Nutkevitch, Ilana Viskin

THE TRANSITIONAL OBJECT AND TRANSITIONAL PHENOMENA: WINNICOTT REVISITED

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THE TRANSITIONAL OBJECT AND TRANSITIONAL PHENOMENA: WINNICOTT REVISITED

by

Ilana Viskin Nutkevitch

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9/15/86
date

Arietta Slade, Ph.D.
Chairman of Examining Committee

9/18/86
date

Herbert D. Saltzstein
Executive Officer

Arietta Slade, Ph.D.

Laurence Gould, Ph.D.

Jan Drucker, Ph.D.
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

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Chapter One

Introduction

The terms transitional object and transitional phenomena are encountered with great frequency in the psychoanalytic literature. In the 35 years since their introduction by Winnicott, these terms have gained much popularity, and have been the focus of many empirical studies, and of some theoretical discussions. Moreover, the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena are extremely popular among psychoanalytic writers on widely differing subjects, and a glimpse at the indexes of psychoanalytic books gives an immediate sense of how extensively these terms are quoted in a variety of theoretical contexts. These terms are also encountered with great frequency in the clinical arena, and are used as often in clinical discussions on child, adolescent and adult populations. The acquaintance with the prototypical transitional object, the security blanket, goes well beyond the psychoanalytic or even the psychological world: Linus's security blanket in Schultz's cartoon exemplifies the layman's view of these phenomena.

Yet a closer look at the very different ways in which these terms are used and the very varied phenomena they are applied to sounds an alarm as to the probable overextension of the terms: the blanket to which the

6-month-old is attached, the teddy bear which the 18-month-old carries around the house, the doll with which the 3-year-old sleeps, the stuffed monkey which a borderline-psychotic child carries most places, toys to which latency children develop special attachments, and a variety of objects which take special significance for adolescents or adults--are all of these transitional objects? Are the infant's babbling, the toddler's singing himself to sleep, children's play, hair-pulling, self-rocking, fantasy, day-dreaming, and almost any activity at one time or another, all transitional phenomena? Should art works, symphonies, or religion, be referred to as transitional objects? Are transitional objects and transitional phenomena characteristic of infancy and early childhood, or do these phenomena span throughout development?

It soon becomes evident that behind the very widespread use of the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena lie a great many ambiguities, contradictions and unclear issues. The nature of some of those issues is basic to the understanding of the concepts. A close exploration of the literature on transitional objects and transitional phenomena reveals that there is, in fact, much disagreement in the different ways these phenomena have been defined. As a result, the different empirical studies, theoretical explorations and

clinical applications of the concepts have been, in fact, focusing at times on very different phenomena.

The relationship between the transitional object and transitional phenomena and development has also remained vague and ambiguous. These phenomena are usually seen as intimately tied to the process of separation and individuation from the mother. But statements as to the time of onset of the phenomena are usually broad; and the relationship between the different times of appearance of the phenomena and the specific developmental processes characteristic of those stages has mostly remained unexplored. Moreover, while the transitional object and transitional phenomena are often assumed to gradually lose importance in normal development, little has been said about the timetable of this healthy development; and findings and notions as to the continuing reliance on transitional objects and transitional phenomena through latency, adolescence and adulthood remain obscure as to their developmental implications.

In addition, the relationship between the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena, as well as between the phenomena they subsume, has remained unexplored, and the importance of clarifying this relationship has not been recognized. Thus, the approach to these concepts has been varied, with writers focusing on one of the concepts while ignoring the other, applying

theoretical notions mistakenly to only one of the terms, attacking the introduction of the term transitional object as too concrete, or of the term transitional phenomena as too abstract, and so on. Seldom have writers on these concepts focused on both notions, taking into consideration the theoretical relationship between them and exploring the implications of such a relationship.

Finally, the way Winnicott's theoretical understanding of the phenomena has permeated current thinking on them has led to much confusion. His views have influenced psychoanalytic understanding so much, that hypotheses he raised are at times taken as proven facts, and his theory has biased many attempts to look at these phenomena empirically. At the other extreme from this psychoanalytic approach lies an empirical approach that has attempted to look at the phenomena from a purely experimental point of view. The literature on these concepts is plagued with tension between these two approaches, between the a priori endorsement of Winnicott's insights and the wish to look at the phenomena afresh.

In spite of the pervasive influence that Winnicott's notions on these phenomena have had and continue to have on the way they are viewed, Winnicott's views are generally only briefly quoted. Moreover, Winnicott is at times misunderstood, his views are simplified, his

writings are interpreted in divergent ways. While his notions on the transitional object and transitional phenomena serve as the basis of most empirical, theoretical and clinical approaches to these phenomena, these notions and their relationship to Winnicott's views on development have never been thoroughly explored. Thus, it seems as if the expanding structure of studies and knowledge on the transitional object and transitional phenomena is being built on foundations that are far from stable.

The main purpose of the present study is to re-examine the concepts of the transitional object and transitional phenomena. The basis of the theoretical re-evaluation undertaken herein will be a critical review of the literature on these concepts. A thorough, in-depth analysis of Winnicott's writings will be at the core of this review.

Chapter Two will consist of an overview of the empirical studies on transitional objects and transitional phenomena, with a focus on the central issues which remain confusing and ambiguous. Chapter Three will briefly review some of the major theoretical writings on these concepts. The overview of the literature will highlight the need to re-examine closely Winnicott's views on these phenomena.

Chapter Four will consist of a thorough review of Winnicott's main concepts on development. This will entail a major re-integration and re-organization of his writings, in order to arrive at a clearer and more coherent exposition of his views.

Chapter Five will consist of a critical review of Winnicott's notions on transitional objects and transitional phenomena. This review will again entail a major re-integration, as well as interpretation of his writings. It will also involve a clarification of the ways in which the concepts of transitional object and transitional phenomena are grounded in Winnicott's theory of development, and of how the meanings and functions of these phenomena as thought of by Winnicott are intrinsically tied to his developmental theory.

Finally, Chapter Six will re-examine some of the obscure issues in the current literature on these phenomena, in light of the previously offered interpretations of Winnicott's notions. Lines for future research, both theoretical and empirical, will be suggested, so that an understanding of transitional objects and transitional phenomena can be built gradually on firmer ground.

Chapter Two

An Overview of the Empirical Literature on the Transitional Object and Transitional Phenomena: Problematic Issues

Introduction

The terms transitional object and transitional phenomena are so widely used in the psychoanalytic literature that, at first glance, it seems as if everyone knew what these concepts meant and covered. The term transitional object is the most common of the two; it is freely applied in the literature, as well as in clinical settings, creating the impression that most clinicians and researchers are clear about what the transitional object actually is. The transitional object is popularly referred to as the security blanket. This, in fact, seems to be the prototype of the transitional object, a term which is most often applied to a soft, malleable object to which a child has a special attachment. But the term has been applied to a wide variety of phenomena, such as to children's stuffed animals and preferred dolls (Busch, Nagera, McKnight & Pezzarossi, 1973; Busch, 1974; Hong, 1978; Hong & Townes, 1976), to the pacifier (Fink, 1962), to the body as a whole in pathological cases (Kafka, 1969; Sugarman & Kurash, 1982a), to thoughts, ideas or concepts that are experienced in the intermediate area (Coppolillo,

1967; Coppolillo, 1976; Horton, Louy & Coppolillo, 1974), and more. The transitional object has recently gained popularity as a subject of empirical investigation (e.g., Boniface & Graham, 1979; Busch, 1974; Busch et al., 1973; Gaddini, 1970; Hong & Townes, 1976; Jonsson & Taje, 1983; Litt, 1981; Stevenson, 1954). It has also been the focus of some theoretical papers (e.g., Brody, 1980; Metcalf & Spitz, 1978; Modell, 1970; Reeves, 1981; Tolpin, 1971). The concept has also been widely applied to the clinical context, has been quoted in a vast number of case reports, and is the focus of a number of clinical papers (e.g., Beratis, Miller & Galenson, 1982; Fintzy, 1971; Fisher, 1975; Schlierf, 1983).

The term transitional phenomena is, in comparison, less frequently focused on. Writers who seem to feel comfortable when dealing with the transitional object have often practically ignored the more abstract concept of transitional phenomena (e.g., Boniface & Graham, 1979; Busch et al., 1973; Hong & Townes, 1976; Jonsson & Taje, 1983; Litt, 1981). Yet the term transitional phenomena has been as widely--and wildly--applied, and has been treated as referring to auto-erotic activites (Sugarman & Jaffe, in press), to drugs (Sugarman & Kurash, 1982b), to inappropriate boyfriends and girlfriends (Rosenthal, 1981), to clothing in adolescent males (Downey, 1978), and more. Such a widespread use of the term led Sugarman and

Jaffe (in press) to conclude that in attempting to integrate different psychoanalytic perspectives "perhaps no object relations concept has been found so attractive nor used so indiscriminately as Winnicott's (1953) notions about transitional phenomena."

Given the widespread use of the concepts of transitional object and transitional phenomena, it is surprising to find, upon close review, that the literature on these phenomena is fraught with contradictions, unanswered questions and unexplored issues. In fact, one can find contradictory views on almost any aspect of these concepts. Discrepant views exist regarding the way these phenomena should be defined, and the instances to which the terms should apply; whether the phenomena are healthy and universal or whether they have pathological implications; the relationship between these phenomena and development and a developmental framework; the theoretical meaning of the phenomena; their functions; the relevance and centrality of each of the two concepts; the relationship (or lack thereof) between them, and so on. It soon becomes evident that these concepts are far from being clear and understood enough to justify the freedom and extensiveness with which they are used.

The present work will not attempt to present a systematic review of the literature on these phenomena, since such reviews have been written in the past. The

reader is referred primarily to Hong (1978), but also to Barkin (1978) and Brody (1980). Instead, this chapter will present an overview of the empirical studies on the transitional object and transitional phenomena with a focus on the particularly problematic issues that are encountered in these studies. This will acquaint the reader with central contributions on the subject, while also introducing some of the most strikingly obscure issues in this area. Chapter Three will then briefly summarize some of the central theoretical writings on the transitional object and transitional phenomena. Winnicott's writings will be the sole focus of Chapters Four and Five, and will not be included in the overview of the literature.

In an attempt to delineate the ambiguities and contradictions in the literature, the following overview will highlight ways in which Winnicott's writings have at times been misunderstood or misinterpreted. I would like to preface this by emphasizing that Winnicott's style of writing contributed in central ways to the misunderstandings and the divergent interpretations. Winnicott wrote in a very loose, disorganized, relaxed manner. His ideas on any notion are spread throughout his writings in an unsystematic manner; thus, he is difficult to quote. His statements are often obscure, vague; he did not elaborate, he seldom explained. His style is at times

poetic, and metaphors and more concrete notions are interspersed. It is left to the reader to interpret, to elaborate, to organize and to arrive at coherent meanings and sequences, and to differentiate between metaphor and fact. The sources of confusion in Winnicott's writings will be more thoroughly reviewed at the end of Chapter Five, following the presentation of his central notions. But the following critical review of the literature should be read while keeping in mind the difficulties inherent in reading and understanding Winnicott.

Problematic Issues

1. Confusion regarding the definition of the concepts.

One of the issues which stands out in the literature is the lack of agreement as to the definition of the concepts of transitional object and transitional phenomena. Focusing first on the transitional object: Disagreement exists as to the basic approach to a definition of this concept, that is, whether it should be defined dynamically or operationally. Thus Gaddini (1970), one of the most quoted writers on the subject, listed a number of characteristics that the transitional object must fulfill: "To be external to the mother's body and also to the child's body; to have been discovered or invented by the child who is symbolically evoking a reunion with the mother from whom he has experienced separation; to be discovered or invented at an age when

the child's capacity for imagination has begun to develop; to have the unique and exclusive capacity of consoling the child in situations of distress or fear" (p. 350).

Busch et al. (1973) opposed such an approach to a definition of the transitional object, which "may have erred in defining characteristics of the transitional object in terms of an assumed 'theoretical' significance of the object to the child" (p. 197). Similarly, Rudhe and Ekecrantz (1974) stated that "sometimes the phenomenon is 'defined' on the basis of its presumed intrapsychic functions" (p. 382). Instead, Busch et al. (1973) and Busch (1974) listed six criteria for what they called, respectively, the primary or the first transitional object: (a) Attachment to the object is manifested within or very close to the first year of life; (b) the attachment is of lasting duration, approximately one year or longer; (c) the presence of the object reduces anxiety; (d) it does not directly meet an oral or libidinal need (which excludes the breast and the bottle); (e) it was not clearly provided by parents to comfort the infant (which excludes the pacifier); (f) it is not part of the infant's body. These criteria have probably been the most widely used in empirical research (e.g., Hong & Townes, 1976; Litt, 1981; Sherman, Hertzig, Austrian & Shapiro, 1981). Yet the arbitrary nature of some of Busch's criteria is highlighted by Jonsson and Taje's (1983) adoption of his

definition with some modifications, so that "lasting duration meant 6 months or more, and objects appearing after the first year of life were also accepted" (p. 547).

Some studies have focused on the transitional object without actually defining it. For example, Boniface and Graham (1979), who preferred the term attachment object but seemed to use it interchangeably with transitional object, did not define the objects of their study. They also did not elaborate on the rationale for their use of the term attachment object instead of transitional object, on the relationship between the two concepts, or on the implications of their approach.

Among the different approaches to studying and defining the transitional object, it should also be noted that some empirical studies focused on the security blanket per se, without attempting to make inferences about the transitional object or transitional phenomena as a whole. (See Passman, 1976; Passman, 1977; Passman & Adams, 1982; Passman & Halonen, 1979; Weisberg & Russell, 1971.)

In addition to the difficulties and disagreements regarding the definition of the transitional object there is, not surprisingly, widespread disagreement regarding the objects that should be included under this term; that is, the boundaries of the concept remain unclear. While the security blanket is seen as the typical example of a

transitional object, different views exist regarding most other phenomena. Soft dolls and stuffed animals have most often been included as transitional objects, although it is not clear from Winnicott's writings that this should be the case: Winnicott (1971a) saw the transitional object as falling "between the thumb and the teddy bear" (p. 2). If the thumb is excluded from most definitions of transitional objects, shouldn't the teddy bear also be? Brody (1980) was one of the only ones to "exclude objects that resemble animate forms" (p. 567) from her definition of transitional objects.

Disagreement exists even among those including dolls and stuffed animals as transitional objects. Some writers distinguished between primary and secondary transitional objects (Busch et al., 1973; Hong, 1978), or between first and second transitional objects (Busch, 1974). The main basis for such distinctions was the differing times of onset of the attachment (first vs. second year, roughly), but also the kind of objects children typically become attached to (soft, malleable, amorphous objects such as blankets, vs. soft toys). Gaddini (1975) strongly opposed such a distinction, seeing it as an arbitrary division of what, in her view, is a continuus process: The adoption of a transitional object always begins, according to her, in early infancy. The skin sensations that accompany the early feeding experiences are the basis for the tactile

properties of the transitional object, even if this develops much later.

The relationship between transitional objects and earlier object attachments, such as the pacifier, is also problematic. Most writers (e.g., Busch, 1974; Busch et al., 1973) excluded pacifiers from their definitions. Gaddini (1970, 1975) referred to them as precursors of transitional objects; this in spite of her having found only a small relationship between use of pacifiers and later use of transitional objects. Hong (1978) included the pacifier among what he called transitional object equivalents. Yet Fink (1962) proposed that "pacifiers can be used as transitional objects by some children" (p. 82).

Given the diverse ways the transitional object has been defined in different studies and the different objects included, such studies are extremely difficult to compare, and their findings are difficult to integrate. This is further complicated by the different populations employed by the studies, especially in terms of the subjects' ages (ranging from infancy to adulthood). Methodologies also vary greatly from study to study. Thus, attempts at integrating findings may result in misinterpretations of studies, and in further confusion.

The situation surrounding the definition of transitional phenomena is hardly more encouraging.

Writers on the transitional object at least have the security blanket as a concrete and clear prototype, and different views of the transitional object all rotate around this prototype, even if at different distances from it. The views on transitional phenomena have no such center of gravity, and thus the literature on this notion is considerably more amorphous. The concept of transitional phenomena is itself amorphous and ambiguous, and many writers on the transitional object have, as stated, practically ignored it.

Only a small number of writers have attempted to focus on it empirically, and these include Ekecrantz and Rudhe (1972; Rudhe & Ekecrantz, 1974) and Horton et al., 1974. Gaddini's (1970) approach to this concept is confusing since, while she set out to explore transitional objects and transitional phenomena, she defined the transitional object explicitly (see above) but did not define transitional phenomena. It is not clear in her writings what she was referring to as transitional phenomena, what she saw as "equivalents" to these phenomena (a term she used), or what the basis for such a distinction was. Her statement that "the basic principle of transitional objects (and phenomena) must always be that they are a symbol of union (a union after separation) with the mother" (p. 350) does not help elucidate what her use of the term transitional phenomena covered.

Ekecrantz and Rudhe (1972) offered a definition of transitional phenomena, which covered "anything--behavior or object--that habitually comforts the child, especially at bedtime or at times of loneliness, sadness or anxiety, with the exception of objects like the whole or part of the mother's or the child's own body" (p. 263). They equated pacifier with thumb, and bottle with breast, and thus excluded these from their definition. Rudhe and Ekecrantz (1974) further clarified that they considered "the strong emotional dependency on a specific object or a specific habit to be the main criterion of transitional phenomena" (p. 382). While these authors are unique in their recognition of the theoretical importance of the concept of transitional phenomena and in their attempt to explore it empirically, their definition raises the question of whether the essence of transitional phenomena is indeed their comforting effect, or the child's dependence on them.

Horton et al. (1974) seem to be the only other instance of an attempt to explore transitional phenomena empirically. They differ from the above writers in their view of the essence of this concept. They defined transitional phenomena as:

> a mode of experience and relatedness in which the internal reality of wishes, desires, or convictions, are blended with external physical reality in the contemplation of an object. Here we speak of object in the broadest sense (not only the child's teddy bear or blanket, or the adult's charm bracelet or luck

> coin) and include nursery rhymes, songs, poems, religious figures, even unto Winnicott's 'ultimate stages of a human being's capacity for cultural experiences.' (p. 618)

Horton et al. (1974) added that their main criterion for transitional phenomena was "the subjects' creation of a soothing illusion" (p. 620). Their definition is interesting and clear, but not easily implemented.

A different definition of transitional phenomena was offered by Hong (1978) in a theoretical article. According to him, these phenomena "encompass all the phenomena occurring during various transitional periods and providing the transitional mode of experience ... and the intermediate area of experiencing inner and outer reality. They include all the terms which Winnicott originally described, such as sounds, movements, objects or thoughts, and even mother herself" (p. 63). Thus, Hong added a new aspect to the definition of transitional phenomena, which he considered essential: that they occur at transitional periods throughout development. The inclusion of such a criterion seems questionable, but has been adhered to by others (e.g., Sugarman & Jaffe, in press).

The definitions of transitional phenomena offered by Hong (1978) and by Horton et al. (1974) share the view that an essential component of these phenomena is that they are experienced in the transitional mode, or in the intermediate area of experience. This notion, introduced

by Winnicott, is an elusive one, and a difficult one to assess; it will be thoroughly presented in Chapter Five.

The concept of transitional phenomena remains to this day vague and elusive. It has been broadened to apply to any activity, concept, idea, as long as it is experienced in the intermediate area, whatever that might be (Coppolillo, 1967, 1976; Horton et al., 1974). This concept is so elusive that Sugarman and Jaffe (in press), in a long and detailed article which attempted to develop a developmental line of transitional phenomena, never explicitly defined this term.

2. Lack of clarity regarding the relationship between transitional objects and transitional phenomena, and development.

While it is generally agreed upon that transitional objects and transitional phenomena make their appearance in infancy and early childhood, and that they are an important manifestation of underlying developmental processes, little more is known or agreed upon in terms of the relationship between these phenomena and development. Starting with Winnicott's writings, these phenomena have been repeatedly seen as related specifically to the separation-individuation process (e.g., Gaddini, 1970), or to the development of a cohesive self (e.g., Tolpin, 1971). But more specific notions regarding the relationship between time of onset or of disappearance of

the phenomena and specific developmental sub-stages have not been developed. In fact, statements about the relationship between the phenomena and a developmental timetable are usually broad or vague. As will be seen, Winnicott set the onset of transitional phenomena at 4 to 6 to 8 to 12 months, never focusing on the significant developmental differences between the 4 and the 12-month-old, and on whether the 12-month-old's transitional phenomena differed in any way from those of the 4-month-old. Similarly, while he repeatedly emphasized that in normal development transitional phenomena gradually fade away, their importance being transferred to play and later to cultural and other experiences, he never indicated when such normal occurrence takes place.

Further references to the time of onset or disappearance of transitional phenomena in development are at times even broader and more ambiguous. Thus, regarding the time of onset of attachment to a transitional object, Litt (1981) referred to it as occurring during the first two years of life; and Gay and Hyson (1976) talked about how "normal children under four often develop a tenacious attachment to a tattered blanket, a grimy piece of cloth, or a stuffed animal" (p. 271). Empirical studies attempting to explore the time of onset of these phenomena and their incidence vary in their findings. (See, for

example: Busch et al., 1973; Ekecrantz & Rudhe, 1972; Hong & Townes, 1976; Rudhe & Ekecrantz, 1974; Stevenson, 1954.) The different findings are difficult to integrate and interpret, given the divergent definitions of the phenomena and the different populations and methodologies.

The views and findings regarding the time of disappearance or fading of the transitional object and transitional phenomena are even more vague and ambiguous. In fact, these phenomena are often referred to as continuing through latency, adolescence and adulthood; for references on the persistence of transitional phenomena into adult life see Kahne (1967). Gaddini (1970) stated that the patterns of the transitional object and transitional phenomena set in childhood "may persist into late childhood or even into adult life" (p. 348). Hong (1978) conceptualized transitional phenomena as being characteristic of transitional stages in general, and Sugarman and Jaffe (in press) saw them as appearing during transitional developmental stages throughout life.

Empirical studies have often found that the importance of the transitional object or transitional phenomena persists beyond early childhood. (See Busch et al., 1973; Hong & Townes, 1976; Sherman et al., 1981.) For example, Sherman et al. found that 26% of those age 9 to 13 were still using their treasured objects as soothers at bedtime or at times of inactivity and stress. Yet, in

spite of the intrinsic relationship, mostly agreed upon, between the transitional object and transitional phenomena and development, specifically the process of separation and individuation, the developmental implications of such prolonged attachments have not been discussed. Stevenson (1954), referring to such continued dependence on patterns set in infancy, stated:

> This suggests that what begins as a progressive phenomenon in children's development may become, as the years go by, a regressive manifestation, in that at times of stress the child returns to the infantile object which comforts and relieves for a time the 'strain of relating inner an outer experience.' It may be, nevertheless, an entirely harmless and safe means of relieving anxiety in a healthy child. (p. 202)

Having raised such an important and interesting possibility, Stevenson said nothing more about it. Brody (1980), too, proposed that the transitional object may become a regressive phenomenon. She seems to be the only one to have suggested a specific timing for the disappearance of the transitional object in health, stating that "by age three the levels of body ego development and of object relations should enable the TO [transitional object] to lose its importance for the child during waking hours" (p. 584). Ekecrantz and Rudhe's (1972) empirical study supported the notion that continued dependence on transitional phenomena may not be such a healthy sign: They found that when transitional phenomena persisted beyond age 7, they were significantly related to

lower levels of frustration tolerance. This finding seems to have attracted no interest, and little more has been said about the relationship between continued use of transitional objects and transitional phenomena beyond early childhood and psychological development.

Similarly, very few attempts have been made to look more closely at the relationship between transitional objects and transitional phenomena and the developmental processes underlying the broad time periods during which these phenomena appear and continue to be of central importance. As much as the extent of intrapsychic development in the first few months and years is known in the psychoanalytic literature, it has not been appreciated in reference to the transitional object and transitional phenomena. Rudhe and Ekecrantz (1974) explicitly expressed such a lack of appreciation when stating, in their discussion of the origin of transitional phenomena, that "it is not reasonable to presuppose a sharp difference in the character of the motivation between children beginning during the first six months and those beginning later" (p. 398). Few writers have acknowledged the likely relationship between developmental phases and the onset and use of transitional objects and transitional phenomena; some exceptions are Busch (1974), Busch et al. (1973), and Hong (1978). For example, Busch et al. (1973) stated:

> To see attachment behavior to objects, while ignoring the separate time periods in a child's life when these attachments occur, may obscure important developmental issues. While it might appear that the infant's beginning attachment to a blanket at the age of 7 months is the same as that of the 2-year-old developing a need for a soft toy at certain crucial times, it is our view that on an a priori basis these phenomena must be qualitatively different.... We cannot ignore the enormous differences in the development of the drives, the ego, and the narcissistic organization that exist in a 7-month infant in comparison to a 2-year-old child. (p. 195)

Busch (1974) noted that "in the literature of transitional objects the specific time when a child forms an attachment to an object has largely been ignored" and that "lumping the two object attachments together obscures important developmental issues for each" (p. 216). Yet in their dividing transitional object attachment into primary and secondary (Busch et al., 1973; Hong, 1978) or first and second (Busch, 1974) according to the time of onset of the attachment, these authors are themselves lumping together these phenomena--now into two groups--without clear justification. Development is in fact continuous, and transitional objects and transitional phenomena make their appearance and are important throughout infancy, early childhood, and beyond. The above quoted writers did not really clarify the relationship between the two types of transitional objects they identified and different underlying developmental processes, experiences and functions.

Gay and Hyson (1976) seem to be the only ones who, in

an exploratory study, attempted to look more closely and deeply at the different functions that object attachments may serve at different ages. They found different stressors and anxieties against which these objects may help defend at two different ages, and different ways in which they may achieve these defensive functions. But their findings were confounded with the impact of sex, since the younger subjects were boys and the older ones girls. Their study is rarely quoted in the literature, and the interesting suggestions in their very tentative findings were never followed up.

An additional issue which has seldom been discussed regarding the relationship between transitional objects and phenomena and development, is whether similar phenomena encountered at different ages deserve to continue to be called transitional objects and transitional phenomena. It is not clear from Winnicott's writings that he extended these concepts even to the stuffed animals and soft dolls referred to often as secondary or second transitional objects. Stevenson (1954) hinted vaguely at the possibility that major differences may exist between the transitional object as defined by Winnicott and these other object attachments, which might make the inclusion of these within the transitional object questionable. He stated that in terms of Winnicott the secondary object attachment that develops

after the primary transitional object is not a "first not-me possession," and that he nevertheless included it in his study "as marking an interesting second stage in the process of development toward adult relationships" (p. 210). Stevenson saw these objects as clearly personified and as involving the projection onto them of human emotions, and he referred to the children using these objects as "approaching the goal of interpersonal relations and ... using their objects in a way very different from Roy's use of 'Say,' the duster, which at seven still serves as a kind of basic comforter without individual personality" (pp. 211-2). However, Stevenson still referred to these sophisticated objects as transitional objects, albeit secondary ones. It is surprising that little more has been said in the literature as to the questions raised by the inclusion of such personified later objects as transitional objects. As stated above, Brody (1980) seems to have been the only one to exclude them from a definition of transitional objects.

As a last comment on the relationship between development and the transitional object and transitional phenomena, Passman and Halonen's (1979) developmental norms on attachment to a security blanket should be mentioned: Theirs seem to be the clearest and most specific norms, even if they refer only to one type of

transitional phenomenon. They defined strong attachment to a blanket as an above-average maternal rating in a 10-point scale of blanket attachment (which ranged from no attachment [1] to very strong attachment [10]). Passman and Halonen found that less than 5% of their subjects under 8 months of age were strongly attached to a blanket. The percentage of children gradually increased from 9 months on, and peaked between 18 and 24 months, when between 30 and 35% of the children were strongly attached to a blanket. At that same age, 65% of the children had some attachment to a blanket, defined as a maternal rating of 2 or more on the attachment scale. These percentages gradually decreased, but at 60 months of age 8% of the subjects were still strongly attached to their blankets, and 16% kept some attachment to them. Again, although the conclusions that one may extract from this study as to transitional objects and transitional phenomena in general are limited, the development of such clear norms may contribute to the gradual clarification of the relationship between transitional phenomena and development.

3. Lack of clarity regarding the relationship between transitional objects and transitional phenomena.

The terms transitional object and transitional phenomena were both introduced by Winnicott in 1953. As will be seen, his views on both of these concepts are

grounded in his theory of development. The two concepts are in his view intrinsically related, both aspects of the same developmental processes and experiences.

Yet, the relationship between these concepts has been approached in very different ways by different writers. At one extreme, some have focused solely on the transitional object, ignoring altogether the concept of transitional phenomena (see Boniface & Graham, 1979; Busch et al., 1973; Hong & Townes, 1976; Jonsson & Taje, 1983; Litt, 1981). While it is legitimate to focus on and explore one aspect of a phenomenon, the relationship of that aspect to the larger phenomenon should be kept in mind. Treating the part as a whole may be a source of confusion; in this way, focusing solely on the transitional object may lead to misinterpretations of Winnicott's views on transitional phenomena as referring to the transitional object per se.

Winnicott himself often focused on the transitional object (i.e., the first not-me possession), encouraging such interpretations of his writings as applying to the transitional object per se. It is not surprising, therefore, that Winnicott's view of the universality of transitional phenomena is often presented as referring specifically to the transitional object: Winnicott is often quoted as having said that the transitional object is universal and essential for healthy development. For

example, Litt (1981) stated that "Winnicott assumed this special attachment to an inanimate object to be universal in healthy children" (p. 131). Such an interpretation of Winnicott led her to ask: "Are all children who fail to develop transitional objects then to be considered the recipients of inadequate mothering?" (p. 132). Similarly, Sherman et al. (1981) stated that "Winnicott implied that attachment to an object was normal, universal, and even necessary for health" (p. 379).

Some articles that focused solely on the transitional object contain no mention of the concept of transitional phenomena. When Winnicott's statements are quoted in such a context, the impression may be created that his statements referred to the transitional object per se, while at times they did not. For example, Busch et al. (1973), in such an article on the transitional object, stated that "in Winnicott's (1953, 1954) early discussions of transitional objects ... he hoped to stimulate others to investigate what he called 'a very important third aspect of life which is surprisingly neglected in psychoanalytic writings' (1954, p. 201)" (p. 193). This quote from Winnicott, in this context, may be interpreted as referring to the transitional object per se; in fact, Winnicott's words about this very important third aspect of life referred in the original to the whole "transitional area of existence between inner reality and

external reality" (Winnicott, 1954, p. 201). Thus, this again highlights the danger of focusing solely on the transitional object without referring to its relationship to transitional phenomena and the transitional area of experience.

Some writers who focused on the transitional object explicitly opposed the use of the term transitional phenomena. Busch (1974) doubted that transitional phenomena have the importance attributed to them, and stated that in the records of his studies he found no examples of transitional phenomena. According to his reading of the literature, these phenomena never have the same permanence as the first transitional object does, and do not soothe except at bedtime. Busch hypothesized that transitional phenomena are "transitory in nature and serve a time-limited function that is superficially similar but qualitatively very different from the function served by the first transitional object" (p. 228).

At the other extreme, some writers have focused on transitional phenomena, opposing the emphasis on the transitional object. Coppolillo (1967) went as far as suggesting that "it is almost unfortunate that with the idea of the transitional phenomena Winnicott also introduced the term transitional object" (p. 241). In his view, this term is so captivating that many authors focus on it as a characteristic object-relationship of early

development; "this is a much too narrow and restricted way of using the concept" (Coppolillo, 1967, p. 241). According to his interpretation of Winnicott he "clearly indicates that any object, thought, or concept can become a transitional object. They need only be experienced in the 'intermediate area of experience'" (Coppolillo, 1967, p. 241). Coppolillo viewed the sole focus on the transitional object as restrictive and unproductive, and the concept of transitional phenomena as Winnicott's real contribution.

Between the focus on the transitional object, and the focus on transitional phenomena and opposition to the importance attributed to the transitional object, one encounters much confusion as to the approach to these two concepts and to the relationship between them. Mahalski (1983) is a good example of such confusion. Her article referred to "attachment objects and oral habits at bedtime" (p. 283); her literature review was solely on the transitional object per se; her questions to parents addressed not only objects, but also movements and sounds, which seemed to tap transitional phenomena. Moreover, she did not discuss the relationship between the concepts she used or the phenomena she studied and transitional objects and transitional phenomena; nor did she examine the theoretical implications of her approach.

It is important to emphasize again in this context that Winnicott's own treatment of the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena was confusing. As will be seen in Chapter Five, he used the terms haphazardly, at times focusing on the first not-me possession, at times emphasizing the transitional phenomena or the intermediate area of experience as a whole, and at times being unclear and vague as to what the subject of his statements was. It is thus not surprising that Hong and Townes (1976) introduced what seems to be yet a new term, transitional object phenomenon, in their attempt to make sense of the confusion. According to them, "Winnicott (1953) stated that the 'transitional object phenomenon' is 'healthy and universal'" (p. 50). My reading of Winnicott found no reference by him to the term transitional object phenomenon. The use of this term, which seems to condense the concepts of transitional object and transitional phenomena, instead of simplifying may further obscure attempts at teasing apart Winnicott's notions on the different concepts.

Similarly, Winnicott's unsystematic writing leads to difficulties in quoting him on specific notions. As a result, his quotes are often open to misinterpretations, and may lead to more confusion regarding Winnicott's views on the separate concepts. For example, Horton et al. (1974), in one of the few studies to grapple empirically

with transitional phenomena as a whole, stated that "Winnicott introduced the term, 'transitional phenomenon' to designate an 'intermediate area of experience ... symbolical of some part object, such as the breast ... more important than the mother ... a soother ... a neutral area of experience which will not be challenged'" (p.618). These statements, while accurate quotations from Winnicott, are taken out of context: In Winnicott's article they appear spread throughout it, and do not refer to transitional phenomena specifically, but to both the transitional object and transitional phenomena, or to the transitional object per se. For example, Winnicott (1971a) stated that "the piece of blanket (or whatever it is) is symbolical of some part-object, such as the breast" (p. 6); he also stated that "...a true transitional object would have been more important than the mother" (p. 7); and in talking about a child's specific jersey, which he considered a typical example of a transitional object, he stated that that jersey served as "a soother" (p. 7). It is not clear that any of these statements would be applied by Winnicott to transitional phenomena in general. When Winnicott's statements on the different concepts are combined, and are presented as referring to transitional phenomena, his views on the separate concepts and on the relationship between them become even more obscure.

Few writers have given due, balanced importance to

both the transitional object and transitional phenomena. Ekecrantz and Rudhe (1972; Rudhe & Ekecrantz, 1974), and Gaddini (1970) are among the few to have covered empirically the transitional phenomena, including the transitional object as a specific instance. Stevenson (1954) is one of the few who, although focusing in his study on the transitional object alone, in his discussion of the findings fully acknowledged the importance of the more subtle transitional phenomena fulfilling some of the same functions of the transitional object. Hong (1978) and Sugarman and Jaffe (in press) both attempted to develop developmental lines of transitional phenomena which include the transitional object as one of the stages. While their interpretations of the transitional object and transitional phenomena seem to me questionable, and while their views seem to be in disagreement with Winnicott's original notions, their studies represent important contributions in their attempt to grapple with the theoretical relationship between the transitional object and transitional phenomena, as well as with their developmental implications.

4. <u>The tension between a "Winnicottian" and a "pragmatic" approach to the phenomena</u>.

Underlying the literature on transitional objects and transitional phenomena, and contributing in a subtle way to the confusion in it, is a certain tension between

different approaches to these phenomena: an approach which is based on Winnicott's insights into them, and an attempt to look at the phenomena afresh and without theoretical preconceptions. At the core of this tension lies the fact that Winnicott (1953) not only introduced the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena together with his theory about them; he also was practically the first to focus on these phenomena, and thus he initiated the scientific interest in them.

This emergence of a theory hand in hand with the first observations on the phenomena it explains, is in contrast with the more usual development of a theory based on a gradual accumulation of observations and of understanding. Hong (1978), noting this unusual state of affairs, claimed that it resulted in little flexibility and open-mindedness, and that "subsequent psychoanalytic publications have been little more than expansions and refinements of his [Winnicott's] propositions" (pp. 47-8).

This peculiar development of the main theory on the transitional object and transitional phenomena helps explain why Winnicott's views on these phenomena still permeate almost all approaches to them. In addition, Winnicott was an especially sensitive and perceptive clinician, and his notions on these phenomena obviously strike a chord in most of those who study them. Finally, the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena

themselves imply Winnicott's theoretical view of these phenomena; this makes it even more difficult to separate the actual phenomena from the theory about them.

In reading the literature, one senses a confusing tension between the tendency to fully embrace Winnicott's insights into these phenomena, and the wish to explore the phenomena empirically, to observe them and understand them without being influenced by Winnicott's hypotheses about them. One finds different approaches to the relationship between Winnicott's theory and the observable phenomena: At one extreme, Gaddini (1970) represents the "Winnicottian" aproach, basing her research on Winnicott's notions, which she seems to fully endorse. In fact, she at times quoted Winnicott's hypotheses as if they were proven facts. For example, she stated: "This is, in fact, the principle which underlies transitional objects and phenomena: the basis must always be a symbol of union --union after separation-- with the mother" (p. 348). In another case, she stated: "In spite of what many people used to think, attachment to a transitional object is part of normal emotional development" (p. 348). She defined these phenomena, as seen above, on the basis of their intrapsychic meaning as assumed by Winnicott. Similarly, the literature is plagued with theoretical writings on these concepts which build and expand on Winnicott's theoretical views of them, embracing his basic

notions; some of these will be covered in the following chapter.

At the other extreme of the continuum, one finds experimental researchers who have been able to look at aspects of what Winnicott called transitional object and transitional phenomena on a purely operational, observational basis. Thus, Passman and Halonen (1979) offered developmental norms for children's attachments to pacifiers, security blankets and hard objects. Weisberg and Russell (1971) validated a maternal rating scale for children's attachment to their security blankets. Others (e.g., Passman, 1976; Passman, 1977; Passman & Weisberg, 1975) explored different aspects of the effects of security blankets on children's behavior: In well controlled laboratory studies they found that, under mildly stressful conditions, security blankets reduced distress, increased exploration and playfulness, and improved learning, in manners very similar to the effect of the mother's actual presence. Most of these studies do not even mention Winnicott or include his writings in their references; none of them even mentioned the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena.

In between these two extremes, one can again find confusing approaches to the relationship between Winnicott's theory and the actual phenomena. It is common to encounter attempts at separating the two; yet

Winnicott's influence on current views of these phenomena is so pervasive that his notions often creep in, resulting in even greater confusion. Thus, in an attempt to separate Winnicott's theory from the actual phenomena, some have discarded the term transitional object. Boniface and Graham (1979) used instead the term attachment object, but interspersed throughout their article were references to the transitional object and to the literature on the transitional object; and they attempted to use their findings to arrive at conclusions about the transitional object. In this way they create the impression that the terms are synonymous or equivalent, and that all attachment objects are transitional objects, which is not necessarily the case. The fact that they did not explicitly deal with the implications of their introduction of a new term, or with the relationship between this term and the transitional object, further confuses the reader. The same can be said about the introduction of the term treasured object by Sherman et al. (1981).

It is obviously legitimate to study the range of object attachments and treasured objects. The observation by Busch et al. (1973) that "in the first 3 years of life children become attached, for varying lengths of time, to a bewildering array of objects" (p. 197) highlights the need to study the different kinds of object attachments.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the term transitional object may refer to a very specific kind of object attachment or of treasured object.

Busch et al. (1973) and Hong (1978) highlight the complexity of the confusion created by the pervasive influence of Winnicott's psychodynamic views of the transitional object and transitional phenomena on one hand, and the wish to define these phenomena in operational or observable terms. Busch et al. (1973) criticized Winnicott for including in his description of the special qualities in the relationship to the transitional object characteristics that depend "on the understanding of the internal life of the preverbal child, a very difficult task fraught with potential speculative errors" (p. 197). Addressing this difficult task of identifying Winnicott's transitional objects and transitional phenomena, Hong (1978) stated: "One parsimonious way of solving the issues would be to use descriptive terms such as blanket attachment or teddy-bear attachment, instead of terminologies derived from theoretical positions" (p. 66). Yet, this ignores the fact that the concepts of the transitional object and transitional phenomena as introduced by Winnicott did not refer to specific objects or activities. He stated: "What I am referring to in this part of my work is not the cloth or the teddy bear that the baby uses - not so much the

object used as the use of the object" (Winnicott, 1971a, pp. xi-xii). As will be seen, Winnicott had in mind specific intrapsychic functions, processes, experiences and meanings which are just what set the transitional object and transitional phenomena apart from similar phenomena, including possibly similar teddy bear attachments and even similar blanket attachments. Thus, defining the terms descriptively raises difficulties and may lead to much theoretical confusion.

Gay and Hyson (1976), in a study seldom referred to in the literature, provide one of the few examples of a more balanced approach to the study of transitional objects and transitional phenomena: an approach that makes use of Winnicott's insights to generate hypotheses, while also being exploratory and open-minded in its attempt at understanding children's use of objects of attachment. They closely observed four children in their homes, focusing on the situations that preceded the children's approaches to their attachment objects, the ways they used their objects, and the behaviors that followed the use of the objects. While their study was fraught with difficulties which, in combination with the small sample, make their findings ambiguous, their study is one of the few to contribute on the basis of empirical data to a dynamic understanding of some object attachments.

Concluding Comments

As the above overview of the empirical literature reflects, some very basic issues regarding the nature of the transitional object and transitional phenomena remain obscure. Moreover, the different approaches to the study of the phenomena and the tension between these approaches has contributed to the chaos in the state of our knowledge on these phenomena. Many other issues remain ambiguous, with contradictory views on them and approaches to them. The relationship between the phenomena and the mother is such an issue: Whether parts of the mother can be experienced as a transitional object or transitional phenomena, or the mother as a whole can be used as a transitional object, or the phenomena are in health more or less important than the mother--all these remain as problematic issues. In addition, while most writers on the subject view these phenomena as healthy, there is widespread disagreement as to their universality and as to their importance for health. Moreover, some (e.g., Dickes, 1978; Sperling, 1963) see the phenomena as pathological, and view the transitional objects as fetishes and as manifestations of disturbances in the mother-child relationship.

Very few writers have acknowledged the ambiguities and confusion that plague the literature on transitional objects and transitional phenomena, but some did. Fintzy

(1971) recognized "...an element of diffuseness and confusion in the literature on this rather elusive topic" (p. 107). Similarly, Busch et al. (1973) stated that "...nearly 20 years after the appearance of Winnicott's original article on the subject, the developmental significance and clinical usefulness of the transitional object remain obscured" (p. 193). Yet in spite of all the very basic issues that remain unclear, further theoretical elaborations on still other meanings and functions of the transitional object and transitional phenomena continue to appear. Some of these are based on what is wrongly assumed to be known and understood about the phenomena; few of these address--or acknowledge--the basic issues that remain obscure. The following chapter will present a brief review of some of the major theoretical elaborations of the concepts of the transitional object and transitional phenomena.

Chapter Three

An Overview of the Theoretical Literature on the Transitional Object and Transitional Phenomena

Theoretical elaborations on and interpretations of the concepts of the transitional object and transitional phenomena abound in the literature. New theoretical views and elaborations continue to emerge in spite of the prevailing ambiguities and confusion regarding central aspects of the concepts (see Chapter Two). Some of the major theoretical writings on these concepts will be briefly reviewed.

Tolpin's (1971) article has become central in the literature on transitional objects and transitional phenomena. Hong (1978) referred to it as "the most innovative idea on the importance of the transitional object in ego development" (p. 52). Tolpin's main contribution was to claim, in opposition to Winnicott, that the transitional object does "'go inside' as mental structure" (p. 320), that is, it becomes internalized.

As will be seen, according to Winnicott the fate of the object is to become de-cathected, to lose meaning through its becoming diffused over the whole cultural field. In contrast, Tolpin claimed that the soothing and anxiety-regulating functions of the transitional object become gradually internalized so that eventually the

object is no longer needed. When the child begins to emerge from the symbiotic phase, he transfers the cathexis from the mother's soothing functions to other objects or experiences, in order to preserve the soothing experience of the previous merger. "Repeated, minute experiences of loss lead to the narcissistic cathexis of the blanket that creates the illusion of soothing symbiotic merger" (Tolpin, 1971, p. 328). Then, gradually, the soothing functions that had been transferred to the transitional object undergo internalization, and the object is eventually replaced by inner regulatory, soothing mechanisms. Tolpin (1971) stated: "The tension-regulating and tension-reducing effects of the mother as soother that were first invested in the blanket undergo transmuting internalizations and are preserved as a part of the child's own capacity to avert traumatic intensities--i.e., 'to calm himself down'" (p. 330). She emphasized that while the transitional object is the concrete manifestation of such a process, it is equally possible to cathect and internalize less visible experiences (i.e., transitional phenomena).

Some articles have focused on attempts to develop a developmental line of transitional phenomena, seeing these phenomena as typical of transitional stages in development beyond the transitional stage of infancy and early childhood on which Winnicott focused. Hong (1978), for

example, considered the transitional phenomena as characteristic of transitional developmental stages in general. Focusing on three developmental transitions in childhood, he proposed a classification of transitional phenomena according to the age of onset, the nature of the phenomena, and the different functions they serve: transitional object equivalents, primary transitional objects and secondary transitional objects belong to different stages in development, and thus serve different functions.

Hong's first transitional stage occurs around the third month of life, when the infant begins to distinguish between animate and inanimate objects, and social smiling makes its appearance. According to Hong, this stage is what Winnicott had in mind when he described the beginnings of differentiation between self and world and of the ability to recognize reality. Because of his lack of ego differentiation, the infant must rely on the mother to reduce the strain involved. Thus, the mother herself and her soothing activities emerge as transitional phenomena, or as transitional object equivalents.

A second transition, indicated by separation and stranger anxiety, occurs in the second half of the first year. This stage is also marked by a transition from the infant's relative passivity to his increasing activity. The infant is now able to create the blanket, or primary

transitional object, which helps him both maintain closeness to mother and separate.

A third transition, during the early part of the second year, is characterized by the establishment of a sense of separateness. Soft toys or stuffed animals, or secondary transitional objects, characterize this stage: while they still provide the child's "contact need" (p. 73), they also meet his new needs to talk, play, and share his new world.

Expanding on Hong's ideas, Sugarman and Jaffe (in press) claimed that during transitions from one developmental stage to another, throughout life, transitional phenomena are turned to in order to facilitate the regaining of equilibrium between the individual and his environment. In their view, transitions to new developmental stages are marked by shifts in the internal and external demands the individual must meet. The increasingly complex adaptation to these demands is facilitated by the progressive internalization of key self-regulatory functions; in this way the capacity to regulate inner states becomes increasingly incorporated into the ego. "The role of transitional phenomena during this process is to act as a way-station for such internalization." "The specific nature of transitional phenomena will differ at each stage due to maturational

and developmental shifts ... and the demands of the environment."

Sugarman and Jaffe (in press) focused their discussion on four developmental stages they see as major:

1. Around the third month of life, the appearance of the social smile indicates a transition from a world of internal sensations to the increasing importance of external perception. The infant is suddenly barraged by external stimuli. The auto-erotic use of the body facilitates the regaining of homeostasis, and is considered as the transitional phenomenon of this stage.

2. Practicing and Rapprochement subphases, during which concrete objects, such as the blanket, are the typical transitional phenomena. The blanket facilitates the integration and differentiation of self and object representations, the regulation of drives, and the development of autonomous ego functions such as reality testing and secondary process thinking.

3. Oedipal and Latency periods, during which fantasies serve as transitional phenomena. The use of fantasy facilitates the internalization of a wide variety of functions, such as narcissistic regulation, drive regulation and superego development.

4. Adolescence, during which ideas and philosophies appear as transitional phenomena. These help promote the internalization of key regulatory functions such as

narcissistic and drive regulation and superego development.

Although, as stated, a critique of the theoretical contributions is beyond the scope of this paper, one must note the conspicuous lack of a definition of transitional phenomena in Sugarman and Jaffe's article. While there may be some merit in attempting to develop a developmental line of transitional phenomena, this must be based on a clear definition of the phenomena. It is, in fact, not at all clear what the authors' criteria for transitional phenomena were, except that the phenomena occur in what they view as transitional stages in development, and that they mediate the internalization of regulatory functions. This differs widely from Winnicott's defining statements on the phenomena, as well as from most subsequent definitions. Moreover, Sugarman and Jaffe's instances of transitional phenomena are questionable: for example, the auto-erotic use of the body, with its buffering of both the external and the internal worlds through the heightening of bodily sensations, is diametrically opposed to central aspects of Winnicott's transitional phenomena, as will be seen. Similarly, Coppolillo (1976) explicitly and very clearly stated the differences between fantasy and transitional phenomena, which may be briefly summarized in his statement: "In the process of fantasying, there is no reliable representative of

external reality" (p. 43).

Kestenberg and Weinstein's (1978) main contribution was their attempt to formulate the characteristics of transitional objects and transitional phenomena which distinguish these from other objects and phenomena used for either distracting or soothing. Transitional objects and transitional phenomena are rarely used for distraction from pain. They are also neither prime soothers like the breast and the thumb, nor secondary soothers like the bottle and the pacifier. Instead, their power to console and comfort stems from their origin as adjuncts to drive satisfaction during nursing. As such, they acquire the capacity to reproduce the stability and comfort first experienced in the arms of the mother; they reinstate the child's capacity to play; and they aid in the integration of body parts into the totality of the child's body image as separate from that of the mother.

Kestenberg and Weinstein (1978) described some of the qualities of the transitional object and transitional phenomena which contribute to their serving the above specified functions. They noted, for example, that the transitional object often envelops the child; it can be held, fingered, brought close to the face. These properties contribute to its giving the illusion of holding the mother and playing with her breast during nursing. They emphasized the similarities between the

rhythmic use of transitional objects and transitional phenomena and bodily rhythms: Transitional objects are initially fingered with oral rhythms, and with further development become also associated with bodily rhythms of other dominant zones. Similarly, the visual and auditory rhythms and tunes that are integral to transitional phenomena were in their inception adjuncts to bodily rhythms. "These supplementary rhythms are not prime soothers, but rather the coordinators and mediators between various body zones and the nursing mother" (p. 88). They help the child integrate sensations from all parts of his body. As adjuncts to bodily rhythms, the transitional objects and transitional phenomena play an important role in the building of the body image.

Brody (1980), too, emphasized the role of transitional objects and transitional phenomena in facilitating the establishment of the body ego. Yet in contrast to Kestenberg and Weinstein (1978), who saw this as an additional function of the phenomena, Brody presented her views as "an alternative interpretation" (p. 579) to Winnicott's understanding of these phenomena. According to Brody, the infant's environment is initially perceived by him as an extension of himself, a part of himself that must be held by him at all times. The transitional object is adopted by the infant because of its association with his bed, and "it is experienced as

integral to the infant's own body and not to an aspect of the mother" (p. 582). This is why even its temporary loss arouses distress or panic. The transitional object's main role is to strengthen the child's feelings of body integrity.

Metcalf and Spitz (1978) viewed the transitional object as a psychic organizer, an affective indicator of a critical developmental period and of the establishment of a new modus operandi. The transitional object represents a stage of its own on the way from recognition memory to the establishment of evocative memory. This stage, in which the early steps toward evocative memory can be discerned, corresponds to the emergence of a new type of psychic functioning: Memory traces begin to become organized into coherent units capable of complex interrelations; interchanges between cognitive mental structures in the form of thought processes become possible; original creative mental activity appears. The transitional object is the indicator of the onset of this critical period in development. It consists of "the libidinal cathexis of a 'thing'" (p. 106), and is established through the endowment of one inanimate object with an essential attribute of the libidinal object: security. When the need for the mother arises, the transitional object serves as a quasi-evocative stimulus, and "evokes the total affect-gestalt, 'mother,' with the

unique meaning of security" (p. 102). The transitional object represents "a specific stage in the progress from recognition of a sign gestalt to evocation through a volitional act of mentation" (p. 105).

In contrast to such an emphasis on the centrality of the transitional object in development, Coppolillo (1976) saw as "almost unfortunate" (p. 36) Winnicott's introduction of the term transitional object. Instead, he emphasized the transitional experience, or the ability to experience objects, thoughts or concepts in the transitional mode. Coppolillo (1976) suggested that the ability to experience in the transitional mode is essential for optimal ego development, particularly for the development of sublimation and neutralization. The development of the ego's autonomous functions is mostly dependent on stimulation from the external world; and repression and compromise formations are mostly dependent on internally generated stimuli. In contrast, the development of sublimation and neutralization is equally impacted by drive activity and by the external world. While the child's ego is usually supported in its subliminatory activities by a person, the transitional object and transitional mode of experience can serve the same function. The transitional mode of experience is characterized by the co-existence and amalgamation of the objectively perceived world with the internally created

subjective reality. As such, it provides an ideal arena for the ego to reconcile internal wishes with external reality, facilitating sublimation and neutralization.

Coppolillo (1976) emphasized that the transitional experience is invaluable for the ego, because it allows it a great degree of control: "If the drive component becomes too imperative, the ego can cathect the realistic qualities of the object. If, conversely, the reality becomes too oppressive and boring, more of the inner world of wishes is permitted into awareness" (p. 42). In the transitional mode of experience, the ego "is in excellent control and experiencing its finest hour. It can achieve this control because there is in the experience representation from the external world to buffer internal impulses, and representation from the internal world to safeguard against stimulus slavery" (p. 44).

The above theoretical contributions to and views on the concepts of the transitional object and transitional phenomena are only a sample of the many theoretical writings on these concepts. Some important articles had to be excluded, such as Sperling's (1963) and Dickes' (1978) views on the transitional object as a symptom of pathology, Greenacre's (1969, 1970) central articles on the differences between transitional objects and fetishes, and articles on the persistence of transitional objects and transitional phenomena into adulthood (e.g., Kahne,

1967). Many other writings on a variety of clinical and theoretical aspects of the phenomena (e.g., Arkema, 1981; Cooper, Perry, Hoke & Richman, 1985; Davidson, 1976; Elmhirst, 1980; Giovacchini, 1978; Modell, 1970; Ogden, 1985; Reeves, 1981) also had to be excluded, and can only be noted. Many more have been written. In addition, as overdue as a thorough critique of the theoretical writings on the concepts is, this was not attempted. The purpose of this theoretical review, and of the present emphasis on the many articles excluded from it, is to provide a sense of the vast material that exists on these concepts: their numerous theoretical elaborations, the many discrepant theoretical views of and emphases on them, and the continuous appearance of new and/or alternative interpretations of these phenomena.

Given all the basic issues that remain unclear regarding the nature of the transitional object and transitional phenomena, and the chaos in the status of the concepts, it is surprising that so many theoretical elaborations and interpretations of these notions continue to appear. Most theoretical articles ignore the chaotic context in which they are written, and appear to be artifically divorced from this context, adding to the confusion. This state of affairs may lead one to concur with Brody (1980) in her view that the notion of the transitional object has been overidealized.

Winnicott's writings lie at the very basis of the literature on transitional objects and transitional phenomena: He established the first working assumptions on them, assumptions which are still accepted by most. In her article on the overidealization of the transitional object, Brody (1980) raised some valid points regarding the ways in which Winnicott's writings might have contributed to the obscurities in the literature. For example, she noted Winnicott's manner of presenting hypotheses as "a series of assertions, presented as if the necessary empirical data had already been collected and studied" (p. 568). She criticized Winnicott's statements that the transitional object appears between 4 and 12 months of life, noting that "this is a long time span for an infant" (p. 569), and that the ways objects are handled and their functions must differ sharply from the beginning to the end of such a period. She also noted some of Winnicott's ambiguous statements, such as his assertions that the mother herself may be a transitional object, and that the true transitional object is more important than the mother.

Yet, Brody's article did not focus on Winnicott's writings and did not attempt to clarify what he left vague and ambiguous. Instead, she raised her own alternative interpretation of the transitional object, proposing that it contributes to a sense of body integrity.

Given the very basic confusions and the chaos in the literature on transitional objects and transitional phenomena, it seems unproductive at this point to continue to develop ever more interesting hypotheses on them, or to offer other new and contradictory interpretations. It seems equally unproductive to continue to focus empirically on specific details of these phenomena, ignoring the general confusion that surrounds such a study. Before proceeding to develop further and to broaden the complex structure of knowledge on these phenomena, the foundations of the present knowledge must be reviewed.

The pervasive influence of Winnicott's views on the approach to these phenomena has been made clear through the present literature review. At the same time, some of the ways in which Winnicott's writings lend themselves to misunderstandings and to divergent interpretations and contribute to the confusion were also noted. It is striking that, in spite of the influence of Winnicott's views on transitional objects and transitional phenomena, much of what is known of these views seems to be based only on Winnicott's (1953) central and famous article on the transitional objects and transitional phenomena; practically all of Winnicott's quotes on the subject have as their reference that one article. In fact, taken in isolation this article contains many obscure and ambiguous

statements. Winnicott's notions on the transitional object and transitional phenomena are spread throughout a great number of his writings. Moreover, his understanding of these phenomena is grounded in his theory of development: the way the phenomena are experienced, the way they are defined, the manner in which they develop, the functions they fulfill, their meanings for the child, are all intrinsic to his conception of healthy development. Yet there is little of Winnicott's general notions on development in his 1953 article on the transitional object and transitional phenomena; in fact, an understanding of these notions can be based only on a very broad reading of Winnicott's writings.

A thorough review and a re-evaluation of Winnicott's views seem necessary at this point. Some of the answers to the confusing questions and the difficult issues may lie in Winnicott's own writings, once these are thoroughly understood. Grappling with some of the obscurities in Winnicott's writings, and exploring the meanings of some of his ambiguous statements, is likely to elucidate his views on the transitional object and transitional phenomena. Understanding his theory of development, and exploring the way the transitional object and transitional phenomena are grounded in it, will most likely illuminate the functions and meanings of these phenomena in Winnicott's theory. Such are the aims of the following

two chapters. Only after thoroughly understanding Winnicott's notions on the transitional object and transitional phenomena can we begin the gradual process of submitting these to careful study; only then will we be able to discard from his views what proves unhelpful, while continuing to benefit from his insights into development and into the internal life of children.

Chapter Four

Winnicott's Notions on Development

Introduction

Upon embarking on a presentation of Winnicott's writings on any subject, one has to start by noting that Winnicott was a very unsystematic writer. One cannot fully understand a certain notion of his by limiting a discussion to a few articles he might have written with a focus on that notion, since one can find important ideas on any subject spread through most of his writings. In addition, Winnicott often wrote in a quasi-telegraphic style, presenting central ideas briefly and without explaining, clarifying or elaborating. An example of such style is his statement that a transitional phenomenon "is a defence against anxiety, especially anxiety of depressive type" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 4). This statement of Winnicott was presented flatly, without explanation, without any elaboration on the sources of this conclusion or on the meaning of the statement. As a result it is not always clear what Winnicott meant or what the bases for his assumptions were. Moreover, Winnicott's style often results in the impression that he treated hypotheses and assumptions as proven facts. Yet ideas are often pursued again by Winnicott in a different context, and often then they are presented more thoroughly and explicitly, and are

more fully explained. Thus, a broad reading of Winnicott which includes a variety of his writings on different subjects results in a better and fuller understanding of specific notions.

For this reason, an organized, systematic, coherent presentation of his writings on the transitional object and transitional phenomena and of the theory behind these concepts requires an unsystematic jumping back and forth across his writings. Such a presentation will be attempted.

Winnicott's notions on the transitional object and transitional phenomena are inherently tied to his views on development. One can only understand and appreciate his ideas on these phenomena on the basis of an understanding of his theory of development. Thus, the present chapter will review Winnicott's general developmental theory; it will focus on those concepts most closely relevant to his views on the transitional object and transitional phenomena.

Basic Concepts

One of Winnicott's central contributions to the psychoanalytic theory of development was his focusing on the very first weeks and months of life. As Winnicott put it, Freud illuminated pregenital sexuality, the formation of ego mechanisms of defense, and the anxiety derived from instinct tension or from object loss, while he highlighted

stages of development which precede the above, "namely the structuring of the ego which makes anxiety from instinct tension or object loss possible" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 41).

In addition, while Freud focused on the intrapsychic, Winnicott focused as much on the environment and on its impact on the infant; one of his central notions is that "maturation (in psychology) requires and depends on the quality of the facilitating environment" (Winnicott, 1965b, pp. 179-80). According to Winnicott, one cannot attempt to understand the infant and its development without focusing as much on the infant's environment. At first the unit of study is not the infant, "'there is no such thing as a baby'" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 99). The infant cannot exist in isolation, and its development cannot be studied in isolation; the unit of study is "an environment-individual set-up" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 99; p. 221; p. 266). "At the earliest stages the infant and the maternal care belong to each other and cannot be disentangled" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 40).

Winnicott referred to this earliest stage of development as one of "absolute dependence" of the infant on its environment (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 84). "In the earliest stage there is no vestige of an awareness of this dependence, and for this reason the dependence is absolute" (Winnicott, 1965a, p. 4). In this stage the

infant does not know about its dependency, does not know about the maternal care he needs; he cannot have any control over it, he can only benefit or suffer from it.

According to Winnicott, in health the infant's absolute dependence on the mother is matched by the mother's almost total adaptation to her infant's needs, "an almost 100 per cent adaptation" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 11). "The characteristic of the facilitating environment is adaptation, starting almost at 100 per cent..." (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 239).

Yet, during this stage the infant cannot communicate its needs, and the mother has to fulfill these based on empathy. What enables her to do so is the high degree of identification with her infant that characterizes the last weeks of pregnancy and the first weeks after delivery. Winnicott referred to this state of the mother as "'primary maternal preoccupation'" (Winnicott, 1965a, p. 15), and described it as a "state of heightened sensitivity" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 302), "a willingness as well as an ability on the part of the mother to drain interest from her own self on to the baby" (Winnicott, 1965a, p. 15). The physiological processes and changes of pregnancy trigger in the pregnant woman a change of orientation: she becomes interested in the changes going on inside herself, and she "shifts some of her sense of self on to the baby that is growing within her"

(Winnicott, 1965b, p. 53). The mother identifies herself with the baby growing within her, and this identification carries over beyond the birth process and continues for a few weeks after birth. Through this identification with her infant the mother "achieve[s] a very powerful sense of what the baby needs" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 53). "This is the thing that gives the mother her special ability to do the right thing. She knows what the baby could be feeling like. No one else knows ... they do not know what a baby feels like from minute to minute because they are outside this area of experience" (Winnicott, 1965a, p. 15). Thus, through this natural emotional state of the mother in the first weeks of the infant's life nature provides the infant with what he needs at this stage: a high degree of adaptation.

Winnicott's notion of the mother's almost 100 per cent adaptation to her infant, of the mother knowing what her infant feels like from minute to minute, seems to place very high demands on the mother. Yet, this notion is balanced by his well known concept of the <u>good-enough mother</u>. According to him, mothers "tend on the whole to know accurately enough what their infants need, and further, they like to provide what is needed" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 54).

Parallel to the importance that Winnicott attributed to the mother's almost full adaptation to her infant's

needs during the first stage of its life, is the importance he attributed to her gradual lessening of adaptation. The healthy mother begins a process of "graduated de-adaptation" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 87) which matches the rapid development and growth of her infant. She "recovers her self-interest, and does so at the rate at which her infant can allow her to do so" (Winnicott, 1965a, p. 15). The mother's gradual failures of adaptation "are again a kind of adaptation, because they are related to the growing need of the child for meeting reality and for achieving separation and for the establishment of a personal identity" (Winnicott, 1965b, pp. 96-7). Thus, as the infant needs to become separate, the healthy mother becomes ready to let go of her ego-support and to gradually allow her infant to take over. The mother's de-adaptation to her infant is enabled both by "her own recovery from a high degree of identification with her baby and because of her perception of the baby's new need, the need for her to be a separate phenomenon" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 107).

In this way, as the infant begins to give signals of his needs, the mother is ready to switch from "understanding of her infant's need based on empathy, and ... understanding based on something in the infant or small child that indicates need" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 51). The distinction between the two is subtle, but is

central for the child's development, since if mother still "knows too well what the infant needs, this is magic and forms no basis for an object relationship" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 50). Dissatisfactions are important in helping the infant differentiate between self and object, emerging from the merged state. Instinct gratification may result in the elimination of the external reality, since a satisfied infant feels "'fobbed off' ... has lost object-cathexis" (Winnicoctt, 1965b, p. 181). "Per contra, the infant's experienced aggression, ... and the ideas bound up with it, lends itself to the process of placing the object separate from the self" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 181). In addition, the mother's gradual de-adaptation to her infant's needs aids the infant in the process of fusing anger and love, since "a mother who cannot gradually fail in this matter of sensitive adaptation is failing in another sense; she is failing ... to give her infant reasons for anger" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 87), and thus fails to allow the infant the experience of hating the loved object.

What are those needs of the infant that characterize this stage of development, and to which the mother must adapt? Winnicott is not talking about instinctual needs, about id needs, "in referring to the meeting of infant needs I am not referring to the satisfaction of instincts" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 141). Winnicott focused on the

development of the ego and on ego-experiences, which according to him predate and are a prerequisite for id-experiences.

> Id-functioning ... is collected together in all its aspects and becomes ego-experience. There is thus no sense in making use of the word 'id' for phenomena that are not covered and catalogued and experienced and eventually interpreted by ego-functioning.
>
> In the very early stages of the development of a human child ... What instinctual life there may be apart from ego-functioning can be ignored, because the infant is not yet an entity having experiences. There is no id before ego. (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 56)

Winnicott emphasized the development and growth of the ego, "that part of the growing human personality that tends, under suitable conditions, to become integrated into a unit" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 56). He focused on "the evolution of the ego and of the self" to which he referred as "'maturational process'" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 85).

To understand what Winnicott meant by the evolution of the ego and of the self, it is important to refer to his view of the state the infant is in during the first days of life. As stated, the infant is in a state of absolute dependence, unaware of his dependency and of the maternal care he needs. The infant is also in "a state of mergence, not yet having separated out mother and 'not-me' objects from the 'me'" (Winnicott, 1965b, p 97); at this early stage of development it is only the observer who can distinguish between the infant and the environment, the infant cannot do so. The infant's life is ruled by

"primary process, primary identification, auto-erotism, primary narcissism" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 44). The infant's ego is unintegrated; the infant has no experience of itself as a unit. He also has no awareness of the external world and of a separation of the external and the internal; thus, he has no way of distinguishing fantasy from fact. The infant at birth is equipped with: "A constitution. Innate developmental tendencies ... Motility and sensitivity. Instincts, themselves involved in the developmental tendency, with changing zone-dominance" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 303).

One of the most concise statements of Winnicott as to the meaning of maturation, and of the role of the mother in it in very broad terms, is that the mother in a state of "'primary maternal preoccupation' provides a setting for the infant's constitution to begin to make itself evident, for the developmental tendencies to start to unfold, and for the infant to experience spontaneous movement and become the owner of the sensations that are appropriate to this early phase of life" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 303). That is, in health maturation is a process in which personal tendencies and the inherent potential of the individual are allowed to develop, and the infant gradually becomes aware of himself as a unit, an individual who owns his sensations, and for whom experiences and expression of the spontaneous and the

personal are a continuous characteristic. The mother's role is to provide the conditions that will allow such unhindered maturation to happen; she has to establish the setting in which "the infant's maturational processes are not blocked but are met and enabled to become part of the child" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 85). The mother has to adapt to her infant's maturational processes, so these can proceed unhindered, in a manner that is natural and spontaneous and based on the infant's own tendencies. "The environment, when good enough, facilitates the maturational process. For this to happen the environmental provision in an extremely subtle manner adapts itself to the changing needs arising out of the fact of maturation" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 223). Only the mother in a state of identification with her infant can know his changing needs, and thus meet this function.

In this general context of a mother allowing maturation to happen "as by a natural process" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 223), the ego will develop in a healthy manner. Winnicott characterized ego-development by three main trends: integration, personalization, and initiation of object relating. These three aspects of ego-growth are matched by three aspects of infant care: holding, handling and object-presenting. It should be stated that the mother's role is at first expressed only in her physical care of her infant: "Love, at this stage, can

only be shown in terms of body-care" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 58). At this early stage the good-enough environment "meets physiological needs. Here physiology and psychology have not yet become distinct, or are only in the process of doing so" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 48). As the psychology of the infant emerges, the maternal role also becomes expressed in more abstract, psychological adaptation.

Main Trends in Ego Development

1. Integration of the ego, facilitated by the mother's holding.

Winnicott considered integration as "the main trend in the maturational process" (Winnicott, 1965b, p.59). He postulated a state of "primary unintegration" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 149): from the infant's point of view "the personality does not start off as a completed whole thing" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 225) but as "many bits" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 150). Integration is the process by which "the unity of the individual psyche becomes a fact" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 225), and the individual begins to experience himself as "one whole being" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 150). The material out of which this sense of integration emerges is at first, as everything else, physical and physiological, "motor and sensory elements" that gradually "acquire a tendency towards a sense of existing" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 60). But soon "the rudiments of an

imaginative elaboration of pure body-functioning" emerge (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 60), and are gradually gathered together to give way to a sense of wholeness. The process of integration also includes putting together "bits of nursing technique and faces seen and sounds heard and smells smelt ... into one being to be called mother" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 150).

The integration of the self in health is characterized not only by a feeling of wholeness, of unity. Winnicott saw integration not only as a process of becoming a unity, but also as the process by which a "new human being has started to be, and has started to gather experience that can be called personal" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 60). Winnicott is here alluding to his view that in health the feeling of wholeness develops hand in hand with a feeling of realness, since both are based on a gathering of personal experiences.

To understand this, Winnicott's concept of True or Central Self has to be presented. Winnicott postulated the existence of a central self, which he defined as "the inherited potential which is experiencing a continuity of being, and acquiring in its own way and at its own speed a personal psychic reality and a personal body-scheme" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 46). "At the earliest stage the True Self is the theoretical position from which come the spontaneous gesture and the personal idea. The

spontaneous gesture is the True Self in action. Only the True Self can be creative and only the True Self can feel real" (Winnicott, 1965b, p.148). Like everything else, the central self, or the inherited potential, is at first expressed only physically, in "the aliveness of the body tissues and the working of body-functions, including the heart's action and breathing" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 148). Rudimentary imaginative elaborations of these body-functions and processes and of their sense of aliveness follow. Eventually, the central self corresponds to all that is personal, spontaneous and deeply alive in the individual.

In health integration refers to the gathering of personal experiences from the central self into the emerging unit or psyche. If so, integration in health can be seen as involving two aspects of ego development: the achievement of a sense of wholeness, and the gathering together of personal, real, central experiences as a basis for the new unit. The mother's role of holding could be seen as facilitating the two separate aspects of integration, although Winnicott did not make such a distinction explicitly. On the one hand, through her holding of the infant the mother is gathering the infant's bits together, which is the basis of the infant's achievement of a sense of unity. In this respect "the main thing is the physical holding, and this is the basis

of all the more complex aspects of holding" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 54). This aspect of the mother's role of holding the infant, and its impact, may be better understood by looking at it in contrast to faulty holding and its effects:

> Holding is very much related to the mother's capacity to identify with her infant. Satisfactory holding is a basic ration of care, only experienced in the reactions to faulty holding. Faulty holding produces extreme distress in the infant, giving a basis for: the sense of going to pieces, the sense of falling for ever, the feeling that external reality cannot be used for reassurance, and other anxieties that are usually described as 'psychotic'. (Winnicott, 1965a, p. 18)

A second aspect of the mother's holding is her adapting to the infant's needs and meeting its spontaneous gestures, while protecting it from environmental demands and impingements. This function of the mother will facilitate the infant's achievement of integration along personal lines, that is, its gathering of personal experiences as the basis of a feeling of unity. In this context, the mother's holding includes the "ego-support" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 49) that the mother lends her infant, and which allows him to be in an unintegrated state, periodically expressing a spontaneous gesture. Only with appropriate holding and ego-support the infant can be alone, his central self isolated from the environment, with no need to react to impingements; the central self, which "is, at the beginning, essentially not

reactive to external stimuli, but primary" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 148), can simply be.

> It is only when alone (that is to say, in the presence of someone) that the infant can discover his own personal life.... and only when alone, the infant is able to do the equivalent of what in an adult would be called relaxing. The infant is able to become unintegrated, to flounder, to be in a state in which there is no orientation, to be able to exist for a time without being either a reactor to an external impingement or an active person with a direction of interest or movement. The stage is set for an id experience. In the course of time there arrives a sensation or an impulse. In this setting the sensation or impulse will feel real and be truly a personal experience....
>
> It is only under these conditions that the infant can have an experience which feels real. A large number of such experiences form the basis for a life that has reality in it instead of futility. (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 34)

This kind of holding, which protects the infant and supports its ego while responding to its spontaneous gestures, implies a mirroring by the mother of her infant's early expressions. "By constantly looking for and seeing the human being in her infant, the mother has been enabling the infant gradually to come together as a personality, to integrate from within into a unit" (Winnicott, 1957a, p. 18). In this way the mother's holding provides the conditions "so that the infant starts by existing and not by reacting" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 148). This facilitates the development of integration that includes the gathering of personal experiences: the emergence of a sense of wholeness, a sense of I am, that feels real.

If holding is faulty, it does not protect the infant's going-on-being; it does not allow the infant's central self to be alone, undisturbed. Any failure of adaptation of mother is an impingement on the infant's central self, and causes a reaction in the infant which breaks the going-on-being. "The alternative to being is reacting, and reacting interrupts being and annihilates. Being and annihilation are the two alternatives" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 47). "If reacting to impingements is the pattern of an infant's life, then there is a serious interference with the natural tendency that exists in the infant to become an integrated unit, able to continue to have a self with a past, present, and future" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 86). When the infant must constantly react to impingements instead of <u>being</u>, when the mother introduces her own gestures instead of meeting her infant's gestures, the infant's personal tendencies and individual potential are endangered. The infant must respond to the external demands, must comply to the environment because of its state of absolute dependence, and its only way of protecting its central self is to develop a False Self. "A compliant False Self reacts to environmental demands and the infant seems to accept them" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 146). The price the infant pays is the development of a split in its personality, so that the spontaneity and creativity that characterize its central

self cannot be a feature in the infant's living experiences.

"The holding environment therefore has as its main function the reduction to a minimum of impingements to which the infant must react with resultant annihilation of personal being" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 47). In health, thus, the individual achieves a sense of wholeness that feels real and alive; the inherited potential becomes a continuity of being. "The inherited potential gradually develops into an individual infant" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 54). The individual continues to be able to experience the spontaneous and personal impulse. He also maintains the capacity to experience, in relaxation, the un-integrated state. He develops a polite self, a social manner, which allows the central self to continue living undisturbed while the infant adapts to the demands of social life. But the creativity and spontaneity of his central self continue to colour his experience of himself and of the world. In addition, in health the individual develops an "intermediate area of experience," in which he exists between the objective world and the internal, silent, hidden world in which the True Self exists. But this notion will await my presentation of Winnicott's notions on the transitional object and transitional phenomena.

2. Personalization of the ego, facilitated by the mother's handling.

Personalization of the ego is a second trend of ego development at this stage, referred to at times by Winnicott as an aspect of the central phenomenon of integration of the ego. Similarly, the mother's handling of her infant, a second characteristic of infant care, seems not so clearly distinguished from her holding, and appears to be more an aspect of this. Winnicott's specific references to these concepts are sparse.

Personalization is "the development of the feeling that one's person is in one's body" (Winnicott, 1958, pp. 150-151), "the way in which the individual psyche becomes lodged in the body" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 226). Personalization is the process by which "the skin becomes the boundary between the me and the not-me. In other words, the psyche has come to live in the soma and an individual psycho-somatic life has been initiated" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 61). This development is enabled particularly by what Winnicott refers to as the mother's "good-enough active and adaptive handling" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 62) of her baby, the "repeated quiet experiences of body-care" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 151). Winnicott does not specifically state the difference he sees between the processes of handling and holding, but he seems to refer to handling as those aspects of maternal care more

specifically related to touching and skin contact, feeding, bathing and the physical contact that is at the basis of an emerging sense of boundaries.

One of Winnicott's most elaborate statements on the nature of personalization is the following:

> I have referred to this as the psyche indwelling in the soma. The basis for this indwelling is a linkage of motor and sensory and functional experiences with the infant's new state of being a person. As a further development there comes into existence what might be called a limiting membrane, which to some extent (in health) is equated with the surface of the skin, and has a position between the infant's 'me' and his 'not-me'. So the infant comes to have an inside and an outside, and a body-scheme. In this way meaning comes to the function of intake and output; moreover, it gradually becomes meaningful to postulate a personal or inner psychic reality for the infant. (Winnicott, 1965b, pp. 44-5)

Thus, personalization is the achievement of a sense of separateness from the world, with an accompanying sense of an inside separate from an outside. This is the origin of the ability to distinguish fantasy from fact. It is also an important development in the increasingly elaborate, inner, psychic world of the child, which now becomes for him something internal and separate from the objective world. The sense of a self living in the body is very much built on the basis of bodily functioning, and the imaginative elaborations of this bodily functioning, including digestive and eliminatory processes, "quickly become extremely complex and constitute the psychic reality specific to that infant" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 96). Thus, projection of what is now experienced as part

of the self, and introjection of what is outside and not part of the self, are now a central part of the psychic life of the individual.

As will be seen, in health the individual achieves a clear sense of separation between the internal and the external. He can also continue to enjoy and to benefit from an active internal life, with its creativity and spontaneity and intensity of experience, since at the same time the firm sense of external reality puts brakes on fantasy: "Fantasy is only tolerable at full blast when objective reality is appreciated well. The subjective has tremendous value but is so alarming and magical that it cannot be enjoyed except as a parallel to the objective" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 153). In addition, in health the individual achieves an intermediate area of experience, characterized by a lively interchange between the internal and the external worlds, "so that the external world is enriched by the inner potential, and the inner is enriched by what belongs outside" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 99). But this already belongs to Winnicott's notions on the transitional object and transitional phenomena.

3. Initiation of object-relating, facilitated by the mother's adaptive object-presenting.

This third area of ego development encompasses the initiation of object-relating, which is based on the transition from the infant's relation to subjective

objects only to its relation to objects objectively perceived. According to Davis and Wallbridge (1981), "object presenting can be said to embrace not only the initiation of interpersonal relationships, but also the introduction of the whole world of shared reality to the baby and growing child" (p. 105). It is clear that the development of object relating is not independent or clearly distinct from personalization (just like personalization is very much tied to integration of the ego). In Winnicott's (1965b) words: "Here the infant changes from a relationship to a subjectively conceived object to a relationship to an object objectively perceived. This change is closely bound up with the infant's change from being merged with the mother to being separate from her, or to relating to her as separate and 'not-me'" (p. 45).

The way the infant is introduced to the world, and the objects are introduced to the infant's world, has central implications, as will be seen later. The healthy process of introduction of objects to the infant starts at the very beginning of the infant's life, in the mother's response to the infant's first spontaneous gestures. According to Winnicott, at first the infant has no relationship at all to external objects, and "out of this state the infant is disturbed by instinct tension which is called hunger. I would say that the infant is ready to

believe in something that could exist, i.e. there has developed in the infant a readiness to hallucinate an object; but that is rather a direction of expectancy than an object in itself" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 163). The readiness to hallucinate an object is what Winnicott called the creative potential, or "creative impulse" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 69). The nature of the mother's response to this potential, to the infant's earliest expectancy, will have important implications not only as to the way the infant experiences the world and relates to it, but also to the future of his creative potential. In her almost 100 per cent adaptation to her infant's need, the mother places the breast where and when the infant is ready to hallucinate it; the infant then will experience the breast as an hallucination, and his first feedings will be from an object of his own creation. This is the beginning of the realization of the infant's creative potential.

Of course, from the observer's point of view the infant is always feeding from the mother's breast. The following statement by Winnicott nicely highlights how an infant feeding at the breast may, from his own point of view, be feeding from a self-created object:

> The mother allows the baby's face to touch the breast. At the beginning babies do not know about breasts being part of mother. If the face touches the breast they do not know whether the nice feeling comes in the breast or in the face. Babies play with their cheeks and scratch them just as if they were breasts....

> Sooner or later there will be some kind of contact between the mother's nipple and the baby's mouth....
>
> This contact of the nipple with the baby's mouth gives the baby ideas--"perhaps there is something there outside the mouth worth trying to get." ... Gradually the mother enables the baby to build up in imagination the very thing that she has to offer, and the baby begins to mouth the nipple ... and perhaps to suck.
>
> And then there is a pause. The gums let go of the nipple, and the baby turns away from the scene of action. The idea of the breast fades.
>
> Do you see how important this last point is? The baby had an idea, and the breast with the nipple came, and a contact was made. Then the baby was finished with the idea and turned away, and the nipple disappeared.... This baby does not have something pushed back into the mouth in order that sucking movements shall be started up again. The mother understands what the baby is feeling ... She waits. In the course of a few minutes or less the baby turns once more toward the nipple, and so a new contact is made just at the right moment. These conditions are repeated time and again, and the baby drinks not from a thing that contains milk but from a personal possession lent for the moment to a person who knows what to do with it. (Winnicott, 1957b, pp. 50-2)

Such an object created, from the point of view of the infant, by the infant, is what Winnicott called a <u>subjective object</u>. A subjective object "behaves according to magical laws, i.e. it exists when desired, it approaches when approached, it hurts when hurt. Lastly, it vanishes when not wanted" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 153). According to Winnicott at first only such objects exist for the infant, and Winnicott referred to this period as a stage of object-relating (vs. later object-usage). "Object-relating is an experience of the subject that can be described in terms of the subject as an isolate" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 88); the infant can relate to

objects, but cannot yet use objects.

The progress from hallucinatory wish-fulfillment to a world of subjective objects is gradual. Hallucinations and subjective objects blend into each other: A subjective object continues to be, in Winnicott's view, a creation of the infant, a creation out of need, but one that takes into consideration increasingly more cues from previous satisfying experiences and stimuli.

A similar blending exists between the stage of subjective objects and the next stage, that of illusions. While the infant is feeding from a breast which he experiences as part of himself, he is in fact feeding from an external object; and soon a sense of the externality of the object creeps into his experience. The infant gradually moves into a stage in which he has the illusion that the object on which he feeds is both created by him and found. This stage is central in Winnicott's theory of development--and in his notions on the transitional object and transitional phenomena--and will be elaborated upon once the relationship between this and the previous stages is more clearly established.

Throughout this development from hallucination to subjective object to illusion, the actual situation may be exactly the same; and for the observer the setting has always been an infant feeding from its mother's breast. The difference is in the infant's experience of the

situation, and is almost more a change in emphasis in the experience than any clear cut distinction. In a silent, gradual way, the infant progresses from a stage of primary hallucinations that are determined by need, into a relation to subjective objects that are created by the infant with consideration of the accumulation of memories, and into a stage of illusions, in which the object is experienced both as created and as found. The following statements by Winnicott, which imply a transition from hallucinations to subjective objects to illusions without explicitly distinguishing between these, illustrate the blending of one into the other:

> The infant comes to the breast when excited, and ready to hallucinate something fit to be attacked. At that moment the actual nipple appears and he is able to feel it was that nipple that he hallucinated. So his ideas are enriched by actual details of sight, feel, smell, and next time this material is used in the hallucination. In this way he starts to build up a capacity to conjure up what is actually available. The mother has to go on giving the infant this type of experience. (Winnicott, 1958, pp. 152-3)

Also, when talking about a theoretical first feed, Winnicott (1958) stated:

> The creative potential of the individual arising out of need produces readiness for an hallucination. The mother's love and her close identification with her infant make her aware of the infant's needs to the extent that she provides something more or less in the right place and at the right time. This, much repeated, starts off the infant's ability to use <u>illusion</u>, without which no contact is possible between the psyche and the environment. (p. 223)

This continuum from hallucination to subjective object to illusion, as confusing as it might appear with

different concepts, kinds of objects and stages that blend into each other, underscores a central notion of Winnicott's: that of a creative potential that should be allowed to be realized while at the same time the world is sensitively introduced. The infant's creative potential, which at first was expressed only as a direction of expectancy, or a readiness to hallucinate, continues to be expressed in hallucinations, subjective objects and illusions, with the externality of the object being increasingly more accepted. This will lead to the creativity of the individual continuing to be expressed, even once the world begins to be objectively perceived. Such healthy development is only possible in the context of a mother who presents "the world in small doses" (Winnicott, 1957b, ch. 9). The mother should at first adapt almost 100 per cent to her infant's needs, and present what the baby has a capacity to find, and only that, and at the right place and time, where and when he needs it. "It is a mother's job ... to go on steadily providing the simplified bit of the world which the infant, through her, comes to know. Only on such a foundation can objectivity or a scientific attitude be built.... Only on a basis of monotony can a mother profitably add richness" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 153).

As stated, the stage of illusion is central in Winnicott's theory: its achievement signals health,

signals that development is proceeding the way it should. By illusion Winnicott meant "a bit of experience which the infant can take as either his hallucination or a thing belonging to external reality" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 152). Illusions are thus an achievement: a sign that the process of reality acceptance has begun, and that it is proceeding along the lines of the infant's creative potential as expressed at first in the infant's hallucinations. For a while, during the stage of illusion, external reality and hallucinatory experiences merge. Winnicott emphasized again and again the importance of accepting this merger, this co-existence of two realities for the infant. "In health the object is created, not found.... A good object is no good to the infant unless created by the infant.... Yet the object must be found in order to be created. This has to be accepted as a paradox" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 181).

The mother's gradual de-adaptation is central in the infant's increasing recognition of the externality of objects, and of the illusory status of an illusion, as already stated. "Incomplete adaptation to need makes objects real, that is to say hated as well as loved.... exact adaptation resembles magic and the object that behaves perfectly becomes no better than a hallucination" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 11). But just as the transition from hallucination to subjective object to illusion to

objective perception is imperceptible, so is the mother's change in attitude extremely gradual and imperceptible. Winnicott (1971a) very concisely expressed such a subtle change in the mother's attitude, when he stated that during the stage of illusion the mother for a while is "in a 'to and fro' between being that which the baby has a capacity to find and (alternatively) being herself waiting to be found" (p. 47). The mother gradually changes from behaving as a subjective object and presenting to the infant only that which he is ready to create, to being also herself and presenting to the infant what he may be capable of finding. Then, for a while the infant has the experience of both creating and finding, that is, an illusion.

This is the only way of presenting the world in health, because it is the only way that introduces reality in the context of the infant's personal tendencies, allowing these to survive and develop. Thus Winnicott (1958) stated that "at the start a simple <u>contact</u> with external or shared reality has to be made, by the infant's hallucinating and the world's presenting, with moments of illusion for the infant in which the two are taken by him to be identical" (p. 154).

When the mother succeeds in this task, that is, when she again and again places her nipple where the baby is ready to create it, she is doing a few things: She is

"meeting the infant's spontaneous gesture or sensory hallucination" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 145), and through this she is allowing the infant's central self to continue to exist undisturbed and to express itself, while at the same time adaptation to reality is initiated. In this way, the mother also "meets this infantile omnipotence revealed in a gesture" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 145): The baby "is presented with an object in such a way that the baby's legitimate experience of omnipotence is not violated" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 112). This is important because it leads to the infant accepting reality while giving up omnipotence at his own pace, instead of reality being forced on him and omnipotence being repressed and maintained in isolation. In Winnicott's (1965b) words:

> The infant begins to believe in external reality which appears and behaves as by magic (because of the mother's relatively successful adaptation to the infant's gestures and needs), and which acts in a way that does not clash with the infant's omnipotence. On this basis the infant can gradually abrogate omnipotence.... The infant can now begin to enjoy the illusion of omnipotent creating and controlling, and then can gradually come to recognize the illusory element. (p. 146)

Through such a sensitive way of presenting the world, the mother is also allowing the infant's creativity to flourish. The infant is allowed to trust his own creative potential, to trust in his ability to create the world, which will eventually lead to his ability to creatively perceive the actual world. The infant's acceptance of reality does not come at the expense of his creativity or

spontaneity of living, but instead joins up with it and allows its existence and expression. In Winnicott's (1957b) terms: "For the lucky infant the world starts off behaving in such a way that it joins up with his imagination, and so the world is woven into the texture of the imagination and the inner life of the baby is enriched with what is perceived in the external world" (p. 78). In this way the baby can continue to live creatively while at the same time make use of the outside world. As Winnicott (1971a) said: "Given the chance, the baby begins to live creatively, and to use actual objects to be creative into and with" (p. 101).

On the other hand, a mother who does not meet the infant's spontaneous gestures but instead introduces her own gestures, a mother who presents to the infant more than he can create, is impinging on the infant's central self. She is clashing with the infant's sense of omnipotence and encouraging its repression. She is also discouraging the infant's creativity. The infant cannot make sense out of the world that is imposed on him, because the objects don't resonate with his internal life. "The mother who is not good enough ... repeatedly fails to meet the infant gesture; instead she substitutes her own gesture which is to be given sense by the compliance of the infant" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 145). Forcing the nipple into the mouth of an infant who at that moment does

not have an idea of the breast alive, or teaching a child to say 'thank you,' or in other words, to acknowledge the existence of an environment before his first birthday, are examples of intrusive experiences to which the baby must react. The infant then learns to accept reality on the basis of compliance and builds a False Self to relate to the world, but there is no creativity involved in his relation to reality. The infant can either relate to objective objects in an impersonal, compliant, False manner; or he can relate to internal, subjective objects that are unaffected by the world, and such a result is pathological. There is no bridge between internal and external experiences. In addition, the infant's central self has to be isolated for it to be saved, but "being isolated, however, becomes less and less pure the further the child is from the beginning, involving more and more defensive organization in repudiation of environmental impingement" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 222).

In contrast, in health the infant accepts external reality but his internal life continues to be alive and expressed. He can perceive the world creatively. He "has at one and the same time a feeling of the realness of the world and of the realness of what is imaginative and personal" (Winnicott, 1957b, p. 72). He "can use ... imagination to make the world more exciting and ... can use the things of the real world to be imaginative about"

(Winnicott, 1957b, p. 72). For such a person there is "a continuous interchange between inner and outer reality, each being enriched by the other" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 91). That is, reality acceptance has been achieved in the context of the personal tendencies and the creative potential, and reality can be experienced and perceived in a creative, personal manner. The transitional object and transitional phenomena are central in this development, and are the earliest instances of such a creative perception of the world. But this will be elaborated upon below.

To sum up Winnicott's views on the adaptive object-presenting and its implications, the following statement of his, which condenses the development from the first moments of the infant's life to its creative acceptance of the world, is presented:

> Imagine a baby who has never had a feed. Hunger turns up, and the baby is ready to conceive of something; out of need the baby is ready to create a source of satisfaction, but there is no previous experience to show the baby what there is to expect. If at this moment the mother places her breast where the baby is ready to expect something, and if plenty of time is allowed for the infant to feel round, with mouth and hands, and perhaps with a sense of smell, the baby 'creates' just what is there to be found. The baby eventually gets the illusion that this real breast is exactly the thing that was created out of need, greed, and the first impulses of primitive loving. Sight, smell, and taste register somewhere, and after a while the baby may be creating something like the very breast that mother has to offer. A thousand times before weaning a baby may be given just this particular introduction to external reality by one woman, the mother. A thousand times the feeling has existed that what was wanted was created, and was

> found to be there. From this develops a belief that the world can contain what is wanted and needed, with the result that the baby has hope that there is a live relationship between inner reality and external reality, between innate primary creativity and the world at large which is shared by all. (Winnicott, 1957a, p. 139)

It should now be clear that for Winnicott healthy development is inherently tied to growth along the lines of the individual personal tendencies; and the function of the environment is to provide the conditions for unhindered, spontaneous, personal growth. Mental health is, according to Winnicott (1958), "a product of the continuous care that enables a continuity of personal emotional growth" (p. 220). Only such conditions lead to the realization of the individual's potential; only then the individual's life will be characterized by a sense of realness, instead of a sense of futility. An appropriate summary statement of his views on integration and personalization of the ego and on object-relating, is the following: "Feeling real is more than existing; it is finding a way to exist as oneself, and to relate to objects as oneself, and to have a self into which to retreat for relaxation" (Winnicott, 1971a, 117).

We can now move on to a presentation of Winnicott's notions on the transitional object and transitional phenomena, which occupy a central place in his views of healthy development.

Chapter Five

Winnicott's Notions on the Transitional Object and Transitional Phenomena

Introduction

Winnicott introduced the concepts of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in 1951, in a paper given at a scientific meeting of the British Psycho-Analytical Society. This paper led to the publication in 1953 of an article, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena; A Study of the First Not-Me Possession," which presented his central ideas on the concepts. Winnicott continued to refer to these phenomena or to different aspects of them in later writings, further elaborating--and sometimes confusing--his ideas on these concepts.

Winnicott (1971a) introduced the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena to designate an "intermediate area of experience, between the thumb and the teddy bear, between the oral erotism and true object-relationship, between primary creative activity and projection of what has already been introjected, between primary unawareness of indebtedness and the acknowledgment of indebtedness (Say 'ta')" (p. 2).

As obscure as the above statement may seem, Winnicott (1971a) referred to it as a "definition" (p. 2). He

elaborated on it by adding that his definition covered the child's objects that are not part of his body but neither are recognized by him/her as belonging to the external world; it also covered "an infant's babbling and the way in which an older child goes over a repertory of songs and tunes while preparing for sleep" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 2).

Through Winnicott's writings one finds many other defining statements on the transitional object and transitional phenomena; he never offered a coherent definition of the terms, and his statements on the descriptive and functional characteristics of these phenomena and on their theoretical implications are spread throughout his writings. Yet the above defining statements are a good starting point for a discussion of the concepts, since they contain condensed versions of central elements and aspects of his notions.

First, the above statements introduce, albeit in a quick, blurred and unexplicit manner, three different concepts that are central to any discussion of these phenomena: the term transitional object, the more abstract transitional phenomena, and the even more abstract intermediate area of experience. It is not clear from the above statements what the relationship among the three concepts is, and in fact Winnicott never explicitly addressed himself to this question: Are the three terms synonymous, and may then be used interchangeably?

Winnicott at times seemed to be doing just so; when discussing transitional phenomena, he often focused on objects or possessions. Are the terms distinct concepts referring to distinct phenomena? How are they related and how are they different? As will be seen later, this vagueness in Winnicott's use of the terms led to much confusion.

Winnicott's above defining statements also condense, again implicitly and in a blurred fashion, two central aspects of the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena: a developmental aspect, and an experiential aspect. Thus, when Winnicott stated that the transitional object and transitional phenomena are located between the thumb, oral erotism, hallucinatory activity and unawareness of the world, and the teddy bear, true object-relationships, projective activity and awareness of the external world, he was referring to the developmental context in which the transitional object and transitional phenomena exist. Yet at the same time he was referring to the experiential characteristics of the transitional object and transitional phenomena, to their being experienced in an intermediate area between the thumb and teddy bear, oral erotism and object-relationships, hallucination and projection, autism or primary narcissism and awareness of the external. In more explicit terms, which Winnicott used again and again throughout his

writings, the transitional object and transitional phenomena belong to an intermediate area of experience between the internal and the external worlds of the individual.

These two aspects of the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena, the developmental and the experiential, are condensed also in the term transitional itself, which has two central meanings: a temporal and a spatial. In Winnicott's (1971a) words, the transitional object "can be located. It is at the place in space and time where and when the mother is in transition from being (in the baby's mind) merged in with the infant and alternatively being experienced as an object to be perceived rather than conceived of" (p. 96).

In attempting to define, describe or understand the transitional object and transitional phenomena, both their temporal and spatial aspects--that is, their developmental and experiential characteristics--must be understood. I do not believe that the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena can be defined prior to an understanding of these aspects, since Winnicott was not referring to an object or an activity per se when using these terms; "what I am referring to ... is not the cloth or the teddy bear that the baby uses - not so much the object used as the use of the object" (Winnicott, 1971a, pp. xi-xii). What defines the transitional object and

transitional phenomena is the use of the object (or of the activity, I believe); and in my view, "the use of the object" refers both to its functions--mostly developmental--and to the way it is experienced. One cannot emphasize enough the intrinsic relation of the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena to both these aspects.

The developmental context and functions of these phenomena will be elaborated on below. First, Winnicott's key statement that the transitional object and transitional phenomena designate an intermediate area of experience will be focused on.

The Intermediate Area of Experience

Winnicott introduced the term intermediate area of experience to fill the gap he perceived in the usual description of human life in terms of internal and external experiences. According to him, it is not enough to describe human nature in terms of behavior in the external world, and life in the inner world: "If there is a need for this double statement, there is also need for a triple one: the third part of the life of a human being, a part that we cannot ignore, is an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 2).

In Winnicott's (1971a) view, external life refers to "behaviour or to the observable extrovert life" (p. 104);

to "environmental actuality" (p. 98); to "shared reality" (p. xi); to "the actual world" (p. 103); this actual world is "relatively constant ... being common property" (p. 103). In Winnicott's (1971a) writings inner life refers to the "personal or psychic reality" (p. 103); this is "the personal property of each individual" (p. 106). The term inner world subsumes "the paramount importance of sleep and the deep dreaming that is at the core of the personality, and of contemplation and of relaxed undirected mental inconsequence" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 109).

Inner reality becomes a fact once the individual achieves unit status with a limiting membrane; then one can refer to outside and inside. That is, "the term 'inner reality' presupposes the existence of an inside and an outside, and therefore of a limiting membrane belonging to what I would now call the 'psyche-soma'" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 129, footnote). According to Winnicott (1971a) the inner reality is "biologically determined" (p. 103), and intimately related to "personal body functioning" (p. 98), and because of this it is "relatively constant" (p. 103). That is, this inner world is based on physiological processes and functions and their imaginative elaborations. "The inner world of the individual builds up in three main ways: A. Instinctual experiences. B. Stuffs incorporated, held or eliminated. C. Whole

relationships or situations magically introjected" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 272). So physiological processes of instinctual stimulation, ingestion and elimination or expulsion become the basis for a rich inner world of good and bad objects, introjection, projection. Life impulses and dreams belong to the internal world of the individual; remembered dreams reduce the split between this hidden, internal life and the external, objective world.

The intermediate area of experience complements the remembering of dreams in this task of bridging the internal and the external worlds of the individual. Winnicott introduced this term to designate "a place for living that is not properly described by either of the terms 'inner' and 'outer'" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 106). It contrasts with the external world of purposeful and directed behavior and of objective perception and common property; it also contrasts with the internal world of impulses and dreams and relaxed mental activity and spontaneous floundering and personal gestures and communications. The intermediate area of experience involves an active and alive interchange between the internal and the external, between the subjective and the objective, between creation and perception, between the personal and the shared, between the original and the common, between the spontaneous and the deliberate. This is the area of "a significant exchange with the world, a

two-way process in which self-enrichment alternates with the discovery of meaning in the world of seen things" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 113). It is the area in which creative perception exists, in which imagination and the objective world can join together. In contrast with the spontaneity of the inner life and with the intentionality and deliberateness of external life, experiences in this intermediate area are characterized by "concentrated deliberate attention, deliberate but without too much of the deliberateness of trying" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 109).

This intermediate area of experience is "a highly variable factor (from individual to individual)" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 103); it can be extremely narrow or broad, "the extent of this third area can be minimal or maximal, according to the summation of actual experiences" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 107). The phenomena that may be experienced in this area (or in this mode) have "infinite variability" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 98). The following are examples of the activities that may populate this intermediate area of experience: "listening to a Beethoven symphony or making a pilgrimage to a picture gallery or reading Troilus and Cressida in bed, or playing tennis ... a child ... sitting on the floor playing with toys under the aegis of the mother ... a group of teenagers ... participating in a pop session" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 105). Winnicott seems to include in the term

intermediate experiences all deliberate activities that involve enjoyment; he asked, "where are we when we are ... enjoying ourselves?" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 106) and responded that we are in this intermediate area of experience. He stated: "I am looking at the highly sophisticated adult's enjoyment of living or of beauty or of abstract human contrivance, and at the same time at the creative gesture of a baby who reaches out for the mother's mouth and feels her teeth, and at the same time looks into her eyes, seeing her creatively" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 106). Thus, these experiences which join deliberate action and personal enjoyment, behavior in the shared world and spontaneity and creativity, cannot be described in terms of either inner or outer worlds: they join the two worlds, stem from both, profit from both, and contribute to both.

The above is only a basic sketch of Winnicott's notion of the intermediate area of experience. Much more could be said about it; and indeed more will be said once its origins and its more primitive and basic manifestations are explored. The concepts of the transitional object and transitional phenomena refer to the primitive manifestations of the intermediate area of experience; these concepts will be discussed in the following section.

The Transitional Object and Transitional Phenomena

As a basis for an exploration of the transitional object and transitional phenomena, it is important to restate Winnicott's defining statements on these concepts, since he himself referred to these as a definition. These statements seem to convey the essence of the transitional object and transitional phenomena:

> I have introduced the terms 'transitional objects' and 'transitional phenomena' for designation of the intermediate area of experience, between the thumb and the teddy bear, between the oral erotism and the true object-relationship, between primary creative activity and projection of what has already been introjected, between primary unawareness of indebtedness and the acknowledgment of indebtedness ('Say: "ta"').
>
> By this definition an infant's babbling and the way in which an older child goes over a repertory of songs and tunes while preparing for sleep come within the intermediate area as transitional phenomena, along with the use made of objects that are not part of the infant's body yet are not fully recognized as belonging to external reality. (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 2)

The above definition establishes the transitional object and transitional phenomena as intermediate kinds of experiences; it also states the specific developmental context in which they appear, and through this, I believe, establishes them as very specific kinds of intermediate experiences. The developmental context in which these phenomena exist is central in determining the way they are experienced. The transitional object and transitional phenomena appear at a time in development in which the infant has emerged from a stage in which auto-erotism and

oral stimulation and satisfaction were the focus of experience, a stage of primary process functioning in which hallucinatory wish-fulfillment was the rule, in which boundaries between inner and outer did not exist, and thus the external world was not known as such and the infant felt magically omnipotent. Yet the infant is just emerging from this state, and has just begun the long process toward secondary-process functioning and reality-testing, which will include a firm sense of boundaries between inner and outer and a giving-up of magical omnipotence, and which will enable the development of true object-relations and of true interpersonal relations between separate individuals. Developmentally, the infant is in an intermediate stage, having emerged from his primitive protective shell of earliest infancy, in the process of becoming a unit, a separate individual.

This developmental stage which determines the infant's functioning during this period, determines also his experience; and the transitional object and transitional phenomena, central during this stage, are experienced in a way characteristic of and unique to this stage. These phenomena are experienced between the thumb and the teddy-bear, that is, not any more as something constituting a part of the infant, but not yet as something separate from it; not any more as an object of pure auto-erotic, oral stimulation, but not yet an object

with which intricate interpersonal relationships exist; not any more as a mental product of the infant's creativity over which he has magical control, but not yet as an external object onto whom the infant may project, but whose existence is not based on that projection and over whom the infant has no control. This experience, I believe, is the central characteristic of the transitional object and transitional phenomena; and these phenomena aid in the process toward achieving the higher state of development, as will be seen when exploring their functions.

It seems clear how "objects that are not part of the infant's body yet are not fully recognized as belonging to external reality" fit the above definition. These are the transitional objects, objects that are found by the infant and used in creating such an intermediate experience, and which become very important to the child. Yet, Winnicott (1971a) also suggested that "an infant's babbling and the way in which an older child goes over a repertory of songs and tunes while preparing for sleep come within the intermediate area as transitional phenomena" (p. 2). While it is less clear how this is so, the common denominator between these phenomena and the transitional object seems to be the experience involved. Babbling, just like rubbing one's face with a soft blanket, goes beyond total self-involvement, pure bodily stimulation,

hallucinatory withdrawal and detachment from reality: In the imitation of the maternal sounds, there is an implied acknowledgment of the outside world, an emergence from pure auto-erotism and primary process, a beginning contact with the world. An infant babbling, or a child singing to himself, could not be described solely in terms of internal, mental experiences; nor could he be described in terms of involvement and behavior in the external world. These activities, like the transitional object, involve the child in an intermediate kind of experience, in an intermediate world.

Winnicott often stated that "the essential feature in the concept of transitional objects and transitional phenomena ... is the paradox, and the acceptance of the paradox: the baby creates the object, but the object was there waiting to be created" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 89). Again, this statement is clear with regard to the transitional object: "The transitional object is not an internal object (which is a mental concept) - it is a possession. Yet it is not (for the infant) an external object either" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 9). The object is at the same time the infant's creation and something he found lying around. The paradox is less clear with regard to transitional phenomena; but these phenomena, too, may be experienced by the infant at the same time as something he created and as something he found. Babbling, singing and

other activities may be experienced not as behaviors related to, in imitation of, originated in, taking place in, and having an effect on the actual world, but neither as fantasies or dreams, inner phenomena; instead they may be experienced as something in between, occurring neither internally nor externally, originating neither in the mother nor in the inner world.

Thus, while transitional phenomena are a more abstract concept, their commonality with the transitional object lies in the way the two phenomena are experienced. Transitional objects are a manifestation of how infants "weave other-than-me objects into the personal pattern" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 3); transitional phenomena are a manifestation of a weaving of other-than-me activities into the personal pattern, of actions that are at the same time found or perceived in the outside world and created by the infant. An infant babbling may be in an intermediate state, being in contact with both the talking or singing mother and with the inner, personal, creative self.

This is why when talking about the intermediate area of experience, of which the transitional object and transitional phenomena are specific instances, Winnicott (1971a) referred to "the interplay of the edges of two curtains, or of the surface of a jug that is placed in front of another jug" (p. 98). The experience in

transitional objects and transitional phenomena is that of two worlds fusing, coming together, being superimposed, resulting from the juxtaposition of aspects from the internal and the external worlds of the individual.

Yet, the concept of transitional phenomena is clearly a more elusive and ambiguous one, since even hidden, unnoticed activities can be experienced as transitional phenomena. According to Winnicott: "Sometimes, instead of objects, we find techniques, like humming, or more hidden activities such as the matching of lights seen or the study of the interplay of borders--as between two curtains that move slightly in the breeze or the overlap of two objects that change in relation to each other according to movements of the infant's head. Sometimes thinking takes the place of visible activities" (Winnicott, 1957b, p. 186). Any activity in which aspects of the external world are joined with inner, personal elements, with imagination, with creativity, are at that moment experienced neither as external, nor as internal, but as both at the same time.

A central statement of Winnicott, which may elucidate another aspect of the transitional phenomena, and of their common thread with the transitional object, is that "something is important here other than oral excitement and satisfaction, although this may be the basis of everything else" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 2). The

transitional object and transitional phenomena indicate an emergence from the stage in which auto-erotism is the center of experience; they involve new motivations and needs. According to Winnicott (1971a), "in common experience one of the following occurs, complicating an auto-erotic experience such as thumb-sucking" (p. 3): When with the other hand the baby caresses his face, or holds a blanket, or rubs his face with a cloth, or when he mouths or mumbles or babbles while sucking his thumb, the activity cannot be described any more in terms of auto-erotic stimulation alone. "There are two things going on here: the first, with some part of the hand in the mouth, being clearly related to the excited feeling; the second is one stage further displaced from excitement and is more nearly affectionate (Winnicott, 1957b, p. 183). New motives, needs and experiences are under way, "complicating" oral-erotism. The transitional object and transitional phenomena may involve auto-eoric or oral stimulation; the important thing is that they involve more than only that.

We have covered, I believe, the essence of the transitional object and transitional phenomena. Other characteristics are important, and are helpful in identifying them. Winnicott (1971a) placed their appearance "at about four to six to eight to twelve months. Purposely I leave room for wide variations" (p.

4). These phenomena often become very important to the infant at times of stress, depression, loneliness, separation, transitions, or at bedtime; the reasons behind this will be understood when we explore the functions of the phenomena (see below). At a concrete level, this can be seen as the use of the object; and since Winnicott stated that when talking about the transitional object he was not referring to the object per se but to the use of the object, often the transitional object has been defined by these concrete uses. Winnicott's repeated inquiry in "Therapeutic Consultations in Child Psychiatry" (1971b) about the children's techniques for going to sleep as a way of arriving at their transitional objects and transitional phenomena, may create the impression that he, too, equated techniques for going to sleep--or for soothing at times of stress and separation--with transitional objects and transitional phenomena. However, even if transitional phenomena were often (or always) used for going to sleep, and inquiring about techniques for going to sleep would then be a good way of arriving at these phenomena, this would not mean that any technique used qualifies as transitional phenomena. As stated earlier, when Winnicott talked about "the use of the object" he appeared not to be talking on a concrete level; he was, instead, referring to how the object is experienced (i.e., in the intermediate area) and to what

its functions are (which will be explored below).

The acceptance of the transitional object and transitional phenomena by the infant's environment is an important element in the experience: The environment accepts the paradox, agrees not to challenge the infant as to the origin of the transitional object, not to ask the question 'did you create it or find it?', not to destroy the object's special qualities (or, I assume, interfere with the transitional activities); it accepts the rights that the infant assumes over the object. Only then can the infant maintain the sense that, although he found the object, he created it, which is the essence of the transitional experience. Because of the infant's need to keep the sense of the object as created and as controlled by him, the object must never change, unless changed by the infant; parents most often cooperate with this need of the infant.

The transitional object is both loved and mutilated and must survive instinctual loving as well as hating, and even pure aggression. As will be seen later, this is central in its serving as a defense against depressive anxiety.

Finally, a central characteristic of the transitional object and transitional phenomena is that they gradually fade, disappear: The transitional object (and this applies to transitional phenomena as well) "in health ...

does not 'go inside' nor does the feeling about it necessarily undergo repression. It is not forgotten and it is not mourned. It loses meaning, and this is because the transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world as perceived by two persons in common', that is to say, over the whole cultural field" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 5).

But this moves us already into one of the central functions of the transitional object and transitional phenomena: their establishing the ground for all other intermediate experiences and for the whole cultural field. This, as well as other central functions of these phenomena, will now be explored.

Functions of the Transitional Object and Transitional Phenomena

Winnicott did not talk about different functions that the transitional object and transitional phenomena serve, but a variety of functions can be differentiated in his writings. It is clear that these functions, described below, are intimately related, to the point where it is difficult to talk about them separately. At the same time I believe that the understanding of these phenomena will be enhanced by attempting to tease out the many different ways in which they relate to development as viewed by Winnicott.

Before embarking on this task, it is important to note something which applies to all the different functions of the phenomena: I believe that Winnicott viewed transitional objects and transitional phenomena mainly as a result of development, as a manifestation of healthy developmental processes, as an achievement. At the same time these phenomena aid development; they help further the processes from which they result and within the context of which they appear. The transitional object and transitional phenomena play an important role in many different developmental processes, as described below.

1. The role of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in the establishment of a relationsip with the external world.

As reviewed above, Winnicott conceived of the newborn infant as being unaware of the external world, being in a world characterized by primary process functioning and primary creative activity, that is, hallucinations. The transitional object and transitional phenomena are a manifestation of the infant's emergence from this hallucinatory world and of his beginning contact with shared reality; they are also an important aid in the process of establishing a healthy relationship with the external world. As stated in the review of Winnicott's theory of development, such a healthy relationship implies that the awareness and acceptance of the external world do

not come at the expense of the individual's relationship with his internal world and his spontaneous self, but exist parallel to this, and in contact with it.

At first, the baby feeding at the breast is feeding from a personal object, "from a breast that is part of the infant" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 12); and at first "the infant perceives the breast only insofar as a breast could be created just there and then" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 12). "The world as it presents itself is of no meaning to the newly-developing human being unless it is created as well as discovered" (Winnicott, 1957b, p. 185). For the infant to progress in a healthy manner to the point in which the breast becomes for him an external object, he must first have the experience that he created this breast. Gradually, he begins to have a sense that the object is in fact found, but he maintains at the same time the sense that the object is his creation: He is allowed the illusion that he created the object he also found. "In infancy this intermediate area is necessary for the initiation of a relationship between the child and the world" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 13). Only in this intermediate area in which illusion exists the external world begins to be accepted in a creative manner, and a personal relationship with the common world can be established.

The transitional object and transitional phenomena

give shape to this area of illusion "which is at the basis of initiation of experience" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 14); they are both created by the infant, and found in the external world. The transitional object (and probably this applies metaphorically to transitional phenomena as well) "represents the mother's ability to present the world in such a way that the infant does not at first have to know that the object is not created by the infant" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 81). "The transitional phenomena represent the early stages of the use of illusion, without which there is no meaning for the human being in the idea of a relationship with an object that is perceived by others as external to that being" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 11).

Thus, the illusion of creating the object that is also found is central in the establishment of a healthy relationship with the external world. Only then this world is accepted in the context of the creative self, instead of being merely accepted on the basis of compliance. The transitional object and transitional phenomena, which represent the early stages of the use of illusion, are a manifestation that the spontaneity and creativity of the central self have been joined with the world's events. They help the infant accept reality while maintaining the central self alive; and, as Winnicott (1957b) stated, the "real world has much to offer, as long

as its acceptance does not mean a loss of the reality of the personal imaginative or inner world" (p. 74).

2. The role of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in the process from subjectivity to objectivity.

The process from subjectivity to objectivity is a specific aspect in the initiation of a relationship with external reality. The focus now is not on the emergence from unawareness of the external world and primary narcissism, but on the progression from a subjective to an objective world. The infant's world is at first populated by hallucinations, mental images, self-created objects. Winnicott talked about the need for "...a term that describes the infant's journey from the purely subjective to objectivity, and it seems to me that the transitional object (piece of blanket, etc.) is what we see of this journey" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 6). Because of its objective status as an external object--that is, because it is not an internal image--the transitional object represents a step toward objectivity, toward finding instead of merely creating.

Winnicott emphasized the difficulty in the process of reality acceptance: It is difficult to achieve objectivity and sanity while maintaining the spontaneous, creative, "mad" self alive. Winnicott assumed "that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and

outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 13). The transitional object and transitional phenomena, because of their illusory status--that is, their nature as external objects or activities that are experienced not only as found but also as created--allow for a very gradual separation between what is found and what is created, while keeping a relationship with both. Because the origin and location of the transitional object and transitional phenomena are not challenged, because the question 'did you find the object or did you create it' is not asked, these phenomena "exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 2).

> Evidently the task of sorting out external phenomena from dreams is a heavy one. It is a task that we all hope to be able to accomplish so that we may claim to be sane. Nevertheless, we need a resting-place from this sorting-out ... For the infant who is just starting on this terrible task of achieving adult sanity we allow an intermediate life, particularly at the time between waking and sleeping, and these phenomena that I am referring to and the objects which are used belong to the resting-place that we give to the infant at the beginning, when we only slightly expect the sorting out of the dream from the real. (Winnicott, 1957b, pp. 188-9)

In fact, these phenomena are allowed to the infant "because of the parents' intuitive recognition of the strain inherent in objective perception, and we do not

challenge the infant in regard to subjectivity or objectivity just here where there is the transitional object" (Winnicott, 1971a, pp. 13-4). The infant is allowed to feel he created an object he found. "We allow the infant this madness, and only gradually ask for a clear distinguishing between the subjective and that which is capable of objective or scientific proof" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 224). By bridging between subjectivity and objectivity, by being an unchallenged experience in which subjectivity and objectivity are allowed to co-exist, the transitional object and transitional phenomena allow for a very gradual increase in objectivity, lessening the strain involved in the process. The transitional object and transitional phenomena are the earliest instances of a joining of inner and outer, of creative perception of the external world, and thus serve in the progression toward objective perception that is related to the subjective, personal, inner world.

3. <u>The role of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in setting an intermediate area of experience</u>.

"The transitional object and the transitional phenomena start each human being off with what will always be important for them, i.e. a neutral area of experience which will not be challenged" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 12). The transitional object and transitional phenomena are the first, earliest, most primitive phenomena experienced in

the intermediate area between the subjective and the objective, between the internal and the external. Before then, everything is experienced as internal; in later years, objectivity and behavior in the external world become increasingly important. But the infant who is just beginning to acknowledge the world and to establish a relationship with it is allowed a large neutral area, a resting place between the internal and the external. "This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or external (shared) reality, constitutes the greater part of the infant's experience, and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 14).

Thus, while behavior in the objective world takes a larger and larger share in development, because of the strain inherent in separating external from internal while keeping both alive and related an intermediate area of experience is always needed. In infancy, this intermediate area of experience is manifested in the transitional object and transitional phenomena. "In health, however, there is a gradual extension of range of interest" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 4). The transitional object and transitional phenomena disappear, fade away, "they become the group of phenomena extending out into the

whole of the realm of children's play, and of cultural activities and interests -that wide area which is intermediate between living in the external world and dreaming" (Winnicott, 1957b, p. 188). This cultural field, a broad concept that includes the arts, religion, imaginative living, creative scientific work and more, represents the adult's intermediate area of experience. "We adults use the arts and religion for the off-moments which we all need in the course of reality-testing and reality-acceptance" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 224); and the transitional object and transitional phenomena start each human off in the developmental process toward such a sophisticated intermediate area of experience as is manifested in arts and religion.

One should note in this context that the common thread in this broad cultural field is that Winnicott was referring to activities that involve the individual in the external world in a creative, spontaneous, alive, personal manner. Thus, not all activities that involve art, and not all approaches to religion, are intermediate experiences. For example, Winnicott (1965b) talked about "the abstract picture that is a cul-de-sac communication, and that has no general validity" (p. 183), an example of art based on a relationship to a subjective object. Similarly, his view of religion as an intermediate experience implicitly excluded religion based on

compliance; he talked about "the futility of teaching values or religion by force" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 93). Religion as an intermediate experience is based on an alive interchange between common values or beliefs and the internal personal world of the individual: "Moral education does not work unless the infant or child has developed in himself or herself by natural developmental process the stuff that, when it is placed up in the sky, is given the name God" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 94). The similarity and continuity between transitional phenomena and this kind of religion is further illuminated in the following statements: "The baby who adopts an object as almost part of the self could not have adopted it unless it had been lying round for adoption .... as the infant grows in this way the stage becomes set for those engaged in infant- and child-care to leave lying round not only objects (such as golligows or teddy bears or dolls or toy engines) but also moral codes" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 99).

One should also note that the intermediate area of experience into which the transitional object and transitional phenomena develop is not populated by isolated, specific cultural or artistic expressions only. Winnicott referred to it as a way of experiencing the world. He seemed to categorize human experience as belonging to one of three groups: internal, or introvert experience, which is the individual's life in his inner,

private, silent and isolated world; external, or extrovert experience, the individual's life in the outside, shared world. In health, a third area exists, the intermediate area of experience, the individual's intense experiential life, that joins the external and the internal worlds, the shared and the personal, and is thus an alive, intense and creative relationship to shared reality. Although never stating so explicitly, Winnicott seemed to refer to experience in the inner world as creating, to experience in the external world as perceiving, and to life in the intermediate area as experiencing: this highlights how broad this intermediate area was for him. This experiencing, this intermediate area of experience, is built on the basis of the infant's transitional object and transitional phenomena, and of the child's play; "on the basis of playing is built the whole of man's experiential existence. We experience life in the area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 64).

4. The role of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in the development of creativity.

The importance of these phenomena in the development of creativity has been implicit in all of their above described functions. As stated, the status of these phenomena as both internal and external, as created and found, allows the infant to find and eventually perceive

the shared world in the context of his creativity; it allows him to keep alive and to develop his creative potential. The pathological alternative is an environment that does not meet the infant's personal gesture, that does not present the breast where the infant is ready to create it, that does not present the world in a way that joins with the infant's imagination. The infant then has no alternative than to accept the presenting world on the basis of compliance, and at the expense of his inner, creative tendencies.

Winnicott's concept of creativity is a broad one, not limited to the "successful or acclaimed creation" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 65). It refers, instead, to "a colouring of the whole attitude to external reality" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 65), to an attitude of creative apperception of the external world. Winnicott contrasted this attitude with "a relationship to external reality which is one of compliance, the world and its details being recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation. Compliance carries with it a sense of futility..." (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 65). On the other hand, the creative apperception that is first manifested in the transitional object and transitional phenomena is more than anything else that which "makes the individual feel that life is worth living" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 65).

The transitional object and transitional phenomena are also related to creativity in its more usual, narrow sense, or to what Winnicott called inventiveness: Inventiveness in the realm of culture requires, according to Winnicott, both acceptance of the shared world and personal contribution.

> In any cultural field it is not possible to be original except on a basis of tradition. Conversely, no one in the line of cultural contributors repeats except as a deliberate quotation, and the unforgivable sin in the cultural field is plagiarism. The interplay between originality and the acceptance of tradition as the basis for inventiveness seems to me to be just one more example, and a very exciting one, of the interplay between separateness and union. (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 99)

Thus the transitional object and transitional phenomena, which are based on the joining of originality with the acceptance of the common, are the basis of cultural inventiveness. And their special status as phenomena that both separate and join infant and mother (as will be seen below) is the basis for inventiveness in culture which both joins the individual and society, and separates him from it.

5. The role of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in the process of separating from mother.

Winnicott's notions of the newborn infant being, from his point of view, merged with his mother, and only slowly developing into a unit with a membrane that separates inner and outer, remind one of Mahler's (1969) process of

separation-individuation. Yet it is important to note in this context that Winnicott opposed the term symbiosis: For him, this term "is too well rooted in biology to be acceptable" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 152). He stated:

> The study of the mother needs to be rescued from the purely biological. The term symbiosis takes us no further than to compare the relationship of the mother and the infant with other examples in animal and plant life -physical interdependence....
>
> We are concerned with the very great psychological differences between, on the one hand, the mother's identification with the infant and, on the other, the infant's dependence on the mother; this latter does not involve identification, identification being a complex state of affairs inapplicable to the early stages of infancy. (Winnicott, 1958, p. 301)

Winnicott's views on the infant's transition from a state of merger with mother to becoming an integrated unit with a body and a skin and capable of a relationship with the outside world were summarized above. The transitional object and transitional phenomena play an important role in this long and complex process: the object (and I believe the transitional phenomena as a whole) "represents the infant's transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate" (Winnicott, 1971a, pp. 14-15; 1957b, p. 183).

Winnicott (1971a) stated: "It is true that the piece of blanket (or whatever it is) is symbolical of some part-object, such as the breast. Nevertheless, the point of it is not its symbolic value so much as its actuality. Its not being the breast (or the mother), although real,

is as important as the fact that it stands for the breast (or mother)" (p. 6). This aspect of the transitional object is the basis for its important role in aiding the infant in the process of separating from the merged state with mother: Because it stands for the mother while not being her, it helps the infant separate from the actual mother while maintaining, through the relationship with the object, some needed sense of merger with the mother. I believe that this applies to transitional phenomena as a whole: The infant's babbling or the child's singing are in a way a symbol of mother, re-creating in the child experiences with mother. In their not-being-mother yet re-creating experiences with her, they help the infant separate from the actual mother.

Winnicott emphasized that the transitional object and transitional phenomena not only separate infant and mother, but also join them: The soft blanket with which the infant rubs his face, as well as the infant's babbling, separate him from the mother, while at the same time join him and her symbolically. Their ability to join infant and mother is as central as their separating them in the important role that these phenomena play in the process of achieving separation. According to Winnicott (1971a): "With human beings there can be no separation, only a threat of separation; and the threat is maximally or minimally traumatic according to the experience of the

first separatings" (p. 108). That is, "the baby's separating-out of the world of objects from the self is achieved only through the absence of a space between" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 108). When the infant begins to emerge from a state of being merged with the mother there is a threat of separation, a potential space between the baby and the mother; by this space Winnicott (1971a) referred to "the hypothetical area that exists (but cannot exist) between the baby and the object (mother or part of mother) ... at the end of being merged in with the object" (p. 107). In health, this "potential space becomes filled with the product of the baby's own creative imagination" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 102). This potential space "can become an infinite area of separation, which the baby, child, adolescent, adult may creatively fill with playing, which in time becomes the enjoyment of the cultural heritage" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 108).

The way in which this potential space between mother and infant can become filled with the infant's creative products is rooted in Winnicott's views of healthy development, as reviewed above. In health, the infant's spontaneous gestures are met by the world as presented by mother, giving the infant the illusion that he creates what he finds; this experience of illusion joins his imagination with external reality. As the mother lessens her adaptation to her infant, the infant can continue to

have creative experiences that join him with her and fill the potential space emerging between them. These creative experiences arise naturally in such a trusting and reliable relationship, because this relationship with the ego-supportive mother allows the infant to be in a state of relaxed self-realization of which creativity and spontaneity are characteristic. That is why Winnicott (1971a) stated:

> In the experience of the more fortunate baby (and small child and adolescent and adult) the question of separation in separating does not arise, because in the potential space between the baby and the mother there appears the creative playing that arises naturally out of the relaxed state; it is here that there develops a use of symbols that stand at one and the same time for external world phenomena and for phenomena of the individual person who is being looked at. (pp. 108-9)

The transitional object and transitional phenomena are the first such symbols; they are the first creative expressions that stand at the same time for the external world and for the inner personal world. They both join and separate mother and infant. They exist in the potential space between them. This helps more fully to understand Winnicott's statement, quoted above, that the transitional object--or transitional phenomena--is located at the point in space and time of the initiation of separateness between mother and infant. In their symbolizing "the union of two now separate things" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 96), the transitional object and transitional phenomena join them, and through this they

allow the infant to separate from mother. The paradox inherent in the transitional object and transitional phenomena, the fact that they are both created and found, corresponds to a paradox in development: that separation between self and object can be achieved only through an absence of separation.

More sophisticated manifestations of experiences in the intermediate area are all, as stated, characterized by the same paradox of being external and internal phenomena, joining outer and inner. They all exist in the potential space between infant and mother, individual and society, separating them while joining them. This helps more fully explain another above quoted statement: that cultural inventiveness, which Winnicott saw as based on both originality and the acceptance of tradition, is another example of "the interplay between separateness and union" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 99). I believe that all creativity in Winnicott's sense involves a mixture of originality and commonality, of separateness and union.

6. <u>The role of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in introjection based on emotional acceptance</u>.

In the above exploration of Winnicott's meaning of religion as transitional phenomena, his comparison between the parents leaving around objects for the child to adopt and their leaving around morals was quoted. Winnicott compared the adoption of objects as transitional objects

and the adoption of morals; the transitional object and transitional phenomena are first examples of the personal adoption of external phenomena on the basis of a weaving of "other-than-me objects into the personal pattern" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 3), and thus they open the possibilities for other external phenomena to be adopted in such a personal, creative, spontaneous manner. Winnicott emphasized the impact of the environment on the growing child, how "the self becomes increasingly shaped by the environmental provision" (Winnicott, 1965b, p. 99); but in health, this shaping should not be on the basis of compliance, but of emotional acceptance. A concrete example of the difference was expressed by Winnicott (1965b) in the following statement:

> In terms of sphincter morality, it is easy to see that parents who expect the small child to comply with the regulations before reaching the stage in which self-control has meaning are depriving the child of the sense of achievement and of faith in human nature that comes from a natural progress toward sphincter control. This sort of mistaken attitude to 'training' ignores the child's maturational processes, and ignores the child's wanting to be like the other persons and animals who are in the child's worlds. (pp. 99-100)

The transitional object and transitional phenomena set the individual off in a process of adjustment to the world and adoption of values and codes on the basis of the individual's personal and spontaneous tendencies, as opposed to on the basis of compliance.

7. The role of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in the abrogation of omnipotence.

This aspect of the phenomena has been implicit in many of their previously described functions. Because they are external phenomena--in contrast to mental concepts--the transitional object and transitional phenomena represent a first step toward abrogation of magical omnipotence. At the same time, these phenomena are not yet fully recognized by the child as external to him: The child assumes rights over the object--and, metaphorically, over the activities-- and the environment agrees to such an assumption. This helps the infant maintain some sense of omnipotence, which he gradually gives up. "The transitional object is never under magical control like the internal object, nor is it outside control as the real mother is" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 10). That is why the transitional object and transitional phenomena "describe the way in which good-enough environmental provision at very early stages makes it possible for the individual to cope with the immense shock of loss of omnipotence" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 71).

8. The role of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in the building up of memories of relationships.

The transitional object and transitional phenomena stand for the internal good object. This becomes evident in situations in which the actual object leaves for an

extended time: As the internal image of it fades, the child becomes unable to use these phenomena, to use symbols in general, and to play. Thus, the appearance of the transitional object and transitional phenomena is a manifestation of the building up of an internal image of the good object. "They are evidence that things are going well in the child's emotional development and that memories of relationships are beginning to be built up" (Winnicott, 1957b, p. 183). "Memories of good situation-holding experiences help the child to tide over short periods in which the mother fails, and they provide the basis first for the 'transitional object'..." (Winnicott, 1958, p. 276).

One could also say, then, that the transitional object, and transitional phenomena, in turn help maintain the memories of good situation-holding experiences, the image of the good-mother, since they help the child to tide over short periods in which mother fails.

9. <u>The role of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in the development of symbolization</u>.

According to Winnicott (1971a), "when we witness an infant's employment of a transitional object, the first not-me possession, we are witnessing both the child's first use of a symbol and the first experience of play" (p. 63). This statement equating the transitional object with the first use of a symbol should be viewed in the

context of other statements, in which Winnicott emphasized that the transitional object is not a symbol per se yet, but an indication of progress toward the attainment of symbols. He stated:

> When symbolism is employed the infant is already clearly distinguishing between fantasy and fact, between inner objects and external objects, between primary creativity and perception. But ... I think there is use for a term for the root of symbolism in time, a term that describes the infant's journey from the purely subjective to objectivity; and it seems to me that the transitional object (piece of blanket, etc.) is what we see of this journey of progress toward experiencing. (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 6)

Thus, the transitional object might be more accurately referred to as a precursor of symbols. Although Winnicott referred in this context only to the transitional object, I believe that his statements on this subject apply to transitional phenomena as a whole: Transitional phenomena stand for external world phenomena and are symbols (or pre-symbols) of these, albeit more abstract ones.

10. <u>The place of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in the development of play</u>.

Winnicott was quoted above as stating that the transitional object is the infant's first use of play. Again, I believe that this applies to transitional phenomena as a whole. And again, the notion of the transitional object and transitional phenomena being the first instance of play should be viewed in the context of

Winnicott's reference to transitional phenomena developing into play. I believe that we can conclude that Winnicott had in mind a notion of the transitional object and transitional phenomena as precursors of play, sharing many of the characteristics of play per se and leading into it. Thus, according to Winnicott play appears at the stage in which the infant begins to emerge from being merged with mother, and this is exactly the stage in which the transitional object and transitional phenomena appear. These phenomena, like play in general, do not exist inside or outside, but in the intermediate area of experience.

Winnicott emphasized the excitement involved in play, an excitement which stems not from the involvement of instincts, but from the magic involved in the experience of play, that is, in "the precariousness of the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 47). "The precariousness of play belongs to the fact that it is always on the theoretical line between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 50). The transitional object and transitional phenomena lie in such a line as well; they share the precariousness that characterizes the experience of play, and they can be seen as an early form of play.

11. The role of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in defending against depressive anxiety.

As quoted above, Winnicott stated that the transitional object and transitional phenomena are a defense against anxiety, especially anxiety of a depressive kind. Winnicott did not elaborate on this statement, and never repeated it. But a brief review of his notions on the depressive position and depressive anxiety, as well as other statements of his on the transitional object and transitional phenomena, help explain how these phenomena may defend against depressive anxiety.

The depressive position belongs, according to Winnicott, to a time in development between the infant being merged with mother and the toddler being in a family situation working out his instinctual life; this coincides with the stage of the transitional object and transitional phenomena. Winnicott did not see the term depressive position as appropriate; he stated that "the term 'depressive position' is a bad name for a normal process, but no one has been able to find a better. My own suggestion was that it should be called 'the Stage of Concern'" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 264). Winnicott claimed that the emphasis is not on the infant passing through a stage of depression, but on his progressing from a

ruthless stage to a stage of concern. "At first the infant (from our point of view) is ruthless; there is no concern yet as to results of instinctual love.... the change of ruthlessness to ruth occurs gradually, under certain definite conditions of mothering, during the period around five to twelve months" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 265).

During this stage of development "the infant has the chance to work through the consequences of instinctual experiences" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 263). The infant has to integrate his love and his hate. He also has to integrate the two corresponding maternal objects: Before this happens the mother is, for the infant, split into the environmental mother who embodies all that the infant loves in her as his caretaker, and the object-mother, the object of the infant's assaults during phases of instinctual tension. The baby is vulnerable to two kinds of anxieties at this stage: "Instinctual experience brings the baby two types of anxiety. The first is ... anxiety about the object of instinctual love. The mother is not the same after as before ... there is a hole, where previously there was a full body of richness ... The other anxiety is of the infant's own inside. The infant has had an experience and does not feel the same as before" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 268). The infant is anxious about the imagined hole in the body of the mother which is

perceived as resulting from his instinctual experience, and is anxious about whether what is inside himself is good and self-supporting or bad and persecutory.

Given good-enough mothering--which in this context means mainly that the mother holds the situation in time, giving the infant the opportunity to work through his instinctual experience, that she survives, and that she survives without retaliating--the infant begins to integrate his love and hate, and to integrate the images of mother. "The infant realizes that the 'quiet' mother was involved in the full tide of instinctual experience, and has survived" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 268). In addition, the good-enough mother who survived, and who knows her infant's gift gestures when these are made and accepts these, is also giving her infant the opportunity for reparation and restitution; this is important in helping the infant integrate his love and his hate.

How do the transitional object and transitional phenomena help defend against depressive anxiety? Winnicott talked repeatedly about the characteristic way in which the transitional object is both loved and hated, and how "it must survive instinctual loving, and also hating and, if it be a feature, pure aggression" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 4). "There is nothing that may not happen to this thing, which becomes subjected to a very primitive form of loving -a mixture of affectionate

caressing and destructive attack" (Winnicott, 1957b, p. 184). I believe that these statements explain how the transitional object may defend against depressive anxiety: In its being subjected to instinctual loving, hating, and even pure aggression, yet surviving, the transitional object helps the infant work through his instinctual experiences, gradually aiding him in integrating his love and his hate, as well as part objects that are loved and alternately hated. Through this, the transitional object lessens the anxiety that accompanies the working through of instinctual experiences and of their consequences vis-a-vis the maternal object.

It is less clear how this function of the transitional object applies to transitional phenomena as well. One can assume that transitional phenomena, by their symbolizing the maternal object and reproducing experiences with her, may become alternately fused with aggression and with love; and through their survival over time, they may help the infant similarly work through the anxieties characteristic of this stage. In addition, by the mere fact that transitional phenomena are a symbol of mother and reproduce experiences with her while being under the infant's control, they defend against the anxiety that results from the sense of having damaged the maternal object.

12. The role of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in maintaining the infant's relationship with his central self.

While this function of the phenomena has been implicit in all the above functions, it is important to isolate it and to emphasize it, since Winnicott's view of healthy development was intimately tied to the continued expression of the individual's central self. The transitional object and transitional phenomena are the first manifestations of a variety of developments that are largely based on the impact of the environment and of the external world on the individual (e.g., the initiation of a relationship with external reality, the development of objective perception, the abrogation of magical omnipotence); yet at the same time they are creative products of the individual, and keep an intimate relationship with the individual's central self. Through this they usher in a manner of adaptation to the world, they initiate the individual in healthy development which integrates the impact of the environment and the need to adapt to it with the aliveness, creativity and spontaneity of the central self.

How much the transitional object is tied to the central self is expressed in a concrete manner in Winnicott's (1971a) statement on why parents allow the object to get dirty: "The mother lets it get dirty and

even smelly, knowing that by washing it she introduces a break in continuity in the infant's experience, a break that may destroy the meaning and value of the object to the infant" (p. 4). It is almost as if the transitional object were a receptacle of the infant's central self, and the same continuity of being that characterizes the existence of this central self in health should characterize the transitional object's existence. The object "must never change, unless changed by the infant" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 5); this could be seen as a concrete manifestation of how the infant should not be changed by forceful impact from the environment, but should be allowed to change by his own maturational processes.

Not only the transitional object and transitional phenomena, but also all the more sophisticated forms of experiences in the intermediate area, continue to allow the expression of the individual's central self, and its impact on the individual's reaction to the world. All of these experiences are based on what Winnicott called "ego-relatedness" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 101), that is, on the infant's relationship with the ego-supportive mother which allows him, and later the adult, to be in a state of relaxed self-realization, and have spontaneous, intense, personal experiences.

According to Winnicott (1957b), "happy are those whose feet are well planted on the earth, yet who have

kept the capacity for enjoying intense sensations" (pp. 72-3). The transitional object and transitional phenomena start the human being in the process toward this dual capacity of maintaining a firm relationship with the objective world while enjoying the intense emotional experiences that are a manifestation of the aliveness of the central self. These phenomena are an expression of the madness allowed to infants; but some madness is an important element in health, and this madness continues to be experienced and expressed in more sophisticated intermediate experiences. "Through artistic expression we can hope to keep in touch with our primitive selves whence the most intense feelings and even fearfully acute sensations derive, and we are poor indeed if we are only sane" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 150, footnote). This clarifies why Winnicott (1958) referred to the intermediate area of experience also as "intermediate area of primary madness" (p. 224), a madness which is central to his view of psychic health.

13. <u>The role of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in achieving and maintaining integration</u>.

Again, this function of the transitional object and transitional phenomena has been implicit in all of the above, but deserves to be explicitly noted. In their bridging the dream life and reality, subjectivity and

objectivity, the child's relationship to his inner world and to the shared world, these phenomena help the child integrate experiences, as well as parts of his self. "The object is one of the bridges that make contact possible between the individual psyche and external reality" (Winnicott, 1965a, p. 149); this applies, I believe, to transitional phenomena as a whole.

Moreover, the transitional object and transitional phenomena initiate the child in the intermediate area of experience, which will forever be important in helping him maintain integration. "Play, and the use of the art forms, and religious practice, tend in various but allied ways towards a unification and general integration of the personality. For instance, play can easily be seen to link the individual's relation to inner personal reality with his relation to external or shared reality" (Winnicott, 1957a, p. 151).

According to Winnicott, the transitional object and transitional phenomena, as well as the more sophisticated play, also help the child integrate fantasy and body functioning. These phenomena are still fused with sensuality, and often with auto-erotism, but are a step removed from it, are also symbols, and are suffused with imagination and fantasy as well. Thus, according to Winnicott (1957a) "it is in play that the child links ideas with bodily function" (p. 151). He referred to "the

healthy tendency that there is in play which relates the two aspects of life to each other, bodily functioning and the aliveness of ideas. Play is the alternative to sensuality in the child's effort to keep whole" (p. 151).

Yet, Winnicott emphasized mostly the way the transitional object and transitional phenomena bridge internal and external life, subjectivity and objectivity, the relationship to the central self and the relationship to the outside world. His description of the consequences of losing the transitional object and transitional phenomena highlights the way these phenomena help integration:

> If we deprive a child of the transitional objects and disturb the established transitional phenomena, then the child has only one way out, which is a split in the personality, with one half related to a subjective world and the other reacting on a compliance basis to the world which impinges. When this split is formed and the bridges between the subjective and the objective are destroyed, or have never been well formed, the child is unable to operate as a total human being. (Winnicott, 1965a, pp. 144-5)

Final Statement

The following diagram (Figure 1), which is a juxtaposition of two diagrams offered by Winnicott (1958, p. 224), can serve as an appropriate final statement on his views of the transitional object and transitional phenomena. This diagram condenses in it some of Winnicott's notions on the location of the phenomena, in time as well as in place, and on some of their functions.

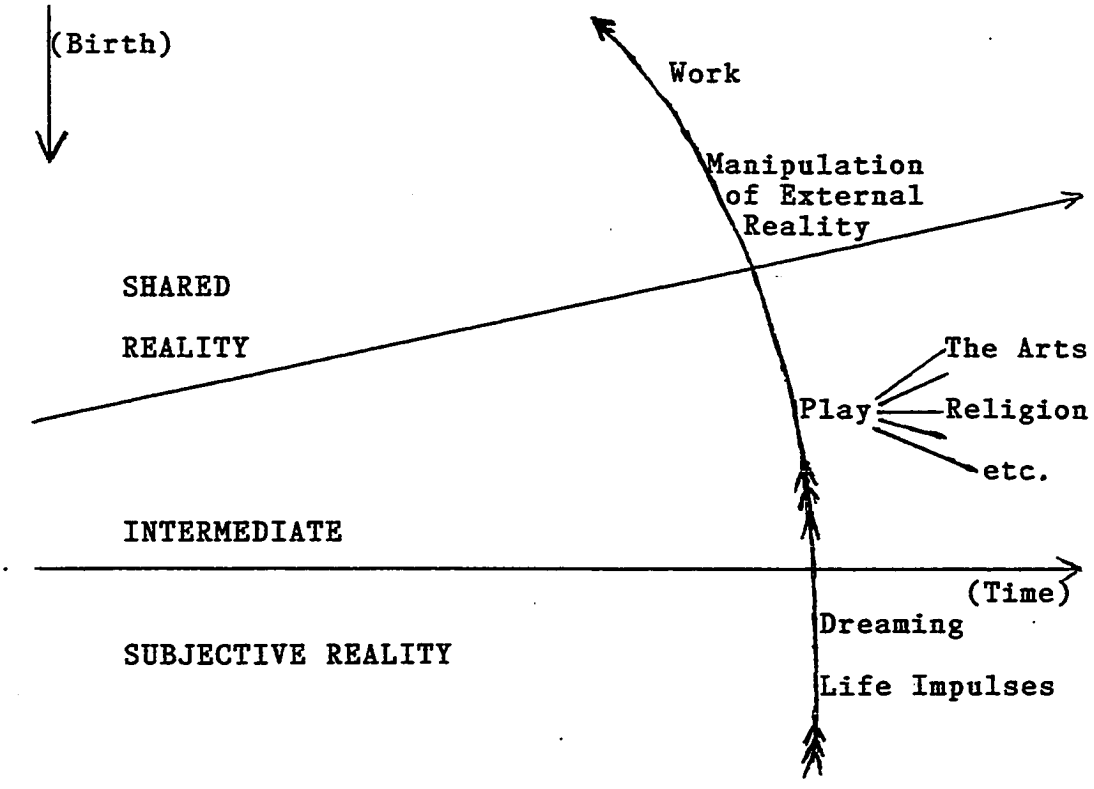

Figure 1. The Intermediate Area of Experience

Note. Adapted from Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis (p. 224) by D.W. Winnicott, 1958, New York: Basic Books

The transitional object and transitional phenomena, although not explicit in the above diagram, are implied in the term intermediate; we know that they appear in this intermediate area between the subjective and shared reality, and that they appear earlier in time than play per se.

The above diagram (Figure 1) is not an accurate description of some of Winnicott's views, and can be misleading. For example, Winnicott stated repeatedly in his writings that at birth the external and the subjective worlds are not separate; yet, in this diagram they are depicted as being so. Also, the diagram illustrates the way in which the intermediate area of experience broadens gradually into the whole range of cultural experiences; yet, at times Winnicott also stated that the individual is allowed a broader intermediate area of experience during infancy than later in life. Thus, while it may be tempting to reduce Winnicott's notions to such a clear and succint diagram, his views are too complex for that.

On the other hand, the above diagram (Figure 1) adds an important element to what has been said about Winnicott's notions, something which he never explicitly stated: Although he talked in terms of three distinct areas of experience (i.e., internal, intermediate and external), he perceived experiences as being in a continuum from subjective to objective, from internal to

external. This continuum, according to his diagram, ranges from the impulse life as internal phenomena on which the impact of the environment is minimal, to work, a deliberate activity in the external world which may be dissociated from subjective life. Intermediate experiences themselves also differ in the extent in which they are impacted by the subjective life of the individual or by the world of shared reality.

In addition, this diagram (Figure 1) highlights in a clear way some of Winnicott's notions: It expresses how the distance between the subjective and the objective worlds of the individual grows with development. It also shows how the intermediate area of experience correspondingly broadens, filling the potential space between the inner life and the external world, separating between them while joining them. In addition, the diagram expresses how play (which may include the transitional object and transitional phenomena) broadens into a variety of cultural interests.

This diagram (Figure 1) can thus stand in place of a brief summary of Winnicott's notions on the transitional object and transitional phenomena; although much is left out of it, it does highlight in a very clear manner some of his central notions on these phenomena.

Winnicott's Writings as a Source of Confusion

As stated in Chapter Two, the literature on the transitional object and transitional phenomena is plagued with ambiguities and confusion. Many of these can be traced back to Winnicott's writings on the subject. Some of the sources of confusion in Winnicott's writings will now be explored. At the same time, it should be recognized that in his writings Winnicott was dealing with phenomena which are intrinsically elusive and difficult to define. His focus was on the intrapsychic characteristics of these phenomena: on the way they are experienced, their meaning, their functions in development. The elusive nature of the transitional object and transitional phenomena often remains unappreciated because the prototypical transitional object, the security blanket, is so readily observed. But Winnicott's concepts refer equally to more elusive, silent and hidden phenomena. The elusiveness of the transitional object and transitional phenomena will be more thoroughly discussed in Chapter Six.

On the other hand, one should also recognize that Winnicott's writing style contributed to the present confusion in the literature. The above summary of Winnicott's notions was introduced with a note as to the unsystematic nature of his writings. Thus, the summary compiled his ideas on the transitional object and

transitional phenomena, ideas which in the original were spread through a great number of his writings. Only a very broad reading of Winnicott, based on cross-references that elucidate his ideas, results in an understanding of his notions. While Winnicott did offer one article focusing on the transitional object and transitional phenomena, this article, read in isolation, contains many obscure statements. Its vagueness leads to divergent interpretations and to misunderstandings.

The fact that Winnicott never offered a concise, coherent definition of the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena has been a central source of confusion. Moreover, his offering instead a series of descriptive or theoretical characteristics or criteria--see, for example, his "Summary of Special Qualities in the Relationship" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 5)--has increased the confusion: It resulted in different people choosing different criteria and characteristics as defining aspects of the phenomena, and to still others adding characteristics and criteria of their own.

Winnicott's confusing use of the terms intermediate area of experience, cultural experience, play, transitional phenomena and transitional objects, often using some of these interchangeably, added to the confusion. At times he used the term play in a broad manner, covering transitional objects and transitional

phenomena and children's play (and even adult experiences in the intermediate area); at other times he explicitly distinguished between the different concepts, referring to transitional objects and transitional phenomena as early phenomena that precede and lead into play. Similarly, at times the terms transitional phenomena, intermediate experiences and cultural experiences seem in his writings to be interchangeable; at other times the term intermediate experiences seems to be presented as the broader concept covering the other two, with the transitional phenomena referring to an early and primitive manifestation of these experiences, and cultural experiences being a much more sophisticated form of the phenomena.

The most prevalent example of Winnicott's confusing treatment of concepts is his use of the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena. Winnicott oscillated in his writings between treating these two terms as distinct yet intimately related parallel concepts; treating the transitional object as one instance of the broader transitional phenomena, as one way in which transitional phenomena can be manifested; and treating the transitional object as the focus of his theory, creating the impression that this was his central concern.

Thus, after describing activities which he called transitional phenomena, he added that out of these

activities "there may emerge some thing.... Perhaps some soft object or other type of object has been found and used by the infant, and this then becomes what I am calling a transitional object" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 4); this suggests that the transitional object is one instance of transitional phenomena. Similarly, his statement that "this first possession is used in conjunction with special techniques derived from very early infancy" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 4) suggests that the transitional object is used in conjunction with transitional phenomena, as part of transitional phenomena. If this is so, then the two phenomena are not independent; rather, transitional phenomena become the central notion which covers the transitional object.

On the other hand, throughout his writings Winnicott repeatedly focussed on concrete objects, and on "the first 'not-me' possession." At those times he seemed to be referring only to the transitional object, thereby creating the impression that much of what he wrote referred only to transitional objects, and that here was his emphasis and this concept was his main theoretical contribution.

To clarify on his repeated focus on concrete objects, Winnicott added in a footnote to his article "The Location of Cultural Experience" (Winnicott, 1971a, ch. 7): "It is necessary to simplify matters by referring to the use of

objects, but the title of my original paper was 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena' (1951)" (p. 98). This statement did not clarify much: it created the impression that whatever Winnicott said about concrete objects applied to transitional phenomena as a whole, but this was not explicitly stated. This statement left even less clear whether that would be so in all instances of his talking about objects, or whether at times Winnicott meant to refer specifically to the transitional object only. Thus, it is left to the reader to decide whether a specific statement about concrete objects applied to transitional phenomena as a whole as well; it is also left to us to decide how such application would be performed. For example, when Winnicott (1971a) stated that the essential paradox in the phenomena is that "the baby creates the object, but the object was there waiting to be created" (p. 89), it is left to us to conclude how this applies metaphorically to transitional phenomena. A similar task is left to the reader regarding statements such as "the infant assumes rights over the object," and "the object is affectionately cuddled as well as excitedly loved and mutilated," and "it must survive instinctual loving, and also hating, and if it be a feature, pure aggression" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 5).

The title of Winnicott's original article on the subject condenses and highlights his confusing treatment

of the terms. The full title of his original article on the subject, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena: A Study of the First Not-Me Possession" (1953), heralds the confusing treatment of the terms: While the term transitional phenomena seems to be broader and to subsume the term transitional object, Winnicott did not call his article "Transitional Objects and Other Transitional Phenomena", or "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena as a Whole". His main title, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena", suggests two distinct concepts of equal importance, which are related but which warrant separate consideration. Yet Winnicott's inclusion of the sub-title, "a study of the first not-me possession," suggests a focus on the transitional object, even to the exclusion of the transitional penomena. This highlights the confusing treatment of the relationship between the terms throughout Winnicott's writings.

There are many other examples of the lack of clarity in Winnicott's treatment of the terms transitional object, transitional phenomena, intermediate area of experience, play and cultural experience. In my view, Winnicott's confusing treatment of these terms and of the relationship between them has led to obvious confusion in the use of the terms in the literature. Moreover, it has encouraged divergent interpretations of his writings, and different

views of the importance of the different phenomena. Primarily, it has led to a lack of appreciation of the importance of understanding the theoretical relationship among Winnicott's different concepts and among the phenomena to which he referred.

Yet, much of the confusion that followed Winnicott's writings stems from a lack of understanding of the spirit in which Winnicott wrote. Winnicott did not offer his writings as scientific, objective truth, but they were for him an instance of an intermediate experience, a transitional phenomenon loosely speaking. His writings incorporate much of the observed, of shared reality; but there is in them also much of the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional intensity, the floundering relaxation that characterizes the subjective world.

Reading Winnicott is, in a way, a transitional or intermediate experience, which has many of the characteristics of play: It speaks both to the soul and to the mind, it is both emotionally stirring and intellectually or scientifically stimulating; it links the inner with the shared or objective; it elicits some of the precariousness which characterizes experiences in the fine line between the subjective and the objective; it is exciting. This is, I think, one of the main sources of Winnicott's widespread appeal, and of his being widely appreciated in the psychoanalytic community in spite of

the unsystematic and obscure quality of his writings: he speaks not only to the scientist and thinker in us, but also to our creative, spontaneous, sensitive parts.

To Winnicott, the creativity and originality in his, and others', writings seemed almost as important as the common and the objective. Thus, in his introduction to the 1971 edition of Playing and Reality, Winnicott stated that he may disagree with Dr. Solomon's views on the transitional objects; but he did not even specify in what ways he disagreed, "the important thing is that with a theory of transitional phenomena at hand many old problems can be looked at afresh" (p. xiii).

Winnicott meant for his writings to stimulate creative thinking, not to stagnate it. Yet, one has to accept the playful, creative spirit in which Winnicott wrote in order to be able to benefit from his perceptive obsevations and insights without being limited and constricted by his ideas.

Finally, some of the chaos in the literature seems to come from an intrinsically confusing aspect of the transitional object, transitional phenomena and intermediate experiences as a whole, a confusion which is related to yet another meaning of the term transitional: "These things seem to exist in a layer in between the superficial and the deep, in between the simple examination of obvious facts and a probing into the

obscure realms of the unconscious" (Winnicott, 1957b, p. 182). As seen in Chapters Two and Three--and in the artificial split they reflected between the empirical and the theoretical writings on these concepts--studies on the phenomena often either stayed on the descriptive, obvious level, or delved into the theoretical but often dissociated themselves from the observed and the factual. In the difficulty bridging the descriptive and the dynamic or theoretical approaches we may be witnessing a manifestation of the difficulty bridging subjectivity and objectivity, originality and commonality, creativity and the world of shared reality.

Chapter Six

Discussion

The present investigation has been an attempt to re-examine the status of the transitional object and transitional phenomena in the literature. These concepts are used and applied with such frequency, that the impression may be created that what they refer to is clear to all. Yet, a closer look at the literature reveals how ambiguous and vague these concepts remain.

Chapters Two and Three of the present paper highlighted some of the ambiguities and the lack of clarity on central issues regarding the transitional object and transitional phenomena. The subsequent review of Winnicott's views on development, and of his writings on the transitional object and transitional phenomena, was offered as an initial step in re-examining some of the problematic aspects of these concepts. The present chapter will formulate possible ways in which the ambiguous and unclear issues might be resolved: These will be based on the suggested interpretations of Winnicott's writings. Finally, ideas for further research will be presented, so that a firmer understanding of the concepts might gradually emerge.

Re-Examining Some Difficult Issues: Possible Solutions

A basic aspect that remains obscure and unresolved is the manner in which the transitional object and transitional phenomena should be defined. As noted in Chapter Two, attempts at defining these phenomena in terms of their intrapsychic meaning have been criticized as involving speculation. An alternative, frequent approach has been to attempt to define the phenomena descriptively (e.g., as objects and techniques that comfort; techniques used in going to sleep; attachment objects or treasured objects; security blankets). Yet, the implications of such an approach and the potential difficulties it creates have not been addressed. Descriptive definitions, of concepts, diagnostic categories, behavior and other phenomena, might be simpler and more easily applied; yet in some instances they might create more confusion than they help to clarify. The following statements by Anna Freud (1965), while referring to the difference between descriptive and metapsychological assessment of pathology, are useful in highlighting the important differences between descriptive and metapsychological definitions of phenomena in general, and of transitional objects and transitional phenomena in particular. She stated:

> The descriptive nature of many of the current diagnostic categories runs counter to the essence of psychoanalytic thinking, since it emphasizes the identity of or difference between manifest symptomatology while neglecting those of the

> underlying pathogenic factors. It is true that in this manner a classification of disturbances is achieved which seems orderly and comprehensive to the superficial glance. But such a schema does nothing to advance deeper understanding or to promote differential diagnoses in a metapsychological sense. On the contrary, whenever the analyst accepts diagnostic thinking on this level, he is inevitably led into confusion in assessment and subsequently to erroneous therapeutic inferences.
>
> To name a few examples in place of many: terms such as temper tantrum, truancy, wandering, separation anxiety, etc., subsume under the same heading a variety of clinical pictures in which behavior and symptomatology are similar, although, according to their underlying metapsychological pathogenesis, they belong to totally different analytic categories and call for different therapeutic handling. (Freud, 1965, p 110-111)

I suggest that terms such as attachment objects, treasured objects or soothing objects may also subsume a variety of experiences and of uses of objects and a variety of underlying internal processes that may behaviorally appear as similar. One should keep in mind Anna Freud's (1965) statement: "Thinking in descriptive terms, useful as it may be in its own area, becomes disastrous when taken as a starting point for analytic inferences" (p. 113).

The important differences between the descriptive and the metapsychological or dynamic approaches to defining and assessing tend to be overlooked. Such differences are particularly important when talking about the transitional object and transitional phenomena: These terms, as introduced by Winnicott, are psychodynamic, not descriptive. The concept of <u>transitional</u> was not used by

him descriptively; its meaning was not limited to 'temporary' or to 'pertinent to a transitional stage in development.' Rather, by transitional Winnicott referred to an intricate, complex intrapsychic experience.

Similarly, Winnicott's transitional object and transitional phenomenon, and his theory about them, do not refer to a specific object or activity that can be simply described, but to a unique use of an object or an activity. Winnicott did not mean use concretely, as in the use of objects in going to sleep or in times of stress. Children may use different techniques or objects in such situations: Tustin's (1980) autistic objects may be calming, and auto-erotic activities might be used in going to sleep, yet the categorization of these as transitional phenomena would be questionable. Winnicott had in mind a deeper, dynamic meaning: by use he referred to the way the object or activity is experienced and to its intrapsychic functions.

Thus, I suggest that the transitional object and transitional phenomena should be defined by their use; and such use is not easily defined operationally or descriptively. A common way of simplifying this task has been to choose one characteristic of the use of the object or activity, of its experience, one of its functions, as defining the phenomena as a whole. Transitional objects and transitional phenomena have at times been viewed, and

defined, as soothing objects or activities (e.g., Ekecrantz & Rudhe, 1972, Rudhe & Ekecrantz, 1974); as objects and activities that appear at developmental transitions and serve as transitional regulatory mechanisms (Hong, 1978; Sugarman & Jaffe, in press); as anything experienced between the subjective and the objective (Coppolillo, 1967, 1976).

Such an approach takes a single aspect of the phenomena, and defines the phenomena as a whole on its basis. Often the defining element is not even a central element; thus, the soothing function of the transitional object and transitional phenomena is a by-product of the central characteristics of the phenomena, rather than their essence. Saying that all transitional objects and transitional phenomena soothe does not mean that all soothing objects or activities are transitional objects or phenomena. Similarly, stating that all transitional objects and transitional phenomena are experienced between the subjective and the objective--and this is indeed one of their central characteristics--does not mean that all that is experienced between the subjective and the objective is a transitional phenomenon. This will be expanded upon later.

What, if so, is the essence of the transitional object and transitional phenomena? I have stated that what defines the phenomena is their use, meaning the way

they are experienced and their intrapsychic functions. I suggest that the specific experience and functions of the transitional object and transitional phenomena are intimately related to what I believe is their essential and unique characteristic: their being transitional both in a temporal and in a spatial sense.

1. The transitional object and transitional phenomena are transitional in time, that is, they are characteristic of a specific transitional stage in development: a stage in which the child begins to emerge from fusion with mother but is not yet a separate individual; he begins to emerge from a state dominated by auto-erotism but is not yet capable of interpersonal relations; he begins to have some sense of boundaries and to perceive the world but does not yet clearly distinguish inner and outer, and is not yet capable of perceiving the world objectively; his previous omnipotence is beginning to be challenged, but he is not yet able to accept his lack of control over an external world. The transitional object and transitional phenomena help achieve a gradual, smooth and healthy transition from the earlier into the later developmental stage.

2. The transitional object and transitional phenomena are transitional in space. That is, they exist in the intermediate area of experience between internal and external, between subjective and objective, between

created and perceived. The child's ability to experience objects and activities in such a transitional manner is enabled by a combination of the child's cognitive and structural characteristics at this stage, and by the mother allowing developmental processes to unfold naturally: the child's weak ego--with its limited capacity for reality-testing, its fragile ego boundaries, its primary process functioning--will result, given a good-enough mother, in the child's ability to experience objects and activities in a transitional manner, as being both created and perceived. Because of the strain involved in maturation at this stage, some of these objects or activities become very meaningful for the child, who obtains much needed support from them. These are what we refer to as transitional objects and transitional phenomena; their appearance is what we see of the underlying processes.

Yet, while the individual may retain his capacity to experience objects and activities between the subjective and the objective, there is an additional meaning to Winnicott's notion that the transitional object and transitional phenomena are transitional in space, a meaning which is unique to these phenomena: they are experienced as existing between the infant and the mother, as filling the potential space between them, as joining them while separating them. This unique aspect of the

experience of these phenomena is particularly related to the important developments in object-relations that are taking place at this time: The child is beginning to emerge from a symbiotic state, a potential space is widening up between the child and the mother. Yet the only way the infant can separate the self from the world of objects is through the absence of a space between: "With human beings there can be no separation, only a threat of separation" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 108). The transitional object and transitional phenomena help the child deal with the threat of separation: he can fill the potential space with phenomena that are both created and provided, both self and mother, thus joining them while separating them.

Thus, the essence of the transitional object and transitional phenomena, their uniqueness, is their being transitional in both time and space. This is what determines their use, the unique way in which they are experienced, their meaning for the child, their functions. The origin of these phenomena in the transitional stage at which they emerge is not a coincidental occurrence: they are the result of the convergence of structural, cognitive and object-relations developments and achievements that come together at this point in time. Their specific use is a result of these developments.

If this is so, what is the relationship between the

transitional object and transitional phenomena, and later experiences in the intermediate area, such as play, religion and culture? Aren't all these transitional phenomena, as they are usually referred to? Are the transitional object and transitional phenomena concepts that apply throughout development, or are they specific to the transitional developmental phase discussed here and by Winnicott? Wasn't Coppolillo (1967, 1976) right in his view that all objects, concepts and activities experienced in the intermediate area are transitional objects? I disagree with such a broadening of the concepts of the transitional object and transitional phenomena. In my view, obvious and less obvious differences between play, culture and religion for example, and the use of a blanket for falling asleep, warrant a distinction between these phenomena; this in spite of some central characteristics shared by all of the above phenomena. Similarly, it is necessary to distinguish between the adult's creative enjoyment of a symphony, or of any activity, and an infant--or an adult--caressing a blanket while sucking his/her thumb.

I suggest that the terms transitional object and transitional phenomena be reserved for a specific kind of experience in the intermediate area: their unique properties among other intermediate experiences are determined by the transitional developmental stage at

which they appear, and the personality characteristics of the infant at such a stage. I suggest that the transitional object and transitional phenomena can be seen as early, primitive forms of experiences in the intermediate area. In health these develop into more sophisticated, mature intermediate experiences. The terms transitional object and transitional phenomena refer to the experiencing of objects and activities as between the internal and the external, between created and perceived, fusing the subjective and the objective <u>at a stage in development</u> in which there is no firm, established ability to differentiate between internal and external, a stage that precedes boundaries and objective perception. Such an experience should be differentiated from similar experiences when boundaries are firmer and reality testing has been established. The difference in such similar experiences at different stages in development was hinted at by Winnicott (1954) in his preface to Stevenson's article, when he stated:

> The transitional object is also not the same as the next soft toy. It can be said that the next one must be acknowledged as coming from the world. The infant is expected to say 'ta' and in this way to make an acknowledgment of the gift. The transitional object comes from the environment, as we know, but it is essential to understand that from the infant's point of view it was created by the infant. There is no question of saying 'ta,' because the object was in use before the word 'ta' could be formulated and before the acknowledgment of the world had become meaningful. In respect to these transitional objects the parents, as it were, conspire not to challenge the origin.... There is a madness here which is permissible because

> it belongs to this stage of the infant's emotional development. The madness is that this object is created by the infant and also it was there in the environment for the infant's use. The same thing a little later is called pseudologia fantastica; when a child of four years tells of a lion seen in the park, the parents know that just at that moment it is true for the child but also that it is not true. (pp. 200-1)

Thus, Winnicott clearly differentiated between the transitional object and transitional phenomena, and later phenomena which may also occur in the intermediate area of experience. Transitional phenomena belong to a specific time in development, a time before the acknowledgment of the world has become meaningful. For the infant, the object he is perceiving is at the same time his creation; there is no ability to recognize its externality and independent status. This experience is very different from later experiences of creative perception in which the individual can acknowledge the object's origin in the external world. Thus, "the same thing a little later" (Winnicott, 1954, p. 201) is called something else.

This does not mean that one does not encounter transitional objects and transitional phenomena in adult life. The same fusion of internal and external may exist at a later stage in development, but then it is pathological, regressive, characteristic of a much more primitive level of functioning. While there might be some regressive aspects to all experiences in the intermediate area, which by definition imply a temporary blurriness of

boundaries and a momentary suspension of reality-testing and secondary-process functioning, in phase-appropriate intermediate experiences this regression is momentary and adaptive, carried out in the service of the ego. In mature experiences in the intermediate area the ego remains under control, able to cathect at any moment the realistic aspects of the situation, thereby reducing the involvement of the individual's internal life in the experience.

Coppolillo (1976) emphasized the importance of transitional phenomena in development since in his view these experiences, which join the inner world and objective reality, allow the ego maximum control: The internal world can be allowed to be alive and to be experienced, since more of the external aspects of the situation can be cathected at will. I suggest that the ego of the infant has no such choice or control, due to its weakness at this early stage, and to the fragility of the boundaries between inner and outer. With the strengthening of the ego and the establishment of firm boundaries, the ego increasingly gains the control to which Coppolillo referred. Coppolillo (1976) quoted Charles Lamb's statement, "The true poet dreams being awake. He is not possessed by his subject but he has dominion over it" (p. 43). The 3-year-old, or the 6-month-old, may creatively perceive a piece of his

environment, but he is not yet a true poet.

This view of the transitional object and transitional phenomena as specific to an early developmental stage, enables one to differentiate between primitive and more sophisticated experiences in the intermediate area. In health, the transitional object and trannsitional phenomena develop into more sophisticated experiences in the intermediate area. These will be characterized by an increasing recognition of externality, by further abrogation of omnipotence and control, by increased control of the ego in terms of how the object or activity is experienced and used. A developmental line toward such mature, creative experiences can be developed, including steps such as transitional phenomena, play, shared play, and as a final step creative religion, culture, scientific endeavors and creative living in general. A careful elaboration of such a developmental line is beyond the scope of this paper, and can only be suggested here.

The development in health of transitional phenomena into more sophisticated experiences in the intermediate area cannot be emphasized enough. While the creative perception of the world in adult life is a sign of health, transitional phenomena, with their blurriness of boundaries, recreation of symbiosis and the lack of ego-control I believe is involved in them, are a sign of pathology: not only in adulthood, but in adolescence and

latency as well. Each developmental stage enables the individual to rely on more mature, discrete and controlled creative experiences, and the continued reliance on the first, must rudimentary creative act is a sign of pathology. More research, both theoretical and empirical, is needed to gradually arrive at both a developmental line of experiences in the intermediate area, and a timetable pertinent to such a developmental line.

While it is important to recognize the centrality of the transitional object and transitional phenomena as a first step in a developmental line toward mature experiences in the intermediate area, it should be emphasized that being experienced between the subjective and the objective is only one characteristic of these phenomena. Yet, just as Coppolillo focused solely on this characteristic, other writers focused on one or another characteristic: their soothing function, their facilitating the emergence of a firm body-ego, their use as transitional mechanisms for inner regulation, and so on. It is less often recognized that what is unique about these phenomena is that they play a central role in so many different aspects of development.

I suggest that one can see these phenomena as being at a juncture of a variety of developmental lines. This is intimately related to the specific time in development in which they appear and to the way they are experienced,

that is, to their being transitional in time and space; they are a result of a variety of developmental processes--outlined above--coming together. They are a manifestation of progress and achievements along different developmental lines, and at the same time they contribute to further progress along such lines.

While, again, the elaboration of the different developmental lines of which they are a manifestation and in which they play a central role is beyond the scope of this paper, it is suggested that some of these developmental lines are: (a) toward sophisticated mature experiences in the intermediate area, or toward mature creative living; (b) toward the development of self-soothing functions; (c) toward internal regulation; (d) Anna Freud's (1965) "from the body to the toy and from play to work" (p. 79); (e) from narcissism to object-love; (f) toward different aspects of mature ego-functioning, such as reality-testing, establishment of firm ego-boundaries, abrogation of omnipotence; (g) toward mature symbolic functioning.

To recapitulate: it has been suggested that the transitional object and transitional phenomena be defined by their use, that is, by the way they are experienced and their intrapsychic functions. The unique use of these phenomena is determined by their being transitional in time and space. Because of the stage in development in

which they appear and the way in which they are experienced, these phenomena lie at a juncture of a variety of important developmental lines. Their being a first step toward mature experiences in the intermediate area is an important characteristic of these phenomena. Yet while all transitional phenomena are experienced between the subjective and the objective, it is here emphasized that not all that is experienced in such an intermediate mode is a transitional phenomenon.

Even after outlining the central characteristics and functions of the transitional object and transitional phenomena, it remains difficult and problematic to apply these concepts to reality and to delimit their boundaries. One of the difficulties in attempting to delimit these concepts is the often unrecognized fact that different objects or activities may fulfill one or another characteristic of transitional phenomena while differing from the prototypical instances of these phenomena in central aspects. For example, a child's rubbing of his/her ear lobe may be experienced by him in the intermediate area of experience; that is, the ear may at times be experienced not as a body-part which is being stimulated but as an object between the internal and the external, perhaps between the self and the mother; it may elicit experiences that reproduce the sense of being caressed by mother and/or caressing her, thus facilitating

a re-establishment of a sense of fusion; it is certainly often soothing, and may ease the transition into sleep; in its being a soothing mechanism under the child's control it may facilitate separation from mother. Yet it is not a first 'not-me' possession, and has central auto-erotic elements, and thus in important ways fails to facilitate the development of mature object-relations, a central function of transitional phenomena. Similarly, when fingering his mother's hair the child may not experience her as an external object or as part of the self, but may experience her as between the internal and the external, the created and the perceived. The experience may have many transitional qualities; yet, since the object of it is the mother herself, it fails to facilitate separation from her, again a central function of transitional phenomena.

A similar source of confusion is the tendency to see attachment to an object as an all-or-none characteristic. It is important to recognize that the degree of importance of objects or activities to the child is a continuous variable. This adds confusion to the attempts to delimit the concepts of the transitional object and transitional phenomena and to the efforts to determine and study the presence or absence of such phenomena.

Recognizing that the concepts of the transitional object and transitional phenomena might not lend

themselves to a clear demarcation might contribute to their clarification. While typical transitional objects and transitional phenomena might be easily recognized, children's use of many objects and activities may approximate the prototypical transitional phenomena to different degrees. In fact, the literature is full of examples of transitional objects and transitional phenomena that are atypical in one way or another, such as in their early or late time of onset, the short or prolonged period during which they were meaningful, the nature of the object or activity, and so on. In studying these concepts one should consider that phenomena which differ in central ways from the typical transitional phenomena may be experienced in a manner similar to these phenomena and/or fulfill functions characteristic of them.

Nevertheless, it is still legitimate to attempt to differentiate between types of object attachments or of activities according to their typical use, the way they tend to be experienced, and their intrapsychic functions. Can earlier, or later, objects of attachment be used as transitional objects? Having said that what defines the transitional object is not the object itself but its use, it is important to note that the nature of the object itself does not lack importance. Winnicott (1971a) included "the nature of the object" (p. 2) as one of the important things to study about the transitional object.

His statement that what he had in mind was "not so much the object used as the use of the object" (p. xii), while emphasizing the use of the object, specifically leaves room for the importance he did give to the object itself. I believe that what Winnicott was alluding to is the fact that different objects lend themselves to different uses and foster different experiences.

Thus, while the pacifier might at times be experienced as a transitional object, as Fink (1962) emphasized, I suggest that its nature does not lend itself to such use; mainly, it elicits oral stimulation and gratification, a focus on bodily sensations which usually blurs both internal psychic activity and the external world. Also, it typically originates at an early time in development, before the emergence of an awareness of externality and of boundaries; and it is given by parents, with little spontaneous involvement from the child, all of which discourage the typical experience and use of the transitional object. Similarly, stuffed animals, soft dolls and other objects with definite shapes and specific animate forms encourage their experience as companions, their use as recipients of projections, as objects of fantasy, their recognition as separate, personified objects. At the same time, particularly during times of stress when an older child's boundaries weaken, such an otherwise personified, separate object may lose its

autonomous status: The soft, warm, cuddly properties of a doll may become the focus of the child's experience, and the object may become for the time being a transitional object, being experienced as a typical transitional object is and fulfilling all the typical functions of such an object. In the same vein the blanket, with its warm, soft, malleable properties and its availability at the time of the emergence from symbiosis, seems to be the perfect object for encouraging the experience and use typical of transitional phenomena. Yet an older child may at times use such a blanket as an object of more sophisticated fantasy, for example as Superman's cape or as material for a tent, recognizing its externality and its autonomous status.

Thus, Winnicott's reference to the blanket as the transitional object obviously refers to a typical, very common use of the blanket by infants, without it meaning that blankets are always used in this manner. Similarly, I suggest that Winnicott's (1971a) statement that the transitional object and transitional phenomena lie "between the thumb and the teddy bear" (p. 2) should be interpreted as meaning that they exist between the typical experience and use of the thumb and of the teddy bear. This does not mean that such objects cannot be experienced as transitional objects, or as having transitional qualities; they often are.

This leads me to the need to emphasize the questionable inclusion of the criteria of extended duration of attachment, usually meaning over one year, in definitions of transitional objects. I am suggesting here that objects and activities can at moments be experienced and used as transitional objects and transitional phenomena. If so, objects and activities can certainly be used and experienced as transitional phenomena for periods of time which fall short of the one-year criteria.

Thus, the emphasis here is on the need to study the specific ways in which objects and activities are used and experienced by the child; and on the fact that while a wide array of objects may be experienced as transitional objects, some objects foster such an experience while others discourage it. Stuffed animals, dolls and other toys usually encourage a more elaborate use of fantasy and of symbolization than the transitional object, and a stronger sense of boundaries is usually maintained. This warrants a distinction between these objects as typically used and the transitional object.

An additional difference between the two sets of objects is that while the transitional object is associated with and may encourage behavior which might be seen as regressive, dolls and stuffed animals encourage more progressive behavior. That is, the transitional object is usually accompanied by behaviors such as

sucking, narcissistic withdrawal, and an underlying blurriness of boundaries. Beyond infancy such functioning is regressive, at first only minimally so, but more so as the child grows. In health the regression associated with the transitional object is momentary and in the service of the ego: a child resorts to it in moments of stress, despair, or when in need to ease the transition into the world of sleep. Gay and Hyson (1976) in their empirical study noted the regressive behaviors associated with the use of transitional objects; but they also noted the frequent increase in progressive, adaptive behaviors following such use. Yet, dolls and toys encourage more progressive mechanisms such as the active use of fantasy, turning passive into active, practicing and mastering. Litt (1981) noted mothers' spontaneous comments on their perception that dolls and toys fostered their children's intellectual development, while transitional objects fostered regression.

The transition from the transitional object to the ability to use dolls as personified, separate objects, receptacles for projection and so on, is gradual. For a time, as the child's ego develops, as boundaries become firmer and as secondary process becomes established, the objects and the different ways of using them probably blend into each other. Winnicott's view of the transition from hallucinations to subjective objects to illusions,

which is gradual and hardly perceptible, comes to mind. I propose that the transition from illusions to imaginative, creative play is similarly gradual and imperceptible. The two phenomena are not discrete; rather, the transition between them may be viewed as a continuum. Thus, the ability to perceive dolls and stuffed animals as autonomous and as originating in the environment is at first tenuous, with the experience resembling often the illusion which characterizes the transitional object and transitional phenomena. The teddy bear, with its warmth, softness and cuddliness and its frequent origin at an early time in the child's life on the one hand, and its definite representational shape on the other hand, is a common means of transition from the more primitive to the more elaborate use of fantasy and symbolization; its use by the child may vary according to his emotional state. Thus, again, while the typical transitional object might be easily identifiable, the phenomenon blends developmentally with previous and with later phenomena and is not easily delimited.

What about the mother herself? Can she serve as a transitional object, as Winnicott seems to have suggested? Opposition to such an idea is often raised on the basis that a central characteristic of the transitional object is that it is created by the infant. Yet Winnicott did not mean this in any concrete way. Thus, in his preface

to Stevenson's article, Winnicott (1954) suggested that an object can be given by the parents for comfort in such a way that the infant can at the same time create the object and experience it as a transitional object. He stated:

> A part of the blanket or the fringe of a rug or a napkin or a piece of a colored cloth may be adopted, or parents may supply just at the right minute a soft nondescript object. There is every room for variations according to whether the accent in on the infant's discovery or the parents' provision. What soon becomes clear, however, is that the object has a very great significance for the infant and that distress results if the object is not available. (p. 200)

Thus, it is important to recognize that throughout his writings Winnicott often emphasized not reality but the infant's experience of it. Just as the objective externality of an object does not preclude its being experienced between the internal and the external, the fact that it was provided by the parents for comfort does not preclude its being experienced between the created and the perceived. The mother may provide herself to the infant at the moment in which he can perceive her while creating her, thus being experienced as a transitional object: The infant may experience her in a personal manner, fusing her characteristics with his imagination. Yet an important characteristic of the transitional object is that it is, at one and the same time, not a part of the mother and also is symbolic of the mother, thus joining them while separating them. The mother fails to fulfill this important characteristic, and on this account, I

believe, she does not qualify as a transitional object per se.

I suggest that Winnicott's (1971a) statement that "sometimes there is no transitional object except the mother herself" (p. 5) may refer to the notion that the mother may acquire, for the child, qualities typical of the transitional object, as discussed above. This statement may also be interpreted as referring to pathological cases, in which the infant is not allowed to separate, to express his personal tendencies, to be creative; the mother may then be the closest the infant gets to a transitional object.

Yet, in health a potential space is allowed to emerge between infant and mother, a space that is gradually filled with the products of the child's imagination. The mother begins to regain her self-interest, and to lose some of the identification with her infant; she also senses her infant's need to meet the world. She gradually stops fulfilling her infant's needs as if by magic, and instead responds more and more to her infant's signs. Communication between separate people gradually emerges, hand in hand with a stregthening of the infant's boundaries, reality testing, and ego development in general.

However, in moments of stress the sense of separateness may become too threatening for the child, a

need for some of the previous omnipotence may appear, boundaries may be weakened. At those moments the increasing separateness of the good-enough mother may be more than the child can tolerate. Moreover, during this transitional period toward independence or individuation from mother, there are likely to be many instances in which the mother's separation from her child moves beyond--or at times lags behind--the child's ability to accept such separation with all that it implies. As Winnicott (1965b) put it, "it is in any case a difficult thing for a mother to separate from her infant at the same speed at which the infant needs to become separate from her" (p. 54). A gap emerges between what the good-enough mother gives her infant, and what the infant may still, at times, need.

I suggest that at those times the infant uses his emerging creativity, experienced first in his relationship with his mother, to fill that emerging gap. This is where the transitional object and transitional phenomena emerge. Thus, these phenomena may be viewed as <u>auxiliaries to the auxiliary-ego</u>: When the externality of the mother cannot be ignored in moments in which the infant needs to emphasize his creation of the world, when the experience of objectivity and of separateness between inner and outer becomes too threatening, when the infant needs to experience control but the mother cannot allow herself to

be controlled, when the child's ego needs more support than the good-enough mother can give, the infant can use his creative abilities to create and control another piece of the world, thus obtaining the support he needs. The transitional object and transitional phenomena are indications that a potential space has been allowed to emerge between infant and mother, and that the infant is being permitted to fill this space with his personal, spontaneous creations. The mother as a transitional object does not leave room for such a space.

As stated, the transitional object and transitional phenomena may appear at moments in which the mother's separateness from her infant is beyond what the infant can tolerate. At those moments, these phenomena serve as a defenese against the infant's separation anxiety. The transitional object's role as a defense against separation anxiety has been repeatedly emphasized. The transitional object is commonly viewed as helping the infant re-create a symbiotic experience when the emerging separation becomes too threatening.

I suggest that the transitional object and transitional phenomena defend also against the anxiety elicited in the infant by his symbiotic needs; and that their role as a defense against such "symbiotic anxiety" is equally important. Kestenberg and Weinstein (1978) as well as Brody (1980) emphasized the transitional object's

role in strengthening the sense of ego boundaries. While Brody saw this as an alternative hypothesis to the view of the transitional object as a symbol of mother and as facilitating separation from her, it may be that the transitional object and transitional phenomena serve both roles intermittently, according to the needs and anxieties aroused in specific situations.

Thus, it has been repeatedly observed that the transitional object is often used by the child in the mother's presence; at times the object seems to be even more important than the mother herself. I suggest that the transitional object's role as a defense against anxiety from symbiotic needs may be an important factor behind the continued need for the object in the mother's presence. Similarly, this function of the object may help explain Gaddinin's (1970) observations of children who often did not resort to their transitional objects during separations from mother; yet upon reunion with her ran to recover their objects, sometimes before they approached their mothers. At such moments of reunion, when symbiotic needs are intensified, the transitional object may be used to defend against the concomitant anxiety and to reaffirm the sense of ego boundaries. Thus, the transitional object and transitional phenomena can be seen as responding to both of the central needs and anxieties of this period of emerging separation, particularly of its

rapprochement phase: the child's need to separate and individuate, and his fear of separation and need to re-experience union.

To sum up: the transitional object and transitional phenomena are complex concepts. They do not refer to specific objects or activities, but to experiences and functions that are difficult to identify. They apply to a stage in development that is continuous with previous and later stages and blends into them, and the phenomena blend into experiences typical of those stages. The experiences and functions that characterize these phenomena are also often partially fulfilled by objects and activities that differ from the transitional phenomena in central ways. The use of objects and of activites approaches the prototypical transitional object and transitional phenomena in different degrees. Clarification of these concepts might be advanced with the recognition that they cover phenomena which are not discrete and isolated from other similar phenomena but lie on a continuum with them.

Lines for Future Research

Further research is needed to elucidate these concepts and the continuum on which they lie, as well as many other aspects of them which remain unclear. Research on these concepts should acknowledge the difficulties involved in identifying and delimiting the phenomena, instead of evading these difficulties by focusing on the

prototypes of the phenomena, or on their otherwise more identifiable forms, as is often done.

The fact that these concepts are psychodynamic, not descriptive, and refer to specific intrapsychic processes, is basic to attempts at studying these concepts empirically. Due to the psychodynamic nature of the phenomena, close, in-depth clinical observations would be at this point most useful in elucidating them. Such are rare in the literature.

Close observations of children's special objects, or objects of attachment, might help elucidate the continuum on which transitional objects lie: It may help clarify different ways objects are experienced, different functions they fulfill. Such observations would help identify objects used as transitional objects, and help differentiate between these and other similar objects and objects' uses. Eventually, this could illuminate the motives and anxieties that elicit the need for such objects. And focusing on situations following the use of transitional objects, in a manner similar to Gay and Hyson's (1976), may help clarify the functions these objects fulfill, as well as distinguish between successful and unsuccessful, or healthy and unhealthy, use.

The concept of transitional phenomena is even more abstract and elusive; this concept might also be better delineated through clinical observations. Focusing on

situations in which the transitional object is typically used, and transitional phenomena are also assumed to be in operation, might elucidate these phenomena. For example, careful observations of children when going to sleep, or in stressful situations, might be an appropriate way of arriving at observations of transitional phenomena, as well as at initial attempts to differentiate between these phenomena and other techniques for going to sleep, or other soothing techniques.

The relationship between transitional phenomena, or the transitional object as an initial step, and development, needs to be studied. Infant observations in nurseries might help elucidate the determinants of the variability in the age of appearance of transitional objects in different children. Is a transitional object used differently during early differentiation, practicing, rapprochement, or when object-constancy is being established?

The time of disappearance of the transitional object and development warrants empirical study. One might compare, for example, children who retained their transitional object into latency with children for whom the object was decathected at an earlier stage. Diagnostic and dynamic information would be central to such a study, mainly regarding issues assumed to be central to the use of the transitional object, such as

reality-testing, symbolic functioning, attainment of object-constancy, and so on.

Studying children who use the mother herself as a primary comforter might also elucidate the transitional phenomena. Do such children lack other manifestations of creative use of objects, of self-soothing capacities? Do they lag behind in their object-relations, ego, or cognitive development? Is their use of the mother parallel and comparable to other children's use of transitional objects?

Studies comparing children who develop a transitional object with those who don't might elucidate the transitional phenomena, as long as the likelihood of the latter employing subtle transitional phenomena is recognized. Important issues and characteristics might distinguish between those who need the concrete security of a palpable object, and those who resort to more abstract means of consolation or symbolization.

The possibilities open for study around the concepts of the transitional object and transitional phenomena seem at this point endless. It is beyond the scope of this paper to carefully develop such studies, and only areas of study can be suggested. The emphasis here is on the need for close, in-depth observation and exploration of children's use of objects and activities as a step toward elucidating these phenomena. It is hoped that the present

paper, with its focus on the confusion that plagues the literature and its exploration of the theoretical bases of the concepts, will contribute to the clarification of the concepts of the transitional object and transitional phenomena. It is also hoped that this paper will encourage further re-examination of this area of study and its progressive elaboration on firmer foundations.

Summary

The present paper is an attempt to re-examine the foundations of our knowledge on the transitional object and transitional phenomena. The need for such a re-examination emerges from the ambiguities and confusion that pervade the status of these concepts in the literature.

Chapter Two presented an overview of the major empirical studies on these phenomena. The focus of the overview was on the problematic central issues in the literature, which were highlighted by the studies reviewed. The central issues seen as obscure were: (a) the confusion as to the definition of the concepts; (b) the lack of clarity as to the relationship between the transitional object and transitional phenomena, and development; (c) the lack of clarity regarding the relationship between the transitional object and transitional phenomena; and (d) the tension between a "Winnicottian" and a "pragmatic" approach to the phenomena.

Chapter Three presented a brief overview of some of the major theoretical contributions on the transitional object and transitional phenomena. The purpose of this overview was to provide a sense of the numerous

theoretical elaborations on these concepts, and of the divergent theoretical views. This review also highlighted the artificial split that exists between the theoretical and the empirical approaches: New, interesting and elaborate theoretical views continue to emerge in a chaotic context, usually without addressing--often without acknowledging--the basic issues that remain obscure.

The review of the literature highlighted the need to re-examine the foundations of our understanding of the transitional object and transitional phenomena. Winnicott's views are the foundation on which most other writings are based. Chapter Four summarized Winnicott's major notions on development: these notions are the ground on which Winnicott's views on the transitional object and transitional phenomena evolved.

Chapter Five summarized Winnicott's views on the transitional object and transitional phenomena. This entailed an integration and re-organization of his statements on these concepts as they appear throughout his writings. The relationship between these concepts and Winnicott's views of development was emphasized; the developmental functions of these phenomena were delineated. Finally, ways in which Winnicott's writings contributed to the confusion in the literature were suggested.

Chapter Six undertook a re-evaluation of some of the

problematic issues in the literature, in light of the suggested interpretation of Winnicott's writings. Several formulations were advanced as to possible ways of resolving some of those issues. Finally, lines for further research were suggested. The need for close, in-depth observations and exploratory studies was emphasized, given the difficulties remaining in defining and delimiting the phenomena under study.

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