Chapter 1

The Myth of the Isolated Mind

IN CONTRAST WITH THE VIEW that modern man suffers from an absence of myth, in this chapter we challenge a central myth that pervades contemporary Western culture and has insinuated itself into the foundational assumptions of psychoanalysis—The Myth of the Isolated Individual Mind. By bringing into focus the unconscious organizing power of this myth and proposing an alternative perspective emphasizing the intersubjective foundations of psychological life, we hope to contribute not only to the advancement of psychoanalytic theory but also to the deepening of reflective self-awareness. Liberated from the constraining grip of this myth, psychoanalytic theorizing will be freed to picture human experience in radically new ways.

ALIENATION AND THE ISOLATED MIND

The myth of the isolated mind ascribes to man a mode of being in which the individual exists separately from the world of physical nature and also from engagement with others. This myth in addition denies the essential immateriality of human experience by portraying subjective life in reified, substantialized terms. Viewed as a symbol of cultural experience, the
image of the isolated mind represents modern man's alienation from nature, from social life, and from subjectivity itself. This alienation, still so pervasive in our time, has much to do with the culture of technocracy and the associated intellectual heritage of mechanism that have dominated thought about human nature in the 20th century (Matson, 1964; Barrett, 1979). Our purpose in what follows, however, is not to offer a critique of such cultural and historical factors, but rather to explore the psychological meanings underlying the myth of the isolated mind.

It is our view that modern man's threefold alienation serves to disavow a set of specific vulnerabilities that are inherent in human existence, vulnerabilities that otherwise may lead to an unbearable sense of anxiety and anguish. We shall consider first the embeddedness of human life in the world of physical nature.

**Alienation from Nature**

Positing the existence of mind as an entity introduces a distinction within man's constitution between bodily and mental forms of being. This distinction diminishes the experience of the inescapable physical embodiment of the human self and thereby attenuates a sense of being wholly subject to the conditions and cycles of biological existence. These conditions include absolute dependence on the physical environment, kinship to other animals, subjection to biological rhythms and needs, and, perhaps most important, man's physical vulnerability and ultimate mortality. Inherent in an unalienated attitude toward mortality—the certainty and finality of biological death—is anxiety at the prospect of physical annihilation and anguish in the face of the transitoriness of all things. Insofar as the being of man is defined and located in mind, existing as an entity apart from the embeddedness of the body in the biological world, an illusion can be maintained that there is a sphere of inner freedom from the constraints of animal existence and mortality. This reassuring differentiation from physical nature may pass over into frank reifications of the self as an immortal essence that literally transcends the cycle of life and death. Such reifications take many forms, including the various concepts of the immortal soul, identifications of the self with ideas and works considered to have everlasting significance and value, and projections of the self into lines of descendants extending indefinitely into the future (Rank, 1930; Becker, 1973, 1975).

We distinguish between the unalienated experience of the physical embodiment of the self just discussed and a class of defensive states entailing wholesale identifications of the self with the physical body. These latter states, corresponding on a psychological level to philosophical doctrines of crude materialism and behaviorism, involve an effort to nullify subjectivity and reduce human existence to the exclusive terms of pure physicality. As the person becomes solely matter or body, there is no experience of anguish in reaction to mortality because experience itself has been denied. Moreover, death loses much of its power in a world that has become entirely material and concrete, because there is then no life of a conscious subject that inevitably becomes obliterated, but rather only the cessation of a particular set of physiological processes.

**Alienation from Social Life**

A second realm of alienation symbolized in the myth of the isolated mind is that of the individual's relationship to other human beings. The idea of mind as a separate entity implies an independence of the essential being of the person from engagement with others. The image of this mental entity, located in the midst of reality and subsisting alongside other minds, reifies in the first place the widespread experience of psychological aloneness. It is said by those who have fallen under the power of this myth that each individual knows only his own consciousness and is thus forever barred from direct access to experiences belonging to other people. This ostensibly "ontological" aloneness (Mijuscovic, 1988), which ignores the constitutive role of the relationship to the other in a person's having any experience at all, attributes universality to a quite particular subjective state characterized by a sense of imprisoning estrangement from others. This is a state in which one feels neither known nor understood at the level of one's deepest affects; it is, moreover, one in which the longing for such sustaining connection to others has
succumbed to resignation and hopelessness. This isolation, so pervasive and deeply rooted in our culture, provides, in our view, the specific intersubjective context that renders the experience of anguish unbearable and necessitates the disavowals of vulnerability inherent in the myth of the isolated mind. The pain associated with modern man's alienated aloneness is, in addition, diminished within this myth by the calming vision of personal isolation being built into the human condition as the common fate of all mankind.

Other experiences reified in the image of the isolated mind include those of psychological distinctness and self-constancy. Inherent in the idea of the mind's existence as an entity is a notion of its separateness from other minds and from a surrounding reality. Separateness is seen as belonging to the mind-entity as an intrinsic feature of its being and is thus not understood to be contingent on any particular relation between the person and the surround. This we contrast with the experience of psychological distinctness, a structuralization of self-awareness that is wholly embedded in formative and sustaining intersubjective contexts. Similarly in the case of constancy, the mythical image of mind is one of a quasi-spatial thing that retains an enduring integrity as an absolute property of its nature. The structure of mind as such is regarded as possessing its own internal constancy, even though specific contents of mind may be viewed as changing over time. This idea again strikes a contrast with experiences of self-constancy and of the continuity of personal identity, which always derive from constitutive intersubjective contexts.

An unalienated attitude toward man's irreducible engagement with others leads to an experience of anguish at the fate of human beings to be so irrevocably dependent on and vulnerable to events occurring in the interpersonal milieu. The intrinsic embeddedness of self-experience in intersubjective fields means that our self-esteem, our sense of personal identity, even our experience of ourselves as having distinct and enduring existence are contingent on specific sustaining relations to the human surround. The reifications being discussed create reassuring illusions of self-sufficiency and autonomy and thus serve to disavow the intolerable vulnerability of the very structure of psy-

chological life to interpersonal events over which the individual has only limited control.

**Alienation from Subjectivity**

The third and most important form of alienation is man's estrangement from the features of subjectivity itself. The disavowals of vulnerability crystalized in the myth of the isolated mind, as noted earlier, are achieved through the reification of various dimensions of subjectivity. These reifications confer upon experience one or another of the properties ordinarily attributed to things on the plane of material reality, for example, spatial localization, extension, enduring substantiality, and the like. The mind thus takes its place as a thing among things. Lost in the process are the properties of subjective life itself, which becomes swallowed up inside the reified mind-entity and conceived in terms of categories applying to tangible objects in the physical world.

Invariably associated with the image of mind is that of an external reality or world upon which the mind-entity is presumed to look out. Here too we encounter a reification, in this case one involving the experience of the world as real and existing separately from the self. What psychological purpose can be ascribed to the reifying of the experience that there is an enduring world distinct from the self? Within the myth of the isolated mind, this world is viewed as having a definitive existence of its own; its experienced substantiality thereby becomes transformed into a metaphysical absolute, a universal that is valid for all human beings. This stands in contrast to the subjective sense that there is an enduring and substantial world of reality separate from the self, again an experience constituted and sustained by particular intersubjective fields. The vulnerability disavowed by reifying the experience of the world outside the self stems from a certain insecurity deeply rooted in the conditions of modern life. If even the permanence and substantiality of the world are constituted and maintained by intersubjective fields, in a culture of pervasive psychological alieneness there is little to protect a person from feeling that the solidity of things is dissolving into thin air.
The image of the mind looking out on the external world is a heroic image or heroic myth, in that it portrays the inner essence of the person surviving in a state that is separated from all that actually sustains life. This myth appears in many guises and variations. One can discern its presence in tales of invincible persons who overcome great adversity through solitary heroic acts, in philosophical works revolving around a conception of an isolated, monadic subject, and in psychological and psychoanalytic doctrines focusing exclusively on processes occurring within the autonomous person. We turn now to a discussion of the guises of the myth of mind as they appear in classical and contemporary psychoanalysis.

**VARIANTS OF THE ISOLATED MIND**

In psychoanalysis, the stage was set for the various versions of the doctrine of the isolated mind by its founder, Freud. In virtually all phases of his metapsychological theorizing, Freud pictured the mind as a "mental apparatus," an energy-disposal machine that channels drive energies arising endogenously from within the interior of the organism. In this vision, the developing organization of experience is shaped by the mind's successes, failures, and compromises in the processing of drive energies emerging from within. The experience of one's surround, for example, is shaped by the vicissitudes of innate drive pressures, and the surround contributes to the organization of experience only insofar as it affects those drive vicissitudes. Accordingly, the organization of experience is ultimately the product of internal forces, and the mind's insularity is symbolically reified in the image of an impersonal machine. This image has insinuated itself into all the variants of Freudian psychoanalytic theory.

In Freudian ego psychology, for example, the importance of the surround in the regulation of early developmental experiences is acknowledged—what Mitchell (1988) aptly terms the "developmental tilt"—but the image of an isolated, individual mind is retained in the form of an ideal endpoint of optimal development. Hartmann (1939) conceptualized ego development as a process whereby regulation by the environment comes to be replaced by autonomous self-regulation, an evolution that he cast in a reified spatial metaphor by designating it "internalization," as if the surround eventually becomes unnecessary because it is literally "taken in." This idolatry of the autonomous mind finds vivid expression in Jacobson's (1964) description of the experiential consequences of superego formation. Prior to this developmental achievement, according to her view, the child's self-esteem is highly vulnerable to the impact of experiences with others. As a result of the consolidation of the superego, by contrast, self-esteem is said to become stabilized and relatively independent of relations with others, so that it "cannot be as easily affected as before by experiences of rejection, frustration, failure and the like" and is "apt to withstand . . . psychic or even physical injuries to the self" (p. 132). In this model, the vulnerability of self-esteem that derives from the embeddedness of self-experience in a shifting intersubjective context is reserved for early childhood, prior to the structuralization of the psyche. The autonomous ego of the healthy older child or adult, by contrast, is presumed to have achieved immunity from the "slings and arrows" encountered in experiences of the surround.

This ego-psychological view of development, emphasizing autonomy as its successful outcome, was preserved in Kohut's (1971) early theory of self-structure formation through "optimal frustration" leading to "transmuting internalization"—the gradual formation of particles of psychic structure that exercise regulatory functions heretofore performed by others. As we develop more fully in the next section and in chapter 4, we would replace the theory of transmuting internalization, which elevates a variant of the isolated mind to an ideal goal of development, with a conception of increasing affect integration and tolerance evolving within an ongoing intersubjective system (Socarides and Stolorow, 1984/85; Stolorow et al., 1987). Emotional experience, we contend, is always regulated and constituted within an intersubjective context.

As an example of the clinical consequences of ego psychology's idealization of autonomy, consider the familiar notion that in the successful termination phase of an analysis the trans-
ference should be resolved or dissolved, meaning that the patient's emotional attachment to the analyst must be renounced. In this view, residual transference feelings are seen as an infantilizing element, undermining the patient's progress toward independence. The autonomous, isolated mind is pictured here not only as the endpoint of optimal early development but as the ideal outcome of a successful psychoanalysis. In contrast, a perspective that recognizes that experience and its organization are inextricably embedded in an intersubjective context can accept and even welcome the patient's remaining tie to the analyst as a potential source of emotional sustenance for the future (Stolorow and Lachmann, 1984/85; Stolorow et al., 1987).

Remnants of the doctrine of the isolated mind can also be found in a number of theoretical frameworks that have been posed as radical alternatives to Freudian ego psychology—for example, Schafer's action language, object relations theory, Kohut's self psychology, and interpersonal psychoanalysis.

Schafer (1976) has argued cogently that the structural-energetic constructs of Freudian ego psychology represent unlabeled spatial metaphors, concretistic reifications of nonsubstantial subjective experiences such as fantasies. Metapsychological concepts such as psychic structures, forces, and energies treat subjective states as though they were thinglike entities possessing such properties as substance, quantity, extension, momentum, and location. Schafer proposes a new "action language" for psychoanalysis. This would do away with mechanistic metapsychological reifications and would focus on the person-as-agent—that is, on the person as a performer of actions who, consciously and unconsciously, authors his own life. Within this framework, the subject matter of psychoanalytic conceptualization and interpretation becomes action itself, especially disclaimed action, along with the person's conscious and unconscious personal reasons for his actions.

While we have found Schafer's critique of Freudian metapsychology to be exceedingly valuable, it seems to us that he is no less guilty of reifying an aspect of experience than those whom he criticizes. The dimension that Schafer substantializes and universalizes is the experience of personal agency. Indeed, in Schafer's system the experience of agency is elevated to the ontological core of psychological life. Hence, his framework cannot encompass those experiential states in which the sense of personal agency has remained atrophied or precarious in consequence of developmental interferences and derailments. More important, the continual embeddedness of the sense of agency, and of self-experience in general, in a nexus of intersubjective relatedness becomes, in Schafer's vision, obscured by the reified image of an omnipotent agent single-handedly creating his own experiences—another variant of the isolated mind in action.

The omnipotence of the individual mind reaches its pinnacle in certain versions of Kleinian object relations theory, most notably in the clinical application of the concept of projective identification. Kernberg (1975), for example, transforms Klein's (1950) description of a primitive fantasy into a causally efficacious mechanism through which a person is presumed to translocate parts of himself into the psyche and soma of another. Consider, in this regard, his discussion of Ingmar Bergman's movie, Persona:

A recent motion picture . . . illustrates the breakdown of an immature but basically decent young woman, a nurse, charged with the care of a psychologically severely ill woman presenting . . . a typical narcissistic personality. In the face of the cold, unscrupulous exploitation to which the young nurse is subjected, she gradually breaks down. . . . The sick woman seems to be able to live only if and when she can destroy what is valuable in other persons . . . In a dramatic development, the nurse develops an intense hatred for the sick woman and mistreats her cruelly at one point. It is as if all the hatred within the sick woman had been transferred into the helpful one, destroying the helping person from the inside [pp. 245-246, emphasis added].

Here we see a caricature of the isolated mind unleashed. The subject is viewed as creating not only her own experiences, but even the other's experiences as well. A unidirectional influence system is pictured, wherein everything that one experiences

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1 We are grateful to Dr. Sheila Namir for calling this point to our attention.
from the surround is seen as being the product of one’s own omnipotent intrapsychic activity. The impact of the surround is nowhere to be found.

Kernberg (1976) has offered a revision of Freudian drive theory in which he pictures the basic building blocks of personality structure as units consisting of a self-image, an object (other) image, and an affect. Units with a positive affective valence are said to coalesce into the libidinal drive, while those with a negative valence form the basis for the aggressive drive. Although Kernberg acknowledges the developmental and motivational importance of affect, once integrated into enduring self-object-affect units, affect states are seen to behave like drives, stirring within the confines of an isolated mind and triggering all manner of distorting defensive activity. The lifelong embeddedness of affective experience in an ongoing intersubjective system thereby becomes lost.

Kohut’s self psychology has made enormous strides toward loosening the grip of the doctrine of the isolated mind on contemporary psychoanalytic thought. The concept of “selfobject function” (Kohut, 1971, 1977, 1984), in emphasizing that the organization of self-experience is always co-determined by the felt responsiveness of others, is a prime example. In striking contrast to the ego-psychological view of development, Kohut (1984) wrote:

Self psychology holds that self-selfobject relationships form the essence of psychological life from birth to death, that a move from dependence (symbiosis) to independence (autonomy) in the psychological sphere is no more possible . . . than a corresponding move from a life dependent on oxygen to a life independent of it in the biological sphere [p. 47].

In regard to the psychoanalytic situation, one of the most important contributions of self psychology has been the heightened attention to the impact of the analyst/investigator on the field that he investigates. Kohut (1984) drew a parallel between the shift from traditional analysis to self psychology and the shift from Newtonian physics to the Planckian physics of atomic and subatomic particles, in which “the field that is ob-

served, of necessity, includes the observer” (p. 41). Whereas, according to Kohut, traditional analysis “sees the analyst only as the observer and the analysand only as the field that the observer-analyst surveys,” the self-psychological orientation “acknowledges and then examines the analyst’s influence . . . as an intrinsically significant human presence” (p. 37).

Despite such powerful challenges to the myth of the isolated mind, relics of this myth still persist in self-psychological writings. One such remnant can be found in the persistent use of the term self to refer both to an existential agent (an independent initiator of action, Schafer’s focus) and a psychological structure (the organization of self-experience). As we have discussed in another context (Stolorow et al., 1987), some of the theoretical difficulties that result from the conflation of these two usages can be illustrated by the following sentence, typical of many that appear in the literature of self psychology: “The fragmented self strives to restore its cohesion.” Here the term self has two distinctly different referents: (1) an organization of experience (called the self) has undergone fragmentation, and (2) an existential agent (also called the self) is performing actions to restore cohesion to that organization of experience. This creates a theoretical conundrum. Clearly, it is not the pieces of something (fragments of a self) that strive toward a goal (restoration). More important, the second usage of self as an independent existential entity transforms the experiential, agentic “I” into a reified “it,” not unlike the impersonal mental apparatus of Freudian theory. This residue of the doctrine of the isolated mind clouds Kohut’s central contribution—the recognition that self-experience is always organized within a constitutive intersubjective context.

A second remnant of the myth of the isolated mind that persists in self psychology can be seen in the idea that the self possesses an innate nuclear program or inherent design (Kohut, 1984) awaiting a responsive milieu that will enable it to unfold (see Mitchell, 1988). Unlike ego psychology, which postulates the autonomous mind as the ideal endpoint of development, self psychology seems here to locate this ideal in the prenatal or genetic prehistory of the individual, as a preexisting potential requiring only the opportunity to become actualized. Such an idea contrasts sharply with our view that the trajectory of self-
experience is shaped at every point in development by the intersubjective system in which it crystallizes.

As Bacal and Newman (1990) have pointed out, Kohut seemed reluctant to consider his framework a relational theory, probably because he wanted to preserve its link to the intrapsychic tradition of Freudian psychoanalysis. Yet the pervasive reifications of the concepts of the self, the selfobject, and the self-selfobject relationship threaten to transform self psychology into just the sort of crude interpersonalism or social interactionism that Kohut wished to eschew. A solution to this quandary can be found in the perspective of intersubjectivity. The concept of an intersubjective system brings to focus both the individual's world of inner experience and its embeddedness with other such worlds in a continual flow of reciprocal mutual influence. In this vision, the gap between the intrapsychic and interpersonal realms is closed, and, indeed, the old dichotomy between them is rendered obsolete (see also Beebe, Jaffe, and Lachmann, 1992).

Another variation on the theme of the isolated mind is found in the recent theoretical formulations of Basch (1988). Basch's work is particularly interesting to consider because he is both a prominent advocate of Kohut's self psychology and an outspoken representative of a trend in contemporary psychoanalysis that seeks to ground psychoanalytic theory in the neurosciences. He presents a conceptual framework intended to bridge the "longstanding and counterproductive gap between psychology and biology," a "scientifically based . . . unified, and unifying theory of psychotherapy" (p. 15). The unification of psychology and biology is here attempted in a way that returns to the spirit of Freud's (1895) ill-fated "Project for a Scientific Psychology," namely, the reduction of psychological functioning to mechanistic processes occurring within the human nervous system. Basch, relying on metaphorical imagery drawn from modern cybernetics and computer science, envisions psychological activity as essentially pattern-matching, error-correcting feedback cycles taking place inside the brain.

There are two major aspects of Basch's (1988) thinking that betray the infiltration of his writings by the myth of the isolated mind. The first of these concerns his view of the relationship between the person and reality. He argues that the individual stands in relation, not to an external world having an independent existence of its own, but always and only to a reality that "is a construction created by the brain of the beholder" (p. 60). For example, he suggests that when he once went in search of a lost piece of soap, although he may have felt that he was looking for something located in a world outside of himself, actually he was trying to find "a pattern of sensory signals that would add up to what [he] already had inside his head—an encoded pattern of sensory features labeled 'soap'" (p. 60). Even one's mother and father are seen as not possessing any literal existence in a world apart from the self but are regarded instead as examples of "imaginary entities that exist only in the brain" (p. 101). Presumably when one searches for a missing parent, as in the case of the lost soap, one is actually trying to find perceptual and affective signals that add up to what is located only in one's head: the assembly of characteristics labeled "mother" or "father." Here we see a position of radical constructivism verging on solipsism, and one moreover that situates itself inside the physical boundaries of the human cranium. This position appears to involve a self-contradiction: it contains on one level a claim that at another level it denies. On one hand, Basch denies the literal truth of the individual's experience of the independent existence of objects outside the boundaries of the self; he argues that such objects are only "constructions" localized inside the human brain. On the other hand, Basch does accord independent existence to one class of such external objects; the brains themselves. This seeming paradox arises, in our view, from Basch's unacknowledged use of the brain as a reified symbol of the isolated mind, which produces experiences out of its own autonomous constructive activity.

The second way in which the myth of the isolated mind becomes manifest in Basch's conceptualizations appears in his views of human motivation and especially the sources of individual self-esteem. According to Basch, the prime motivator underlying all psychological activity is the quest for competence, which he defines as "the brain's capacity to establish order among the disparate stimuli that continuously bombard the senses" (p. 27). On the level of introspection and reflection,
competence becomes the experience of self-esteem. Basch elaborates: "True self-esteem, a genuine sense of one's self as worthy of nurture and protection . . . stems from the experience of competence, the experience of functioning appropriately . . . no one can give another the experience of competence: one must achieve that for oneself" (p. 26, emphasis added).

He further clarifies: "the standard by which one judges one's own competence or incompetence is always internal, not external" (p. 59). This judgment of competence and self-esteem is made in terms of matches or mismatches between brain representations of one's behavior or circumstances and preexisting neural patterns functioning as the goal that is being pursued. This curious doctrine specifically denies that experiences of competence and self-esteem derive from interpersonal transactions pertaining to one's sense of oneself in the human community. Again we encounter the autonomous subject who needs little more than internal arrays of sensory signals matching with previously encoded neurological patterns in order to be sustained and to function as a human being.

Consider now the central construct in Basch's metapsychology, the so-called self-system. This system is defined as a biological entity consisting of a hierarchical organization of interrelated, error-correcting feedback cycles. Although Basch states that it is unsatisfactory to reduce the complex activity usually denoted by the term mind to the neurological activity of the brain, his concept of the self-system does precisely that. This entity is a creation of the brain, is located within the brain, and controls and guides the brain in its relation to the world. The self-system moreover is pictured as enabling the brain to function "as a self-programming computer" (p. 106) using arrangements of "software" that function as "the guardians of order, the ensurers of competence and, ultimately, of self-esteem" (p. 105). In this image of the brain as a self-programming computer relating only to its own internal constructions, we find a dramatic materialization of the isolated mind within a physiological organ that has been endowed with the attributes of personhood.

Interpersonal psychoanalysis grew out of Sullivan's (1953) attempt to replace the intrapsychic determinism of Freudian theory with an emphasis on the centrality of social interaction. Indeed, Sullivan wished to resituate psychiatry and psychoanalysis within the domain of the social sciences. His efforts were marred, in our view, by the vacillation of his investigatory stance from one that assumed a position within the experiential worlds of those involved in an interaction (an intersubjective perspective) to one that stood outside the transaction and presumed to make objective observations that were subject to "consensual validation." The latter stance is illustrated by Sullivan's concept of "parataxic distortion," a process through which a person's current experiences of others are said to be "warped" in consequence of his past interpersonal history. We wish to emphasize here that the concept of parataxic distortion enshrines another variant of the doctrine of the isolated mind, a mind separated from an "objective" reality that it either accurately apprehends or distorts. This objectivist stance contrasts with an intersubjective one, in which it is assumed that one's personal reality is always codetermined by features of the surround and the unique meanings into which these are assimilated.

Contemporary interpersonal psychoanalysis is well represented by Mitchell's (1988) effort to develop an integrated "relational model," drawing on the work of Sullivan and British object relations theorists, most notably, Fairbairn (1952). Mitchell's general description of relational-model theorizing in psychoanalysis is highly compatible with our own viewpoint:

In this vision the basic unit of study is not the individual as a separate entity whose desires clash with an external reality, but an interactional field within which the individual arises and struggles to make contact and to articulate himself. Desire is experienced always in the context of relatedness, and it is that context which defines its meaning. Mind is composed of relational configurations.... Experience is understood as structured through interactions.... [pp. 3-4].

Despite the harmony that exists between his overall vision and an intersubjective perspective, remnants of the isolated mind appear in Mitchell's work, particularly in the clinical application of his ideas to the psychoanalytic situation. He describes
the analytic patient as continually engaging in "gambits" designed to draw the analyst into old relational patterns to which the patient has remained committed and deeply loyal. The analyst, in turn, is said inevitably to find himself a "coactor" in the patient's passionate drama, "enacting the patient's old scenarios" (p. 293) and inexorably falling into "the patient's predesigned categories" (p. 295). The patient—or better, the patient's mind—is pictured here as the chief director of the analytic stage, much in the manner of Schafer's (1976) omnipotent agent and the unidirectional influence system embodied in the theory of projective identification. Insufficient attention is given to the patient's becoming a coactor in the analyst's drama, to the reciprocal impact on the patient's experience of the analyst's predesigned categories (including the assumption that patients engage in gambits), as conveyed, for example, by the analyst's interpretations. In his clinical approach, it seems to us, Mitchell's elegant relational model ultimately collapses into a variant of the myth of the individual mind.

Why is it that the isolated mind, as we have seen, is such a difficult demon to exorcise, even for those who have so assiduously devoted themselves to the task? As we proposed earlier, it is our view that this pervasive, reified image in its many guises serves to disavow the exquisite vulnerability that is inherent to an unalienated awareness of the continual embeddedness of human experience in a constitutive intersubjective context. The impersonal machine, the autonomous ego, the omnipotent agent, the inviolable pristine self—all such images of the mind insulated from the constitutive impact of the surround counteract, to paraphrase Kundera (1984), what might be termed "the unbearable embeddedness of being." Analogously to isolated states in early development (Ogden, 1991), they provide a "buffer against the continual strain of being alive in the world of human beings" (p. 388).

THE ONTOGENY OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

We contend that the development of personal experience always takes place within an ongoing intersubjective system.

Earlier, in a chapter written in collaboration with Brandchaft, we (Atwood and Stolorow, 1984) summarized the intersubjective perspective on psychological development:

"Both psychological development and pathogenesis are . . . 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 [p. 65]."

An impressive body of research evidence has been amassed documenting that the developing organization of the child's experience must be seen as a property of the child–caregiver system of mutual regulation (see Lichtenberg, 1983, 1989; Sander, 1985, 1987; Stern, 1985, 1988; Beebe and Lachmann, 1988a,b; Emde, 1988a,b). According to Sander (1985, 1987), it is the infant–caregiver system that regulates and organizes the infant's experience of inner states. The development of self-regulatory competence, therefore, is a systems competence. In a more recent work, Sander (1991) has shown that even the sense of distinctness, uniqueness, and personal agency emerges and is sustained within a developmental system in which there is a synchronous "specificity of fittedness" between the infant's shifting states and the caregiver's ability to recognize them. Stern (1985), too, has described in great detail the formation of various senses of self from the child's interactions with "self-regulating others." Beebe and Lachmann (1988a,b) have shown that recurrent patterns of mutual influence between mother and infant provide the basis for the development of self- and object representations. They argue that in the earliest representations what is represented is "an emergent dyadic phenomenon, structures of the interaction, which cannot be described on the basis of either partner alone" (Beebe and Lachmann, 1988a, p. 305). A similar view of the interactional basis of psychic structure formation is implicit in Lichtenberg's (1989) discussion of the schemas or "scripts" that underlie the experience of various motivational
systems and in Emde's (1988a) description of personality structures developing from the internalization of "infant-caregiver relationship patterns." Each of these authors, in different language, is describing how recurring patterns of intersubjective transaction within the developmental system result in the establishment of invariant principles that unconsciously organize the child's subsequent experiences (Atwood and Stolorow, 1984; Stolorow et al., 1987), a realm of unconsciousness that we term the "prereflective unconscious" (see chapter 2). It is these unconscious ordering principles, crystalized within the matrix of the child-caregiver system, that form the essential building blocks of personality development.

Some may see a contradiction between the concept of developmentally preestablished principles that organize subsequent experiences and our repeated contention that experience is always embedded in a constitutive intersubjective context. This contradiction is more apparent than real. A person enters any situation with an established set of ordering principles (the subject's contribution to the intersubjective system), but it is the context that determines which among the array of these principles will be called on to organize the experience. Experience becomes organized by a particular invariant principle only when there is a situation that lends itself to being so organized. The organization of experience can therefore be seen as codetermined both by preexisting principles and by an ongoing context that favors one or another of them over the others.

Examples of this codetermination are readily seen during the course of psychoanalytic treatment, in the shifting figure-ground relationships between what we (Stolorow et al., 1987) have termed the "selfobject" and "repetitive" dimensions of the transference. In the former, the patient yearns for the analyst to provide selfobject experiences that were missing or insufficient during the formative years (Kohut, 1971, 1977, 1984). In the latter, which is a source of conflict and resistance, the patient expects and fears a repetition with the analyst of early experiences of developmental failure (Ornstein, 1974). These two dimensions continually oscillate between the experiential foreground and background of the transference in concert with perceptions of the analyst's varying attunement to the patient's emotional states and needs. For example, when the analyst is experienced as malattuned, foreshadowing a traumatic repetition of early developmental failure, the conflictual and resistive dimension is brought into the foreground, and the patient's selfobject longings are driven into hiding. On the other hand, when the analyst is able to analyze accurately the patient's experience of rupture of the therapeutic bond and demonstrate his understanding of the patient's reactive affect states and the principles that organize them, the selfobject dimension becomes restored and strengthened and the conflictual/resistive/repetitive dimension tends to recede into the background.

In our experience, intractable repetitive transferences are codetermined (in varying degrees) both by the relentless grip of the patient's invariant principles, a product of the absence or precariousness of alternative principles for organizing experience, and by aspects of the analyst's stance that lend themselves to repeated retraumatization of the patient (see chapter 7). Successful psychoanalytic treatment, in our view, does not produce therapeutic change by altering or eliminating the patient's invariant organizing principles. Rather, through new relational experiences with the analyst in concert with enhancements of the patient's capacity for reflective self-awareness, it facilitates the establishment and consolidation of alternative principles and thereby enlarges the patient's experiential repertoire. More generally, it is the formation of new organizing principles within an intersubjective system that constitutes the essence of developmental change throughout the life cycle.

It should be clear that the intersubjective view of psychological development is not to be confused with a naive environmentalism. Rather, it embraces what Wallace (1985) felicitously terms "intersectional causation." At any moment the child's formative experiences are understood to emerge from the intersection of, and to be codetermined by, his psychological organization as it has evolved to that point and specific features of the caregiving surround. In this model, the development of the child's psychological organization is always seen as an aspect of an evolving and maturing child-caregiver system.

Studies of the vicissitudes of the developmental system are giving rise to a radically altered psychoanalytic theory of moti-
vation. Clearly, it is no longer satisfactory to view motivation in terms of the workings of a mental apparatus processing instinctual drive energies. Instead, it has increasingly come to be recognized, as Lichtenberg (1989) aptly argues, that "motivations arise solely from lived experience" and that "the vitality of the motivational experience will depend...on the manner in which affect-laden exchanges unfold between infants and their caregivers" (p. 2). Most important, in our view, has been the shift from drive to affect as the central motivational construct for psychoanalysis (see Basch, 1984; Demos and Kaplan, 1986; Jones, in press). Affectivity, we now know, is not a product of isolated intrapsychic mechanisms; it is a property of the child-caregiver system of mutual regulation (Sander, 1985; Rogawski, 1987; Demos, 1988). Stern (1985) has described in exquisite detail the regulation of affective experience within the infant-caregiver dyad through processes of intersubjective sharing and mutual affect attunement. The "affective core of the self" (Emde, 1988a) derives from the person's history of intersubjective transactions, and thus the shift from drive to affect resituates the psychoanalytic theory of motivation squarely within the realm of the intersubjective. Early developmental trauma, from this perspective, is viewed not as an instinctual flooding of an ill-equipped mental apparatus. Rather, as we develop in chapter 4, the tendency for affective experiences to create a disorganized or disintegrated self-state is seen to originate from early faulty affect attunements—breakdowns of the infant-caregiver system—leading to the loss of affect-regulatory capacity (Socarides and Stolorow, 1984/85). These are the rock-bottom dangers for which later states of anxiety sound the alarm. As we demonstrate in chapter 2, the shift from drive to affect leads inevitably to an intersubjective view of the formation of psychic conflict and of what has been traditionally termed the "dynamic unconscious."

Let us now consider, from an intersubjective perspective, the development of a constituent of personal experience that has great clinical import—the sense of the real.

The Genesis of the Sense of the Real

We are concerned here with the process by which a child acquires an experience of the world and the self as real. "Reality," as we use the term, refers to something subjective, something felt or sensed, rather than to an external realm of being existing independently of the human subject. In classical Freudian theory, reality is pictured in the latter way, and psychological development is conceptualized as a gradual coming into contact with the constraints and conditions of this independent, external world. Central to the process of establishing contact with reality, according to Freud (1923) and other classical theorists (Ferenczi, 1913; Fenichel, 1945), are experiences of frustration and disappointment. Such inevitable but painful moments supposedly propel the child out of an undifferentiated mode of functioning by contributing to the separation of an ego that takes into account the independence of the external world and operates under the so-called reality principle. Our focus, by contrast, is on the child's establishing a sense that what he experiences is real, and on how this sense of the real develops within a facilitating intersubjective matrix.

We have previously highlighted (Stolorow, Atwood, and Brandchaft, 1992) the developmental importance of a self-object function contributing to the articulation and validation of a child's unfolding world of personal experience, and we have designated this the self-delineating self-object function. It is our view that the development of a child's sense of the real occurs not primarily as a result of frustration and disappointment, but rather through the validating attunement of the caregiving surround, an attunement provided across a whole spectrum of affectively intense, positive and negative experiences. Reality thus crystallizes at the interface of interacting, affectively attuned subjectivities.

The self-delineating self-object function may be pictured along a developmental continuum, from early sensorimotor forms of validation occurring in the preverbal transactions between infant and caregiver, to later processes of validation that take place increasingly through symbolic communication and involve the child's awareness of others as separate centers of subjectivity.

Preverbal forms of validation are implicit in the sensorimotor dialogue in which the caregiver's sense of the infant's shifting subjective states is expressed. Such communication, occurring primarily through modulations of touch, holding, facial expression, and vocal rhythm and intonation (Stern, 1985), creates an
Chapter 2

Three Realms of the Unconscious

In this chapter we extend our intersubjective framework to a reconsideration of a cornerstone of all psychoanalytic thought—the concept of unconscious mental processes.

In an earlier attempt to reconceptualize the unconscious, we (Atwood and Stolorow, 1984) distinguished two forms of unconsciousness that are important for psychoanalysis—the prereflective unconscious and the more familiar dynamic unconscious. Both differ from Freud’s (1900, 1915) “preconscious” in that they can be made conscious only with great effort. The term prereflective unconscious refers to the shaping of experience by organizing principles that operate outside a person’s conscious awareness:

The organizing principles of a person’s subjective world, whether operating positively (giving rise to certain configurations in awareness) or negatively (preventing certain configurations from arising), are themselves unconscious. A person’s experiences are shaped by his psychological structures without this shaping becoming the focus of awareness and reflection. We have therefore characterized the structure of a subjective world as prereflectively unconscious. This form of unconsciousness is not the product of defensive activity, even though great effort is required to overcome it. In fact, the defenses themselves, when operating