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The emergence of Klein’s idea of projective identification in her published and unpublished work

Elizabeth Spillius

Introduction

I will first describe something of the history of the term ‘projective identification’ followed by discussion of Klein’s own ideas about it in the two published versions of her paper ‘Notes on some schizoid mechanisms’ (Klein, 1946, 1952a) and in her 1955 paper ‘On identification’. Then I will discuss two sets of unpublished entries on the concept of projective identification in the Melanie Klein Archive.

History of the concept

Although Melanie Klein was the originator of the definition and usage of the concept of projective identification as we know it today, she was not the first person to use the actual term. It was first used by Edoardo Weiss, in 1925 in a paper called ‘Über eine noch unbeschriebene Phase der Entwicklung zur heterosexuellen Liebe’ in the context of explaining sexual object choice (Weiss, 1925). Klein refers to Weiss’s paper in The Psycho-Analysis of Children (Klein, 1932b, p. 250, n. 2) where she explains Weiss’s understanding of sexual object choice, using the term ‘projection’ in her explanation but not discussing his use of the term ‘projective identification’ (see also Massidda, 1999 and Steiner, 1999).
There was another precursor to Klein’s use of the term projective identification. In 1945, a year before Klein published her first version of ‘Notes on some schizoid mechanisms’, Marjorie Brierley mentions projective identification in a paper called ‘Further notes on the implications of psycho-analysis: Metapsychology and personology’, in which she says

projective identification of ego-ideal with outer object, human or abstract, would appear to be a feature of the economy of all fanatics [. . .] the pedestrian everyday charity that begins at home, as distinct from fanatical devotion of ultra-personal interests, may depend upon projective identification with a fairly well-libidinized operative self.

(Brierley, 1945, p. 96)

Brierley mentions projective identification again in a second paper in 1947. Brierley and Klein do not refer to each other’s work, but it looks as if considerable thinking and discussion about introjection, projection and identification was going on among British analysts in the 1940s and that projective identification was not so much a special focus as part of this general discussion.

### Klein’s published views on projective identification

Klein first mentions the idea of projective identification in her paper ‘Notes on some schizoid mechanisms’ in 1946 but at first only in passing. In the original version of ‘Notes on some schizoid mechanisms’, which was published in the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* in 1946, Klein describes the process of projective identification as follows:

Together with these harmful excrements, expelled in hatred, split off parts of the ego are also projected on to the mother or, as I would rather call it, into the mother. These excrements and bad parts of the self are meant not only to injure the object but also to control it and take possession of it. Insofar as the mother comes to contain the bad parts of the self, she is not felt to be a separate individual but is felt to be the bad self.

Much of the hatred against parts of the self is now directed towards the mother. This leads to a particular kind of identifica-
Emergence of Klein’s projective identification

tion which establishes the prototype of an aggressive object relation.

(Klein, 1946, p. 102)

In the next paragraph Klein adds:

It is, however, not only the bad parts of the self which are expelled and projected, but also good parts of the self. Excrements then have the significance of gifts; and parts of the ego which, together with excrements, are expelled and projected into the other person represent the good, i.e. the loving parts of the self.

(Klein, 1946, p. 102)

In essence these paragraphs are a definition of projective identification, but the concept is not mentioned by name. The actual name ‘projective identification’ is mentioned not as part of this definition but only in a passing comment two pages later where Klein says, ‘I have referred to the weakening and impoverishment of the ego resulting from excessive splitting and projective identification’ (Klein, 1946, p. 104);¹ this is the only mention of the concept of projective identification by name in the 1946 version of the paper. It was not until the 1952 version of ‘Notes on some schizoid mechanisms’ that Klein added the crucial sentence ‘I suggest for these processes the term “projective identification” ’ to the defining paragraphs quoted above.

Somewhat confusingly, it has become customary for this 1952 version of the paper to be cited as ‘1946’ in the Kleinian literature. It is the 1952 version that is reprinted in Chapter 2 in the present book.

The 1952 version of the paper differs from the 1946 version not only in including the term ‘projective identification’ in the definition but also in other respects. There are two new paragraphs, one of which is devoted to projective identification, and there is some rearranging of the order of other paragraphs. There are also thirteen new footnotes, notably one to Paula Heimann thanking her for her

¹ I am grateful to Riccardo Steiner for pointing out that Klein uses the term ‘projective identification’ in the 1946 version of her paper even though it is not part of her definition of the concept.
'stimulating suggestions' about Klein’s paper, one to Ferenczi (1930) on fragmentation, two to Rosenfeld, especially to his papers on depersonalisation (Rosenfeld, 1947) and on male homosexuality and paranoia (Rosenfeld, 1949), and one to an unpublished paper on paranoid attitudes by Joan Riviere which I have been unable to track down (Riviere, unpublished).

According to Hanna Segal (personal communication) the term ‘projective identification’ was suggested to Klein by her colleague (and patient) Roger Money-Kyrle. Segal also said that Klein did not like the term ‘projective identification’ and she added that Klein thought of the term in the context of comparing projection with introjection. In the case of introjection, once an object has been taken in several things may happen to it: it may exist inside the subject as an internal object, good or bad; the subject may unconsciously identify with this internal object or with an aspect of it; or both processes may occur, that is, the internal object may be recognised as separate from oneself but it may also be identified with. Klein, according to Segal, thought of projective identification as a parallel process to introjective identification, meaning that projective identification was only one of several possible outcomes of projection, although Klein does not describe what these other outcomes might be.

After 1952 Klein makes comparatively few mentions of projective identification except of course for her paper ‘On identification’ in 1955 in which identification is the central theme (Klein, 1955). But this paper is an analysis not of a patient but of a character in a novel who projects his whole self into various other people in order to acquire their identity. The idea of this sort of projective identification is still used, but nowadays the concept is more frequently used to describe the projection of aspects of the individual’s self into other objects.

Apart from this 1955 paper, the most frequent mentions of projective identification come in 1957 in Envy and Gratitude where Klein notes the projective character of envy and the contribution envy makes to difficulties in making the basic and primal split between good and bad experiences and feelings, this split being essential for the development of integration of the ego. Envy leads to attacks on the good object which take the form of projection of bad parts of the self into the good object, resulting in confusion between the good and the bad self, between good and bad aspects of the object, and between self and object.
Klein’s unpublished notes on projective identification in the Melanie Klein Archive

If one were to know about Klein’s views on projective identification only from her published work, one would conclude that she did not think the concept was very important, for she published comparatively little about it. Once one explores the Klein Archive, however, one finds much more material on the topic, both in the form of theoretical thoughts and in clinical illustration. One file of particular importance, B98, dates from 1946/1947 when Klein was working on her important paper ‘Notes on some schizoid mechanisms’ (1946), which she always refers to in the Archive as ‘my splitting paper’, never as ‘my projective identification paper’. The file B98 consists of excerpts of clinical material, sporadic notes and some longer theoretical thoughts especially on splitting and projective identification. Other relevant material occurs in parts of file D17, which probably dates from the late 1950s and includes both theory and clinical illustration. The comments on projective identification in file D17 are scattered here and there throughout the file.

James Gammill (1989), whose work with a three-year-old child was supervised by Klein in the late 1950s, has told me that she talked to him in considerable detail about the way his patient was using projective identification. Thus, although Klein published so little about projective identification, it was important in the thoughts she was formulating and using in her supervisions in the late 1950s.

2 The Melanie Klein Archive was given to the Wellcome Library for the History of Medicine by the Melanie Klein Trust in 1984 and has been catalogued by their excellent archivists. The part of the Archive with which I am mainly concerned has been divided into B, C, and D files. B files consist of Klein’s clinical notes on patients. C files consist of her papers, published and unpublished. D files consist of her notes on theory and various other matters. In quoting from the Archive I have made minor corrections of spelling but I indicate other changes or comments by putting them within square brackets [ ]. When Klein herself puts brackets in her text, I use rounded brackets ( ). All files are prefaced by PP/KLE followed by the letter and number of the file. In most files the pages are not numbered consecutively so that I have not been able to cite page numbers.
The notes of file PP/KLE, B98, ‘Patients’ material: theoretical thoughts’

This file of 106 pages dates from 1946 and 1947, the year before and just after the time when Klein’s 1946 version of ‘Notes on some schizoid mechanisms’ was first published. Some pages give theoretical formulations, some give clinical material; some are generalisations about several patients; some give the material of a single patient. The pages are not at all systematically arranged and they seem to have been hastily written or perhaps dictated; almost all are typed. One gets the impression that for this file Klein put down or dictated examples and thoughts on splitting, identification, projection and introjection spontaneously as they occurred to her. Because file B98 file is so long it will not be reproduced in the present book, but I will quote from it in some detail.

Although this material of B98 is interesting in itself, it is not of very much help in showing how Klein arrived at the novel formulations of her 1946 ‘splitting’ paper. It seems to me that there is a huge conceptual leap from the notes of B98 to the paper, which describes her formulation of the paranoid-schizoid position for the first time. In addition, only one of the clinical examples given in the published paper is to be found in B98; nor could I find the clinical examples of the paper in any other part of the Archive. I think it likely that the clinical material and theoretical thoughts of B98 formed a general background for Klein’s thinking rather than a specific source of inspiration for the new ideas of ‘Notes on some schizoid mechanisms’.

There are certain themes that Klein repeatedly refers to in the notes of B98.

The first theme is that good as well as bad aspects of the self are involved in projective identification. Klein also states this view in her paper ‘Notes on some schizoid mechanisms’, although she puts less stress on it than she does in the Archive notes, and most of the literature since Klein’s work has stressed the projection of bad aspects rather than good. Klein gives several examples of the projection of good aspects of the subject’s self, as for example in the case of Patient H, who projected good aspects of himself into one person and bad aspects into another, his analyst:

June 25th, 1946
Patient H felt particular gratification in a situation which could have stirred his jealousy and envy through comparison with
Emergence of Klein’s projective identification

...somebody but in fact was only felt to be gratifying. The enviable object – Mrs. X – not only represented an ally in what was felt to be a good cause which she had particularly well dealt with (that is where envy would have come in); but as a good aspect of H himself. It appeared that he felt that he had put everything good he possessed into her. That is how she came to represent himself. During this hour he had a strange feeling of being quite estranged from himself and could not account for that. He had been very satisfied with progress in analysis and insight gained, and was struggling to maintain an exclusively friendly and grateful relation to me. I could show him that the satisfaction led to an increased greedy wish to get more, and that he was trying to prevent his greed because he felt that he would enter my mind violently to rob me. The interpretation was that he was putting into myself all his valueless products, representing faeces and urine, and in this process taking such full possession of me when his products had also come to represent himself. At this moment he said, ‘I would wish to get out’ with quite a strong physical feeling of breathlessness and oppression. The interpretation being that he would like to withdraw himself out of me which was followed by physical relief. Now we could connect the feeling of strangeness to himself, depersonalisation, with the feeling that he had been inside me, and getting himself out of me had felt that he had left so much of his personality inside me that he was estranged to what he took back. On the other hand, his identification with Mrs. X was based on the feeling that he had put his good things into her and therefore could enjoy without rivalry or envy her accomplishments.

(Klein Archive, PP/KLE, B98)

Klein’s second main theme in the notes of B98 is that projection and introjection go together. She says, for example:

To Schizoid paper
Chapter Note (to p.18)
Projective identification is the basis for many anxiety situations of a paranoid nature. Since projection and introjection operate simultaneously, paranoid anxieties focus on persecution within the self and within the object which the self has forcefully entered. The attempts to control an external object by entering it give rise to the fear of being controlled and persecuted by this object. The subject

may be unable to withdraw from this object; it is kept imprisoned and subjugated by the object. Once part of the ego, or the whole ego, might be felt to have got lost for ever etc. (I have described formerly, in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, such fears as being not only at the bottom of paranoid anxiety but also as a cause for disturbances in the male’s sexuality – impotence – and as a basis for claustrophobia.) In addition, the re-introjection of this object, which now represents a combination of a persecutory object and the bad self, reinforces inner persecution. The accumulations of anxiety situations of this nature – particularly the fact that the ego is, as it were, caught between external and internal anxieties – is one of the basic features in paranoia. (Cf. chapter on ‘Notes on some schizoid mechanisms’ also H. Rosenfeld’s paper ‘Analysis of a Schizophrenic state with Depersonalization’, IJPA Vol. XXVIII, 1947, and Joan Riviere’s paper. [Title? Published?])

(Klein Archive, PP/KLE, B98)

She puts it more concisely in another entry:

To Theoretical Reflections
Vampire like sucking. In the first sucking of sadistic character you do not only suck out but you put yourself in. Projective identification already there as a complementary process to earliest greedy introjection of the breast.

I believe that persecutory fear of a greedily introjected object – and later the guilt regarding this – contributes to projection and projective identification.

(Klein Archive, PP/KLE, B98)

Klein also gives a specific example, once again from Patient ‘H’.

September 20, 1946
To Splitting paper
Extension into the body, and loneliness derived from the fear of destruction of the object from which one is parting – this has been explained as the fear of loss of the object because of one’s own sadistic desires against it. Now in one case, ‘H’ [this phrase and the letter ‘H’ are crossed out] I have found that panic connected with the fear of parting or being left alone derived from the feeling that one part of himself remained in me and that he could not
withdraw that before going. The interpretation was that the great grievance and hatred to which parting and being left alone gave rise made the part of himself left inside me particularly vicious. I was therefore not only [left, but left] in great danger. But the feeling of being weakened by such an important part of himself being in me increased the feeling of dependence and anxiety. Correspondingly we found in the same hour again the feeling of bits inside. The interpretation was that to this destruction wrought on me by one part of himself acting so ferociously inside me corresponded a similar state of me as an internal object inside him. This internal ‘me’ was also a source of great persecution and danger to him, as for that matter I was as an external object when I was treated by his being in me in that way. Both relations – me inside him and him inside me – were connected with a feeling of narcissistic withdrawal, loss of feelings, incapacity of re-establishing the relation to me and to others. Also between these situations on the one hand of being overwhelmed by an internal me or containing a destroyed internal me, and the situation described before (the external one) – there was hardly anything of his personality left. The remaining of feeling and an increased condition of the ego as a consequence of such interpretations [was] strengthened.

(Klein Archive, PP/KLE, B98)

A third major theme in the material of the B98 file is that a person’s sense of his own identity is built up around the internalised good object. If this internalisation is not secure, the person resorts to intensive but ‘unselective’ introjection and to equally intensive and piecemeal projections of aspects of the self. This is how Klein puts it:

One way of formulating the focus which the good internal object provides: the ego builds it up [this probably means ‘builds itself up’ – EBS] from the identifications. Round the primary good objects cluster the parts of the self which are then as it were held together by this strong identification. If it is not strong enough, the great need of more and more identifications, anybody is taken in, and the connection between this and the unselective throwing out again and dispersing again.

(Klein Archive, PP/KLE, B98)
Klein describes the process in an example from a patient whom she calls 'J'.

April 13, 1946
Patient J.: An hour which is characterised by greed and frustration coming up in connection with the holidays. During that hour he refers to a decision to be made, on which he would wish to have my advice because I have common sense and sound judgement. At one point he mentions a friend, X, who suspects his relative who keeps house for him of taking the cream off the milk. He relates that to his relation with me, wishing to be first in order to get the cream of the milk, but then the people following would be deprived, about which he both triumphs and is sorry. Rivals. Then he speaks of X as being delusional on that point. K interprets that at each of these points he was identified, or rather represented by the relative who steals the cream, the rival who is being deprived, the neglected child, the friend who is delusional, which is in contrast to the other fact where the cream is in fact in his mind taken away from the milk. He then adds: ‘There must be another part there who watches all that and tries to be common sense.’

K interprets four split off aspects which seem incompatible with one another. At this moment – though very impressed at the beginning with the interpretation, there is great difficulty in following and understanding what I just said. K interprets that this difficulty arises from the thought processes being as split as these different aspects are. Also that his common sense aspect is in identification with me who was common sense at the beginning of the hour; that round this identification, which is also part of himself, he is trying to bring together the split off aspects.

(Klein Archive, PP/KLE, B98)

Klein also touches on this matter of the origin of a weak and divided sense of identity in the description of two sessions with Patient ‘H’ in October, 1946. In the first session (which I will not report in full) Klein had interpreted that H was suffering from a lack of emotion and that this was a defence. In the next session H had recovered his capacity to feel. In fact he felt very anxious and feared a kind of explosion in which he would blow up into bits, or be
blown up. Then he had a vision of a monkey, an unemotional monkey, sitting and eating banana after banana. This was almost immediately followed by another vision of a very wild monkey tearing and breaking everything up.

Klein interpreted that the senseless force he was anxious about was his own impulse, one part of himself destroying and disintegrating him.

Following this hour, H had a very striking experience. Somebody rang him and he seemed interested in what he was told but found it difficult to follow. In the conversation he tried to bring together two points of this special topic and could not find them. He felt himself talking round about. He was left with an increasing state of anxiety. This conversation did not in fact contain anything which on the surface one would say needed to stir anxiety in him. Later on he suddenly felt that the very fact that he could not bring things together during this conversation, and that his own thoughts had become confused, had roused anxiety in him. He suddenly saw the monkey in front of him, and now he had torn all his thoughts and words to bits.

In the analysis we found that in this conversation he had suddenly become identified with the person who had been mentioned in the telephone talk, with the person who telephoned and with himself in a specially unpleasant situation because the person referred to was an ill person, and anxiety of illness had been stirred strongly through the recent material. All these quick projective identifications related to the analytic work of the last few sessions and increased the feeling of being in bits and being unable to integrate himself. He had been persons A, B, C, D, during this conversation and now he was exposed again to this terrible force represented through the tearing monkey who, as he suddenly felt, tore his thoughts and words to bits.

All these mechanisms were found in somebody who seems quite normal, just someone who tells things in a rather slow, deliberate way, a type one often meets.

(Klein Archive, PP/KLE, B98)

Finally, Klein describes a different sort of patient, a man who is not uncertain about his identity, but is worried about the way he controls women by projective identification.
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Patient ‘M’
October 12, 1946

The influence the projective identifications have on sexual intercourse are seen quite clearly in somebody whose analysis has not been carried to any length yet. His fear of influencing and moulding the women he is interested in such a way that they are greatly changed and become really like himself. He saw with dismay that a girl he likes and who likes him had changed her style of dressing in the way in which he sometimes likes women to be dressed and he called this ‘the thin edge of the wedge’. In the same hour he told me that he does not like this influence at all and is strongly trying to prevent it in present relations. He speaks with great concern about an earlier relation in which this seemed to be one of the factors which made the girl too fond, too dependent on him and finished unsatisfactorily because he cannot bear too great dependence in the woman. Somebody said that he is apt to choose people (in working conditions) who are so receptive to his ideas that they will make a perfect staff. In referring to this influence he said: ‘They become really too much like myself and [I] don’t want to see so much of myself about.’ The sexual relations too were obviously impeded and influenced by these fears. All relationships, but particularly with women, were affected. He does not seem to feel having such powers over men.

Conclusion: The penis being used as a controlling object, as an object to be split off, and then the mechanism of splitting is very active. Not only faeces are split off, but parts of the body which are entering the body and controlling it. Now the penis is then felt to remain inside in a controlling, guiding, etc. way. That too must have a bearing on difficulties in potency, because if it is too much a sent out part of oneself it impedes the capacity.

(Klein Archive, PP/KLE, B98)

Klein also notes that the projection of goodness may deplete the self. She says:

NOTE

The importance of projection and putting out things from the self also in the service of goodness has its effect on the process of depersonalisation. The goodness put out of the self into the other person, and then trying to get it back – a hardly recognisable
Emergence of Klein’s projective identification

part of the self. One of the important factors in overdoing this process – the intensity of these processes has already to do with fear and guilt. Here also enters the sacrificial attitude – to take over the badness and suffering from the other object in order that it should remain perfect and unharmed.

(Klein Archive, PP/KLE, B98)

I have quoted these excerpts from the B98 part of the Klein Archive to give an idea of the complexity of the way Klein used the idea of projective identification and of the multiplicity of motives for it. Her brief account of projective identification in ‘Notes on some schizoid mechanisms’ does not do justice to the variability of patients’ projective identifications and the complexity of the relations between projective and introjective identifications. Klein’s examples give an idea of the richness and flexibility of her use of her concept, although she does not try to describe this in a systematic way either in her notes or in her publications.

Summary of the main themes of B98 in 1946 and 1947

First, good as well as bad aspects of the self may be projected and identified with.

Second, projection and introjection usually go together.

Third, if there is no strong and stable internalisation of a good internal object around which identifications can cluster, the ego cannot be satisfactorily built up and introjective and projective identifications will be not only complex but also fragmented, unselective and unstable.

The fourth theme is closely related to the third: the ego is likely to be weakened by loss of good and bad parts of the self through excessive projection.

Klein’s unpublished notes on projective identification in 1958: Klein Archive, PP/KLE, D17, entitled ‘Klein: Technique. New Notes on Technique’

The file D17 covers many topics. It consists of 99 ‘frames’ (meaning pages) of which 11 are devoted to projective identification. One
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page of these notes is dated 1958 and it seems likely that the other pages may date from the same time. (The 11 pages of D17 that are devoted to projective identification have been printed in Spillius, 2007, pp. 121–126.)

On the first frame (799) of these 1958 notes on projective identification, Klein states in handwriting: ‘To be used in a paper on projective identification’. I did not find any such paper in the Archive, but it looks as if by this time, 1958, the term ‘projective identification’ was worth writing about in its own right. It had apparently acquired an identity of its own and was no longer thought of mainly in the context of general discussions of introjection, projection and identification.

In these unpublished notes from D17, Klein states several views on projective identification.

First, she distinguishes between projection and projective identification as two steps in the same process. In the first step, which she calls ‘projection’, something of oneself that is very unpleasant or something that one feels one does not deserve to have is attributed to somebody else. In the second step, which is ‘projective identification’, this something, good or bad, is split off from the self and put into the object. The two steps, she says, ‘need not be simultaneously experienced, though they very often are’ (Klein Archive, PP/KLE, D17, frames 802, 840).

I have not found this distinction useful – in fact I find it difficult to see how the second step is really different from the first – and so far as I can see, none of Klein’s colleagues has adopted her distinction.

Second, Klein thinks it is essential for the analyst to project himself into the patient in order to understand him, and that it is also essential that the analyst should introject the patient. She says:

Only is [if] the analyst can project himself into the analysand will he be able to understand him deeply enough [. . .] A conclusion from what I am saying would be that an optimum in identification with the patient, both by introjection and projection, is essential for a deeper understanding with the patient, together with a capacity to regain one’s own self and ego sufficiently not to be misled by the identification.

(Klein Archive, PP/KLE, D17, frame 804)
Emergence of Klein’s projective identification

Third, as in her published paper (1946, 1952a) Klein stresses that good as well as bad parts of the self may be projected into the object (D17, frame 801). There may be several motives for projecting bad aspects of oneself or for making ‘bad’ penetrations into the object: to get rid of something bad in oneself; greedily to control or rob the object; or to satisfy one’s aggressive curiosity (D17, frame 805). The motive she cites for projecting good aspects of oneself is that one feels one does not deserve to have such aspects.

Fourth, Klein says nothing about countertransference in these notes of 1958, but we know from notes in other parts of the Archive that Klein did not agree with the idea that the analyst’s countertransference could be a useful source of information about the patient (Klein Archive, C72, frames 695–724). This is partly because, like Freud (1910), she defines countertransference as a sign of pathology in the analyst. She does imply, however, in the notes on projective identification in the D17 part of the Archive that the analyst is bound to have a distinct emotional reaction to the patient, and she says explicitly that the analyst may be somewhat anxious both about projecting himself into the patient and about the patient’s projecting himself into the analyst (D17, frames 805–806). ‘But again,’ she adds, ‘if the analyst possesses the strength of ego and the other qualities to which I referred earlier, the anxiety of the patient projecting himself into him will not disturb him, and he can then analyse the projection of the patient’ (D17, frame 806). She seems to assume that the analyst’s emotional reaction needs to be overcome because it will interfere with his capacity to think analytically.

Fifth, I believe that Klein assumes throughout these notes, although she does not explicitly say so, that projective identification takes the form of an unconscious phantasy, and I assume that she thought this was also true of introjective identification.

Finally, Klein briefly describes a clinical session in which she shows how she analyses a particular instance of projective identification (Klein Archive, D17, frames 802–803). Because she gives so little published clinical illustration of her ideas about projective identification, I will quote her example here.

In this connection, I wish again to stress the necessity to go step by step according to the emotions, anxieties, etc. activated in the patient, and not to run ahead because the analyst knows already what is behind that. I have an example of this point. The analysand
speaks in an early session of his analysis of some experience in . . . during the War. They had been warned that there were man-eating tigers about, but they had not met any. Previous to that, his suspicions of me, very much stimulated by remarks made [by others] about me, had come up and had led to his distrust of his mother. His mother was supposed to have said, as an aunt reported to him, that, being in very bad circumstances, if she were starving, she would eat her son. Though Mr [X] actually knew quite well that that was not what she meant, he had never forgotten this remark, and it had come up in his suspicions of me, together with his suspicions of my possessiveness, dangerousness, etc. I first analysed these suspicions and linked them with his suspicions of his mother, who had actually not been able to give him enough food at a certain period in his life, and linked these with the man-eating tiger he had mentioned, his fear that she would eat him and that she was starving him for bad and dangerous reasons. [He] went on about his stay in . . . and said that they had never actually met a man-eating tiger, but had met a bear, and then added laughingly that the bear did not eat them they ate the bear. My interpretations were then fully supported, that it was his wish to eat his mother’s breast and that led to his suspicion that his mother was devouring him. At that moment [he] felt that the plants on my desk actually belonged to him, corrected this in the next moment, but found that this was a confirmation of what I said, because he had appropriated something that belonged to me.

(Klein Archive, D17, frames 802–3; this example is also cited in Spillius, 2007, pp. 110–111)

It is worth noting here that Klein does not use her distinction between projection and projective identification in this brief account. It seems clear that she assumed that projection and projective identification were occurring simultaneously in this instance.

As I discuss in Part Two of this book, some of these points have been worked on and developed by several of Klein’s British Kleinian colleagues. Some are no longer adhered to, and some are used by some colleagues but not by others.

This introduction to Klein’s published and unpublished work on the topic of projective identification is here followed by reprinting of the 1952 version of Klein’s ‘Notes on some schizoid mechanisms’.