

Drawing on the ‘ready-to-hand’

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ABSTRACT

What the author terms ‘transitional drawings’ are produced in both the social and autonomous context, and employ abbreviated forms of drawing and other sign-use characterised by indeterminacy, the postponement of premature closure, and the use of ready-to-hand surfaces of inscription that are both dispensable and expendable. This paper correlates the relation of transitional drawings on ready-to-hand surfaces to the experience of early sign use, the mediation this allows between the inner and external world of signs, and the generation of “potential space” (Winnicott, 1971/1982) or “the space between the symbol and the symbolized [where] an interpreting subject comes into being” (Ogden, 1989: 11-12). The paper suggests that transitional drawing on the ready-to-hand enhances the agent’s ability to effectively bridge the gap between the inner and the outer world of signs in the generation, modification and development of ideas.

Introduction

Gadamer states that to “the observer the work ... is reflected as a miracle of creation by inspired genius. ... the self-knowledge of the artist remains far more down to earth. He seeks possibilities of making and doing ...” (Gadamer, 1991: 93). This echoes Frederic Nietzsche, “we are accustomed to abstain from asking how it (the work of art) became: we rejoice in the present fact as though it came out of the ground by magic” (in Schaeffer, 1992: 225). One of the artist’s salient possibilities of “making and doing” is the mode of drawing that I have termed, elsewhere, “transitional drawing” (Pigrum, 2001, 2009). Drawing is not a simple concept with one characteristic sufficient to include all its forms. It cannot be sharply defined by a single set of jointly necessary and sufficient conditions, but is closer to having what Wittgenstein termed, “family resemblances” (Jacquette, 1998: 242-52). While transitional drawings need not share a single set of properties their “family resemblance” can be characterised broadly by incompleteness, and openness to the use of multiple sign modes, and a surface of subscription is “ready-to-hand” (see Figures 1, 2 and 3 below).

I have used the term “transitional” drawing not only because the drawing involves a passage of states, and often involves a transition between one sign mode and another but also because, as I shall attempt to show in this paper, there are correlations between transitional drawing and what Winnicott (1971/1982: 41) termed “transitional object use” and “potential space”. The first section of the paper provides an overview of Winnicott’s notion of “transitional object” use in the formation of “potential space” and its correlation to transitional drawing. In the next section I discuss the relation between transitional drawing and the traces of initial “transitional object use”. The openness to the use of multi-sign modes and the “ready-to-hand” surface of inscription are the themes of the following section, which also discuss a manuscript drawing by Leibniz and a draft manuscript by

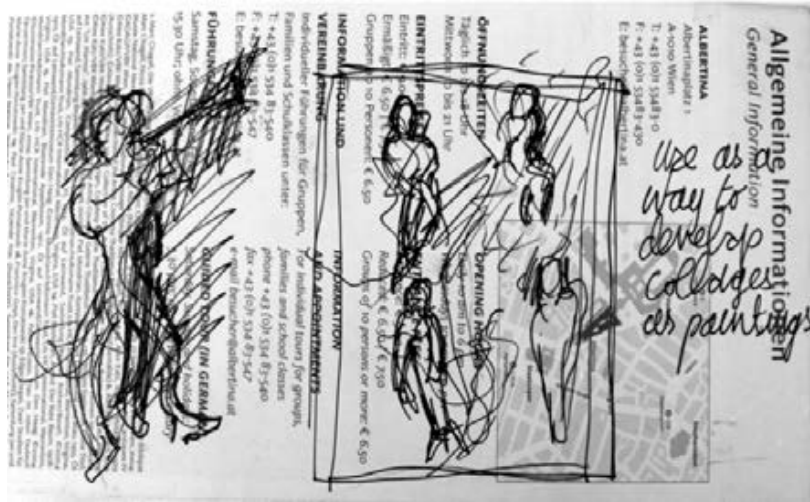


Figure 1. An example of a multi-mode transitional drawing on the ready-to-hand surface of general information concerning the Albertina gallery and Museum in Vienna in an unpublished notebook in possession of the author.

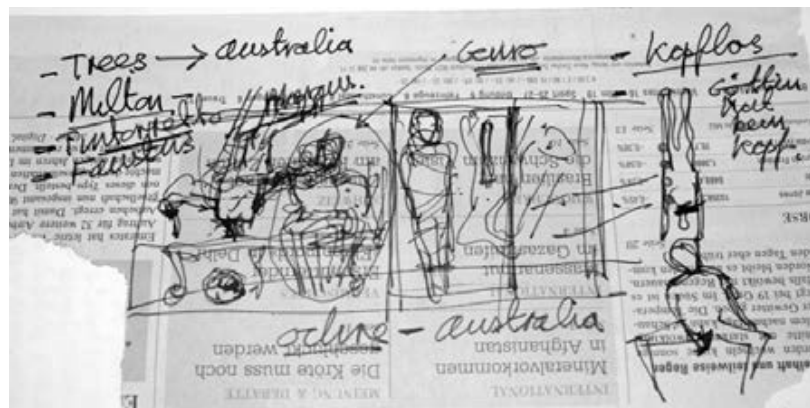


Figure 2. An example of a transitional drawing on the ready-to-hand surface of a German language newspaper in an unpublished notebook in possession of the author.



Figure 3. An example of a transitional drawing on the ready-to-hand surface of an envelope in an unpublished notebook in possession of the author.

Pushkin that involve the use of drawing. This is followed by a description of the way transitional drawing is acquired in the collaborative context of dialogue and drawing. The final section addresses the problematic of potentiality and actualisation and the inherent planarity of transitional drawing. The conclusion draws together some of the salient correlations between transitional drawing, and “potential space” and suggests a number of further research directions.

‘Transitional object use’, ‘potential space’ and ‘transitional drawing’

According to Winnicott (1971/1982) the total dependency on the mother gives the infant the illusion of oneness, of total unity with the mother. This unity is a compound, that the child creates through the illusion that internal and external reality are one. Initially the mother’s role is to protect the infant from a premature awareness of separateness. This begins to change when the mother creates a space for the child in which, what Winnicott terms the “transitional object” enables the child to slowly separate from the mother. With transitional object use the instability of the inside/outside border is given a “place”, or to use Winnicott’s terminology a “potential space”.

The child’s transitional object use in “potential space” is a highly charged activity involving the use and animation of transitional objects. They are transitional in that they help the infant to bridge or affect a passage across gaps in continuity, between the compelling illusion of the unity with the mother and child to the anxiety produced by her perceived absence and the process of separation. Once the infant has generated a “potential space” it enters the symbolic order, “the immediacy of the pre-symbolic *real* is lost forever ... we are submerged in the universe of signs” (Zizek, 1996: 95). According to Winnicott, “potential space” is where we engage in the perpetual task of keeping inner and outer reality, the self and the objective world of other people and objects separate yet interrelated and he attributes the beginnings of all cultural and creative activity and experience to “potential space”.

In Winnicott’s view, the child has omnipotent control over objects until there is a realisation of their existence as entities in their own right. Thus “transitional object use” effects a separation of the object and the subject that avoids a static relationship between imagination and reality, symbols and things. As such the transitional object marks the beginning of the change from object relating to object use.

Already in the pre-linguistic stage of development the child begins handling objects in a way that later leads to the infant’s tendency “to weave other-than-me objects” (Winnicott, 1971/1982: 3) that are “*reliably and readily available*” into its “functional experiences” (3). The move to transitional object use occurs when these objects take on a vital importance for the child as something that has “a vitality or reality of its own” (5) and the child’s sense of it having been in the environment all the time. Subsequently the actual object is “decathected” and its use enters the realm of “potential space”, or the intermediate realm “between inner psychic reality and the external world” (5) that marks the beginnings of creative play and a growing awareness of processes in which the infant has control over objects. Although the initial transitional object is “decathected”, according to Winnicott it starts “each human being off with “what will always be important to them” (12).

‘That something that will always be of interest to us’

Agamben describes a “fundamental dimension. No longer phantasm and not yet sign ... [but] a space which is neither an hallucinated dream nor the indifferent world of concrete objects” (Agamben, in Baldacci 1997: 134)—what he terms an “intermediary epiphanic space, situated in the no-man’s-land between narcissistic self love and the choice of an external object”; a space in which he suspects “the fruits of human culture might one day be seen to reside” (134).

At a later developmental stage, transitional drawing, like the writer's draft, represents the change that an earlier object of "great centrality" (Nussbaum, 2001: 232) has undergone. However, transitional drawing's relationship to the vestigial memory of the transitional object cannot be located because in the transitional drawing it is continuously subject to a process of displacement and deferral that multiplies and diversifies its guises.

Rudolfo (1996), writing on Winnicott's theories, elucidates the significance of this being drawn to that something, that will always be of interest to us as the persistence of a particularly intense memory trace. At the same time he warns that this "something" should not be seen as unified, systematic or harmonious or of all encompassing power, as this would reduce an understanding of its dynamic, innovative function. It is not static and unchanging but open to modification, development and transformation in a continuously transitional process of binding and unbinding.

Transitional object use is then an act of "binding the stimuli that comes from the outside" (Borch-Jacobsen, 1988: 155), and from the outside and of unbinding it, as process that is "the most important function of the psychic apparatus ..." (155). For Winnicott this is the interplay between separateness and union and represents the unification of the social bond that opens up the possibility of acceptance and relations as such; and the process of unbinding as the possibility for differentiation (see Borch-Jacobsen, 1988: 121). Wind (1932, in Wuttke, 1992: 401-417) described this in terms of the transition between the poles of the binding of the desire for the social bond and the unbinding that allows for differentiation. According to the cultural historian, Abraham Warburg (1866-1929), the polar relation between binding and unbinding present "the condition of artistic activity" (see Gombrich, 1986: 288).

The correlation between "transitional object use", "potential space" and "transitional drawing" that come into play here are as follows:

- Transitional drawing is, in a very real, but overlooked sense, a taking up again, a reinvestment of the early ability to bind and unbind that originates in the open possibilities inherent in "transitional object use" in "potential space" and the capacity to play that Jemstedt states "is the foundation of man's capacity for creativity" (Jemstedt, 2000: 124).
- The ready-to-hand surface of inscription, which is often printed matter of some kind, headed hotel note-paper, newsprint, envelopes or the reverse side of printed matter, facilitates both binding and unbinding, doing, undoing and redoing because the surface of inscription is both "dispensable and expendable" enabling us to respond to "that which will always be of interest to us".

Like Huizinga (1949/2002), that other great proponent of the creative nature of play, Winnicott conceives of play as remaining at the centre of the human psyche, in other words play itself has a continually evolving and unfolding "after-life" that catches up the sign traces of that "something which will always be of interest to us". But a trace, according to Derrida, is less determinate than the structure of the sign in that it does not lead along a path to a particular kind of image, but to "*open and transformative possibilities* that merely suggest a way, a track or trail" (see Lucy, 2004: 122).

Transitional drawing, 'multi- mode' sign use and the 'ready-to-hand'

The early forms of representation, enaction and image formation, do not disappear as the new lexical capacity is gained. They do not remain at primitive organizational levels. They probably continue epigenetic development because the acquisition of lexical capacities increases the availability of schemata for organization of information in any mode (Horowitz, 1983: 84).

The iconic sign of transitional drawing is often supplemented by the symbolic sign of writing used to remind the agent of complex ideas, materials and processes, and is sometimes as indeterminate or semantically unstable as the drawing. The sculptor Stimm states, "Sometimes I write on drawings, I put down a telephone number because I am afraid to forget it. I will also write one word that in this



Figure 4. A manuscript draft by Pushkin where drawing is characteristically interwoven with his writing (in Zavlovskaya, 1987).

moment is pregnant with the name of a future sculpture, a word that marks an intention, or a criticism. It is possible that I write on a drawing ‘too kitschy’, ‘too Baroque’, ‘more vertical’ ... I use words to correct the future, in order not to forget a feeling I had when looking at these drawings where something seemed too weak or too baroque” (cited in Pigrum, 2001: 222).

In Pigrum (2009) the author remarks on the fact that Pushkin’s manuscripts are often permeated by drawing and are among the most interesting examples of creative transitional notation that exists. Zavlovskaya (1987) states that Pushkin used drawings in his compositional process as an “exit or outlet for things he could not yet express in words” (Zavlovskaya, 1987: 381). This produces drawings in his manuscripts that have no relation to the words on the page but are thrown up by an unexpected association with what he was working on at the time. Very often the human profiles that litter the margins of his drafts were drawn before he described the person in words. According to Zavlovskaya Pushkin often used drawing to “wrest” the words he needed to describe something.

Franz Kafka (1852-1931) also made use of very rapid drawing in his draft manuscripts. Drawings that Max Brod sometimes rescued from the wastepaper basket or cut from the margins of the school exercise books in which Kafka wrote. Like Pushkin, Kafka did not use drawing to illustrate his texts but as an integral part of his creative notation. According to Böttcher and Mitterzweil (1982) Kafka employed drawing in a playful transposition of thoughts and emotions, but more importantly to initially capture the gestures, movement and appearance of the characters in his works. If we follow Winnicott then both Pushkin and Kafka used drawing in their drafting processes to repeatedly re-establish a relation to the trace of that something, in all its many guises, that was always of interest to them, a sign charged with a potentiality open to creative notational practices that can also activate alternative paths. Their drawing “announces” something that is not fixed or static but opens the potential of something to stand forth (see Pigrum, 2010).

In Pigrum (2009) the author looks at the above manuscript where Leibniz employed more than one sign mode. Following Peirce these signs can be categorised as iconic, symbolic and indexical signs, where drawing and diagramming are an iconic sign, writing is symbolic, and signs of cancellation are indexical (see Peirce, 1913/1998: 13). There is a “to and fro process that links the modes dynamically. The oblique view drawing conventions that Leibniz employs depend on a view

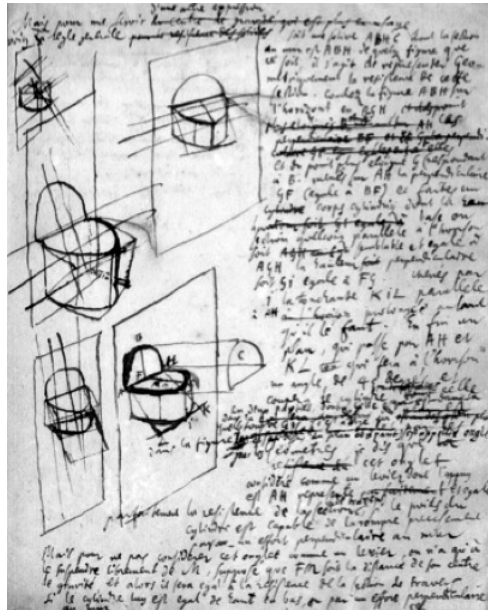


Figure 5. Leibniz manuscript from 1683 on fracture strength that is part of a four-page letter to Mariotte. Courtesy of The National Library of Hanover (Leibnizbrief an Mariotte Signatur LBr. 608 Bl. 57-58).

of the paper as virtual three-dimensional space” (Pigrum, 2009: 148). Nor, should we forget that as a letter, “it is also part and parcel of a dialogic exchange with another practitioner, where Leibniz has the freedom to do, undo and redo the modes of visualisation and writing without impairing the comprehension of the letters recipient” (148).

The Leibniz manuscript employs the linear, sequential, one-dimensional signs of writing and drawings that are “read as having three dimensions, producing ... an illusion of depth [where] the words actually appear to take up a place in front of the drawing” (149) but just as importantly “in the drawing the nature of the writing implement, the quill, is in evidence in the unevenness of transcription, the blurred edges and fainter ink lines” producing “a visual entity, a text in its original Latin meaning of *textire* or weave that in places, like the drawing is done, undone and redone” (149).

Heidegger suggests that every entity that is to-hand has different conditions of closeness and identifies three states of proximity that are linked: the presence-at-hand where things are not proximally given, the “proximally ready-to-hand” (Heidegger, 1962: 135), and readiness-to-hand where the thing and our immediate concerns converge. In the context of this paper the ready-to-hand is most often a piece of paper that is “proximally ready-to-hand”, something lying around that in its readiness to hand converges at a certain moment with our concerns. Most often this is a planar horizontal surface. The “dispensable and expendable” quality of the ready-to-hand surface means that it is not only something “reliably available” in the work environment but something that can be left around in the workplace after we have drawn on it, re-found, recovered or destroyed.

The sign modes already on the ready-to-hand surface of inscription contribute to its dispensable or expendable nature. There is no intentional connection between the drawing and whatever signs already exist on the ready-to-hand. However, looked at after their completion these antecedent signs often seem to augment the drawing in a singular way, almost as if the subject had unconsciously used those parts of the ready-to-hand that would contribute an unexpected and unintentional dimension to the drawing.

Transitional drawing on the ready-to-hand stands in relationship to the finished drawing or the finished work of art rather like the cardboard box stands to the toy that it contained and as artists we sometimes find it more interesting than finished works. It is not unusual for practitioners to write a telephone number or other items somewhere on the drawing— drawings that are often discarded after use. The drawing may or may not survive which, to some extent, places it outside of the

subject's omnipotent control. When, like the drawings reproduced in this paper, it survives then it undergoes a change in status. Once inserted into a notebook it takes on a quality of something assigned to an archive where it potentially contributes to the common pool from which we may all draw inspiration.

Winnicott states that to develop an understanding of creativity we "must be directed away from a concern with an individual isolate" (Winnicott, 1971/ 1982: 71) and turn to factors of the physical environment. Peppiatt (1996) describes the studio of the British painter, Francis Bacon (1909-1992) in terms of layer upon layer of images depicting Bacon's preoccupations "... like the partial physical manifestation of the mental compost" (Peppiatt, 1996: 203). This strew of images included photographs of friends, golf and x-ray manuals, film stills, reproductions of paintings by artists such as Michelangelo, Velasquez, Rembrandt and many others, photographs from Muybridge's work on human motion and photographs of mouth and skin diseases. As the author suggests (Pigrum 2009), Bacon's movement and painting activity in the studio reshuffled, creased, blemished, tore and besmirched these images.

In Pigrum (2009) the author goes on to describe the way Deleuze (2003), in his book on Bacon concentrates on the actual "diagramming" on the canvas but does not mention the role of the layering of "stuff" in Bacon's studio. Although Bacon would pick up ready-to-hand, overlapped images from the floor, fasten them together, sometimes supplementing them with drawing there is no evidence of a one to one transfer of these ready-to-hand images to his painting process that would constitute what Agamben states is a gesture that "breaks the false alternative between ends and means because it is ... the display of mediation, the making visible of the means as such" and as such "is the communication of a potential" (Agamben, 2007: 154-156).

The space of acquisition

Winnicott describes a decisive "turn" in development when the infant moves from playing alone in the presence of the mother, but without her intervention, to what Jemstedt terms "mutual play" (Jemstedt, 2000: 129) where the infant accepts the introduction of ideas into the play that are not his or her own. Jemstedt goes on to state that this "development of a capacity for 'mutual play' widens out into the intense experiencing that appertains to ... creative activity" (129). In this "mutual play" there is "a sensitive searching quality, a kind of intelligent expectation in the infant of becoming received and understood" (129). The listening and being listened to involved in the play between the mother and the child where the mother "attends to and processes what the infant has transferred into her [and] subsequently conveys it back to the child in a form that the child can receive and retain" (129) is, I believe, the foundation of the acquisition of transitional drawing in the collaborative context.

None of the expert practitioners interviewed in my research could remember how they had acquired transitional drawing processes, although one informant related what he believed to be the key experience of sitting down with a graphic designer who drew him into a dialogue and then took whatever paper was to hand and started drawing (see Pigrum 2001, 2009). In my educational experience students do not respond, for example, to an explanation with visual examples of generating, modifying and developing ideas on a "ready-to-hand" surface, but acquire this mode when the teacher repeatedly employs such a surface to illustrate his understanding of the student's ideas and then passes the drawing to the student for further clarification. The teacher puts himself and his knowledge into play with the drawing in a complex oscillation between images and concepts, gesture and thought. Most often, once the ritual of drawing on the ready-to-hand has been completed, I either suggest the student paste this "conversation" into their notebook or simply discard it. An important finding of my research (Pigrum, 2001) is that transitional drawing is only successfully acquired, like language, in a social context and in response to an immediate task. The

quality of dialogue, and the “dispensability and expendability” of the drawing shaped the informant’s ability to draw transitionally in the autonomous context.

Transitional drawing, potentiality and planarity

Transitional drawing exists in a state of tension between potentiality and actualisation. Thus, the relation of transitional drawing to the completed work is one of potentiality, as an area between impulses from the external world and subconscious mental activity and thinking. In other words, while such drawings pass into our thinking, they seldom pass into the material actualisation of the finished work. Mills, in his discussion of the philosophy of Agamben, highlights precisely this notion of potentiality where “to explicate the effective mode of potentiality’s existence, it is necessary that potentiality be able to *not always to pass over into actuality*” (Mills, 2008: 36, emphasis added).

In transitional drawing on the ready-to-hand surface of inscription some potential comes into play, producing a non-finite, projection of possibilities. This is often followed by an unstable growth of potential that produces a kind of indeterminate expectancy. The repetition with modifications that this resonance sets in motion is a process of doing, undoing and redoing. Transitional drawing on the ready-to-hand surface of inscription aids our ability to “undo” or “unmake” or unbind in a deferral of closure that emphasises the modulation of potentiality towards actualisation and, as such, is an example of what Krämer states is “the fundamental exteriority of the mind” (Koch & Krämer, 2009). This is an exteriority where, following Jemstedt (2000) writing about negative capability, we “develop the capacity to tolerate uncertainty and doubt, to be able to remain in a state where no obvious pattern can as yet be discerned, and then intuitively be able to apprehend when a pattern is formed” (Jemstedt, 2000: 128).

If we follow Peirce (1913/1964) then “potential space”, as an intermediate area between impulses from the inside and the outside, must essentially be semiotic and closely correlated to the planarity of the surfaces on which we draw. Schneider Brody states, “the picture plane [the two dimensional may be understood as a type of potential space ...” (Schneider Brody: 2001: 370). Can we then view transitional drawing as what Krämer (2009), writing about diagrams, describes as “the exteriorization of our mental inner topology” (Krämer, 2009), an “exteriorization” that echoes Summers’ view that planarity is part and parcel of our deepest nature. According to Summers, “all images on surfaces are necessarily involved in the virtual, which is an open-ended realm of possible invention” (Summers, 2003: 342-343).

I have argued that the transitional drawing, like all transitional notational practices are, to borrow a term from Krämer, the “exteriorization” of what Winnicott termed “potential space”. In other words the use of the ready-to-hand surface of inscription to draw on, “creates a space for the movement of thought” (Krämer, 2010: 3) in which both entities in the inner world and those in the outer can be conjoined and made visible in a flexible process that allows the use of other signs and is open to doing, undoing and re-doing.

Conclusion

Winnicott’s notion of “potential space” is the intermediate space between the internal and external world that hinges on actual object use which, although it is eventually discarded, leaves a trace of “something that will always be of interest to us” and which, according to Winnicott, is the source of all subsequent creativity. The thesis of this paper is that in the after life of the trace of “transitional object use”, “potential space” becomes an object, a planar surface of inscription, where we can mediate the interplay of the world of internal and external signs. The particular qualities of the ready-to-hand surface allows the potentiality of this mediation to unfold in ways that avoid definitive closure, allowing for the continual transition of creative ideas and the modulation these produce in the subject. That is to say, as soon as we reach for the “ready-to-hand” to draw on, in the

dialogic or autonomous context, our consciousness undergoes a modification in the direction of a mode of activity that allows multi-sign use and a continuous doing, undoing and the re-doing of ideas.

Transitional drawing on the ready-to-hand is used in many areas of activity. The transitions that this use of the ready-to-hand enhances rest upon the “reliable and available” ready-to-hand surface that, once we commence drawing, is also open to other sign use. It is a surface or support that is both “dispensable and expendable”, a drawing on the ready-to-hand, once complete, is most often left around in the workspace where it “may or may not survive”. The acquisition of transitional drawing, like the initial use of the “transitional object”, depends on the role of the “other”, involving an accommodation of the ideas of someone else in a to and fro process of drawing and talking, of showing and saying that, once internalised, becomes integral to the subject’s agency.

The author is aware that this paper merely touches upon the complex philosophical problem of potentiality and actualisation. Future research will explore this problematic more fully and also attempt to achieve a better understanding of Kant’s and Wittgenstein’s notion of “schema” and Peirce’s triadic notion of the sign and the relation of these to the intermediate “potential space” of the transitional drawing. A further research direction is the exploration of the extent to which certain dimensions of the work of the artist and writer, Antonin Artaud, and the artists Joseph Beuys, Anna Oppermann, Anton Tapies and Cy Twombly have produced a shift in the cultural status of drawing on the ready-to-hand from being an aspect of preparatory invention to one of the completed work.

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