The overarching intent of this book is to make a specific contribution to the ultimate integration of therapeutically useful ideas, while recognizing the value of retaining what is usable in distinctive approaches.

Our aims with this book are threefold: to provide a concise, but comprehensive summary of the central ideas of the major object-relations theorists, to examine the extent to which they articulate with, or lead to, a systematic psychology of the self, and to demonstrate that the basic structure of psychoanalytic self psychology is essentially relational.

Insofar as the first aim is realized, we are offering a resource book on theories of object relations. The recent scholarly presentation of the subject by Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) does not provide such a compendium, nor do these authors regard object-relations theories, as we do, to be so closely related to the psy-
chology of the self. This relationship comprises the basis of the second intent of the book. The notion of “object relations” makes sense only when conceived of as someone-and-their-relationships, and we would assert that the “someone” can most intelligibly be conceptualized as the “self” (see also Goldberg, 1982). Contained in our third aim—to demonstrate that psychoanalytic self psychology has an object-relational structure—is the proposition that “object relations,” the now widely accepted term denoting interactive phenomena, constitutes the central experience that affects the sense of self (Bacal, 1990a). The self “knows” itself only in the context of the experience of the self-other relationship. In the clinical setting, what we come to know about a patient psychologically—his symptoms, his personality, his capacities, his struggles in life—derives totally from our understanding of his experience of his relationships, past and present. Put in another way, the idea of “object relations” in psychoanalysis implies the experience of a relationship by a “self” with another—the “object.” The denotation of “internal,” as contrasted with “external,” object relations usually refers both to the modification by phantasy of what is regarded by analyst and/or patient as “real” about the object, as well as to the perception of what is on either side of the boundary between the self and the outside world. We also contend that, in the psychoanalytic situation, the experience of object relations—both internal and external—is significant insofar as it affects the stability and development of the self, and that analytic theory should reflect this, too. Among the object-relations theorists, only Guntrip (1968:127) has so far articulated this perspective, although a number of them have elaborated ideas that significantly anticipate central concepts of self psychology (Bacal 1987). *Pari passu,* self psychology embodies a perspective on human experience that places *relationship* at its center. To underscore this view, the final “object relations” theory we will consider in the book is the self psychology, or selfobject theory, of Kohut and his colleagues.

Freud tacitly recognized the centrality of such an object-relational perspective. Intending to illustrate the origin of infantile anxiety, he told the following story:

I once heard a three-year-old boy calling out of a dark room: “Auntie, speak to me! I’m frightened because it’s so dark.” His aunt an-

swered him: “What good would that do? You can’t see me.” “That doesn’t matter,” replied the child, “if anyone speaks, it gets light.” Thus what he was afraid of was not the dark, but the absence of someone he loved; and he could feel sure of being soothed as soon as he had evidence of that person’s presence (Freud 1905).

Although Freud wrote this more than seventy years before Kohut introduced a definitive psychology of the self, it is an excellent illustration of the relevance of modern selfobject theory. It appears, however, only as a footnote to his monograph *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud 1905:224) and has little relevance to the work’s central themes. Those themes continued to underlie much of Freud’s subsequent theoretical work, although the advent of the structural point of view enabled the functions of the ego to assume comparable importance to the psychology of instincts. However, just as he failed to develop his earlier discovery of the oedipus complex, undoubtedly the first definitive psychoanalytic statement about object relations, into a fully articulated theory of the latter, Freud did not expand his understanding of the little boy’s anxiety into a theory of self psychology.

While Freud recognized the importance of object relations, his theoretical formulations, especially after his abandonment of the so-called seduction theory, constituted a one-body model in which the child’s instinctual phantasy life is regarded as crucial for the development of psychopathology. As we know, the emerging psychoanalytic community for the most part followed him down this road. Ferenczi, however, turned his attention to the relational perspective in ways that were later reflected in theories of object relations, including self psychology. He drew attention not only to the mishandling of the child’s complex but normal early needs associated with the emergence of the psychosexual stages described by Freud, but also the thwarting of a host of other needs of a nonsexual nature, such as rocking, handling, picking up, and holding. Ferenczi was also the first analyst to emphasize that the patient’s experience of the analytic process was significantly affected by the nature of the interaction between the particular analyst and his patient.

To some extent, Freud’s psychoanalysis did remain a psychology of relatedness, that is, an object-relations psychology. The concepts
of transference, resistance, and countertransference, which are central to classical psychoanalysis, demonstrate convincingly that he conceived of the clinical situation in terms of a two-body psychology. We believe that it would be not only difficult, but peculiar for an analyst to conduct a psychoanalytic process where this is not the case. In theory, however, the emphasis of classical psychoanalysis has been on a one-body, in contrast to a multi-body psychology, and the drive-and-defense paradigm that has characterized it predominantly reflects intrasystemic antagonism between the id and the ego. (The superego is, in effect, an internalized object, but Freud did not follow up the implications of this in his structural theory.)

The progressively evident discrepancy between the basis upon which analysts, as well as analytically oriented therapists, understood their patients in the consulting room, and the basis on which they "formulated" their cases in their reports or papers, led to the development of theoretical constructs to fill the gap. Although some of the contributors to this body of theory, which has come to be known as "object-relations theory," have continued to assert that it is the pathalogy of drive-derivatives that give people trouble in their object relationships, most of them proffer a variety of linkages other than the instinctual between the individual and his object as essential for healthy development.

To the extent that one regards object relating as an ego function, one could regard object-relations theory as an aspect of ego psychology without the need to consider it on its own. Blanck and Blanck in their book *Ego Psychology: Theory and Practice* (1974) include several of the authors that we have placed among the "object-relations theorists." However, object-relations theory is now generally regarded as a relatively distinct body of psychoanalytic theory, one in which there has been a shift in focus from the vicissitudes of instinct—their source, discharge, or aim—to the vicissitudes of relatedness, whether the relatedness is primarily instinctual or not. From a historical point of view, ego psychology in North America marked a shift of theoretical interest from intrapsychic conflict and the defensive functions of the ego to an examination of the ego's adaptive functions. Hartmann's view (1939; 1950) was that the apparatuses of innate adaptedness—the so-called primary autonomous ego functions (perception, motility, memory, language, intention, object comprehension, affect regulation, capacity for delay, cognition, reality testing, object constancy, creativity, capacity for internalization, etc.) evolved on a conflict-free basis, that is, that while they might become invaded by conflict, they did not proceed on the basis of conflict between instinct and reality, but depended upon the presence of an average expectable environment. If this environment failed, these innate biological functions became enmeshed in conflict. This, in effect, comprised an object-relations perspective because it presupposes an average expectable environment in which the organism can adapt and develop. And Kohut, interestingly, regarded Hartmann's work as a starting point for his own (personal communication, 1979). However, Hartmann did not investigate this environment, and an interest in object-relations theory moved forward slowly and awkwardly in North America, developed mainly in the work of Sullivan, Mahler, and Kernberg. Quite a different scenario unfolded in Britain, where the contributions of Suttie, Klein, Balint, Fairbairn, Guntrip, Winnicott, and Bowlby constituted a definitive articulation of an object-relational perspective.

While object-relations theory is perhaps associated more with the name of the British analyst W. R. D. Fairbairn than anyone else, there is no one theory of object relations that is generally regarded as comprehensive or synoptic. There are, however, a number of prominent figures whose theoretical contributions are legitimately identifiable under this rubric. Although we expect there will be little argument about those we have included in this book, some readers may feel that certain others should not have been left out. Space dictated that we choose, however, and the paragraphs following distill the central themes of those that we have included. In the chapters that follow, these and other significant themes are elaborated, along with the ways in which they anticipate and enrich self-psychological theory.

Among the pioneers of the object-relations perspective no one is more remarkable nor more unsung than Ian Suttie. Suttie published his major work in the mid-thirties, but he had already elaborated a significant and substantial object-relations theory in an unpublished paper in 1923 (Brom 1982), which would have predated the work of Melanie Klein. If one judges according to acknowledgment,
Suttie apparently had no "influence" on other significant contributors to object-relations theory,\(^2\) and he had no followers. In effect, the importance of his work is just beginning to be recognized. It is, however, impressive for its perspective on the nature of the link between the self and others. Suttie rejected the centrality of instinct entirely, and substituted companionship, intimacy, and tenderness, rather than sex or aggression, as the prime motivators of human behavior; anger and rage were not only reactions to frustration, but were also attempts to elicit the needed response from the object.

Harry Stack Sullivan's contribution to the evolution of object-relations theory emphasized the important shift from viewing the individual as being primarily motivated and driven by libidinal and aggressive tensions to the interaction between the child and the caretaking environment. This movement away from one-person (or one-body) and drive-model psychology underscored the significance of the parental personality in shaping the infant's self and object representation. His interpersonal theory saw the source of human conflict as emanating from the earliest mother-child transactions and motivated by the essential needs for emotional security as well as emotional satisfaction. Historically Sullivan anticipated, if not influenced, Kohut's self model with its focus on the centrality of the self and its dependence on the earliest transactions with the mother in determining its core stability.

Melanie Klein, who had her early analytic experience with Ferenczi, may have been the first to offer a complete object-relations theory. She conceptualized the idea of the internal object, and regarded development and psychopathology as due to the interactions between the infant's ego and his internal and external objects. However, she accorded relatively little significance to the experience of objects external to the infant. (Klein's internal objects are essentially what other analysts designate as the inner representations of objects, the difference being that Klein's internal object, though a phantasy, is experienced as more concrete than an internal object-representation.) Klein regarded instinctual drives to be the dynamic forces that determined the nature of these interactions—in particular, destructiveness deriving from the death-instinct. While her theories have been dubbed by some analysts as id-psychology, they can also be intelligibly regarded as an ego-psychology in which the ego's relationships with objects are the focus of attention, but where the problems in these relationships have to do with the vicissitudes of instinct. Put in another way, Kleinian theory emerges as an object-relationship theory where the experience of the relationships between the self and its internal objects are of central significance for development. However, it must be recognized that, while the nature of these object-relationships entails a number of different dimensions, the main one, for Klein, is unconscious phantasy, that is, the mental representation of instinct. The personal characteristics of the object and its behavior are regarded essentially as triggers. Klein is an important pivotal figure at the interface between instinct theory, traditional ego psychology, and object-relations theory. While her work largely stands in contrast to self psychology, we shall demonstrate some interesting points of contact between the two.

Otto Kernberg's work in object relations has ties with the classical model, and with Klein's work. Greenberg and Mitchell (1983:327) see Kernberg maintaining loyalty to the drive/structure model and a continuity with the Americans Hartmann and Jacobson, but they also view him as including in his theory a greater role for the influence of the early environmental experiences. They particularly cite his concept of the child's internal world as affectively colored by the interactions with external objects (ibid.:331). By emphasizing that the active valences on the introjects reflect the interpersonal exchanges between mother and child, Kernberg appears also to share points of continuity with Sullivan, Mahler, and many of the British object-relations theorists. However, in our chapter on Kernberg we will contend that, despite offering theoretical constituents to suggest he has moved further in the direction of investigating the inner world and the motivating source for the pathological introjects, we are left feeling that he could more practically be aligned with a "Kleinian" model. In addition, while his theory recognizes the influence of caretakers in the formation of pathological introjects, his clinical material and technical illustrations indicate that he accords much greater importance to the contributions from the subject's constitutional drives and phantasy distortions and a minimization of the specific environmental traumata. Heinrich Racker,
another follower of Klein in the “Americas,” studied problems of specific transference and countertransference configurations and dynamics related to pathological conflicts and introjects, and extended the theory of therapeutic action within the Kleinian framework. By assigning the management of countertransference to a central position, Racker links the task of the analyst with his patient to that of the early environmental mother with the infant—as primary catalyst in modifying the internal world.

Margaret Mahler regarded her contribution as firmly anchored in the psychoanalytic mainstream. She understood her task as that of supplementing the dominant ego-psychology paradigm with an empirically based theory of early object relations in general and of the developmental line of separation-individuation in particular. Mahler attempted to accommodate later insights into preoedipal issues of the early formation of the self and object representations and pregenital developments such as those surrounding the separation-individuation process within the drive/structure model. Her work in the area of the gradual development of self constancy and object constancy represents a precursor of the self-psychological understanding of the development of the cohesive self.

Michael Balint advanced an object-relations perspective that challenged the prevailing classical view of primary narcissism. He elaborated a theoretical perspective that was based upon the proposition that a primitive form of object-relations exists between the infant and the mother from the start, and made important contributions to the understanding of primitive states of regression in psychoanalytic treatment and how they were affected by the reactions of the therapist. Contemporaneously with Suttie, but quite independently, he was the first psychoanalyst to assert that the development of psychopathology was the result of faulty upbringing rather than the result of the internal vagaries of instinct apart from object relationships. Ferenczi had earlier indicated that the analyst’s personality and demeanor significantly affected the nature of the patient’s experience of his relationship with the analyst and hence the treatment. Balint extended Ferenczi’s ideas and formulated the essence of the analytic process as an object relationship that must be considered not exclusively in terms of the patient’s transference and the analyst’s countertransference, but also understood as a product of the interplay between the two. Balint’s view of the development of transference—that the transference does not only represent the projection of intrapsychic issues onto the therapist, but that the reactions of the therapist to the patient’s transference significantly affects its evolution and character—significantly anticipates current perspectives on “intersubjectivity” in self psychology. Balint also offered a new theory of trauma that was based on a relational perspective of the therapeutic process.

Ronald Fairbairn’s object-relations theory constituted the most radical departure from the classical framework since that of Suttie. As Jones put it (see Fairbairn 1952), “Instead of starting, as Freud did, from stimulation of the nervous system proceeding from excitation of various erotogenous zones and internal tension arising from gonadic activity, Dr. Fairbairn starts at the centre of the personality, the ego, and depicts its strivings and difficulties in its endeavour to reach an object where it may find support.” In effect, Jones identified in Fairbairn’s work the anlage of what Kohut later developed as self psychology; that is, that the fundamental link between the self and the object is not mediated by instinctual drive, but by the anticipation or experience of objects that provide functions that positively affect the sense of self. Fairbairn’s theory of dynamic structure posited that the ego was the source of its own energy rather than being bombarded by instinctual energy from without, and that it was primarily motivated to seek relationships with objects rather than pleasure. Fairbairn rejected Freud’s tripartite theory of the mind, and conceptualized a unitary ego at birth that was split as a result of inimical life experiences. The resulting endopsychic structure comprised conflictual and defensive constellations that determined the nature of the individual’s relationships with others.

Harry Guntrip clarified, elaborated, and extended Fairbairn’s, as well as Winnicott’s, ideas. He was the first to focus on the importance of the object for ego development, by which he meant essentially what today we would call “self development.” Although he did not evolve a systematic psychology of the self, he underscored the importance of placing the self, which he regarded as the core of the individual, at the center of psychoanalytic theory. In Hartmann and Lowenstein’s work, the self was not regarded as a separate
psychic system (1962: 59), but as an aspect of the agencies of the psychic apparatus. Guntrip drew out of Fairbairn's work the implication of "a fundamental ego-theory . . . of a real self or person, a unique centre of meaningful experience growing in the medium of personal relationships" (Guntrip 1968: 127). In effect, Guntrip introduced an "ego" psychology that had little to do with traditional ego theory—focused as it is primarily on the ego's capacity for impulse control, adaptation to external reality, perceptual consciousness, and the exercise of conflict-free function—but that has much in common with Kohut's self psychology.

Donald Winnicott, whose work was initially influenced by Klein, came to regard the caring functions of the mother in relation to the needs of her baby to be the most significant determinants of psychological health. The true self that then develops is the result of a relationship with a good-enough mother, who not only recognizes her infant's instinctual needs but also acknowledges his creativity, respects his boundaries, and intuitively realizes that his need for transitional objects and transitional phenomena significantly represents his attempt to balance his experience of illusion and disillusion. The extent to which Winnicott anticipated concepts of current self-psychological theory is remarkable. However, in contrast to Kohut's view, Winnicott continued to regard instincts as psychologically important, and emphasized their developmental function. For example, while Kohut regards destructiveness only as a product of the breakdown of self-cohesiveness arising from rupture in the relationship between the self and its selfobjects, Winnicott saw it not only as a reaction to relational disruption but also as primary, and as developmentally significant. For Winnicott, the infant harbors a basic nonangry destructiveness that is important because its expression enables him to discover that his mother survives it; as a result, he can experience her as an object separate from himself and she can then be used. Recent developments in self-psychological theory include a similar perspective: that responsiveness optimal for healthy self development must include not only responsiveness to selfobject needs but also the acceptance and understanding of the patient's affective reactions to selfobject failure.4

John Bowlby rejects classical instinct theory as a significant factor in the psychology of human relationships. His view of the essential link between the individual and his object throughout life is expressed in his attachment theory, which asserts the motivational centrality of the propensity to make strong affectional bonds to a specific figure. He regards healthy psychological development as mainly determined by the caretaker's ability to grasp and respond appropriately to the child's specific attachment needs, and psychopathology as ultimately traceable to faulty caretaking in this regard; in particular, to the child's reactions to the threat or actual disruption of affectional bonds. Bowlby's views, perhaps more than any of the other object-relations theorists, reflect the essence of the self-psychological perspective: that the major psychological link between the self and the object constitutes the experience of a bond in the context of which certain essential functions are legitimately regarded as available throughout life.

So far, we have noted four theoretical shifts from classical psychoanalytic theory that were variously made by object-relations theorists: the movement from a one-body to a multi-body psychology; the relegation of instinctual motivation from the center to the periphery; the recognition of significant linkages other than the instinctual between the self and the object; and the emphasis on the importance of self-development (Guntrip). Apart from the shift to a multi-body psychology, however, none of these were consistently central components of any of the object relations theories—except for Bowlby's concept of the attachment linkage. But all of these revisions comprise integral features of self psychology theory, which places self experience and its determinant—the experience of the self-selfobject relationship—at the center of analytic consideration. The latter came about via Kohut's radical transformation of the traditional view of narcissism.

Both classical analysts and object-relations theorists, with the notable exception of Balint, retained the concept of primary narcissism, and viewed it as an objectless state that is primary. Balint's view that narcissism is always secondary to a rupture of satisfactory object relationships and that it constitutes a rich but primitively organized object-relatedness, is essentially the view that Kohut adopted for self psychology. In practice, both classical analysts and object-relations theorists regard narcissistic features as secondary, but treat them as defending against the anxieties associated with
the awareness and expression of "object-love." Kohut introduced a new perspective when he proposed the view that narcissistic symptomatology is not a defense against object-love but develops as a reaction of injury to the rupture of self-sustaining relationships with essential others. Object-love, of course, for classical analysts, has meant sublimated sexuality. If, however, "loving" is not defined in this way, but rather as caring, tenderness, affection, or a sense of personal concern, one might consider that "narcissistic" attitudes may function to protect the self against the dangers of loving, insofar as the latter entails risks—such as rejection or humiliation—of expecting another to respond as a selfobject. In practice, some object-relations theorists do recognize that "narcissism" defends against loving in ways that are nonsexual. It should be noted, however, that they tend to focus on this defensiveness, in adult patients, as being fueled primarily by a pathologically immature and self-centered psychological organization rather than as an understandable and basically healthy self-protective attitude of the self. This difference in perspective, of course, determines a quite different therapeutic approach.

Kohut conceptualized the fundamental link between the self and the object as the selfobject relationship, and, further, asserted that this link was essential for the health and development of the self. The evolution of a perspective on object relations that understood their significance in terms of self-cohesion and self-development was delayed, in our opinion, not only and probably not primarily because of the continued adherence to Freud's instinct theories but because, as we have indicated, analysts continue to regard people who struggled with "self"-centered issues as essentially selfish. This selfishness is variously regarded as being due either to fixation at a stage of primary narcissism or as a reactive, entrenched secondary narcissistic position. This last, imbued with hatred and revengefulness for past hurts and rejections constituted, in this view, an unwarranted defensiveness against the dangers of forming a loving relationship with the object; that is, a pathologically distorted (transference) attitude. Kohut "de-moralized" the concept of "narcissistic" needs by asserting that they are distortions of essentially healthy, that is, developmentally legitimate, selfobject needs, and that they emerge as a result of the rupture of essential selfobject relationships. Kohut's conceptualization of selfobject relationships as those in which the object-world is experienced as providing a diversity of sustaining functions throughout life was revolutionary and is, in our opinion, of equal importance to his view that instinct does not comprise the essential nature of the link between the self and its object. Self psychology is, in this sense, a systematically elaborated "object relations" theory where the significance of the link with the object that is experienced as providing a selfobject function is central. "Self" psychology is, therefore, an unfortunate misnomer and we are in agreement with Basch in his contention that the more appropriate designation for it should be selfobject theory.

We also concur with the increasing number of therapists who are now acknowledging the difficulty in maintaining a "verifiable" distinction between what is "real," or "objective," and what is illusory or subjective about the self or the object. In practice, the arbiter of this distinction has traditionally been the therapist in whom both patient and therapist tacitly agreed to invest omniscience and to accept that he had cornered the market on "reality." In 1959, Kohut recognized that the analysts's experience of the analyst and his reactions to him could be empathically understood not only "within the framework of an archaic interpersonal relationship of the patient" but also on the basis of the analyst's "realistic" reactions to the patient (1959:219), however minute these reactions might apparently be. When Kohut later developed his theoretical concepts of self psychology, he continued to emphasize the importance of both of these factors in understanding the patient's experience. Atwood and Stolorow (1984), Stolorow, Brandchaft, and Atwood (1987) and Wolf (1976 and 1986) have continued to study the interplay between the perspectives of analysts and analyst as determining the patient's experience, but it should be noted that this study was initially begun by Ferenczi (1931a, 1931b), Rieckman (1950), and Balint (1949). Atwood and Stolorow call the process "intersubjectivity," a term that, in our view, combines essential elements from both object-relations theory and self psychology: the patient's experience is understood within the context of an interaction that is influenced by the subjective experience of both patient and therapist.

Early self psychology theory, as elaborated by Kohut, clearly specified that the actual personalities and behavior of selfobjects, or
would-be self-objects, contribute to the nature of one’s experience. Current self-psychological theory, in its emphasis on the importance of accepting the validity ascribed by the patient to his subjective experience of interaction, emphasizes the experiential; that is, it tends to side-step the question as to how this experience is shaped. Thus, it seems to be moving away from an explicit recognition of the crucial role of the surround, although in practice self psychologists continue to recognize the latter as being of central importance. However, insofar as self-object experience may be determined by factors other than environmental, the role of phantasy, which has been ignored by self psychology both in theory and in practice, must now be considered. In the chapter on self psychology, a view of the function of phantasy in self-object relationships introduced by Bacal (1981; 1985a; and 1990b, in press), will be elaborated.

While the chapters in this book may be read in any order, those who are not familiar with self-psychological theory and practice may find it helpful to consult the final chapter first.

Endnotes

1. Basch has stated that the more appropriate designation for self psychology is “self-object theory” (1981, personal communication).

2. Ferenczi emphasized the importance of the pathological and sometimes traumatic effects of the adult’s behavior on the child; for example, when adults indulge their unconscious sexual gratifications in the context of the discrepancy between the adult’s desires and the essentially nonpassionate, but playful and tender, attitudes of the child (Balint 1948; Ferenczi 1933).

3. According to Sutherland (1989), Fairbairn was aware of Suttie’s work and regarded it as important.

4. Both of these perspectives have parallels with Bion’s ideas of the container function of the caretaker.

5. Balint (1968:35) has pointed out that Freud’s earliest theory about the infant’s most primitive relationship to his environment is not narcissistic but rather a primary object relationship: “The finding of an object is in fact a re-finding of it” (Freud 1905:222).