoid or schizophrenic. Understandably, the discrepancy between the Facelessness they find at the centre, and the facade which everybody out there seems determined to construct upon it, proves too much for them.

Jung said that the schizophrenic ceases to be a schizophrenic when he feels he is understood; and one method of treatment has been to adopt (with imperfect sincerity) the symbolic language of the patient. But if the therapist has himself opted out of the Face Game, he can in some cases do much to help the patient by endorsing, with perfect sincerity, the patient's view of himself. Herbert, for instance, sees himself as transparent, a vacuum, made of glass or thin air: people look clean through him. He is empty, unborn, dead, weightless, discontinuous in time, headless, faceless, disembodied, lacking personal identity, at odds with what he sees in the mirror, quite other than the hateful self people try to impose upon him. Now all this (given some change of language), is basically true, indeed obvious, to anyone who isn't playing the Face Game. Herbert is too *sane* for comfort. *He* has to understand the Game the others are playing; *they* (or at least his therapist) have to stop playing it. His cure is theirs.

## 6. HALTING PLAY

Facelessness seldom descends out of the blue upon anyone. Nor is it likely to be got by study, or even solitary do-it-yourself meditation. Normally, it is transmitted. It is easy to see why. Essentially transactional, a social infection, the Face Game is very catching; and so is ceasing from the Game catching. In the company of hardfaced players we play our hardest. In the company of the faceless - animals, idiots, young children - we abate our play and don't bother to put on special faces. In the company of a Seer, we may find ourselves temporarily de-faced altogether - so infectious is his *darshan*.

If I'm opting out of the Face Game, some people around me are already tending to follow, though their initial response may well be to step up their play in self-defence. Precisely how does my ceasing play necessarily involve them, and maybe help them to do the same? There are three transactional stages. (It's no good merely *reading* the following. Get face-to-face with someone - and see if you are, in fact, face-to-face.)

(i) *PARENT-child*

Suppose I'm sitting opposite you and playing the Game - making believe that the set-up is symmetrical. I count two - two pairs of eyes, two mouths, two noses, two faces. We match. This means I'm split: part of me sees your face there, while the other is busy thinking up a similar object right here. The result of this split is that I glimpse rather than see your face. And certainly I don't take on what I see of it. I've got a perfectly good one of my own here, thank you! So I *throw your face back at you*, making it almost impossible for you to refuse delivery. This is what your Parent, and we (your Parent's surrogates) do for you: our wearing faces practically ensures you shall wear one.

(ii) *CHILD-Parent*

Now suppose, while still sitting opposite you, I withdraw from the Game. Then the set-up is for me totally asymmetrical, face to no-face, your presence to my absence. This means my attention is undivided: childlike, I'm going by what I see, without thinking things into it. The result is that I really do see you, vividly and with a minimum of subjective distortion. And even more clearly, I really do see Myself, as this blank screen on which you are now starring. I'm delighted to *take your face off you!*

(iii) *Adult-Adult*

Now suppose you cheerfully give what anyway I take. Then you, in turn, see how you are built open. There is no confrontation; we are no longer opposed. Instead, we are united. This is the factual basis, the essential foundation of any fully Adult-Adult relationship.

But the issue may be a less happy one: the last thing that many people want is relief from their faces, and the game-free intimacy that goes with it.

## 7. RESISTANCE

One of the marks of a game (a game in the technical sense, as defined in Transactional Analysis) is that when a player is in danger of becoming aware of his game and its hitherto unconscious motivation, he is likely to suffer distress. The harder he is playing, and the greater the concealed advantages he is getting from the game, the greater his distress or resentment is likely to be when those advantages are threatened.

All this applies strikingly to the Face Game. Reactions to its exposure vary widely. People who, on account of youth or failure to comply with the social norm, haven't learned to play the Game with ease, are commonly delighted to start giving it up. On the other hand, people who have invested much time and effort in face-building, and won through to the resulting social advantages (so-called), are likely to try any manoeuvre which promises to remove the threat to their hard-won faces.

For instance, when Mr Black, opting out of the Game, declines to go on playing it with Mr White, who is a hard player, and (perhaps unwisely) tries to explain the Game and why he's pulling out, White dismisses Black as incomprehensible, eccentric, or plain crazy. Anyhow, the upshot of Black's well-meant efforts is to provoke White to play still harder. Alternatively, White may be really shaken, in which case his attitude to Black is liable to degenerate into a curious mixture of embarrassment, apprehension and fascination. He tries to avoid Black, but unsuccessfully. Their friendship seems at an end. (In fact, if all goes well, it is now really beginning).

Here is another instance, a more dramatic one. Normally, the Zen monk goes for his daily interview with the Roshi quite willingly, but when he gets to the verge of Satori he may have to be carried, struggling, into the Roshi's presence, which he would give anything to avoid. In general, the disciple who is about to see his Original Face (his Facelessness, his Voidness) is apt to come up against unexpected resistances. His distress, as he confronts this barrier, is matched by his joy and relief as he breaks through to the simple truth of his clarity.

## 8. OUR ORIGINAL FACE

'Seeing one's Original Face' is one of Zen's synonyms for Enlightenment. 'See what at this very moment your own face looks like - the Face you had before your parents were born,' is the message of Hui Neng, the virtual Founder of Zen. Our Original Face is absolutely featureless. Understandably, this doctrine perplexed the young Tung-shan (807-869), who became the founder of Soto Zen. The occasion of his Enlightenment was when he happened to see his reflection in a pond. In our terms, he located his human face down there in the water, and his non-human, featureless Face above the water. He looked at himself as if for the first time, and took seriously what he saw - at its face value - instead of playing games with it. 'When thought is put down', says a later Zen Master, 'the Original Face appears.'

Other religious traditions, including Taoism, Hinduism (Advaita), Islam (Sufism), and mystical Christianity, have their versions of the Original Face. They agree that I have to *see*, not just acknowledge, this Emptiness that lies here at the Centre of my universe - and is filled with that universe. It isn't that I must *become* as faceless, as incorporeal, as much at large, as I was in the cradle; but rather see that I have always been like that, and always will be so, whether I have the honesty to recognise it or not. And, after all, this makes sense: the game-free baby is here so obviously in the right.

## 9. THE FIVE STAGES OF THE GAME

(i) Like any animal, the new-born infant is - for himself - No-thing, faceless, at large, unseparate from his world, 1st-person without knowing it.

(ii) The young child, as we have seen, is liable to become *aware* (however briefly and intermittently) of himself-as-he-is-for-himself - faceless Capacity. Yet he's also becoming increasingly aware of himself-as-he-is-for-others: a very special and all-too-human 3rd person, complete with head and face. *Both views of himself are valid and needful.*

(iii) But as the growing child learns the Face Game his acquired view of himself-from-outside comes to overshadow, and in the end to obliterate, his native view of himself-from-inside. In fact, he grows *down*, not up. At first, he contained his world: now it contains him - what little there is of him. He takes everybody's word for what it's like where he is, except his own, and is 1st-person no longer. The consequences are just what might be expected. Shrunk from being the Whole into being this insignificant part, he grows greedy, hating, fearful, closed in, phoney, and tired. Greedy, as he tries to regain, at whatever cost, a little of his lost empire; hating, as he tries to revenge himself on a society that has cruelly cut him down to size; fearful, as he sees himself a mere thing up against all other things; closed in, because it is the nature of a thing to keep others out; phoney, as he puts on mask after mask for each person or occasion; tired, because so much energy goes in keeping up these appearances instead of letting them go to where they belong - in and for the others. And all these troubles - and many more - arise from his basic pretence, the Face Game, as he imagines (contrary to all the evidence) that he is at 0 feet what he looks like at 6 feet - a solid, opaque, coloured, outlined lump of stuff. In short, he's beside himself, eccentric, self-alienated.

(iv) He sees through the Game. Play is, for the moment, halted. This initial seeing is simplicity itself. Once noticed, nothing is more obvious than one's facelessness. The results, however, including freedom from greed, hate, fear, and delusion, are assured only while the Clarity here (which is Freedom itself) is being attended to. Flashes of Clarity aren't enough.

(v) Now the really exacting stage begins. He has to go on seeing his facelessness whenever and wherever he can till the seeing becomes quite natural and unbroken. Then at last the Game is over. He is game-free, Liberated, Awake, Enlightened, truly 1st-person.

This conscious 1st-personhood, or Enlightenment, has been breaking out here and there for the past 4,000 years, and is now becoming much less rare. It could be exploding, in spite of society's still immense resistances. This is fortunate, for the race's survival may well depend upon the condition becoming, if not universal, at least the recognised norm, against which true mental health is measured.

## 10. CONCLUSION

There is no end to the number and variety of the games which continually arise out of the Face Game, and no way to be free of them but to tackle them at source. The Face Game is the root, and all the other games people play only branches and twigs. It makes sense, in that case, to hack at the root and leave the branches to wither of themselves.

Till they are put to the test, these are mere words. Here is a working hypothesis, and its testing isn't necessarily as difficult as it looks. Though universal, the Face Game is all the while becoming more manifestly absurd and unworkable.

*\*This is a condensed and up-dated version of an article, bearing the same title, first published by Eric Berne in the Bulletin of the International Transactional Analysis Association, April, 1967.*



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# Consciousness, Integration and Responsibility

Mark Matthews

Concerns about some of the practices and the direction of the growth or human potential movement and the role of the Association for Humanistic Psychology have been with me for some time. An accidental typing error - *humoristic* instead of *humanistic* - crystallised the issues in my mind. I resigned from the executive committee of the association and resolved to write this article.

The choice of the title deserves explanation. I believe in the concept of consciousness - not in the sense of levels but as facets of a crystal. A crystal which includes both ideological and physiological dimensions. Consciousness leads to integration, the sense of making whole for the individual and also for the individual as a member of the community, a fragment of the living process. It is in this sense as a member of the community that I wish to introduce a view of responsibility which goes beyond that common in the movement.

Just what the movement is cannot be defined. It must include all who are involved with growth, self realization, therapy or consciousness and it probably includes those who take as their task a process orientation. The extent to which it is a cultural group or view with its own values as against a group who have experienced a process is the dilemma with which I am faced. It appears as both.

It is this dilemma coupled with the fact that there are skills and financial considerations also involved that has lead to such confused thinking and a lack of social awareness. It is certainly not within my ability to resolve the complexity but hopefully these ideas will encourage others and some initiatives will emerge. To make my point I confess to being over dramatic. It is human to err.

The association has under three hundred members, and most of the 'accepted leaders'