

## SOME REMARKS CONCERNING THE “USE OF AN OBJECT”

David-Augustin MÂNDRUȚ<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** The aim of this paper is to propose some philosophical interpretations of Winnicott’s concept of “the use of an object”. These interpretations will be coming from Heidegger’s fundamental ontology and from Buber’s late philosophical anthropology. We also noticed that Winnicott’s theory of “the use of an object” was already in some way or another present in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in the fourth chapter, where consciousness is treated in terms of desire. Our main thesis is that after the subject encounters the resistance of the external world, its adversity and contrasting feature, the subject recognizes it as something independent and autonomous from the self, so the subject is able therefore to set that being at a distance, enter into relation with it, and finally establish the world qua world. We are going also to draw lines between Winnicott’s perspective and the views of some phenomenological authors such as Eugen Fink, Merleau-Ponty or Marc Richir.

**Keywords:** Hegel, Buber, Winnicott, Heidegger, resistance, distance, relation, object, destructiveness, aggressivity.

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<sup>1</sup> PhD Student, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Email: davidmandrut@gmail.com.



## Introduction

The purpose of this article is twofold. Firstly, we want to prove that the so-called resistance of the “external world”, namely its adversity and its contrasting feature is the main means that enables the subject to set it a distance and enter into relation with it. Only after, the subject might speak of the world qua world. Secondly, we wish to argue that after this “primal setting at a distance”, it is possible for the person, whether we call it Dasein (Heidegger) or subject (Winnicott), to perceive the object which has been “set at a distance” in an objective way, namely as something separated from the self, as an independent other and as an autonomous being. Child’s psychology will be invoked here to assist us with its concepts of the permanence of the object, which we take from Piaget’s genetic epistemology, or the object constancy of Margaret Mahler<sup>2</sup>.

Our thesis follows the next way: Only after the object has been “set at a distance” and it has gained permanence (in the child’s mind), does the object also gain a place in space and a duration in time. Respectively, what we want to argue is that the object set in space and time, in order to be perceived as such, needs to be “set at a distance”. This means that the object needs to be recognized as an independent and autonomous other (a permanent/constant other). Only after the object has been set a distance and recognized as a permanence, does space and time “arise” in the mind of the child, because the child links space and time with the permanent object, namely he or she recognizes that the object exists in space and time.

Our supposition follows two different lines of thought. First, we will remember Winnicott’s statement that the survival of the object grants the subject a path towards shared reality. The second line of thought, coming from Piaget, refers to idea that the permanence of the object allows for the child to perceive the object as set in a specific time and a specific place, even if the object is absent from the child’s immediate perception. Combining

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret S. Mahler, Fred Pine, Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant: Symbiosis and Individuation*, Karnac Books, 2002, p. 40.

these two perspectives, we arrive at the conclusion that "the primal setting at a distance" implies that the subject can tell that the world exists apart from himself or herself. Moreover, the world now exists in space and time. Martin Buber called this the "act of distance", without being aware of the certain implications that this concept might have in child psychology or psychoanalysis. The real question which we want to ask is when and how does the child arrive at the state of the "objective subject" (Winnicott). We will consider the theory which implies that the first relation of the infant and his or her mother is a symbiotic one (Mahler), or an "anonymous collectivity"<sup>3</sup> (Merleau-Ponty). Winnicott calls this by the name of the merged state of infant and mother, or the fusion. We must also remember that the term fusion was already present in Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, in his theory on intersubjectivity<sup>4</sup>. The concept of fusion in Husserl's fifth meditation plays a different role, respectively, it is linked to the constitution of the other. With these statements we also want to recall Daniel Stern's theory of the interpersonal world of the infant, emphasizing the difference which it bears in relation to Winnicott's and Mahler's theories. Daniel Stern, using empirical data, assumes that, at first, the child "has distance" from the mother, meaning that, at first, the child sees the mother as a separate person, and only by virtue of this distance between infant and mother might fusion behaviors take place<sup>5</sup>. This is a kind of paradigm shift coming from Stern's part, because he is explicitly contrasting the theories of Merleau-Ponty, Winnicott and Mahler.

Returning to our main subject, we want to follow Winnicott's argument that the survival of the object gives the object permanence for the child, and it enables the child to establish what belongs to the "external world", namely what he or she can use and relate to, apart from his or her own mind contents

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<sup>3</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Child Psychology and Pedagogy*, Northwestern University Press, 2010, p. 248.

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, Martinus Nijhoff, 1977, p. 118.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, Karnac Books, 1998, p. 206.

(the projective mechanisms). After the object has been set a distance, it is recognized/perceived objectively, as given in a specific place (absent from the child's immediate perception), and existing within its own duration. In his book on the child's conception of time, Piaget offers a critique of Bergson's theory of duration, and our point of departure would be that we consider that the child is not first of all aware of his own duration and place in time, but he or she is aware of the object's spatial and temporal features. Our argument bears certain resemblances with Heidegger's ek-sistence theory. In his conception, Dasein is always already outside in the world, being preoccupied with something. So, for us, the child perceives at first the permanent object to be set in a specific spatial and temporal register (to be a part of the external or shared world), and only by the process of introjection can the child assimilate these notions of space and time, as abstract ones.

We want to borrow from Kant's first *Critique* this idea of permanence as a mode of temporalization, this being the first "analogy of experience"<sup>6</sup>. We can affirm that the child who is encountering the adversity of the "external world" manages to set it a distance, by virtue of its contrasting feature (its resistance), perceive it objectively and recognize it as something independent and autonomous from the self, then perceive its permanence in space and time. All of this is building up the child's perception of space and time. We want to argue that before having the notions of time and space as abstract ones, the child has the notions of time and space of a particular object, in this case the object which has survived the destruction and has gained permanence in space and time. All of this is possible only by virtue of the "primal setting at a distance" (of the object), respectively the capacity for recognizing something as independent and autonomous from our own selves. This specific dialectic unfolds as it follows: The child "stubs his soul" (in Buber words) against something, and this would be the resistance and adversity of the object, the child wants to destroy it, but the object survives, so it is perceived as something different from the self (what we have called the "primal setting at a distance"), and finally the object gains permanence in

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<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 299.

space and time, because for Winnicott, the object now gains a life of its own. Only after this stage of object permanence will the child establish his or her abstract notions of space and time, namely only after the infant has perceived the place and the duration of the object set a distance as something other-than-me. This specific process of perceiving space and time as abstract concepts is achieved only by virtue of the introjection of the permanent object (the introjection of its spatial and temporal features).

### **The philosophical context of our thesis**

In his paper on aggression, Winnicott stresses on the importance of the actual encounter with the external world, this would mean the encounter with the environment which gradually becomes something distinguished as Not-Me<sup>7</sup>. This encounter, which opposes the being of the infant, builds up to the experience of primal aggressiveness, through the feeling of frustration. This early insight from Winnicott's paper will be of great use for us to understand the so-called "use of an object".

In his section on Dasein's temporality from *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes a remark concerning the resistance of the external world. This idea will be also a starting point for our remarks concerning Winnicott. Heidegger is telling us that only after Dasein has encountered the resistance of the "external world", does he understand that he is not the master of the world. These considerations follow naturally from Heidegger's analysis of reality from the first section of *Being and Time*<sup>8</sup>. Resistance is encountered as a not-coming-through, and as a hindrance of willing to come through. With such willing something must already have been disclosed which one's drive/striving and one's will are out for. The experience of resistance is possible, ontologically speaking, only by reason of the world-disclosure. We have to note here that

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<sup>7</sup> Donald Woods Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*, Tavistock Publications, 2003, p. 215.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Blackwell, 2001, p. 407.

resistance also characterizes the “external world” in the person of entities within-the-world, but never in the person of the world itself<sup>9</sup>.

Our interpretation may be the following: Dasein’s journey throughout the world is always characterized by some sort of resistance from this external world. This means that Dasein is always faced towards the world in some sense (Dasein ek-sists), and this external world should be characterized by some sort of adversity, by a kind of contrast, which here is called resistance. The resistance of the external world is the reason why Dasein is not the master of the world, because he cannot go beyond this resistance, in the sense that something always remains, or survives Dasein’s will or drive/striving. Our argument, following the directions proposed by Buber and Winnicott, is that this resistance will be the means by which the subject can set a being at a distance and enter into relation with it, thus establishing what we usually call a world (in this case an objective one). We are going to discover that for Buber the being which has been set at a distance was primarily characterized by adversity and it was contrasting man’s being. Also, with Winnicott, the object has to survive the child’s destructiveness in order for the child to establish the so-called “external world”. Here we could also recall Gadamer’s saying that who “has” language also has world. Our interpretation might be that the following: Language enables the subject to set the world at a distance, thus transforming the *Umwelt* into a *Welt*, as in Buber’s words.

Concerning the philosophical context of Winnicott’s work, we could recall Jessica Benjamin’s numerous attempts at making a conjunction, or even a synthesis between the philosophical view of Hegel and the psychoanalytical one of Winnicott<sup>10</sup>. Benjamin clearly noticed some similarities between the works of the two authors<sup>11</sup>. First, we must notice that desire’s satisfaction in Hegel bears similarities with Winnicott’s survival of the object (of which we

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<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, pp. 253-254.

<sup>10</sup> Jessica Benjamin, *Beyond Doer and Done To: Recognition Theory, Intersubjectivity and the Third*, Routledge, 2018, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*, Pantheon Books, 1988, p. 39.

are going to talk about later). Both authors consider that we become aware of the object and even of ourselves only by aggressivity, aggressivity coming from the part of the subject. This means that after the object is destroyed, as in Hegel, or survives, as in Winnicott, we come to acknowledge that the object is part of the shared reality, the shared world. The problem of the possibility of knowledge of the external reality was already present in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and here we might recall the distinction between phenomena and noumena. Winnicott tried to solve this problem by stating that "reality" doesn't belong neither solely to the outside, nor to the inside, but to the in-between. The in-between is called by Winnicott the intermediate area of experience, which might transform itself into a playground even. Playing becomes, therefore, for Winnicott, the *via regia* for the access to reality, because only by playing does one feel real, and only by playing does one arrive at the object, which has to survive in order so that shared reality might be achieved. The problem of reality was also discussed by Husserl in his *Cartesian Meditations*<sup>12</sup> and by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Both authors consider that reality is a pseudo-problem. Heidegger insists that the problem of external reality has its basis in an ontological constitution, this being of course our being-in-the-world.

Winnicott's work might be compared, as we stated above, to the work of some phenomenological authors, such as Husserl and Heidegger, but not only. Our task in this article is not to make a conjunction between Winnicott's view and that of the phenomenological authors, but to sketch the possible meeting points between these views, by virtue of the theory of the survival of the object. Eugen Fink is one of Husserl's students who stressed a lot on the meaning of the ontology of play for the human being, and his conception bears many similarities with Winnicott's work<sup>13</sup>. For example, both situate the area of play in the in-between (potential space for Winnicott and playworld for Fink). Merleau-Ponty's view of the body might also be of great use for us,

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<sup>12</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, Martinus Nijhoff, 1977, p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> Eugen Fink, *Play as Symbol of the World*, Indiana University Press, 2016, p. 70.

because Winnicott also states that playing is an activity which involves the body, even the lived one (Leib). Therefore, the distinction between Körper and Leib, or flesh<sup>14</sup>, in Merleau-Ponty might be very useful for later talk. Although we invoked these authors, the phenomenological author which came closest to Winnicott's view is Marc Richir. In numerous of his works<sup>15</sup>, he stressed about the phenomenological and even psychopathological meaning of Winnicott's concepts, such as the transitional object or the transitional area. He also insisted on the child's early experience of the moment of the sublime, which plays its part in the exchange of gazes between mother and infant<sup>16</sup>. This exchange was called in Winnicott the mirror-role of the mother's face, of which we won't talk right now. Now that we drew these lines between Winnicott's perspective and that of certain phenomenological authors, we might start with our discussion of the use of an object, but before all of that, we must turn towards some insights coming from Martin Buber.

### **Buber's concept of resistance**

Before starting with our analysis of Winnicott's "use of an object", and before making a conjunction with Buber's late philosophical anthropology, we want to present the little-known text from Buber's personal correspondence, which may in fact throw light on the subject discussed here. The letter is from Buber's correspondence with Hans Trüb, dating from 27 august 1946, a time at which we can consider that Buber was already planning to write his paper called *Distance and Relation*. In this letter it is stated that world is first what which the "soul stubs itself against<sup>17</sup>". For the infant (and here child psychoanalysis is addressed), the world is not the mother's breast that

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<sup>14</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, 1968, p. 130.

<sup>15</sup> Marc Richir, *Phantasia, Imagination, Affectivité*, Jerome Millon, 2004, p. 508.

<sup>16</sup> Marc Richir, *Variations sur le Sublime et le Soi*, Jerome Millon, 2010, p. 36.

<sup>17</sup> Judith Buber Agassi, *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy*, Syracuse University Press, 1999, p. 174.



belongs to him (the merged state), but the edge of the table that causes him pain. World is first (this means from man's starting point), that which is different from me, that which I cannot include into my soul. Perception of world as world occurs again and again through adversity and resistance, through contradiction, and even through absurdity. Before the world becomes actual to me as not-mine, it cannot become mine. Therefore, the world becomes mine, in a sense, through genuine encounters<sup>18</sup>. These remarks resonate with Buber's statement that almost from the beginning of his life, the child "has distance", meaning that, he or she can distinguish himself or herself from other selves. These remarks also imply that by "stubbing the soul against something", the child has a pre-theoretical "concept" of difference, and this "concept" is granted by the pain caused to him or her by that "stubbing". Anticipating, resistance now becomes the means by which the subject is ready to set a being at a distance. The child thus acknowledges that he or she cannot include that object which causes him or her pain into his or her soul, so now the child perceives the object as something different from the self.

Now that we have established the philosophical ground of our discussion concerning Winnicott's paper, we can start to analyze it, and just then see how it can be compared or even synthesized with Buber's conception of the "primal setting at a distance".

### **Winnicott's "use of an object"**

Before starting with the presentation of Winnicott's main thesis, we want to make some steps backwards towards Freud's essay on negation. From this very brief essay we want to take an idea which is to be found in the last paragraphs of the essay. There Freud speaks of negation as related to the death drive, and we also know that the death drive can manifest itself

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 175.

in the form of destructivity, of aggressiveness<sup>19</sup>. The main idea we want to emphasize is that negation is related to the so-called testing of reality. Therefore, the death drive is the “beyond of the pleasure principle”, because only with this negation implied in the structure of the death drive can the child arrive to his or her truth and at the truth of the object, at its certainty. This specific dialectics unfolds as it follows: The child is feeling angry towards something, because he or she met the opposition of the external world, namely its resistance, so he or she chooses an object in order to destroy it (to manifest his or her anger upon it), and only after the object has been destroyed (or maybe it has survived, as in Winnicott), does the child test the (external) reality and arrive at his or her truth, and at the truth of the object, of course. What we want exactly to prove in the following argument is that aggressiveness, the primal aggressiveness of the child is a sort of world-disclosure. The world is disclosed to the child as he or she tries to destroy the object and the object survives. Then the object can be used, Winnicott tells us. But there exists also the alternative, coming from Buber’s philosophy, respectively, the situation in which the object doesn’t survive the child’s aggressiveness. The object will then be teared into pieces, but those pieces can also be contemplated in some way or another, and this specific form of contemplation can give rise to the originator drive, the drive to form something from those remaining pieces, something personal, and this may be the very origin of the work of art in child’s psychoanalysis, a form of proto creativity, we could emphasize.

The thesis that Winnicott is going to defend is that there was a lot of talk in the psychoanalytic field about object-relation, but not so much about the object-usage. His thesis in this chapter from *Playing and Reality* is guided by his work with patients, namely in the situation of the so-called psychoanalytic transference. One of Winnicott’s first ideas is that the psychoanalyst, in some cases has to abstain himself from certain interpretations, which could, finally disturb the psychoanalytical setting. Discussing the implications of the

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<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XIX*, The Hogarth Press, 1986, p. 239.

interpretative act in psychoanalytic cure, Winnicott is suggesting that the analyst should be placed (by the analysand), in the area outside of the subjective phenomena, namely outside the area of omnipotent magical control. We want to retain this idea for our later talk. Winnicott's crucial idea, which will be a motif in this chapter is the analysand's ability to use the analyst<sup>20</sup>. We will also notice that by virtue of the survival of the object, the subject may now perceive the world objectively, and not conceive or create it subjectively.

Concerning the object-relation, we are notified that the subject permits a certain change at the level of the Self, and this is the point where the idea of investment is introduced. The object now has a certain and determinate meaning, because of the projective mechanisms and the certain identifications which occurred. The subject is kind of tired, Winnicott tells us, because he invested some of his feelings upon the object. The object-relation of the subject can be discussed in terms of the isolation of the subject. The object has to be first of all real, namely it has to be a part of the common external world, not some kind of projection. This aspect is defined by Winnicott as the crucial difference between relating and using. The object-relation has of course to be described as the subject alone, while the object-usage has to be described as accepting the independence and autonomy of the object<sup>21</sup>, namely what Martin Buber would have called the "primal setting at a distance".

In clinical terms, after Winnicott, we can say that a baby is feeding from the Self, and another baby is feeding from the breast, of course, in the conditions that the breast is considered a separate object, a not-me source. Mothers, like some analysts can be good-enough, which means that they can facilitate the transition from the object-relation to the object-usage. To use the object, the subject has first the need to develop a capacity for using the object, and this is part of the modification of the reality principle. We can now recall Freud's insight from one of his papers on the psychology of the unconscious, a paper in which Freud tells us that the transition from the

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<sup>20</sup> Donald Woods Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Routledge, 2009, pp. 116-117.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 118-119.

pleasure principle to the reality principle takes place through the delay of the satisfaction of the needs, namely through frustration<sup>22</sup>. Returning to Winnicott, the use of an object is another reason to consider the important role played by the facilitating environment<sup>23</sup>.

In terms of succession, first it comes the relating and secondly the usage, and at this point we have to be reminded that in Buber's terms, the first was the distance, and only after we could have a talk about certain relations. This transition is so painful because the subject renounces at a certain part of his area of omnipotence, in favor of perceiving the object as an external phenomenon, not as something projected. The object is then recognized, in a sense closer to Hegel's, as something in-itself. This transition from relating to using is made by virtue of the subject destroying the object. This dialectic unfolds as it follows: The subject relates to the object, the subject destroys the object, the object survives the destruction, then the object can be used by the subject. The survival of the object may or may not exist. A new type of object-relation appears, the one in which the subject tells the object: "I have destroyed you", and the object is there to receive this type of communication. Now the subject can say the following: "Hello object, I've destroyed you, I love you, you mean a lot to me because you survived my destructiveness". "While I love you, I am continually destroying you in my unconscious phantasy". Here does the phantasy begin, and from now on, the subject can use the object<sup>24</sup>. In a text dating from 1968 (a time at which we can consider that Winnicott was already planning to write *Playing and Reality*) which is found in his posthumous book entitled *Babies and their Mothers*, Winnicott had already introduced the idea of the survival of the breast as a means of achieving shared reality<sup>25</sup>. Marc Richir would insist on this point, arguing that there is a certain rhythmical relation between the

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<sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XII*, The Hogarth Press, 1981, p. 222.

<sup>23</sup> Donald Woods Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Routledge, 2009, pp. 119-120.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 120.

<sup>25</sup> Donald Woods Winnicott, *Babies and their Mothers*, Da Capo Press, 1987, p. 32.

destruction of the object and the survival of the object. Richir also emphasized the role played by the mother in this process, which he links to affectivity. The mother must be very careful while she holds the baby, because the menace of the fear of breakdown is present at every moment<sup>26</sup>.

A very important feature of this transitional phase is that the subject is set outside of his area of omnipotent control, and this is exactly what Heidegger was arguing in *Being and Time* about the resistance of the world. Because of the resistance of the being of the world, Dasein "arrives" at the conclusion that he is not master of the world. Back to Winnicott, now the object has autonomy and a certain type of life for the subject. If it has survived the destructiveness, it can also contribute to the development of the child, in some way or another. Now we come to a very important detail in our research, namely the fact that after this survival of the object, the subject may start a life in the world of the objects<sup>27</sup>, namely Buber's statement that after the "primal setting at a distance", followed by the act of relating there exists a world for man, by virtue of that synthetizing apperception. This concept of the synthetizing apperception was already present in Kant's first *Critique*<sup>28</sup>, but there it was named the synthetic unity of consciousness. Buber stresses not so much on the meaning of external sensory data, but on the possibility of perceiving the wholeness of the human being.

Winnicott repeats his statement in these following words: The emotional development of the subject is made possible only by virtue of the real survival of the object invested with feelings, because the object is destroyed while being real, and is real by virtue of being destroyed. The central postulate of Winnicott's hypothesis is that the subjective object is not destroyed (the projective material), but the destructiveness begins to take place only while the object is objectively perceived, it has autonomy, and it belongs to the shared world. The reality principle implies the fact that the individual subject is angry and destructive, but this destructiveness is a kind of world-disclosure

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<sup>26</sup> Marc Richir, *Phantasia, Imagination, Affectivité*, Jerome Millon, 2004, p. 514.

<sup>27</sup> Donald Woods Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Routledge, 2009, p. 121.

<sup>28</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 238.

in Heidegger's words, namely, it allows for the subject to experience reality, placing the object outside the Self<sup>29</sup>.

In this moment of the subject's development, the subject creates the object, meaning that the subject discovers the external world, and this consists only and only in the object's capacity to survive the primal aggression. Destructiveness means for Winnicott not only the baby's primal aggressiveness, but also the failure of the object to survive this primal aggressiveness. This destruction of the object, Winnicott tells us, doesn't suppose any kind of anger, but there might be happiness at the survival of the object, intended to be destroyed<sup>30</sup>. Here we can recall Buber's letter to Hans Trüb, where he says that the world is not the mother's breast, but the table that the child "stubs his soul upon", namely the child discovers the world by adversity, and this is a stimulus to go on and experience the outside world. We can very well believe that the child is angry because his "soul was stubbed" by the table, but this is also an impulse to get angry at the table, maybe wish to destroy it, and finally find out that it has survived the primal aggressiveness, all of this establishing the table as table (in this example).

From this point onwards, the object is continually destroyed through the unconscious phantasy. This fact of being continually destroyed (in the unconscious phantasy) contributes to the fact of perceiving the reality of the object as something-in-itself, it also enhances the feelings, and it establishes the constancy of the object, and now the object can be used. This very last point is crucial for our understanding of the object's survival and for the concept of the "primal setting at a distance", because after the object has been set at a distance through its survival, it is recognized, in Hegel's words, as something independent and autonomous.

The permanence or the consistency of the object is then established, namely the fact that the child perceives the object as something-in-itself, which has its own spatiality, even if it is absent from the child's immediate perception, and it is perceived as something which has its own duration in

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<sup>29</sup> Donald Woods Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Routledge, 2009, p. 122.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125.

time. In this sense, we conceived this permanence/consistency of the object as the first spatial and temporal rapport which the child establishes with the outside world, namely the shared world. This, namely our understanding, has to be situated in the epistemological field, not in the ontological one, because after Heidegger, the child, namely the Dasein, which is this in-between (birth and death)<sup>31</sup> is always already in the world, our being-in-the-world being here a fundamental constitution of Dasein. Furthermore, this idea, namely Winnicott's one can be very easily combined with the idea of the "world in small doses", with the fact that the mother has to disclose the world to the child in small bits. Resuming Winnicott's words, we say that using the object is more sophisticated than relating to it, but also, in Buber's words, it is the very opposite thing. The object-relating can be done with the subjective object but using implies that the object is to be found in the external reality<sup>32</sup>.

The subject relates to the object, the object is to be found in the external world, then the subject destroys the object, but the object survives and now it can be used as such. The object is continually being destroyed and this becomes the means for the love for the real object, this being an object outside the subject's area of omnipotent control. Winnicott's idea contribute to a certain positive study of the primal destructiveness of the child. This destructiveness and the survival of the object places it (the object), outside the area of the objects invested with the mental mechanism of projection from the subject. In this way, there is created a world of shared reality, which the subject can use, this world being something, of course, other-than-me-substance. We can now anticipate Buber's idea of the two movements of human life, namely the primal setting at a distance and the entering into relation, movements from which by virtue of the synthetizing apperception, man "has" a world. We have here to notice that in Buber's theory, unfortunately, there is no place for aggressiveness or destructiveness, which could have placed him closer to Winnicott's understanding of the issue

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<sup>31</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Blackwell, 2001, p. 425.

<sup>32</sup> Donald Woods Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Routledge, 2009, p. 126.

of object-usage. We must also notice that Buber talks about the adversity of nature, namely its resistance, which can be compared in some way or another with Winnicott's idea of the survival of the object.

In his chapter on desire from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel makes a very interesting claim, which anticipates Winnicott's theory of the survival of the object. Hegel tells us that desire wants to destroy the independent object and thereby give itself certainty for itself, namely in an objective manner<sup>33</sup>. Both Hegel and Winnicott assume the perspective in which there needs to be a primary aggressiveness towards an object, so that we could have an experience of the world. By destroying the object (Hegel) or by the survival of the object (Winnicott), the self-consciousness or the subject might have access to the external reality, but also to the reality of the object.

Winnicott could have combined as well the chapter concerning the origins of creativity with the chapter concerning "the use of an object", namely the chapter which we wanted to analyze in this particular paper. Using Buber's notion of the originator instinct/drive, borrowed from his book entitled *Between Man and Man*<sup>34</sup>, we can affirm that the origins of creativity lie in the early destruction of the object, namely in what is usually called primary aggressiveness. Our argument follows the next path: Buber tells us that even if a child wants to destroy an object, that is because the child wants to see it in its components, so he or she can contemplate the unity that has become fragmented, and of course put these fragments in another specific way/order.

This is the work of the originator instinct/drive, with which we want to imprint our own trace upon a relation (even upon reality), whether it is a relation with a human being, or the relation with the work of art. Following Buber's very interesting idea we want to affirm that the early destruction of the object is a form of creativity, a primitive one, which is accompanied by some sort of curiosity, we might add, this being the specific role played by

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<sup>33</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 109.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, Routledge, 2004, p. 101.



the originator instinct/drive. All of these can be subsumed to Winnicott's idea of the creative apperception, namely the fact that we can look at the world in a different way, namely as an "as if". We can look at a tree in its totality or follow the bending of the branches<sup>35</sup>. We can look at the clock to know the time, or we can just contemplate the play of the clock itself as a mechanism. Here we could as well discuss the role playing in the creative act by the phantasy, after Husserl, but we will take time to prepare this discussion for another time.

### **The primal setting at a distance**

We are now going to consider Martin Buber's view on the concept of distance in order to suggest that what happens between the child and the object that survived the destruction is an "act of distance", respectively what we want to call "the primal setting at a distance", this being the first act of recognition which came from the child, the recognition of something independent and autonomous from his or her own self. With this double movement, consisting in the distance and the relation, man as man, Buber tells us, comes to perceive its own perceiving as well<sup>36</sup>.

The one, and only way perhaps, to expose the principle of being is to contrast its reality with that of other existing beings. Nature alone presents itself to us this act of contrasting, namely what has been called by Heidegger resistance, which should not be understood in this context as something similar to the psychoanalytical resistance of transference, but as the resistance of the world. Following his argumentation, Buber stresses again on the role played by this act of contrasting, and of course, here we talk about man's contrasting the external reality, which here is called by the generic term of nature.

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<sup>35</sup> Jan Abram, *The Language of Winnicott*, Karnac Books, 2017, p. 122.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, Harper&Row Publishers, 1965, p. 59.

Now we come closer to the double movement which enables man to have an experience of the world. The first movement is called the primal setting at a distance and the second movement is called entering into relation. The second movement presupposes the first one because we can enter into relation only with a being which has been set at a distance from us, namely with a being which has become and independent opposite, just like in Winnicott's "use of an object". Distancing should be considered as an event in this case<sup>37</sup>. Buber is here proposing that in order to overcome the resistance of the world, we have to set it at a distance, whereas Schutz's perspective is more psychoanalytical in some sense. Schutz implies the fact that phantasy can be our weapon with which we fight the resistance of the external world. For Schutz, in the world of phantasy, there is no resistance<sup>38</sup>, because the subject who phantasies is in some manner omnipotent of his or her own thoughts, similar to Winnicott's concept of the area of omnipotent control.

Buber is now going to talk about the impossibility of the animal to enter into relation, in the way human beings are able to. Now Buber invokes the concept of *Umwelt*, which is defined as the total world of objects which is accessible to the animal's senses. The animal perceives only that which concerns him in the situation available to it, and this available and concerning things construct his *Umwelt*. The animal doesn't have a world, but rather a realm, or as Merleau-Ponty would insist, a ray of world<sup>39</sup>. By world we understand something independent from the category of man, as we have saw that the animal realm is only that which serves to its immediate survival. Now Buber's goes on to insist on the animal's bodily being which accumulates data through its bodily memory. Only man can replace this conglomeration of information with a unity, which can be imagined as existing for itself, similar to Winnicott's "surviving object". This concept of unity can be also

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<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 60.

<sup>38</sup> Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality*, Martinus Nijhoff, 1962, p. 234.

<sup>39</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, 1968, p. 241.

translated as totality. Here Buber makes a very interesting comparison between the life of the animal and that of the human, namely the animal lives like a fruit in its skin, while man is like a dweller in a huge building which is always being added to, and whose limits can never be penetrated (the universe, the cosmos), but nevertheless man knows this building as something he lives in, in which he dwells, so man has the capacity of grasping the wholeness of the building as such, its totality.

The world thus becomes detached from him, and becomes something independent, through the act of recognition, a concept which Buber most probably takes from Hegel. Only when a structure of being is independently over against a living being, an independent opposite, does a world exist, and here we get the short version of what Donald Winnicott tried to explain in his paper on "the use of an object", without, of course, the problem of aggression/destructiveness<sup>40</sup>.

We may characterize this act of entering into relation with the world as such, as a whole and totality, and not as a sum of parts, as a synthetizing apperception. This synthetizing apperception is the function of unity, similar to the transcendental unity of consciousness from the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Also, this concept should be understood as the apperception of a being in its totality and unity, namely its wholeness.

Buber goes on to talk about the so-called acts of distance and acts of relation, the first being universal, and the second being personal. Distance provides the human situation and relation provides man's becoming in that situation. Man has a great desire to enter into relation with beings and to imprint on them his relation to them. This is what Buber called in *Between Man and Man* the originator instinct<sup>41</sup>, which in this paper, namely in *Distance and Relation*, is addressed in some manner as the will to relation.

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, Harper&Row Publishers, 1965, p. 61.

<sup>41</sup> Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, Routledge, 2004, p. 100.

## Conclusions and perspectives

After the moment of the so-called “act of distance”, the object becomes something permanent for the child, so we can talk about the concept proposed by Jean Piaget, namely the object permanence as having its basis in the phenomenon of the “act of distance”. Moreover, after receiving permanence, the object can be related to as an object objectively perceived, not as what Winnicott would call a subjective object.

We find out that for Piaget not only objects may receive permanence, but people too<sup>42</sup>. This goes along with Winnicott’s idea that the object which survives may also be the analyst in some way or another, this of course, taking place in the analytical setting. For Martin Buber, the act of relating which comes after the act of distancing can also enable the person to perceive others in their wholeness, in their totality and uniqueness.

Our thesis that we want to propose is that even space and time have their origin in the phenomenon of the “primal setting at a distance”, namely following the permanence of the object, the child is able to tell that an object exists whether it (the object) is in front of him or not. With this, we want to argue that the “primal setting at a distance”, which is followed by the permanence of the object, is not spatiality itself, but the presupposition to it, namely, to space. This means that after the object is set at a distance and it is perceived objectively, namely as something unique in the sense of something autonomous and independent apart from the child’s mind, the space is also presupposed there. With this primal setting at a distance, the child, namely the infant perceives spatial correlations between its own body (the objective subject) and the object which may or may not be present. Moreover, we want to suggest that even time is part of this becoming of the object as something independent and autonomous from the child’s mind. Here we want to insist using Kant’s argument, cited above, present in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, namely that permanence (the permanence of the object) is a mode of the

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<sup>42</sup> Ulrich Müller, Jeremy I. M. Carpendale, Leslie Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to Piaget*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 385

temporalization of time. We want to insist on this last point, by arguing that after the object has been set at a distance and regarded as something different from the self, as something not-me, whether it is a possession or not, and by virtue of the object permanence, the child is able to distinguish that the object has its own duration in time, and a place in space, of course.

Furthermore, we want to insist on this feature of the object set at a distance, namely the fact that the child is able to tell that this particular object is situated in space and time, and only after this, can the child have abstract concepts of space and time, by virtue of what Melanie Klein would have called introjection. Alongside Martin Buber, we can affirm that in the beginning there is the relation<sup>43</sup> (with the surviving object), which is the ground for every possible relation to space and time that comes afterwards (in the child's mind). Only after the survival of the object, which has now gained permanence in space and time can the infant perceive spatial and temporal relations. In other words, the surviving object which has now become something permanent is introjected by the child, and by virtue of this process of introjection the spatial and temporal features of the permanent object are assimilated by the infant.

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<sup>43</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970, p. 69.

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