

GRACE NOTES VIII

DR SALMA SIDDIQUE considers the significance of losing things

STORIES CAN BE understood as the act of making meaning from experience with words, which Hillman (1983) refers to as 'the persuasive power of imagining in words, an artfulness in speaking and hearing, writing and reading' (p4). Recently I went to a railway station lost property office in the hope that someone had handed in my beloved black woollen scarf. On entering the office I explained my grief in losing my scarf which was gifted by a friend. The rather tall portly chap in a crumpled ill-fitting station uniform dipped his eyes in acknowledgment and slipped between the openings of two doors returning with a large plastic box labelled 'black scarves'. He unceremoniously tipped the contents onto the counter. I moved along as if at an identity parade. What a motley collection I thought as my eye passed over the shoal washed up on the counter...I didn't want to just take any old scarf, even though some in the pile before me were in a better state, quality and more aesthetically pleasing than my original – I wanted my particular scarf. The scarf was given to me a few years earlier by a friend as a parting gift for my support on completing her PhD before returning to the US.

How often have we lost things? As easily as the clock loses minutes and is followed by the hours, we are left with the awareness of our own existence and experience through discounting (the area, type and mode, Schiff and Schiff, 1971). In losing that scarf I felt that I had lost my friend for in the act of 'giving and taking' between us was what Klein (1975) referred to as the thing acting in the place of the relationship and on this thing we ascribe emotions, values and memories over time which 'ensures our own contentment, and contributes to the pleasure, comfort or happiness of other people' (Klein, 1975). Things engender social relations of power, desire and cultural currency.

It is in our experience of losing and finding of these things that we evoke in 'the lost and found office' of the therapy room. Freud (1999) states that 'when objects are lost, subjects are found and it is that part of ourselves that we find ourselves in a place of grief.' Each thing lost or a thing found operates as a transitional object (Winnicott, 1958) of the experience of the connecting or disconnecting self to the world. I have experienced this

through the loss of my suitcase while at the airport and what happened when my partner left for one destination with my suitcase and I left for another with theirs. The loss of object was to some degree the loss of self and identity in having to envisage myself in the clothes of another personae. It created for that week an altered ego state identification and the tensions between the self-conscious and unconscious boundaries of behaviour which perform the etiquette, techniques and the character (Drego, 1983). These aspects of our behaviour are essentially expressed through the relationships and connections we (un)make with others. I had felt unsettled and distressed but others might have seen it as an opportunity to alter, grieve or extend their self image.

The changes in clothes and different adornments essentially offer a passage from childhood to adulthood, from cultural scripting (White and White, 1975) of engendering and sexualising of status, place, role and responsibilities as we grow up. However, more recently cosmetic surgery, piercing and tattooing are considered a significant part of expressing and modifying the life positions and operational beliefs which can lead both to the loss and expansion of self in relation to others. The story of each loss or gain becomes the narrative of reclaiming, restoration and preservation to make the self a life-long project to create a sense of I'm OK – You're OK (Ernst, 1971). I wonder if we give sufficient attention to the loss of things and their associated meaning in the therapy room?

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Dr Salma Siddique CTA(P) PTSTA is a clinical anthropologist, researcher and academic in social sciences and ethnomedicine. She also works as a volunteer clinician with survivors of torture. Current Chair of UKATA Research Committee