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The Artist and his Objects

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Great artists whose works attain lasting recognition are more identifiable in their permanent affiliation with the objects of their aesthetic creation than with those they procreated. We link Shakespeare's life more with Hamlet than we do with his son Hamnet. Unresolved is the issue of whether an artist's renowned created objects had a more enduring meaning to him than any of his personal relationships. The constituents of the aesthetic audience transpose their exclusive libidinal interest in the artist and his created objects; they tend to assume that the artist shares their major if not exclusive libidinal investment in his created objects.

The personal relationships of each individual, first with his parents, siblings and friends, and later with sexual objects and children, are the most constant and vital ones throughout his life. In the case of the creative person there is the additional factor of his relationships with his created objects which complicate his relationships with his personal objects.

How do we as psychoanalysts comprehend and reconcile the nature and organization of the artist's relationship with the objects of his real world and those of his created world? Some of us consider the relationship between the artist and his created objects (such as Michelangelo and David) an inseparable one (Kris, 1939). Others among us emphasize the artist's relationship with his created object as an expression of his love affair with the world. Conceived of as inseparable or ubiquitous, the relationship between artist and created object could be further clarified if we understood more about the nature and developmental origins of the created object.

This study will indicate that the cathectic characteristics of the created object are not the same as those of the personal object. It will contend that the created object is a derivative of the early infantile anlage of object relationships, such as transitional objects and collective alternates. The creative state (and its concomitant created objects) will be considered as episodic re-emergences of aspects of the infantile developmental stage of transitional phenomena (and collective alternates) which can be revived repetitively through the lifespan of the creative individual. We shall explore the relationship between Winnicott's transitional objects and Greenacre's collective alternates and link them in a developmental continuum with the created objects of the artist.¹

Greenacre (1957) emphasizes the creative person's capacity for flexibility of attachment in object relations as well as his ability to either expand or intensify established relationships in her conceptualization of the artist's love affair with the world.²

Greenacre postulates the early development of a special systemization of the artist's object relationships. His special capacity for a love affair with the world stems from his unique capacity to supplement his personal objects with collective alternates. These capacities imply a greater than average expandability for and expendability of object relationships. Greenacre then proposes that the artist in his very early development is capable of vast and varied shifts of cathexis from a limited number of personal objects to more unlimited peripheral ones. In his subsequent capacity as an artist, his communication to the audience entails a shift of cathexis from a restricted number of personal objects to an unrestricted number of impersonal objects. The creative process itself represents a shift in cathexis away from personal objects to more impersonal objects.

Jacobson (1964) explains the artist's intense commitment to creative work in terms of transformation of object relations. She maintains that creative people have the 'favourable' vicissitude of their orality which enables them to decathect or

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¹ Transitional objects and transitional phenomena answer to Winnicott's descriptions in which he suggested their continuity with the creative process.

² Flexibility has traditionally been considered a characteristic of creative people. Freud (1916-17) suggested that flexibility of repression (a forerunner of the concept of regression in the service of the ego) was characteristic of creative people.

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hypocathect temporarily all other objects except for one hypercatheted subject (an object) upon which they work exclusively with great amounts of energy. This astonishing ability becomes manifest in their 'devouring' interest in (their) work which during such creative spells makes them utterly forgetful of the rest of the world.

Jacobson finds this state of the artist's object relationships 'remindful of the small child's exclusive oral investment in his single love object'.

These formulations by Greenacre and Jacobson on the development of object relations in creative people imply that special departures from normal development of object relations are essential. Whereas Greenacre's assessment of the artist's special equipment is expressed in terms of more than usual sensorimotor functioning and discharge, in her assessment the object relations of the artist-to-be are expressed in qualities of exceptions to the normal rather than more than normal. In Greenacre's schema collective alternate objects are not expansions of average normal development of object relations but are rather seen as an extra development. In contrast, the current formulation on the creative person's development of object relations (which will be subsequently elaborated upon) emphasizes the significance of transitional objects which are ubiquitously present in normal human development.

Jacobson's conceptualization leans heavily on the single phase of oral development and accentuates exclusively the condition of an early fixation on the object of the mother. Her suggestion that the intensive dedication of creative people to their creative work would derive solely from the condition of an overattachment to the maternal object seems unlikely as a general principle for creative dedication. The implication is that intensive creative dedication and work depend on a favourable but nevertheless pathological departure from normal psychological development. It accentuates the unintended conception that creativity and infantile neurosis, rather than creativity and infantile development, are inseparably interwoven. It has a terminological disadvantage similar to Kris's (1952) formulation of creative activity, which emphasizes the central role of a *regressive* function in the service of the ego. Jacobson's and Kris's formulations align the creative person and creative activity with the mechanism of fixation and regression, which unintentionally accent a crucial linkage between creative functioning and pathological mental functioning. As in Jacobson's formulation, Kris's formulation detracts from an evaluation of the positive and strong developmental aspects of ego functioning in creative activity. As I have suggested elsewhere (Weissman, 1967), it suggests a favourable aspect (like a secondary gain) to a weakened and pathological functioning.

In this connexion I have previously suggested (Weissmann, 1967) that a desynthesizing or dissociative function of the ego more aptly accounts for the positive functioning of the ego in creative activity than does regression in the service of the ego. The dissociative or desynthesizing function, a normal ego function, appears early in human development. This ego function is effective when one established phase (such as the pleasure principle phase) must give way to a later phase of development (such as the reality-principle phase). The dissociative function serves to desynthesize an existing phase of development so that a maturer phase may replace it. The dissociative function aided by the synthesizing function is utilized by the ego in processing new and original products in creative activity.

In the present study, I am similarly proposing that the artist's created objects are also derived from phases of normal rather than pathological or exceptional development of object relations. I refer to the phase of development of transitional objects. Transitional objects have been widely accepted as a normal phenomenon in the early development of object relations. The relation of transitional objects to created objects was originally proposed, but not clearly or fully developed, by Winnicott (1953) in his original study on this subject.

Transitional objects, according to Winnicott, appear in the infant who has a 'good enough' mother. Although transitional objects are considered part of normal development, they and their derivatives, created objects, are different from the personal objects of normal development. Both transitional and created objects may directly refer to or be derived from personal objects but only in an illusionary way. The classical transitional object, such as a piece of a blanket, may allude to either the mother or the infant or both in a symbolic or illusionary way. Similarly, the artist's portrait of a living person, be it pictorial, poetic or dramatic, alludes to the artist or a personal object, but only in a symbolic or illusionary way.

Whereas transitional objects have received

³ Modell's recent study (1970) on the actual use of geological formations by palaeolithic artists elaborates upon and supports Winnicott's correlation of the creative act and the transitional object (1953).

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wide attention from many authors in their studies of normal childhood development (Winnicott, 1953) as well as abnormal development, especially pertaining to perversion (Greenacre, 1970), the significance of transitional objects in creativity, as suggested by Winnicott, has been largely overlooked until recently.³

Greenacre's study on the childhood of the artist, which considers the early object relations of the creative person, entirely overlooks the issue of the transitional objects and emphasizes the significant role of collective alternates. In her most recent study, Greenacre acknowledges the importance of the transitional object in relation to illusion and creativity, but paradoxically excludes any consideration of her own theoretical conceptualization of collective alternates (Greenacre, 1957).

In her study on the childhood of the artist she establishes the time of appearance of the collective alternates as occurring mainly during the second half of the first year of life. The period of emergence for collective alternates coincides quite precisely with the time suggested by Winnicott for the first appearance of transitional objects. Winnicott proposes that the existence of 'transitional objects antedates established reality testing'. Winnicott has proposed that 'the pattern of transitional phenomena begins to show at about 4-6-8-12 months'.

Both Greenacre's collective alternates and Winnicott's transitional objects are derived in the same temporal phase of development from the infant's early libidinal object relationship with the mother. This suggests that Greenacre's collective alternates could be considered as special variations of normal transitional objects. The collective alternates, here considered as modifications of the transitional objects, may be pressured into existence by the special equipment of the potentially creative infant and brought about by newly developing ego functions, which will be more fully discussed later.

During the early phase of development, Greenacre notes, in the case of potentially creative giftedness, that

the early sensory oversensitivity together with the greater reactivity to rhythm and gestalt relationships of form would bring the infant into a wider range of awareness of his own body and of the surroundings as well ... such an intensification and extension of the field of reactivity would form the anlage for the development of a greater richness of capacity for symbolization, which is so characteristic of creative people ... Such an infant would probably develop an intense and demanding relationship to the mother and to other early personal objects. The reactivity to the peripheral field might at first be largely extensions of these. Subsequently (roughly from the latter half of the first year on) a powerful libidinal investment in the areas of collective alternates ... might arise coexistent with that to the personal objects (Greenacre, 1957, p. 65).

It is here suggested that the above-described equipment of the infant which designates his potential creativeness is achieved by

elaborating his transitional objects into collective alternates. It should be recalled that transitional objects were originally 'peripheral' external objects which were initially mouthed by the infant. The extension of mouthed external objects to non-mouthed peripheral ones seems to represent the extension of transitional objects to collective alternates.

If we consider that created objects (the subsequently elaborated collective alternates) and transitional objects are of one cloth, it may enable us to clarify the vicissitudes and fate of created objects in the life of the creative person. Our knowledge of the fate and vicissitudes of transitional objects may serve as a guidepost to the fate and vicissitudes of created objects.

Winnicott has elaborated upon the subsequent fate of transitional objects. They are gradually decathected in the course of years and 'relegated to limbo'. He further states that transitional objects are not forgotten, not repressed, not internalized, nor mourned. I am suggesting that created objects derived from collective alternates are subject to the same fate as transitional objects. In the potentially creative infant, transitional objects have been extended into collected alternates which are the forerunners of created objects. The special endowment of the creatively gifted perpetuates the existence of transitional objects in the form of collective alternates. At the time of creative maturation, they are elaborated and continue to appear as newly created objects. Unlike the disappearance of transitional objects in the childhood development of non-creative people, collective alternates persist through the lifetime of the creative person, resulting in a continuing replenishment of potential

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created objects utilizable for creative activity. It is assumed that 'old' created objects are subject to the fate of 'old' transitional objects, i.e. they too are not forgotten, repressed, internalized or mourned. 'Old' created objects, like 'old' transitional objects are 'relegated to limbo ... and lose meaning'.

In the introduction of this paper the issue was raised as to the nature of the relationship that persisted between a great artist and a renowned aesthetic achievement that he had created in the past. What was Shakespeare's subsequent relationship with Hamlet or Macbeth after he created them? Did they retain their original significance and did they modify in any permanent way his relationship with his personal objects?

It is my impression that such questions can more clearly be answered by us in recognition of the origins of created objects in transitional objects. That is to say, it can be assumed that Hamlet was not forgotten, not repressed, not internalized and not mourned by Shakespeare. The further assumption is that Hamlet was gradually decathected, relegated to limbo and lost his original meaning for Shakespeare. I would further assume that each subsequent creation of Shakespeare's went through the same process. One would doubt that his personal relationships were permanently modified by these created objects. At most, his new creations would transiently supersede his relation to his personal objects during the phase of their creation and shortly thereafter.

Such a hypothesis calls for thorough clinical and psychobiographical validation rather than some fleeting examples which could be readily offered to suggest rather than prove its validity.

The direction in this study has been to retrace psychological components of the creative personality to their developmental origin. The second half of the first year of life seems to be the era of emergence of the earliest developmental phenomena later to be involved in creative activity. They are Winnicott's transitional objects and Greenacre's collective alternates. An additional psychological component of the creative personality makes its appearance at the same time of development. In an earlier study I have suggested that the dissociative or desynthesizing function becomes the major ego function involved in creative activity. At that time I suggested that it first appears 'at the early stage of conflict between the established pleasure principle and the developing reality principle' (Weissman, 1967). Winnicott has suggested the same moment of existence for transitional phenomena and objects. He states that 'transitional objects antedate established reality-testing'. The concurrent timing for the origins of these forerunners of creative phenomena—i.e. transitional objects, collective alternates and the dissociative function of the ego—suggest that they interact significantly with each other in some early formative fashion. In the beginning, the infant operates completely under the sway of the pleasure principle. During this phase he has the complete illusion that the mother's breast is a part of himself. As the reality principle begins to come into play, the original illusion about the mother's breast as part of one's self is displaced on to an external object. This becomes the essential condition for the formation of the transitional object. It is likely that the desynthesizing function of the ego aids in the transformation of the early object relationship whence the narcissistic illusion about the mother's breast is shifted to the transitional object (Weissman, 1969). The disestablishment of the complete narcissistic illusion of the primary object by the dissociative function is the initial step towards the establishment of the transitional object, the collective alternate and eventually the created object.

The activation of transitional objects, collective alternates and created objects implies a type of transient alteration in the state of the ego especially occurring during creative and fetishistic activity. Both creative and fetishistic activity were assessed by Freud in terms of special modification of ego functioning. Freud (1940) established that fetishistic objects are activated and utilized when there is the altered state of splitting of the ego. Freud (1916–17) originally described creative activity as an expression of the ego's capacity for greater flexibility in repression. Kris's formulation of regression in the service of the ego and my formulation on the utilization of the desynthesizing function bear consistent testimony to the transient alterations in ego functioning during creative activity. The interwoven origins of fetish and created object as well as fetishistic and creative activity are yet to be clearly untwined. In a recent study, Greenacre (1970) has added considerable clarification to the differentiation of the transitional object and the fetish.

In this connexion one significant pathological development, related to the normal development of transitional objects, deserves consideration. Winnicott

⁴ A striking example of this phenomenon recently presented itself in a hospitalized severely depressed professional violinist. During this period, the patient was unable to play the violin and cancelled all professional commitments. By day and night the patient held on to the black silk handkerchief which was always used between the chin and the violin when performing. Subsequently, when the depression lifted following shock treatment, the

patient resumed using the handkerchief only when playing the violin and entirely abandoned the infantile fetishistic habit of constantly holding on to the black handkerchief.

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(1953) commented upon the possibility that the transitional object can later develop into the fetish object. The transitional object always connotes an illusion of a primary object such as the maternal breast. The fetish object is then a pathological derivation of the transitional object and signifies a *delusional* transformation of the transitional object from a maternal breast into the maternal phallus. This is in contrast to the progression from primary object to transitional object (in the collective alternate-created object continuum) wherein the maturational development in gifted people does not transform the illusion into a delusion of the primary object. The illusionary quality of the transitional object is retained in its metamorphosis into collective alternate and created object. These illusionary qualities of the created objects originating in the infantile transitional objects are the essential ingredients for their creative potential. It is self-evident that pathological modification does often co-develop and fuse with maturational changes in the potentially gifted as well as the non-gifted infant. In such instances, the normal transitional object may then evolve into a hybrid form with the combined qualities of the transitional object and the fetish. Under such circumstances, the characteristics of the fetish object may prevail over its feature as a created object; conversely, during a remission of pathological regression the qualities of the created object may supersede its fetishistic aspects.⁴

SUMMARY

It should not come as too much of a surprise to us that the forerunners of man's development of his created objects and his creativity—transitional objects and collective alternates—should appear early in his life when his sense of reality begins to intrude on his illusionary objects, and his ego must develop its own objects to retain the original illusion—especially among those who are endowed with extraordinary sensorial sensitivity.

This study has investigated the special aspects of the objects of the creative artist. In addition to the usual personal objects, the creative person has an elaborate relationship with his created objects. The nature and development of these objects are considered to emerge from the phase of transitional objects. Winnicott's transitional objects and Greenacre's collective alternates, the forerunners of created objects, begin their development in the second half of the first year and are of the same nature. This period of infantile development is when specific creative features of the psychic apparatus, such as collective alternates and the dissociative function of the ego, begin to emerge in the creatively gifted.

Schematically sketched, the transitional objects of normal infantile development are expanded into more numerous collective alternates in the development of potentially creative infants. The illusionary properties of transitional objects are more prominently evident in collective alternates. The collective alternates of the potentially gifted infant achieve a finalized formation as created objects in the fully developed creative person. Created objects reflect originality and imagination which are the aesthetic elaborations of the illusionary properties of their precursors, the collective alternates and transitional objects.

Similar to the fate of transitional objects, created objects, regardless of their potential universal recognition by the world, gradually become decathected, relegated to limbo, and thus lose their original meaning to their creators.

These developmental clarifications should be helpful in attempting to comprehend the creative artist and his special relationship with his personal and created objects in future clinical and psychobiographical studies.

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