Heinz Kohut's last paper (1982), written shortly before his death, summarized some of his most important differences with classical psychoanalysis and constituted his own legacy to succeeding generations of psychoanalysts. He had arrived at this point, painfully but inexorably, by his persistent dissatisfaction with the clinical results of the application of classical theories of development and pathogenesis and by his return, 25 years earlier, to the "field-defining observational stance of introspection and empathy" (p. 402).

In particular, Kohut took passionate issue with the concepts of intrapsychic conflict that have continued to provide the foundations for traditional psychoanalytic theories and practice. It was a tragic mistake, he insisted, to continue to treat people as if their essence were defined by a lifelong struggle between drives and the civilizing influences of their social environment as embodied in the superego. Error was compounded by the tendency of psychoanalysts to view their patients who fail to respond or who respond negatively to psychoanalytic attempts to understand and treat them from this perspective as "resisting therapeutic analysis because of unwillingness or inability to tame their aggressive/destructive wishes" that characteristically led them to become engaged in wars and self-destruction (p. 402).

To the classical view Kohut counterposed his own. The essence of man, he wrote, resided in his resourceful striving to preserve and un-
fold "his innermost self, battling against external and internal obstacles to its unfolding" (italics added) and his developmental course was shaped by his lifelong attempt, never quite successful, "to realize the program laid down in his depth during the span of his life" (p. 403). These contrasting views Kohut encapsulated, as he had done in earlier works, as "Guilty Man" or "Tragic Man."

Kohut went on in this paper to argue specifically that the intergenerational conflict of the Oedipus triangle and its resolution by renunciation of (presumably) pathogenic impulses or childhood claims was not central to normal development, as generations of analysts had come to accept. Instead, Kohut insisted as his own life was drawing to a close, "It is support for the succeeding generation... that is normal and human, [rather than] intergenerational strife and mutual wishes to kill and to destroy" (p. 404), however frequently the latter are to be found. It is only when the parent whose self is not normal, healthy, cohesive, vigorous and harmonious reacts with "seductiveness and competitiveness, rather than pride and affection...to the child's exhillarated move toward a greater degree of assertiveness, generosity and affection" that the conflictual situation develops. This conflictual situation Kohut described as one of hostility and lust, and he referred to these as "break-up products" of the disintegration of the "newly constituted assertive affectionate self of the child" (p. 404).

In an earlier work (1977), Kohut spoke of a "pivotal point...in late middle age when nearing the ultimate decline, we ask ourselves whether we have been true to our innermost design" (p. 241). This was a time of utmost hopelessness for some, of utter lethargy...which over-takes those who feel that they have failed and cannot remedy the failure in the time and with the energies still at their disposal. The suicides of this period are not the expression of a punitive superego, but a remedial act—the wish to wipe out the unbearable...mortification...imposed by the ultimate recognition of a failure of all-encompassing magnitude. [p. 241]

Although in these passages Kohut established the observational basis for a developmental psychology of the self that encompasses both deficit and conflict, he stopped short of delineating the "internal and external obstacles" to the unfolding of the intrinsic program of the child's self, and that underlay the depression of all-encompassing failure to which he referred. The psychic conflicts that arise as sequelae of parental opposition to the child's attempt to crystallize a design true to his "innermost self" and in consequence of the parents' need for the child's repudiation of such singularity in his developmental processes extend importantly beyond the conflicts of lust and hostility. They are contained within the panoply of pathological structural distortions and misalignments that arise in derailments and miscarriages of the developmental processes of self differentiation and self articulation.

In recent papers, attempts have been made to focus on the genesis and fate of intrapsychic conflict arising in the development of the self (Brandchaft, 1986; Stolorow, Brandchaft, and Atwood, 1988; Atwood and Stolorow, 1984).

Every phase in a child's development is best conceptualized in terms of the unique psychological field constituted by the intersection of the child's evolving subjective universe with that of its caretakers... Pathogenesis, from this intersubjective perspective, is understood in terms of severe disjunctions or asynchronies that occur between structures of subjectivity of parents and child, whereby the child's primary developmental needs do not meet with the requisite responsiveness from (self) objects. When the psychological organization of the parent cannot accomodate to the changing phase specific needs of the developing child, then the more malleable and vulnerable psychological structure of the child will accomodate to what is available. [Atwood and Stolorow, 1984. p. 69]

One of the possible outcomes, we suggested, was that the child may develop symptoms in which sequestered nuclei of an archaic self are preserved in conflict with, or in isolation from, the unresponsive self-objects.

In the passages quoted earlier, Kohut drew attention to the fact that the specific interplay between the child and his environment further or hinders the cohesion of the self, as he also did in his final book (1984, p. 562). There he also called for the detailed examination of varieties of transfersences in order to map out this interplay. Here I wish to emphasize the importance of the varieties of specific parental responses that support or interfere with the second major developmental task—successful negotiation of the crucial sense of individualized selfhood, its consolidation and elaboration in designs of increasingly complex particularity, and the implications for analogous selfobject transfersences.

This, I believe, is the area of development in which environmental failure most frequently results in inner conflict becoming structuralized. Such mishap occurs in the presence of an intersubjective context in which central affect states associated with emerging and crystallizing individualized selfhood remain massively unresponed to or actively repudiated. The resultant psychic conflict involves not clashing instincts or internalized objects but rather the frequently irreconcilia-
able motivations that the developmental course massively fit in with the needs of caretakers, on one hand, and, on the other, that developmental evolution remain firmly rooted in the vitalizing affective, generative, core of a self of one’s own.

Attempts at resolution of this pervasive conflict can proceed in either of two directions. The child may attempt to preserve and protect this core of individualized vitality at the expense of object ties by determined nonconformism or rebellion. That is the path of isolation and ultimate estrangement. Alternatively, the child may abandon or fatally compromise his central strivings in order to maintain indispensable ties. That is the path of submission. Or the child may oscillate between these two.

Depression becomes the dominant affect in a person in whom such a conflict has become chronic and internalized. It signals the loss of hope when no synthesis can be found between intimate connectedness with important others and the pursuit of a program of individualized selfhood. When such despair occurs in middle age, as it did with the patient, Mr. N, who will presently be described, the conditions are set for the type of depression Kohut described so movingly in the passage quoted earlier.

The analytic setting, however, provides a context for the revival of an archaic tie in which development in this essential area can be resumed, even after a lifetime of conflict has resulted in utter hopelessness and lethargy. Such an attempt is always accompanied by an intense fear or conviction that the price for the analyst’s help will once more involve a submissive distortion of self development.

Mr. N’s treatment for severe and sometimes disabling depression has extended almost 15 years, interrupted and resumed three times during that period. He is a 50+ year old man of prodigious and diverse musical talents. Despite his undoubted gifts, success in the endeavor most precious to him, musical composition, has eluded him. His total repertory consists of seven works. Each composition was preceded and followed by an agonizing episode of depression, in which for long periods of time his creativity was paralyzed.

I noted over many years that severe depression invariably recurred following any success. This, together with Mr. N’s pattern of relentless self-reproaches, led me for some time to conclude that his depression was rooted in a pathological superego and an unconscious sense of guilt. Although Mr. N seemed to concur in such explanations and provided an abundance of corroborative material, his hopelessness seemed to increase. Closer attention to the impact of these interpretations over a long period of time enabled me to recognize that my understanding had been faulty. These interpretations had conveyed to Mr. N. that I believed that there was some essential condition existing solely within him that was defeating him at every turn. They thus tended repetitively to reinforce his worst fears about himself. They failed to take into account how urgently he needed a tie with someone whom he could experience as willing to believe in his capabilities, in the purity of his purpose, and in his ultimate success, whatever the obstacles. The interpretations failed to recognize sufficiently how alone and disapproved of he had come to feel as a result of the interpretive stance which I had taken.

Mr. N’s depression cleared sufficiently following the analysis of this situation for him to engage once more in creative endeavor, and he was able to complete an important work. He hoped that his being able to write signalled a complete disappearance of his depression. When the depression soon returned, it became a source of profound disappointment. No matter what the initial trigger might be in this period of time, the moment Mr. N began to feel depressed, a spiralling effect took place. For example, he might read in the newspaper of a fellow composer whose work was being played, and this was enough once more to remind him forcefully that his work was not being played and to start him on the road to despair. Once he began to feel deserted, Mr. N was confirmed in his belief that he was incurably flawed and forever doomed to depression, and he sank more deeply into this state. For hours after hours he would insist that it would never be different, that he could not be helped. This seemed absolutely logical and factual to him. He would cite repetitively that he had been depressed for as long as he could remember and, although he had tried many times, had found no help that lasted any substantial period of time. Perhaps, he would say, he could remember a few days of relief, but then the curtain had always descended once again. He had so grown to experience himself in this way that now when he felt momentarily relieved he would scrutinize his feelings expectantly, and once he could detect any letdown, the slide would get underway. This process was automatic, invariant, and not open to reflection—indications, I had come to recognize, of an unconscious organizing principle (Atwood and Stolorow, 1984, p. 36).

In this circumstance the analysis of the content of whatever had precipitated the depressive mood proved irrelevant, and it became clear that only the context into which it was being assimilated was relevant. I found myself then explaining how Mr. N experienced his depression. I stressed over and over again that the whole pattern and Mr. N’s ultimate despair rested on his unquestioning acceptance that his fate had already been determined and his future foretold. For him there
was to be no hope, no pleasure, and no career of his choosing, since what was most depressing for Mr. N was that his depression kept him absolutely from his life’s work. I tried to introduce an alternative way of looking at his experience, namely that it was that conviction itself around which his experience repetitively became elaborated, not any inexorable fate. It was that which interfered with the recovery of his resilience whenever any setback might temporarily cast a pall on his sense of self and thus his mood and his outlook. He could not do anything to help himself when vagaries of his experience made him automatically feel that he was the victim of an incurable and global defect or were proof of an inexorable fate.

In his posture of seemingly complete hopelessness, Mr. N would also maintain over and over that the analysis was a failure and that it was an illusion to believe that anything could change. Frequently he would return to the assertion that I also felt, or would surely come to feel, hopeless about him and burdened by his hopelessness and inability to change. These feelings became even more unmitting when Mr. N was out of work for a prolonged period and was unable to pay anything toward his bills for treatment. Then he felt that everything I said was critical of him for continuing to feel depressed and an expression of how burdened I felt by him. In this connection, I came to appreciate that the function of holding of Mr. N’s despair was crucial and that no arbitrary time period could be allotted for such experience, but that each depressive episode has its own internal and intersubjective dynamics. I realized that it was essential that my own hopeful attitude be sustained only by my absolute determination to do anything I could to understand his experience and my own and by Mr. N’s showing up each day, no matter how hopeless or automatonike, rather than by any attempt actively to alter his mood. I had to learn to monitor myself rigorously about this and try to resist such urges when I could. Attempts to explain before Mr. N’s subjective experience had been sufficiently elaborated were premature. They had the effect on him of being left alone in a short-circuited state. On the other hand, repeated experiences of shared affect, though without confirmation of his perspective, had the ultimate effect of establishing for Mr. N the necessary conditions for a feeling of safety and harmony that subsequently carried over into other affect states and made the understandings I could convey assimilable.

Mr. N proved extremely helpful to me in enabling me to sustain my attunement to his mood as it found its own baseline. Soon, after leaving particular sessions in which I had had little to say, he began to tell me the next day and sometimes as he got up to leave that he had felt better.

Thus, over a prolonged period, a milieu came to be established in which Mr. N could experience his depressive affects in all their intensity. His tendency to stifle those which had led previously to “dead” feelings was somewhat counteracted. The gradual assimilation of these feelings into a new relationship experience actually came to mark the beginning reinstatement of a traumatically compromised developmental process.

As Mr. N’s conviction about his depressive experience subsided, he began to think more and more about his music. For a long time he would return obsessively to the fact that he had written so sparsely for all these years. “Now, when I’m my age, I’m going to start a career” he would say in a self-deprecatory way. “It’s an illusion.” And again sink into depression. “I can’t be a composer, because a composer is somebody whose life is centered around music! I’ve been on vacation all my life. Nobody’s ever heard of me. I’m a dilettante.” And he would repeat this in endless variation for session after session. He would tell me that he had not listened to music for years and that he avoided going to concerts. Earlier, when Mr. N had been absolutely paralyzed creatively by his depression, he would return frequently to the statement that if he could only give up his delusion that he was a composer, he could escape from the agony that was his everyday lot. Then he would go on to make a convincing case that his illness consisted of his stubbornness in holding on to his desire to do something for which he was clearly unsuited. At the time, I did not recognize the conflictful and reactive nature of these protestations. I had emphasized his inability to move in any direction that would offer him relief from suffering, pointing to what appeared to be the deepest element of his character, a pathological need to suffer. Only gradually did I come to understand that Mr. N experienced my presumably neutral stance as a vote of no confidence in him. This became clearer as he began more openly to tell me that nobody had ever expected anything of him. When he was a child, and his mother would complain about him failing in school or giving her a hard time, his father would say “That’s him—Ach, what do you expect?” He had always disappointed everyone in everything, he felt, so they learned not to expect anything. Since nobody really expected him to amount to anything, he could never sustain any incongruent expectation of himself.

Actually, seen from a different vantage point, Mr. N’s gifts and achievements were prodigious in the face of the overwhelming obstacles that had been placed in his path. To appreciate more fully the creative talent Mr. N kept hidden, it was necessary to recognize and overcome my own fear of being disappointed in him if he persisted in his creative endeavor and of being responsible for having encouraged
larly fallen into a state of despondency and victimhood until, this having run its course, he was able to tentatively make another start. So he was prevented from pursuing many opportunities that might have lay open to him, and he was forced to abandon various pathways for which his gifts might have fit him.

As the analysis illuminated this underlying conflict, he was able to take certain steps that he had hitherto avoided. Consequently, he obtained a number of highly desirable commissions, and other promising professional doors also opened to him.

Mr. N began a session at this time by saying that he had a strange mixture of feelings. During the weekend he had begun to accelerate in his thinking and in his writing, he said, in a way that he had done ten years ago and not since then. However, he had again become depressed and could not get back to his work.

The analyst asked him if he was aware of what might have triggered the switch. He responded in a most familiar depressed tone of voice, "Every time I open the paper, I read about Tanglewood and Aspen. I read about all my old friends who are performing there. They've all been writing music, and naturally they're the ones who get invited," he said, sounding more and more lifeless. Once more he was being left out. "At my age" he went on as if in attempting to write he had been indulging himself in the most ridiculous of delusions," I feel totally invisible!" As the session continued, it developed that, in fact, his mood had shifted right after he first noticed the "acceleration" in the work and before he read the news report about his friend. "I was trying to get the work started and I felt I was dragging my feet", he recalled. "No career in the movies and nothing in serious music. Unemployed and unemployable. Nothing to show for all these years but frustration and disappointment and an empty life."

After some time I said, "As the work accelerates and you begin to feel enthusiastic, you feel something holding you back and once again automatically feel that that means it's not to be. Then your depression begins to accelerate, and that then threatens to bring your enthusiasm and your music to a full stop!"

Mr. N then recalled that when he had looked at the first results of what he had composed he thought it was very, very good. He stopped, paused, and then concluded hopelessly, "But what's the good of it. It's all for nothing!"

Mr. N rarely dared to express a favorable assessment of his work as he had just done. I noticed the progression of hope followed by repudiation and continued: "It seems that when you are pleased with yourself and have some hope for your future, as just now, it somehow doesn't feel right—and then it crumbles."
The session continued in this vein for some time, with me encouraging Mr. N to observe how a sense of himself as good and competent and having something to say in the session itself was constantly being submerged by another sense of himself as an inevitable failure, doomed to a life without distinction, and when that happened, everything in life, including his tie to me and the analysis itself felt meaningless. And I emphasized the importance of coming to understand this sequence, which recurred so regularly, as a shift in his state of mind, surely a disturbing matter, but limited and capable of being understood and altered.

After a time, Mr. N paused reflectively, then said, "What is happening to me is a little like Beethoven. He was going deaf and terribly depressed when he composed his second symphony, but he wrote that it was the sunniest and most beautiful of his works, filled with joy!"

In 1952, Mr. N went on, he had played a recording of a concerto of his, and a well-known maestro remarked that embedded in its atonal elements was a basically optimistic, cheerful piece. The contrast between the relentless depression in this man’s overt sense of self and the opposite mood he experienced in a sequestered corner that he could not sustain or elaborate in his life’s work was becoming striking.

Mr. N continued, "Beethoven singlehandedly influenced Schubert, and Schubert was also a miserably depressed person, except in his music. And Mozart, terribly and incredibly depressed! I have seen the manuscript for his Adagio in B minor for the piano and it is filled with tearstains—there are black droplets on it, but the first 15 or 16 bars is the most extraordinary music ever written." Here again appeared the cyclical lifting of his spirits, this time in an attempt to counter the sense of himself, reinforced by his recent illness, as weak and destined to failure, by aligning himself through me, I recognized, with the heroes of his childhood whose determination and gifts had enabled each to overcome the effects both of their physical disabilities and their own childhood traumas.

In the last few years, Mr. N confided, he had grown tired of heavy music, but he was now realizing that the more he lightened up in the music he created, the more fear he had, the more vulnerable he felt. I told him how aware I was that he entrusted me with the knowledge of the love of life that was locked within him, that I heard how he placed himself in the tradition of those who have fought successfully and at great odds against a brutalizing heritage and did not accept it as their lot in life. And I said, "I seem to hear a plea that I help you understand and overcome your fears and help you elevate yourself from the dismal world of your childhood to experience the happiness of developing and presenting what is best in you in your works with pride and enthusiasm, as you have just done here with me."

"Happiness was never supposed to be part of my life," Mr. N said with feeling. "My parents were so unhappy. My mother was always complaining. Nothing ever pleased her. I never recall seeing a smile on her face. My father had no aspirations at all. He came to this country and settled to be a clerk in his brother's grocery store. There was no love, no happiness, no commitment."

"If I could only conceive of myself as a winner," Mr. N. said hopefully. "But I have this script imprinted on my mind. There is only embarrassment and humiliation in store for me. And," he continued, "unfortunately the facts bear me out!"

Once again there was the unmistakable sequence of hope and enthusiasm about a plan and a design of his own—and reactively the script of himself as doomed to failure and his resignation to this anticipated and inexorable fate. I pointed out the process that had just occurred. I emphasized that the facts only bore out this automatic, recurrent shift in his state of mind, an inability to sustain any happiness; they were not a revelation of a blueprint of the future, which had in fact not occurred. And I suggested that this must be microcosm of what must overwhelm him when he was by himself without having any means, as yet, for countering it, just as he had described at the start of the hour. Enthusiasm or determination arise and then succumb not to a relentless fate, but to some process of his mind that had become tyrannizing.

Now Mr. N revealed that he was starting to have fears of dying insolvent and ending up in the poorhouse. Many associations followed in which he recited ways in which he had failed. He was a loser, he insisted. Even though he had managed to get the commissions, this would fail too, he could just feel it! "When I think about it," Mr. N then said, "I am just exactly as my mother described me—fragile, weak, unfortunate, and incapable." The mantle of Mr. N’s victimhood was now gathering its own momentum as he continued, "She felt I didn’t have the strength to survive when I went out of the house. And when I would manage to leave I could not get interested in what I was doing, because I would see her frightened, unhappy face and I would have to go home. Sometimes she would open the window and scream ‘Tommy, come home now’—it was so embarrassing, I hated her, but I felt so sorry for her." Later on, at the age of 16, Mr. N had a concert in Carnegie Hall. He had been convinced that his mother would appear, and scream at him for staying out and that he would be mortified. This fear kept recurring over and over again in his later life.

I noticed that Mr. N’s mood had now become more despairing as the hour drew to a close until it seemed his own sense of himself was indistinguishable from what had been reflected back to him by his mother. For him apparently no Beethoven was available, as he was
for Schubert, to pick him up and transport him to some higher purpose. As this function had been assigned to me, I wondered to him whether he had been having any thoughts about me during the session or as it was drawing to its close.

"Yes, I remember that I did," Mr. N responded. "I thought that eventually you will give up. The damage is too great. At my funeral you will be there and say 'Cluck! Cluck!' disappointed in me like everyone else has been."

When Mr. N returned the next day, his mood had evidently lifted. He reported that he had had an "interesting" dream. In the dream, he and his wife were in Scotland. They were staying in a hotel and, returning to their room, found that it had been stripped, that all their belongings had been stolen, and that the room was in a shambles. They were told that usually the police can find most of what was stolen but that in their case it was probably too late. The police had, however, located one box. It contained a telescope.

He left the police station and thought "Where could everything be, this whole bunch of clothes?" Then it occurred to him that there was a warehouse around the corner. He went there, and there were all their boxes, packed in a corner. They returned to their room and fixed it up as if it had not been broken into.

One association occurred immediately—to the telescope. "It enables you to see," said Mr. N, "things you ordinarily can't see. That's the analysis!" He said he thought that the dream was connected with the fact that since the day before he had been writing a good deal, that he felt hopeful that he had found himself. The whole dream seemed to him to be a positive experience of the last session. The telescope seemed to convey that Mr. N had now acquired a tool of great promise.

Mr. N noted that the day before he had no fears of going into his studio. And he had written a good deal.

Still animated, Mr. N told of meeting with a composer friend and said how nice it was to exchange experiences with fellow musicians. He felt more of one piece.

He was getting flashes, he said then, about why he had married Jane, his first wife. In his discussion with his friend, it became clear that his friend had arranged everything around developing his career, whereas Mr. N married very shortly after leaving home and then was saddled with a responsibility for his wife and children that he never felt as his own. He realized that he had gotten married because he could not be alone. Mr. N was recognizing now how he had repeated his childhood experience at a crucial turning point in his musical career, surrendering himself to the goals of his wife and subverting his own for the sake of an illusory security.

"The dream about the things lost," Mr. N reflected "is just how I feel. I lost something indispensable at an early age, and I am now trying to find it piece by piece. It is all there, and I haven't found it." Although he had sustained his optimism for a substantial part of the hour, there was beginning to be a change now, a negative cloud creeping in so familiarly.

"This morning," he said, "I had a strange fantasy. I thought of being in the Army. There was a withered old colonel who didn't like me. We had a private conversation, and the colonel got angry with me and took me to a court-martial."

"Perhaps," Mr. N went on, speaking directly to me, "you don't realize the extent of my damage. The best you can do is palliative. You are trying, but you don't realize how damaged I am. Something positive happens, but then I will wake up and it will have been a dream. Then the alarm clock will ring."

I suggested that he seemed to feel that his confidence in him and in our work must be based on his being someone other than who he was, on his having to follow his course, not his own as it emerges and evolves at its own pace. "And you are concerned," I said, "that, withered and old, I will be disappointed in you for not fulfilling my dreams for myself through you! So now the very tie with me that stimulates your hope is being absorbed into the automatic background script 'It's not for me!' As if this were also foretold and not a function of the same state of mind. That these fears appear between the two of us is surely frightening but at the same time," I said, "it opens the way to a better resolution."

A touch of hope then appeared in Mr. N's mood as he said that on that day he was planning to go out and buy a certain set of rare recordings. "Why can't I listen to music?" he mused, revealing the extent of the internal prohibition against pursuing his own interests. "It's amazing that I want to be a composer. Many people have given it up. But then I don't know what else I would be—and I have a lot of things I want to finish."

"There is a weight that keeps pulling me down," he went on sadly. "The storehouse dream echoes what I feel. There is a storehouse within me that I can see and hear. I need to dig it out so I can reclaim what is rightfully mine. I have talent, but I can't use it. When I started this piece I thought, 'What a great piece!' But the thought had only just taken shape when it was followed by another: 'You'll never carry it through!'

Mr. N paused. "My father visited me at a recording session some years ago where I was conducting a ten-piece orchestra, and he turned to my wife and said, 'He didn't really write that!' Parents don't kill; they just plant seeds inside of you that grow. Even if I should suc-
ceed, I will feel, 'That’s not me—I’m just acting!’ It won’t be me. My childhood was a concentration camp. Survivors of concentration camps just try to make themselves invisible."

The work continued the next day as Mr. N reported still another dream. In it he was with Sam at the beach. It was a festive occasion, maybe Halloween. Sam gave him a bunch of colorful shirts, and he took them but then he couldn’t find them. Sam said, ‘The Christians stole them!’ Mr. N thought, ‘Born-again Christians.’ He identified Sam as an old friend and a superb musician, a versatile guy with great promise and a good teacher but one who had never made it. He was having all these dreams, Mr. N realized, because of the focus in analysis on recovering what had been stolen from him. All these years he hadn’t realized that something had been stolen that was rightfully his, and now we were working to have it returned to him. Mr. N paused. ‘This analysis,’ he said, ‘is a lost-and-found department.’

Born-again Christians are soul-less, he said. They have no understanding of creativity. They are dead—people from the wasteland in this country as Mr. N’s parents were from the wastelands of Poland. That morning he had read the newspaper and gotten a headache—there were 46 executions in the South. ‘If the more intelligent people suddenly gave up and allowed these people to run things, this world would go down the tubes,’ said Mr. N, ‘We’re not giving up, we’re no giving up, don’t worry,’ I said and Mr. N laughed. ‘It was impossible,’ he said, referring again to his childhood, ‘and I became like Sam, a person to be respected but invisible.’

During the hour, Mr. N expressed his optimism about the prospects that were opening up to him. And once again, as it had so many times in the past, the optimism simply vanished as the hour drew to a close. ‘I have the feeling,’ he said, ‘I’m biting off more than I can chew. I feel like I did as a kid when I began to write and illustrate a book on paleontology. I remember the mixture of enthusiasm and doom that it wouldn’t come to pass. Anything good is just a fantasy, like my father used to say. It is incredible to remember that there was never any encouragement. He would just laugh. He would never understand.’

Mr. N’s dysphoria had returned when he came to see me the next day. He complained of insomnia and was anxious and depressed. He had written a little the previous day after his session, and it seemed pretty good to him. But today he felt as if he were just going through the motions. He didn’t know if what he had written was any good at all, and even if it was, no one would pay attention to it. ‘I have things to do,’ he said, ‘and this is a nightmare!’ He felt he was sinking backward, that his whole life was going down the tubes. Even when he was cheerful, he said, he was in the grip of an underlying melancholia. He had been struggling with it all his life. The day before, he had thought of burning all his possessions. I said almost nothing during the session, but I recognized clearly from Mr. N’s description that the same feeling of disynchrony when he was happy, as he had been the previous day, continued to haunt him just as it had when he was boy moving out into the world and pulled back by being reminded of his mother’s unhappiness.

During the ensuing weeks Mr. N gradually became better able to articulate this curious internal state that confused him so much about who he was. He had revealed before that when he was cheerful he was unable to shake an underlying melancholia. Now he could detect and relate that even in the throes of the most painful depression ‘there is a feeling of enthusiasm somewhere inside of me, but it is muffled. I am carrying around a weight! I can’t breathe. I feel like I am a prisoner in my own body! I hate this depression.’ Then he said reflectively, ‘It’s a habit but there must be rewards. I don’t have to fail! My immobility is a manifestation of an earlier contract with my parents. If I don’t go out of the house but am depressed, my father doesn’t keep deriding me for what I want to do with my life, and my mother isn’t dying because I will get killed!’

Mr. N recovered his enthusiasm, so damaged by his illness, and its meanings after some time and once again began to make plans for his future. Significantly, a cluster of musical ideas were taking more definitive shape in his mind. As before, each period of feeling alive and hopeful was followed regularly by a reaction: ‘It’s all a fake. I’ll die before its finished!’ However, the balance had shifted, and he remarked that he was ‘able to utilize what we have been doing and push ahead.’

Another dream was enormously revealing. ‘I am going somewhere away from home, and then I try to go back and everything seems totally unfamiliar. There are dangerous things all around and dangerous people blocking my way, and there is some new construction going on. In trying to find my way back, I realize I am lost because I have departed from my accustomed route.’ Mr. N supplied the interpretation. He was feeling endangered because he was not taking his accustomed route of giving up, and that is why he was getting lost. Now he felt that he was on a tightrope almost halfway across, and wanted to run back because he would get to the point of no return and there would be nothing to hold him up.

‘I am afraid that I will become so interested in what I am doing that I will never be able to come back! And I am afraid I was never told that to be afraid is normal.’ Here Mr. N was beginning to articulate the subjective experience of isolation and the anxieties of deper-
sonalization that had hitherto always brought to an end his forays into a world, a life, and a self of his own.

Truth, the familiar platitude goes, is often stranger than fiction, but it is also surely sometimes more cruel. The work was proceeding, Mr. N becoming more and more encouraged in the process of self-reflection. This process and the hope it aroused were also repeatedly drawn into the underlying negative organizing principle as not being for him or as inevitably in some way leading to some personal failure. Nonetheless, he kept moving ahead. He now had developed four works that he considered major; one was well underway.

It happened then that Mr. N, by a twist of relentless fate, was once more struck down. He underwent a serious operation and was recovering when I visited him in the hospital. I had feared that he would surely be depressed from the all but irrefutable confirmation that something would always happen to show that he was not destined to have a life of his own. Instead, although in pain from the surgery, he was anxious to get going again. He had work to do, he said, and he was relieved that his life had been spared and that the outlook for his recovery was good.

This attitude persisted into his convalescence until he gradually became aware of a serious complication of the operation. Mr. N now slowly sank back into his depression. Nevertheless, he continued his sessions regularly as soon as he could get to my office.

The black mood seemed impenetrable. Mr. N would appear in disarray, with bedroom-slippered shuffling gait, face drawn, and with the posture of an old man. A dream he reported three months after his surgery conveyed accurately how he felt during this period.

In the dream, Mr. N had cancer. One of the doctors attending him said, “You have a terminal cancer.” “Where is it?” Mr. N asked. “In the spine.” “How long do I have to live?” “About a year,” was the reply. “Will there be any pain?” he asked. “Well, you’re feeling pain now, but you’re getting used to it,” said the doctor. Mr. N, crying, kept asking, “Is there any cure?” “No” was the answer. Another doctor said, “Wait a minute, there hasn’t been a biopsy,” but then he looked and said yes that indeed it was cancer. There was one way of treating it that would inflame the cancer, but it would give Mr N one additional year. In the dream he wondered whether he would have time to write his piece. He thought not, and there was relief but a terrible sadness.

In two years, Mr. N noted, he would have lived to be exactly as old as his father. It was impossible for Mr. N to believe he could get more out of life than his father.

Subsequently Mr. N gradually began to approach his desk again, but he would be overtaken by the most extreme exhaustion. Frequently he spoke of giving up, feeling dead, and was convinced that he was not going to make it. But he became aware that brief periods of hope would return and then disappear.

The process of analysis at this point deepened Mr. N’s attachment to me as he was able openly to acknowledge that only my hope, and not any of his own, sustained him. Consequently, the work involved even greater attention to the impact of his sensitive awareness and subsequent processing of his experience of me. Thus, for example, weekend interruptions became for him more convincing evidence of my disappointment in him and my loss of confidence in myself, which Mr. N experienced subjectively as a loss of support for himself. Then he could not work, and there would be a renewed ascendancy of his victimhood or failure self.

However, the persistent reinstatement of the bond began once more to shift the balance. I found in this phase that particular attention had to be given to Mr. N’s experiences of my tone of voice and changes in it, or silences and how Mr. N was patterning them. I made no special effort to alter his responses, recognizing the greater importance of permitting Mr. N’s experiences to emerge in their purest form. A shift was first signaled in a dream in which Mr. N and his wife had had a baby, cute little thing full of spit and piss. Mr. N reported concurrently that he felt “somewhat positive.” Following this dream, the importance of the emphasis on the preceding transference analysis became clear through Mr. N’s associations.

He had noticed that as he grew older, he said, that he was eating much faster than anyone else. When he was a child, he used to eat slowly and his father ridiculed and made fun of him. “Slow poke” was the way he was characterized about everything, and it was now how he thought about himself as a composer. “No wonder when I am going so slow I am wincing at what you are thinking,” he said. Now it became clear that for Mr. N a most significant aspect of the terrible illness he had recently suffered was not the physical damage but his fear that it would have a disheartening effect on my belief in him and thus destroy his chance to complete his piece and his self.

I recalled then the dream of incurable cancer that he had reported after his physical collapse, and I realized more clearly what he had tried to communicate in the part in which the one doctor who had not confirmed the hopeless outlook had eventually caved in and given up.

This experience enabled me to crystallize an impression that had been growing upon me for some time. The deepest source of depression in Mr. N, I became convinced, was the underlying belief that no tie could be formed and no pathway sustained in which the central strivings to give meaning
to a life of his own and the disheartening internal obstacles he encountered could find empathic resonance and understanding so that he might ultimately prevail. From this perspective, the loss of an object, so widely credited as the pathognomonic factor in melancholia, was for him merely an event that signaled the deeper loss of meaningful direction that had become engaged in a selfobject attachment that failed.

Several weeks later, some four months after being struck down, Mr. N reported the following dream:

There was a Frankenstein monster. I understood him and knew he needed compassion. We were walking together, holding hands, and the monster started to sing an ode to the evening skies in the most beautiful tenor voice. I looked at him and thought, “What a creative, interesting man he is! That song could have been written by Schubert or Mahler.” The monster was walking and talking. “Surprise!” he said. “Look who’s walking!” The whole scene and especially the music brought tears to my eyes! I started to call someone who was coming towards us—X [a 20th century pioneering composer]! It couldn’t be!”

Mr. N returned to the dream. “When the big monster sang about the night it was effortless, exquisite, like the most magnificent German tenor.” Then he paused. “That monster was me,” he said with a depth of feeling, and then, more softly and deliberately, “I have a song to sing!”

Another nodal dream occurred in this period. In it, Mr. N reported, he was driving in a car with a woman guide. They were driving over an enormous bridge on a smooth, wide, modern road—so wide Mr. N could not see over the sides. They were talking about Schoenberg, the composer. It was a comfortable ride.

Just before this in the dream, Mr. N recalled, he was leaving his house and not finding his way back, and he felt he was in dangerous territory in a slum area with his wife. It looked like Spanish Harlem, and they were trying to hail a cab. There were people looking out of windows. It looked like Dresden. They got to a thoroughfare that was lit, and all the taxis were taken. After that, he had the bridge dream.

His dreams were really a chronicle of his childhood fears, Mr. N realized. He felt the dream had been precipitated by his looking at his composition and thinking that what he had written was real good. He was pleased with himself and then got scared. Mr. N realized that the territory he found himself in was the picture of the world outside that had been painted for him by his mother. The tightrope wire of his fantasies, which he had to traverse to get from the world of his childhood to the world of music that had been foreclosed to him, was now, in this dream, a broad, wide, more secure passageway.

The final dream that I shall report occurred some weeks later. He was in his house. It was so full of people, partying, that he could barely make his way through it. He wanted to sell this house, but it was a wreck, a shambles that no one could possibly want to buy. He was conducting a potential buyer, someone he had known for a long time, on a tour through the house. They walked outside and saw that the whole roof had caved in and was lying on the ground, a pile of rubble. Mr. N thought, “Christ, I can’t sell this house!” But the other man said, “It’s really not as bad as it looks. You can fix this up, and it will be as good as new.” And the man proceeded to show him: you take this and put it here, and this, if you turn it this way and put this alongside it, and so forth!” Mr. N looked at him and said, “Really?” And the man said, “Surely.”

They entered a room where little pieces of piano were broken and splintered. There were yellowing scores, ripped and torn, strewn all over, lying there, festering. It was like going to an old attic and seeing things that had been there 100 years! He felt repulsed, but the man said, “Look at this, you’ve done some remarkable things here!”

The dream, Mr. N said, was transparent. The room with the piano broken up and the manuscripts torn up was his whole life, in shambles and lying fallow. I evidently felt it could be salvaged—and I evidently knew more than he.

The house did have interesting arrangements of space, fascinating aspects to it, he was aware. That was his talent, but he had let it go into disrepair. Like the opening scene in the dream, he had filled this house, his life, with meaningless things. That’s the way he regarded his life, as a leave of absence. Moving pictures, actors, directors, promoters have cluttered it up, just like the people in his dream. Mr. N paused. “It is really an elegant dream,” he said.

Now he had a second chance, he mused. His opportunities wouldn’t happen again. The dream was the picture of his broken dreams, and there we were like friends, no one screaming. I was just standing there, helping him look, not hurrying him and showing him how to begin to put it back together again piece by piece!

The process of sorting out, consolidating, firming up, and then elaborating his own authentic self-experience from various aspects superimposed on it has extended into an investigation of the creative process itself. Mr. N was able to go further and deeper into his own singular experience, to delineate and evolve more and more of what was the necessary, irresistible, and, as nearly as possible, definitive utterance of this singularity (Rilke, 1963). The analytic process, here carried out from a stance of consistent empathic inquiry into the subjective world of the artist, far from interfering with creativity seemed to liberate it to find its own unfettered expression.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A history of a patient with a severe and seemingly intractable propensity for depression has been presented. Initially and for a long period of time, limitations in the understanding of the analyst and especially in his interpretive stance unwittingly contributed to delaying the unfolding of the story that lay behind this lifelong symptom. In two instances, this factor led inexorably in the direction of what has been described classically as a negative therapeutic reaction. (The account of the first of these, attributable to the use of certain traditional concepts to explain failures in life and in analysis as determined intrapsychically, has been described in detail in a previous paper [Brandchaft, 1983]. The second necessitated a revision of the traditional concept of analytic neutrality so that the analyst could grasp the selfobject tie that the patient was attempting to revive.) The analysis of these asynchronies led to a recognition that the tie needed was one in which the analyst could be experienced as a reliable, uncorruptible source of idealized strength, comfort, and conviction in support of Mr. N’s efforts to understand his subjective world, break out of the closed system of helpless victimhood and death, and transform it to one of joyful creativity and life.

Once these obstacles had been removed, it became clear that the patient’s depression was rooted in a relentless internal conflict centering on the meanings that self-differentiating processes had come to have for him.

Mahler, Pine, and Bergman (1975) have identified the core affects that organize and structuralize the evolving development of individualized selfhood, as well as those which characterize its derailment.

The phase-specific, obligatory and dominant mood accompanying the processes of differentiation and individuation is one of unmistakable elation. And when this mood cannot sustain the individuating processes on which the unfettered future and creativity of the child depends, the dominant mood changes into sobriety, then depression [p. 213].

The next stage in this process is necessarily the stage of despair to which Mr. N would regularly succumb.

Mr. N’s development was interrupted at crucial phases in his childhood. Since he could not elicit the parental pride necessary to structuralize and vitalize his efforts to develop his creative gifts, his sense of self remained precarious and vulnerable to dissolution. In its place, a self-organization became structuralized around what was available in order to maintain a vitally needed maternal tie, a shared experience of hopelessness, despair, and victimhood. Mr. N’s father responded to his son’s efforts to escape from the maternal bondage by repudiating his son’s pleasure in the uniqueness of his gifts and beginning accomplishments; they were a threat to the father’s own sense of self. Every attempt of Mr. N subsequently to follow his own trajectory was superceded by the claims of his parents on his incipient selfhood. And so the groundwork was laid for the intense, structuralized, intrapsychic conflict that was to torment Mr. N for almost a lifetime.

In the treatment situation when the analyst was able to focus on the patient’s organizing experience and particularly to encourage the patient’s self-reflective processes, a profoundly stable selfobject attachment developed. The important selfobject functions of the analyst included:

1) Attunement to and integration of the patient’s relentless depression into a context of shared experience, if not of shared perspective.
2) Facilitating the emergence of and focus on the invariant underlying principle that led inexorably to depression—the automatic belief that he had to fail in the attempt to unfold “his innermost self.”
3) Uncovering the developmental sources and origins of this organizing principle in preserving the essential ties to caretakers.
4) Identification of the basic conflict between the entrenched sense of self-as-failure-and-victim, an adaptation to the conditions that had been necessary to maintain his parental ties, and an insufficiently structuralized sense of unique and evolving self.
5) Attunement to the affect of enthusiasm, investigation of its ongoing fate, and the patient’s need for the analyst to be its repository when the patient was repeatedly unable to sustain or recover his own so that gradually it can encompass progressively more differentiated and complex levels of experience.

Mr. N gradually recovered from the complication of his operation. He has completed a major work, and it is scheduled for spring performance. His song appears to have been given a voice.

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