Robert D. Stolorow’s address to the IAPSP on the occasion of the launching of the 2nd edition of ‘Structures of Subjectivity: Explorations in Psychoanalytic Phenomenology and Contextualism.’

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I will use George Atwood's and my book, the second edition of ‘Structures of Subjectivity: Explorations in Psychoanalytic Phenomenology and Contextualism,’ to address certain rather mean-spirited mischaracterizations of our work that have appeared during the past decade or so. They take the form of misrepresenting our work as being merely derivative of, or an offshoot of, Kohut’s Self Psychology. This is dead wrong, and no one who reads this book could take that claim seriously. Let me begin by speaking about Kohut’s Self Psychology a little bit. Kohut made an invaluable contribution to clinical psychoanalysis by demonstrating that the experience of selfhood, and of its collapse, is embedded in a context of emotional interrelatedness. Kohut recognized that the experience of selfhood is context-embedded through and through. That was his central clinical contribution, and it is all in his 1971 book ‘The Analysis of the Self,’ published six years before the birth of Self Psychology as an overarching theoretical framework. We will be forever indebted to Kohut for that clinical contribution. However, when he moved from ‘The Analysis of the Self’ to ‘The Restoration of the Self,’ which marked the birth of Self Psychology proper, he took all his wonderful insights into narcissism, narcissistic disorders, narcissistic transferences, and the psychoanalytic treatment of narcissistic disorders, and generalized them into a theory of the total personality, of the genesis of the whole range of psychopathology, and of the totality of analytic transferences. This was a mistake because it generalized insights from the psychology of narcissism, narcissistic disturbances, and the treatment of narcissistic disorders into a theory of the totality of personality and its disturbances
and treatment, which is what Self Psychology (post ‘The Restoration of the Self) purports to be. This is a mistake because there is more to human personality than the experience of selfhood! There is also the experience of worldhood – the emotional world that we live in psychologically. There can be no alteration in the sense of selfhood without a corresponding alteration in the sense of one’s emotional world, and vice versa, so to reduce everything to selfhood is essentially to reduce everything to narcissism and narcissistic disorders. Kohut’s framework works great for the treatment of severe narcissistic personality disorders, but not so well in the case of more complex personalities and complex psychopathologies. There was a little hubris there when Kohut over-extended his wonderful clinical insights into the context-embeddedness of narcissism, narcissistic disorders, and the experience of selfhood, and generalized those into a theory of the total personality and the totality of analytic transferences. That is one problem I find in the move from ‘The Analysis of the Self’ to ‘The Restoration of the Self.’

Another problem is that Self Psychology is avowedly a theory of deficit. According to this idea, people with so-called self disorders walk around with holes in their ‘selves,’ and this is caricatured in Kohut’s characterization of the goal of treatment as the rehabilitation of the “enfeebled self” (e.g., ‘The Restoration of the Self,’ p. 54). Those are Kohut’s words, not mine! People do not just walk around with something missing, they also walk around with something crushingly present, which is what I call ‘killer organizing principles.’ That is, the legacy of developmental trauma is not just something missing, but is also what is crushingly present, that is, these killer organizing principles. They are incredibly destructive to a person’s emotional life. Reducing that to deficit, to my mind, is only half the story.

The third problem I have with ‘The Restoration of the Self,’ and with Self Psychology proper, is the relentless reification, and even hypostatization, of the experience of selfhood. The bipolar
‘self’ becomes an entity. An entity that has two poles, one of ambitions and one of ideals, and the tension arc between the two that sets the course of a person’s life. And you have ‘selfs’ seeking ‘selfobjects’—more reification. In the new chapter eight of the revised ‘Structures of Subjectivity’ we talk about metaphysical illusion, and how the creation of metaphysical entities is a way of evading the transience and finitude of all things human. Philosophical metaphysics does that, and psychoanalytic metapsychologies, which are forms of metaphysics, also do that. These are my three objections to Kohut’s Self Psychology. His central contribution was a contribution to emotional phenomenology, showing that the experience of selfhood, and of its collapse, is context-embedded through and through. But I have these three main difficulties with the move from ‘The Analysis of the Self’ to ‘The Restoration of the Self.’

Our thinking owes a debt to the insights of ‘The Analysis of the Self’ and its elucidation of the context-embeddedness of the sense of selfhood, but it has origins that have nothing to do with Self Psychology, and anyone who reads our book will see that. In the first new chapter, chapter six, George and I give a memoir of the development of our thinking beginning in 1972 when I came to Rutgers where George and Silvan Tomkins already were, and there was a dream shared by a number of the faculty there, which was the recreation of Henry Murray’s Personology, a movement in academic personality psychology with a central claim that knowledge of human personality was to be gained, not by vast statistical and nomothetic studies, but by the in-depth systematic study of the single individual. We wanted to establish Personology at Rutgers, but it never got off the ground. There was another important influence, by the way—Silvan Tomkins’s interest in the Psychology of Knowledge, including psychological knowledge. In fact George Atwood and Silvan Tomkins published an early paper, "On the Subjectivity of

One thing that came out of the dream of Personology at Rutgers was a series of studies by George and me, which we chronicle in chapter six of the second edition of ‘Structures of Subjectivity,’ on the personal subjective origins of psychoanalytic theories, which we began in the mid-1970s. These were collected together in our first book ‘Faces in a Cloud,’ which we finished in 1976, a year before the birth of Self Psychology proper in 1977. Unfortunately, our book was not published until 1979; otherwise, if we had not had a slow publisher, it would have come out the same year, 1977, as ‘The Restoration of the Self.’ Now it was in that book, finished in 1976, that we reasoned in the following way: “Since psychoanalytic theories can be shown to derive to a significant degree from the personal subjective worlds of their creators, what psychoanalysis needed, and needed to be, was a theory of subjectivity itself, and that’s when we coined the phrase ‘psychoanalytic phenomenology.’ We made a series of proposals in the last chapter of ‘Faces in a Cloud’ outlining the basic principles for a psychoanalytic phenomenology, a framework that took the personal experiential world of the individual as its principle focus, eschewing all reified metapsychological entities. So that is how we got started in 1976 toward a psychoanalytic phenomenology.

The original ‘Structures of Subjectivity’ (1984) was the first extensive systematic presentation of our psychoanalytic phenomenology, and in the first chapter of that book we outlined in some detail what the influences on us were when developing our psychoanalytic phenomenology. In addition to the original ‘Faces in a Cloud’ studies and Murray’s Personology, we talked about the hermeneutic tradition, primarily in philosophy and history, the main figures of which were Wilhelm Dilthey and Hans-Georg Gadamer, who emphasized the role of interpretation in all human understanding. Dilthey, especially, argued that the method of gaining knowledge in the
human sciences relied on empathy for its research projects, which Dilthey interpreted as the finding of the “I in the thou,” in contrast to the method of observation used in the natural sciences. Another big influence on us was philosophical phenomenology, and there are fairly extensive discussions in the first chapter of the first edition about our views of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, and the relevance of their phenomenological frameworks for psychoanalysis. Finally, we were very influenced by modern Structuralism, by which we mean the cultural anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss and the cognitive psychology of Jean Piaget, where the emphasis is not just on experience but on the structures that organize experience. Husserl called them the intentional structures of experience, Piaget called them schemas. So both of these terms bear close similarity to what we call "prereflective organizing principles," which you could just as well call "cognitive-affective schemas." These are structures, not missing structures, but structures that can be crushingly present.

All of these influenced our thinking and had nothing to do with Self Psychology whatsoever, so you cannot read the first chapter of our book, not to mention the new chapter six, the memoir, and seriously hold the claim that we are simply offshoots of Kohut’s Self Psychology; that’s ridiculous. Such a claim distorts the historical facts. One group that tries to maintain this fiction are the orthodox disciples of Kohut. The other group is a certain set of people in relational psychoanalysis who want to split us off from relational psychoanalysis by relegating us to Self Psychology. Why do they want to do this? Some history: About ten years ago George, Donna, and I published an article in which we criticized certain ideas, like projective identification, in certain branches of relational psychoanalysis; we criticized them for retaining remnants of what we call Cartesian isolated-mind thinking. Rather than stimulating a dialogue with those we
criticized, they got injured, because these were ideas that were not supposed to be criticized –
critical dialogue seems not supposed to happen with psychoanalysis because the frameworks are
maintained like religions. This contrasts with arguments in philosophy, which have a much
different quality than disagreements in psychoanalysis, where people fight to the death to
maintain their ideas, take no prisoners! In philosophy people like to argue, it’s fun! That is the
professional activity of philosophy—to argue—without it there would be nothing for philosophers
to do! Nobody could read this book and think that ours is not a relational psychoanalytic theory.
It would be ridiculous. Let me read you a couple of paragraphs from the original ‘Structures of
Subjectivity.’

First, the initial paragraph of chapter 2 of the original ‘Structures of Subjectivity.’ Bear in mind
that these sentences were written in 1982-1983 and published in 1984, four years before Stephen
science is defined by its domain of inquiry. In its most general form, our thesis in this chapter is
that psychoanalysis seeks to illuminate phenomena that emerge within a specific psychological
field constituted by the intersection of two subjectivities—that of the patient and that of the
analyst. In this conceptualization, psychoanalysis is not seen as a science of the intrapsychic,
focused on events presumed to occur within one isolated 'mental apparatus.' Nor is it conceived
as a social science, investigating the 'behavioral facts' of the therapeutic interaction as seen from
a point of observation outside the field under study. Rather, psychoanalysis is pictured here as a
science of the ‘intersubjective,’ focused on the interplay between the differently organized
subjective worlds of the observer and the observed." How can anyone read that paragraph and
deny that ours is a Relational Theory? It is ridiculous!
Here’s another one, from the third chapter, "Development and Pathogenesis": “Winnicott once remarked, 'There is no such thing as an infant,' meaning that infant and maternal care together form an indivisible unit. Having in the previous chapter developed a similar argument with regard to the psychoanalytic patient, we now extend our intersubjective perspective in the direction suggested by Winnicott’s evocative remark. We contend that both psychological development and pathogenesis are best conceptualized in terms of the specific intersubjective contexts that shape the developmental process and that facilitate or obstruct the child’s negotiation of critical developmental tasks and successful passage through developmental phases. The observational focus is the evolving psychological field constituted by the interplay between the differently organized subjectivities of child and caretakers....” Could that be anything other than a Relational Theory?

The fourth chapter in the 1984 book is on the concept of concrete symbolization. We examined how concrete symbolization plays an important role in the formation of neurotic symptoms, transitional objects (which we call "symbolic objects"), enactments, and dreams. George and I have been talking about enactments since the early 1980s. What do we mean by an enactment? We mean putting an organizing principle into action. The important thing that has happened since the original ‘Structures of Subjectivity’ is that the idea of concrete symbolization has been extended by George, Bernie, and me, especially George, into the far reaches of mental disturbance, into the realm of the psychoses, and symptoms like delusions and hallucinations. George is a genius when it comes to the phenomenology of psychotic states and the ways things get concretely symbolized therein. In a paper that was published in 1987, "Symbols of Subjective Truth in Psychotic States," we adopted Kierkegaard's phrase ‘Subjective Truth,’ and George has
really run with that. To anyone who has not read his book ‘The Abyss of Madness,’ I would strongly recommend it.

So that is the first edition of ‘Structures of Subjectivity’ (Part 1 of the second edition). The second edition also contains three new chapters and another conclusion (Part 2). The first new chapter, chapter six, is a memoir that we call "Legacies of a Golden Age," referring to the golden age, or dream, of Personology at Rutgers University. It traces the whole evolution of our thinking from 1972 to the present. I think that speaks for itself. For those of you who are interested in the historical development of this framework, that chapter is essential. The second chapter is called "The Demons of Phenomenological Contextualism." When I would present the ideas of ‘Faces in a Cloud,’ usually someone in the audience would ask whether these principles would apply to us too! So George and I decided that we would do a psychobiography, a ‘Faces in a Cloud’ study of ourselves, in the form of a conversation between us, so that the analysis would benefit from the fact that we do not have identical organizing principles. That conversation is the seventh chapter. It particularly shows how our respective histories of trauma have entered into our theory. The eighth chapter is a sort of culmination and a circling back of our thinking and is one in which we apply a ‘Faces in a Cloud’ type of analysis to metaphysics and metaphysical systems. We pick up on an idea that was first introduced into Western philosophy by Wilhelm Dilthey, that the metaphysical impulse, the search for everlasting immutable entities and eternal truths, represents an illusory evasion of the finitude and the transience of all things human. In that chapter we try to demonstrate that in regard to one philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, and his metaphysical doctrine of the Eternal Return of the Same, and we look at that in terms of Nietzsche’s history of trauma and madness. We claim that psychoanalytic metapsychologies are forms of metaphysics because they too postulate eternal
truths and everlasting entities and ‘true’ realities. Metaphysics is the search for the Really Real!

We do analyses of two analytic theorists: first Freud and his metaphysical doctrine of the dual
instinct theory, which he in his 1937 article, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," actually
compared to the metaphysics of a pre-Socratic philosopher named Empedocles. They are almost
identical, so Freud had not come far since the pre-Socratic Greeks with regard to his
metaphysics! The final example is Kohut and what we regard as his metaphysical doctrine of
‘the self,’ which we see as a metaphysical entity, in contrast to the experience of ‘selfhood,’
which is an aspect of emotional phenomenology. The last thing I want to mention is that we turn
this form of analysis back on ourselves as well, looking at the implicit metaphysical dualities in
our own thinking, and we suggest that we need a further examination of the very concept of
context itself, which is one of our most universalized concepts.

Transcribed by Penelope Starr-Karlin, PsyD, MFT.

GEORGE ATWOOD:

“THOUGHTS ON THE LAUNCH OF THE SECOND EDITION OF STRUCTURES OF
SUBJECTIVITY”

Bob Stolorow gave us an elegant series of reflections on the second edition of our Structures of
Subjectivity, focusing on the ways this new book definitively answers various
mischaracterizations and criticisms of our viewpoint. My thoughts, overlapping and
complementing Bob’s, center on the reasons that the publication of our book has lifted me out of
my ordinarily gloomy mood and made me intensely happy.
1. The first edition of Structures, although the product of supreme efforts on our parts and really good in most ways, had certain flaws that came to my attention after it was released, flaws that were immediately seized upon by critics with cruel agendas to discredit our work. I am an utter fanatic about my own writing, and when I discover something less than shiningly perfect in it, I die a thousand deaths. The errors were minor, from a sane person’s perspective; but I do not consider myself to be sane. They concerned a passage or two in which we seemed to lapse into an objectivism that was inconsistent with the phenomenological emphasis of our project as a whole, a few terminological inaccuracies, and some stylistic features that were less than optimal. These problems loomed, however, in my imagination as defects that opened the door to critical attack, inescapable vulnerabilities, and I was helpless to change them. So I dealt with my suffering by trying not to think about it. When very occasionally my thoughts drifted over to the book’s shortcomings, I would shudder and regret that I had given my enemies anything they could use as points of attack. Phenomenological pursuits awaken great hostility amongst the Cartesians and objectivists around us, for such persons are made to feel the ground melting away from beneath their feet.

Imagine my joy when Routledge, our publisher, proposed a second edition of Structures of Subjectivity. The deficiencies could be remedied and the defects removed! Bob and I rewrote a few offending passages, corrected one or two terminological inaccuracies, and smoothed out the stylistic problems. Not only that. We were able to add whole new chapters to the work, covering the 30 years of our continuing collaboration that have passed since our book first appeared. I now see it as an invincible, radiant entity that shines the light of phenomenology on all things psychoanalytic. Our new book makes me insanely happy.
2. A second reason this book so pleases me pertains to its clinical context. Every theoretical system in our field has its clinical context, meaning the particular class of patients most influencing the theorist’s formulations. Freud’s theory, for example, flows originally out of work with so-called hysterics, and arguably also with obsessional patients. Certainly classical psychoanalysis is grounded in clinical experiences with patients falling in the psychoneurotic range. Jung’s theory, in contrast, shows the unmistakable imprint of his early encounters with dementia praecox, known in our time as schizophrenia. With Fairbairn, we see schizoid patients; with Kohut, narcissistic personality disorders. What is the clinical context of our intersubjective perspective? I would answer that it is importantly a context of work with patients in what I call “extreme states,” states diagnostically classified as psychotic, also including very profound emotional trauma. I do not mean to say that intersubjective systems theory emerges exclusively, or even primarily, out of work with people in extreme states. It is applicable to emotional disturbances of all degrees of severity and of every form and variety. I am nevertheless aware that at every stage in the development of our ideas, I have tested each emerging formulation against what I saw in my early years working in a psychiatric hospital with psychotic patients. These were people for whom the bottom had fallen out, people who had lost all sense of the substantiality and temporal continuity of the world and whose feeling of personal selfhood was under severe threat or was in a state of annihilation. Structures of Subjectivity, by embracing a post-Cartesian, radically phenomenological viewpoint, presents a framework of understanding that includes, rather than excludes, such persons from its purview.

My clinical training took place under the guidance of my first great mentor figure, Austin DesLauriers, author of The Experience of Reality in Childhood Schizophrenia. Although written
in the language of then-contemporary ego psychology (early 1960s), his classic work’s viewpoint was actually phenomenological, locating the essence of schizophrenia in a disintegration and dissolution of the sense of the real. I so wish DesLauriers was still alive so I could show him our book. I am sure he would experience it as a development of his own efforts, extending his adventures in the psychotherapy of psychosis and generalizing his fundamentally phenomenological approach. It fills me with sadness that he is gone, but it fills me with joy that I have been able to make something of all he taught me.

3. Then comes Silvan Tomkins, my second great mentor, author of Affect, Imagery, Consciousness (in 4 volumes). From Tomkins I learned about invariant themes in personal experience and how they are reflected in facial affect patterns, and he also shared his dazzling insights into what he called the psychology of knowledge. My contribution to the idea of invariant organizing principles, central in the intersubjective systems viewpoint, was importantly inspired by his theory of nuclear scenes and personal scripts. Bob Stolorow’s contribution to our use of this concept, in contrast, arose out of his rethinking of the concept of psychic structure under the influence of the writings of George Klein. Tomkins’ teachings regarding the psychology of knowledge were essential in the writing of our first book, Faces in a Cloud, as well as our second, Structures of Subjectivity. He read the 1984 edition of Structures, and although he appreciated our acknowledgment of our profound indebtedness to him, he had no further comment. It was a repeating theme of his long intellectual/academic life to brilliantly mentor young scholars, but then to feel betrayed and stolen from by them when they went off on their own pathways. Even so, all that Silvan Tomkins gave to us immeasurably enriched and deepened our work and I like to think he would be pleased with the new edition of our book. In
my dreams he often appears as a loving figure, which is how I like to remember him. Here is a happy thought: It has been more than 20 years since Tomkins died, but his lifework, like that of Austin DesLauriers, continues in ours.

4. Still another reason for my great happiness in seeing the second edition of our book published pertains to how it turns back on itself and examines its own psychological foundations. In chapter 7, written as a conversation between the two of us, we offer a ‘Faces in a Cloud’ analysis of our own thinking. When Faces first appeared, critics made the point, correctly, that it was incomplete. This first of our collaborative works presented psychobiographical interpretations of great analytic theorists, but offered nothing in the way of a psychological understanding of itself. The reason for our not undertaking such a project of self-reflection, originally, was that we did not yet have much of a theory to analyze. Many years passed before our own psychoanalytic theory became more than a vague set of proposals, an outline of a scaffolding to be filled in by future generations of thinkers. Two points are essential in what we were finally able to discern as to the subjectivity and intersubjectivity of our own theories: 1. the cardinal ideas of intersubjective systems theory are rooted in its creators’ personal experiences of traumatic loss, epistemic tyranny, and corrosive invalidation; and 2. our central concept of the intersubjective field, understood as a system of interacting, differently organized subjective worlds, can be viewed as a symbol of the interactive collaboration out of which our thinking emerged and thus as a shrine to an intellectual romance and a personal friendship spanning 43 years.

Structures of Subjectivity, 2nd edition, seems to me in a position to convey our thinking to the world of psychoanalysis as never before. I have no illusions about the conservative old guard in
our field, but it fills my heart with happiness when I think about communicating with the young. I picture students, years or even decades hence, stumbling across our book, and I can hear them saying: “Wow! This is pretty cool!” Who knows what interesting pathways they will then be inspired to find? The future of our field appears to me to be a very bright one. GA 7-6-14