One of the tasks facing anyone discussing object relations theory is that of mapping the terrain. What is to be included in the territory? To what extent is the field of object relations congruent with the domain of psychoanalysis as a whole? Pine treats object relations as just one of what he calls the four psychologies of psychoanalysis: “the psychologies of drive, ego, object relations, and self” (1988, 571). Pine’s discussion of these realms of theory makes no effort to reconcile their incompatibilities. He ignores the massive case against drive theory. He also ignores the possibility that ego psychology, self psychology, and object relations have much in common, whatever their differences. Pine’s uncritical eclecticism may be contrasted to Gedo’s cautious holism. Gedo, who laments the failure of psychoanalysis “to produce a theoretical consensus with regard to the proper place of object relations in our conceptual armamentarium” (1979, 362), questions Kohut’s claim that scientific disciplines may legitimately utilize uncoordinated fragments of theory: “If we have a choice, a unitary theory is preferable to a patchwork, the components of which bear no discernible relation to each other” (364).

According to the perspective assumed in this chapter, the deficiencies of drive theory and ego psychology have long since overwhelmed their former usefulness. The functions they sought to explain, such as unconscious motivation and conflict, can be better understood along different lines. As for what is left of Pine’s four psychologies, object relations theory and what I call self theory (as distinguished from Kohut’s self psychology) overlap so much as to make their concerns virtually insep-
rable within the territory of psychoanalysis, provided, of course, that one assumes that psychoanalysis is a special psychology, limited in scope, which entertains no ambitions to be a general psychology. When I say that the concerns of self theory and object relations theory are virtually inseparable, I naturally do not mean they are indistinguishable from each other as fields of investigation. As definable areas of knowledge they reflect different perspectives and priorities. The crucial task is to explore the overlap of these distinguishable realms of attention without becoming confused by the differences. One aspect of the problem is terminological. For example, use of the terms “self” and “object” propagates a measure of confusion by tending to reify abstract categories in a way that blurs the existential inseparability of self and other, a conceptual problem addressed by Winnicott’s famous dictum (1952, 97–100) that there is no such thing as a baby (in that babies never appear except as parts of the “nursing couple” dyad). Mitchell speaks to the same issue, the impossibility of dealing with self and other separately, when he writes, “To assign priority to sense of self, object ties, or patterns of interaction is like trying to decide whether it is the skin, the bones, or the musculature that preserves the body form. . . . The intrapsychic and the interpersonal are continually interpenetrating realms, each with its own set of processes, mechanisms, and concerns” (1988, 35).

For the practical purposes of ordinary discussion, therefore, the present work handles self theory as an aspect of object relations theory, object relations theory as an aspect of self theory, and attachment theory as a special branch of both. The possibilities for consolidation seem endless. One has only to think, for instance, of Bowlby’s emphasis on children’s sense of security in the presence of attachment figures in conjunction with the attention Winnicott and Mahler give to children’s ability to play in the presence of their mothers to get a sense of how much attachment theory has in common with object relations theory. An instructive instance of a particular analyst whose work successfully utilizes the combined perspectives of classical psychoanalysis, object relations theory, attachment theory, interactionalst views (Bower, Brazelton), and self theory without ignoring the differences can be found in V. Hamilton’s Narcissus and Oedipus (1982). Stern speaks of his version of self theory as having much in common with psychoanalysis and attachment theory, though it differs from them in treating a subjective sense of self as its primary organizing principle (1985, 25). Eagle (1984) aligns his views of object relations theory with attachment theory. Though other examples of par-
tial integration of these theories could be mentioned, the task of systematically combining the most meaningful parts of the various perspectives in question (in a way that would meet Gedo’s standards for a unitary theory) remains so formidable as to be far beyond the scope of the present chapter, which aspires to do no more than peek through certain windows of opportunity in order to see what a unified theory of object relations might look like when seen from a contemporary vantage point.

POSITIONING ATTACHMENT THEORY

What should be the place of attachment theory in a person-oriented theory of object relations? The beginning of an answer can be glimpsed in the anecdote Guntrip relates concerning a question Fairbairn poses to a child whose mother has cruelly thrashed her: “Would you like me to find you a new, kind Mummy?” The child answers, “No. I want my own Mummy” (Guntrip 1975, 146). In the context of attachment theory, one can say that the strength of the child’s tie to a particular mother—however harsh she may be—infinitely outweighs the possible desirability of any substitute figure. As Guntrip glosses the situation, “The devil you know is better than the devil you do not, and better than no devil at all.” One can also say of this tie that it is instinctive, primary (not based on any secondary drive, such as the need for food), and, in Bowlby’s cybernetic terminology, the child’s behavior (in this instance, her answer to Fairbairn) “is a product of the activity of a number of behavioural systems that have proximity to mother as a predictable outcome” (1969, 179), so that in the presence of anxiety or difficulty (being thrashed) the child paradoxically needs the attacking object more than ever!

Attachment theory can be regarded as the cornerstone of a person-oriented theory of object relations in part because it provides a meaningful substitute, as Bowlby intended it should, for the drive theory of human motivation. It has the potential for modeling both conflictful and harmonious (growth-inducing) relationships. It does not pretend to be a universal theory explaining all forms of human behavior, such as the kind denominated by Lichtenberg (1989) as “exploratory-assertive,” but it does offer a suitable framework for understanding the range of behavior normally understood to be subsumed under the heading of object relations. As Rosenblatt and Thickstun remark, speaking of attachment theory, “The central importance of social relationships (in psychoanalytic
terms, ‘object relations’) in shaping the person’s emotional and cognitive growth is the clinical essence of psychoanalysis” (1977, 122). Or as Greenberg and Mitchell put it, in person-oriented object relations theory “the unit of study of psychoanalysis is not the individual, but the relational matrix constituted by the individual in interaction with significant others” (1983, 220).

Bowlby himself rarely puts into play the conceptual vocabulary of object relations. Why is that, one may ask, and whatever happened, intellectually and emotionally, to Bowlby’s own analyst, Joan Riviere, and to Melanie Klein, one of Bowlby’s supervisors? Bowlby does not neglect to acknowledge his debt to them “for grounding me in the object-relations approach to psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on early relationships and the pathogenic potential of loss” (1969, xvii), yet most of his work departs radically from Klein’s. The necessary inference for those familiar with Bowlby’s methodology and cognitive style is that in rebelling against certain features of contemporary British object relations theory Bowlby bent over backwards to avoid any inferences not based on solid, empirical evidence. Yet his subject matter, as distinguished from his methodology, is entirely object relational. He himself declares that his most “central concepts” are “object relations, separation anxiety, mourning, defence, trauma, [and] sensitive periods in early life” (xv), a group of categories that can be lumped together without any distortion as “object relations.” Bowlby specifies that attachment theory derives from object relations theory and has much in common with the work of Melanie Klein, Fairbairn, Balint, and Winnicott (17).

Positioning attachment theory vis-à-vis object relations theory necessitates supplying what attachment theory leaves out, such as attention to particular individuals, and to internalized representations and their processing, while emphasizing those features of object relations theory, collectively considered, with which attachment theory is correlative and compatible, such as psychological responses to loss. When I say “object relations theory, collectively considered,” I refer as well to ideas deriving from self theory not hitherto part of earlier versions of object relations theory, such as the concept of intersubjectivity and the process Stern calls “affect attunement.” Within an expanded framework of self theory and object relations theory, attachment theory as we find it in Bowlby constitutes a special branch, one that continues to grow through his followers’ contributions.

After relating the anecdote about Fairbairn’s question to the abused
TOWARD A UNIFIED THEORY OF OBJECT RELATIONS

child, Guntrip mentions that the story illustrates Fairbairn's concern about the quality of parent-child relations. As a rule, Bowlby pays little direct attention to the quality of parenting. He speaks instead, along quantitative lines, of the presence, or temporary absence (separation), or permanent absence (loss) of parenting figures. Since his method is prospective rather than retrospective, he does not rely on case histories of adult individuals for illustration. He limits his attention to pathology pretty much to the directly observable consequences of separation and loss—such as those mentioned in experiments with animals, especially Harlow's. Yet even though Bowlby does not talk much about pathological object relations directly, he does do so on occasion, one of them being when he approvingly cites Bateson's double-bind theory of the origin of schizophrenia (Bowlby 1973, 317–19). Another instance that comes to mind is when Bowlby mentions two cases of matricide: "One, an adolescent who murdered his mother, exclaimed afterwards [presumably without irony], 'I couldn’t stand to have her leave me.'" In the other case, "a youth who placed a bomb in his mother's luggage as she boarded an airliner explained, 'I decided that she would never leave me again'" (1973, 251). The point to be registered is that although Bowlby keeps neurosis and psychosis in the background of his discussion in the Attachment and Loss trilogy (1969, 1973, 1980), and although he does not spend much time focusing on separation as a source of crippling emotional conflict or behavioral maladaptation except when discussing experiments with animals, a comprehensive theory of object-relational conflict cannot possibly avoid attending to the themes of attachment, separation, and loss, particularly insofar as the effects of pathological parenting can be regarded as comparable to those of separation and loss. The beginnings of such an expansion of attachment theory have already been initiated by such figures as Ainsworth, Main and Weston, Henderson, Brown, Adam, and Parkes (all in Parkes and Stevenson-Hinde, 1982), and Bowlby's later work (1979, 1988) addresses the issues of etiology and psychopathology more directly than the Attachment and Loss trilogy.

Guntrip's anecdote concerning Fairbairn's question to the little girl implies the presence of a sexual factor when Guntrip remarks (presumably paraphrasing Fairbairn) that the girl's response reflects "the intensity of the libidinal tie to the bad object" (1975, 146). Is this just another instance of "libidinal" being used loosely as a synonym for "emotional," or are such ties erotic? Attachment theory assumes they are not erotic, the need for attachment itself being the primary instinct in operation. What,
then, may be said concerning the relation of attachment behavior to sexual behavior, especially when Bowlby expressly declares attachment theory to be an alternative to libido theory (1969, 17)? The answer is that while Bowlby jettisons the theory of psychical energy, and while he tends to exclude sexual behavior from the areas of his attention, he does not in fact deny the existence or even the importance of sexual behavior. He treats sexual behavior (1969, 230–34) as a separate system of activity that has "close linkages" to attachment behavior. These otherwise separate systems of behavior may "impinge" upon and "overlap" each other, the examples he gives of sharing behavioral components being adult clinging and kissing. Presumably only King Solomon could separate erotic factors from attachment factors in lovers' kisses—or in their sexual intercourse, for that matter. For Freud, even thumb sucking is an erotic activity. But Fairbairn believes babies suck their thumbs because there is no breast to suck, so that thumb sucking "represents a technique for dealing with an unsatisfactory object-relationship" (1952, 33). And for Winnicott also, thumb sucking, a transitional phenomenon, clearly pertains as much to other as to self (1971). What matters in this connection is not to locate particular instances of unmixed instinctive behavior but to recognize the high degree of ambiguity often prevailing in human action with respect to the kind, and proportion, of instincts involved. Granting the presence of that ambiguity makes it understandable that what has usually been interpreted as sexual behavior under the aegis of Freud may in fact have been primarily or essentially motivated by attachment needs, a proposition that will be illustrated at length in the reading of Freud's cases in chapter 3.

A factor to consider in the task of positioning attachment theory in a broader theory of object relations concerns the common practice of using the term "attachment" in a literal and very circumscribed manner, often with a sharp distinction between "attachment" and "attachment behavior" (Bowlby, 1982, 371; 1988, 28). Used in this way, the child's answer to Fairbairn, "I want my own Mummy," denotes a fairly literal tie, or emotional bond, to what is by definition the child's primary attachment figure. Although Bowlby generally limits his discussion of attachment behavior to such instances in early childhood, he recognizes that "attachment behaviour does not disappear with childhood but persists throughout life" (1969, 350). He also clearly links transference activity to attachment behavior (1969, 17; 1973, 206, 271). A particularly good instance of Bowlby's use of "presence" and "absence" in a non-literal way occurs
when he writes, “A mother can be physically present but ‘emotionally’
absent. What this means, of course, is that although present in body, a
mother may be unresponsive to her child’s desire for mothering” (1973,
23). The point being led up to is this: if attachment theory is to be part
of a broader theory of object relations instead of being confined for the
most part to developmental psychology, then the concept of attachment
must be deliteralized and broadened in a way that recognizes its endless
permutations. Freud remarks that “the finding of an object is in fact a
refinding of it” (1905b, 222). By the same token, one can say that
subsequent attachments to some extent replicate earlier ones. All major
attachments in adult life constitute versions, or permutations, of earlier
attachments, which is tantamount to saying that adult interpersonal rela-
tionships reflect the object-relational history of the individuals concerned.
Such, at least, will be the position adopted in the pages to come, which
will treat all object relations as involving the element, or process, of
attachment—even conflicted ones. Normally, of course, the term “attach-
ment,” when unmodified by such words as “anxious,” has only positive
connotations—unlike “object relations,” an affectively neutral phrase.
Thus expanded, the concept of attachment behavior—roughly the equiv-
alent of Fairbairn’s “object-seeking”—functions as the motivational foun-
dation of the entire spectrum of object-relational behavior, including
mentational activity such as fantasy. Even masochistic behavior makes a
kind of sense within this explanatory framework. It becomes a compro-
mised form of attachment behavior—the perpetuation, or recreation, of
the modality of an important earlier relationship—rather than a perverse
search for unpleasure, sexual or otherwise.

WHERE, IN REALITY, ARE SELF AND OTHER?

One of the issues that persists in psychoanalysis has to do with the
comparative reality of what goes on inside and outside of the domain of
mental processing. Where, in this connection, can self and other be said
to be located? In defiance of common sense, object relations theory
situates others both outside, in “real” space, and inside, in the equally real
yet imaginary space of the mind, in the form of residues, or internaliza-
tions, of outside others. In similar defiance of common sense, aspects of
the self may seem to reside within but may unconsciously be projected
onto outside others, or invested, by identification, in some outside per-
son, such as a religious or political leader (Freud 1921). And, to complicate the situation, what was once outside, the other, may, after internalization, be temporarily relocated in outside others (transference), such as one’s analyst. Yet as Schafer reminds us, there are no mental places (1976, 158). A solution to the problem of avoiding the dangers of the convenient fiction of “mental places” is to locate representations of self and other systemically, as stored information, that is, as conceptual and behavioral programs: “All long-term relationships—including mother-and-child, husband-and-wife, and patient-and-analyst relationships—can be profitably studied as feedback-regulated, information-processing systems” (Peterfreund 1971, 159).

Then where does reality come in? Are real events involving real, outside others more real, or more important psychologically, than the undeniably real (really occurring) inner events involving the imagined others of fantasy? This issue has been troublesome for psychoanalysis. Bowlby, in the course of criticizing Klein’s position that anxiety derives from the operation of the death instinct, argues that this position has led to clinical practice that tends to ignore “a person’s real experiences, past or present,” and to treat him “almost as though he were a closed system little influenced by his environment” (1973, 173). Bowlby himself has gone to the opposite extreme of virtually ignoring fantasy activity in the process of favoring conventionally observable behavior, a practice suiting his methodology but disenfranchising denizens of the inner world of memory and desire. Stern addresses the issue of fantasy versus reality by reminding us that Freud’s conception of fantasy as experience distorted by defenses and wishes “resulted in an ontogenetic theory of experience as fantasy, not of experience as reality” (1985, 254). Arguing that “current findings from infancy studies fly against the notion that the pleasure principle developmentally precedes the reality principle,” (254–55) Stern contends that what infants experience, from the very beginning, is mainly reality, and that subjective experiences involving distortions of reality derive from later stages of development: “This position is far closer to Kohut’s and Bowlby’s contention that pre-Oedipal pathology is due to deficits or reality-based events—rather than to conflicts, in the psychodynamic sense” (255). In contrast, Laplanche and Pontalis speak of the danger of regarding real relations with others “as the chief determining factor. This is a deviation that must be rejected by every analyst for whom the object-relationship has to be studied essentially in terms of phantasy (though of
course phantasies can modify the apprehension of reality and actions
directed towards reality)” (1973, 280).

What I always wonder about while reading Klein’s interpretations of
the fantasies of her patients’ in-session play is not the reality of the
fantasies as reported but rather the extent to which these fantasies may be
joint productions of analyst and patient, sometimes with more input from
analyst than patient, especially in the matter of cueing the patient about
the value of sexual elements. Here again is the fantasy, quoted in chapter
1, of an infant attacking its mother (presented in generalized form, with
Klein’s comment): “The idea of an infant of from six to twelve months
trying to destroy its mother by every method at the disposal of its sadistic
tendencies—with its teeth, nails, and excreta and with the whole of its
body, transformed in imagination into all kinds of dangerous weapons—
presents a horrifying, not to say unbelievable, picture to our minds”
(Klein 1932, 187). Yet even if one elects to argue, siding with Stern, that
the evidence of infant research does not corroborate the likelihood that
an infant (of six to twelve months) could have experienced such a fantasy,
one can nevertheless scarcely deny the extraordinary resemblance of this
fantasy to the one depicted in Ted Hughes’s poem called “Crow and
Mama”:

When Crow cried his mother’s ear
Scorched to a stump.

When he laughed she wept
Blood her breasts her palms her brow all wept blood.

He tried a step, then a step, and again a step—
Every one scarred her face forever.

When he burst out in rage
She fell back with an awful gash and a fearful cry.

When he stopped she closed on him like a book
On a bookmark, he had to get going.

Then, after futile attempts by Crow to escape from his mother’s clutches
by jumping successively into a car and a plane,

He jumped into the rocket and its trajectory
Drilled clean through her heart he kept on
And it was cosy in the rocket, he could not see much
But he peered out through the portholes at Creation

And saw the stars millions of miles away
And saw the future and the universe

Opening and opening
And kept on and slept and at last

Crashed on the moon awoke and crawled out

Under his mother's buttocks.

(T. Hughes 1971, 5)

In the words of a discussion on the nature of fantasy, what we may be said to have in hand “is not an object [of desire] that the subject imagines and aims at, so to speak, but rather a sequence in which the subject has his own part to play and in which permutations of roles and attributions are possible” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 318). Infants may not have such fantasies, but adult poets obviously can, and do, and it is equally obvious that in reading such a poem adult readers can re-experience elements of their own infantile omnipotent rage—as well as a certain Winnicottian satisfaction at the indestructibility of the subjective object. What we may also be said to witness in such a poem, beyond all controversy, is the essential innerness of all literary fantasy, and the emotional reality of it, so that even if Klein’s theory and clinical practice may have contaminated the evidence she presents, we can look to the fantasies of literature and other forms of art with at least as much confidence as Freud looked to dreams for wondrous instances of the workings of the mind, especially in the field of object relations.

As for the location of self and other, it will be assumed throughout the present study that figures in a text may be treated as temporary introjects by readers. When I read that Crow’s catastrophic mother—to borrow a phrase from Rheingold (1967)—closes in on him “like a book / On a bookmark,” I, too, have to get going. And when Crow’s activity scars his mother’s face forever, I, as reader, may be said to have momentarily internalized Crow-hero’s behavior according to the model of the Introjecting Reader (Holland 1968). Presumably an elaborate matching takes place during the reading process in which, hypothetically, a perceived or imagined aspect of Hughes’s real mother becomes internalized by Hughes, then eventually projected onto Crow’s Mama, an attribution that I as
reader subsequently introject, match with internalizations of my own, and then respond to—or not, as the case may be—cognitively and affectively, at both conscious and unconscious levels.

CONCEPTUALIZING SELFHOOD

The nature of selfhood is at least as problematic as its location. While the word self does not accumulate much resonance in Freud's works, the latent importance of the term can easily be seen reflected in such concepts as the ego (a specialized aspect of self), the superego (the internalized other as part of self-structure), narcissism (self-love), guilt (self-reproach), and self-observation in dreams (Freud's dream censor). The rise of ego psychology and identity theory, and the reactivation of the theory of narcissism in self psychology, may be regarded in some respects as precursors of the development of self theory. Self theory as represented by (but not confined to) Peterfreund (1971), Rosenblatt and Thickstun (1977), Stern (1985), Basch (1988), and Lichtenberg (1989) should probably be regarded as far from fully developed. Even so, and even granting the difficulty of defining selfhood, viable models of self—and the relation of self to other—are now available.

Freud worked with at least three models of selfhood: the layered, or topographical, model (conscious, preconscious, unconscious), a developmental model (oral, anal, phallic, oedipal, etc.), and the structural model (id, ego, superego). Various post-Freudian models of self, in the order of increasing capacity to reflect complexity, treat the self as a container of forces (libido, aggression), a container of representations (e.g., memories, wishes, fantasies), a structure of representations (id, ego, superego; internalized others), and a system of systems (including such systemic functions as were hitherto attributed to the Freudian ego).

Aspects of these ways of modeling self may be glimpsed in the following selection of observations and definitions. Hartmann makes a point of distinguishing ego from self (1964, 127). Jacobson follows Hartmann in using “self” to refer to the whole person (including the individual, his body, body parts, psychic organization). She remarks, “The self... points to the person as a subject in distinction from the surrounding world of objects” (1964, 6). Greenberg and Mitchell observe that for Hartmann the self is an object as distinct from the subject of experience (1983, 299) and that for Mahler the self is “less a functional unit than a critical
developmental achievement” (300). Winnicott postulates the existence of a spectrum of selfhood integrity. He represents this spectrum in the form of dichotomous selves: the spontaneous True Self and the compliant False Self (1960, 140–52). Erikson’s (1950) identity theory, drawing heavily on Freud’s structural and epigenetic models, presents us with a picture of the self functioning to provide continuity through change. Lichtenstein, who postulates that identity maintenance “has priority over any other principle determining human behavior” (1961, 189), offers a transformational model of self as “the sum total of all transformations which are possible functions of an early-formed invariant correlation of the various basic elements of the mental apparatus” (1977, 241). For Bettelheim (1967, 56) self “is not an isolated entity. It is a totality of inner processes that develops slowly.” Searles (1966) discusses identity as a perceptual organ. In this connection he tells about a schizophrenic patient who repetitively knits “eyes,” which are “saucer-like structures with an aperture in the center” (26). When Searles asks if these “eyes” signify “Ts,” the patient confirms his intuition and makes a drawing of the world as she perceives it: “three large mountain peaks in the center, the head of an Indian prince on the left and a submarine on the right.” In essence, says Searles, “she conveyed to me how crazy is the worldview of one who has no reliable ‘I’ with which to see” (27).

George S. Klein, in conceptualizing self, speaks of beginning “with the assumption of a single apparatus of control which exhibits a variety of dynamic tendencies, the focus of which is either an integration experienced in terms of a sense of continuity, coherence, and integrity, or its impairment, as cleavages or dissonance. I call this central apparatus the ‘self’” (1976, 8). Klein views self as effecting control, sustaining identity (a person-oriented element), and resolving conflict. Eagle goes so far as to claim that “without expressly stating it, Klein (1976) essentially reformulates psychoanalytic theory as a psychology of self” (1984, 87). As for Kohut, he writes confusingly of the self as a content (“a content of the mental apparatus”), as a structure of the mind rather than an agency (a structure “cathected with instinctual energy”), and as a location (a psychic location) of self representations (1971, xv). Later he stresses the need for what he regards as complementary approaches: “a psychology in which the self is seen as the center of the psychological universe, and a psychology in which the self is seen as a content of a mental apparatus” (1977, xv). Astonishingly, the author of self psychology eventually confesses, “My investigation contains hundreds of pages dealing with the psychol-
ogy of the self—yet it never assigns an inflexible meaning to the term self, it never explains how the essence of the self should be defined” (310). A less biased observer might contend that Kohut simply fails to treat the topic with reasonable consistency.

Schafer, who emphasizes the wholeness and integrity of individuals as agents who must learn to take responsibility for their actions, including their thoughts and feelings, has proved to be one of the most incisive critics of ego psychology, identity theory, and self psychology in his efforts to avoid semantic confusion resulting from models involving split selves, anthropomorphism, reification, and various related errors he encounters in psychoanalytic writing. Schafer criticizes Kohut’s conceptualization of self as suffering from an attempt “to mix a phenomenological, experiential, representational concept with the traditional structural-energetic metapsychological entities [such as narcissism]” (1976, 116). Schafer even attacks the term “self” itself because of the multiplicity of meanings attributed to it. Worse, the nominative phrase, “the self,” tends to reify the concept of self: “Like the thingness and agency attributed to identity, ‘the self’ concretizes or substantializes a term whose referents are primarily subjective or experiential and whose force is primarily adverbial and adjectival” (117). Moreover, he adds, “in some of its usages, such as ‘self-actualization,’ ‘the self’ is set up not only as the existential referent of behavior but as, all at once, the motor, the fuel, the driver, and the end point of the journey of existence” (117). Elsewhere Schafer remarks, with commendable clarity, “Self and identity are not things with boundaries, contents, locations, sizes, forces, and degrees of brittleness” (1973, 51). He mentions that individuals’ representations of themselves vary enormously in scope, time, origin, and objectivity: “Many are maintained unconsciously (for example, self as phallus and self as turd), and many remain forever uncoordinated, if not contradictory” (52). Schafer distrusts the term self because of its protean meanings: it can signify “my body, my personality, my actions, my competence, my continuity, my needs, my agency, and my subjective space. Self is thus a diffuse, multipurpose word” (53). When Schafer addresses the concept of self-control he asks, “But just what does self-control refer to? Does it refer to a self that controls, and if so what is the nature of that self? Does it refer to a self that is to be controlled, and if so what is its nature and how does it stand in relation to the exerciser of control . . . ?” (1978, 78). As far as Schafer is concerned, “To say that the self controls the self is to commit a category mistake in that controlling anything is one of the constitutive features, or
one of the referents, of what we mean by self. We would not say that a thermostat controls a thermostat. . . . When someone is admonished, ‘Control yourself,’ a logical mistake is being committed” (79).

As it happens, there are models of selfhood that render moot such issues as the multiplicity of function attributed to self and the problem of the location of control. These may be referred to collectively as the systemic model. According to this model, self can be conceptualized as a set or system of indwelling interrelated governing functions of the whole person, a superordinate system incorporating innumerable subsystems, both physical ones with bodily organs such as lungs (the respiratory system), and others with less palpable, ponderable elements, such as memory systems, value systems, and sets of self-and-object representations. There is no need for any homunculus-like ego, a regulatory self within the self. Regulation can be thought of, metaphorically, as built in, or wired in. From a cybernetics point of view, the system is self-regulating, the function of control being systemically located, feedback-operated, and subject to the hierarchical constraints of a range of well-established priorities. A systemic view of selfhood conceptualizes awareness in terms of systemic monitoring, and lack of awareness (unconsciousness) as absence of access to specific behavioral programs. Inherently dynamic in conception (process-oriented), the systemic model accounts for both normal and neurotic conflict, the latter (less than optimal self-regulation) resulting from the activation of incompatible programs (see Schafer 1983, 82–95 regarding conflict as paradoxical action). A systemic model accounts for motivation as goal-oriented behavior (not necessarily conscious), the categorization of principal goals in the version of Rosenblatt and Thicke (1977, 298–99) being the maintenance of positive affective relationships with significant others (attachment behavior), the satisfaction of basic (mostly physical) needs, and the goal of defending against the threat of any form of injury.

Though Stern remarks with plausible common sense that “no one can agree on exactly what the self is” (1985, 5), he himself may be numbered among the many psychoanalysts whose theory is compatible with a systemic view of self. (The extent to which analysts explicitly subscribe to a systemic model appears to be a function of the degree of their familiarity with general systems theory.) Well before the advent of systems theory, Sullivan wrote about what he called “the self system,” which for him is essentially “an organization of educative experience called into being by
the necessity to avoid or to minimize incidents of anxiety" (1953, 165).
The father of systems theory, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, insists that modern
views of man have in common the principle “to take man not as a reactive
automaton or robot but as an active personality system” (1968, 207),
meaning, among other things, an open (as distinguished from closed),
information-processing, dynamically self-regulating system. Peterfreund,
whose application of systems theory to psychoanalysis remains the most
comprehensive and valuable treatment, writes that “self, object, and super-
ego representations are highly interrelated and interdependent; they
form a vast system, and each part constantly feeds back information to
every other part” (1971, 159). Rosenblatt and Thickstun say that the self
system “can be conceptualized as the superordinate system, or the organ-
ism itself, encompassing all of the systems operating within the organism”
(1977, 300). Bowlby, who embraces systems theory, tends to think in
terms of groups of individuals rather than isolated ones, and he seems to
be uncomfortable with person-oriented terms. He discusses the concept
of self (1980, 59–64), yet makes little use of it; there is, nevertheless,
little or nothing in his writing that conflicts with a systemic view of
selfhood. Although Stern’s book on self theory (1985) does not explicitly
refer to systems theory, nothing in his focus on epigenesis appears to be
at odds with the systems model. Lichtenberg (1989), whose work derives
partly from Stern and partly from self psychology, makes extensive use of
the concept of system even though, methodologically, he does not appear
to rely much on general systems theory as such. Lichtenberg, who defines
“the self as an independent center for initiating, organizing, and integrat-
ing” (12), generates a schema of five distinct yet interactive motivational
systems: a system regulating physiological requirements, an attachment-
affiliation system, and exploratory-assertive system, an aversive system,
and a sensual-sexual system. “As each system self-organizes and self-
stabilizes, the needs that constitute the system’s core are met or fail to be
met” (275). Basch represents the case for a systemic view of selfhood well
when he writes, “The modern term psychodynamics can be understood as
referring to the movement of goal-directed systems toward decisions. The
process is measured by and expressed in terms of information. Thus is the
once-mysterious psyche taken out of the realm of the supernatural to join
science, the search for order in nature” (1988, 58).

While alternative models of self will doubtless continue to be formu-
lated, it seems almost inevitable that the more valuable ones will incorpo-
rate systemic perspectives. If systems models of self become increasingly accepted in psychoanalysis, one consequence will be the total abandonment of libido theory and ego psychology, and sexuality will probably play a more modest role, as in Lichtenberg’s formulation. To a considerable extent the systemic model renders null the criticism, emanating from people like Lacan, of the idea of a highly coherent, specialized, centered self. For Lacan, self, at the mirror stage, is but the reflection of an alienated other (1977, 2–6); at a later stage (the Symbolic) self, or “subject,” is a subjectivity dispersed in language and culture. In contrast, the systemic model, which represents selfhood as an operational whole in spite of the number and diversity of its systemically located “parts,” preserves the possibility of virtual unity in functioning individuals without delimiting the complexity with which larger environments (culture) can be represented within the self system. Barratt (1984), who quotes Adorno as saying that identity is the primal form of ideology (251), mocks the notion of “a unified, albeit multifaceted, subject,” (139), or self, or ego, especially as favored by neo-Freudians and object relations theorists, but his own ur-Freudian model of man as fundamentally alienated and irreparably conflicted refuses recognition of the possibility of functionally unified selfhood such as may be said to be epitomized, in the vision of W. B. Yeats, by the dancer who cannot be distinguished from the dance. In any case, one can claim the existence of room in the systemic model for virtually unlimited complexity of the representation of self, other, and culture.

One can also claim that the systemic model accommodates both self-oriented and other-oriented perspectives on object relations theory. Stern declares that he places sense of self at the center of his inquiry (1985, 5), yet he manages to pursue his study with full recognition of the extent to which the other (mother) influences the development of selfhood in infants. In contrast to Stern, Lichtenstein’s other-oriented version of object relations theory may be thought to undersell infant individuality and potential for autonomy by defining identity strictly in terms of instrumentality (self as an instrument of an all-influential other). He writes, “Even as an adult, I believe, man cannot ever experience his identity except in terms of an organic instrumentality within the variations of a symbiotically structured Umwelt” (1961, 202), identity being experienced unconsciously by adults as variations on themes “imprinted” on them as infants by their mothers (208). In point of fact, Lichtenstein’s theory of selfhood, as identity theory, focuses as much on self as on other. As for
the implication that self theory appears by its very name to favor self over other, what matters in the present context is that self theory models not foreclose in any way on the representation of other.

As a general rule, the idea that the development of self results in large part, though not exclusively, from the interaction of self with other appears to be beyond controversy. Object relations theorists have always been interested in what has come to be referred to as “intersubjectivity” (Atwood and Stolorow, 1984). Winnicott explains in a famous passage how a mother’s face, functioning as a mirror, allows the child to begin to experience itself as a self (1971, 111–18), and throughout his discussion of transitional phenomena he emphasizes that transitional objects are subjective objects. Kohut may be thought of as having extended the concept of the subjectivity of the object through his use of the term selfobject. Stern (1985) throws an abundance of light on the topic of intersubjectivity. As part of his articulation of the dynamics of the infant-mother dialogue, Stern speaks of attachment as self-experience (102); he illuminates the importance of “peek-a-boo” and “I’m-gonna-getcha” as games constituting “we-experience,” a self-other phenomenon (101–2); and he points to the way in which being with others promotes the beginnings of psychological self-regulation (75). In keeping with his declaration that “the sharing of affective states is the most pervasive and clinically germane feature of intersubjective relatedness” (138), Stern develops at length the concept of “affect attunement,” which he defines as “the performance of [complex interactional] behaviors that express the quality of feeling of a shared affect state without imitating the exact behavioral expression of the inner state” (142). Rich and detailed, the rigorous accounts of the observation of infant-mother interaction of Stern, Beebe (1986), and others hold forth great promise for the better understanding of adult object-relations behavior.

INTERNALIZATION

In a footnote Schafer remarks that when he was writing Aspects of Internalization (1968) he had not yet realized “the extent to which the very idea of internalization was part of a major problem in psychoanalytic theorizing” (1976, 177). For Schafer the problem concerns what he regards as the illicit use of pseudospatial terms such as “internal objects.” When analysts employ the term internalization, he writes, “we refer not
to a fantasy but to a psychological process, and we are saying that a shift
of event, action, or situation in an inward direction or to an inner locale
has occurred” (155). The question is, he asks, “inside what?” He then
proceeds to develop his perfectly legitimate claim, mentioned earlier, that
there are no mental places, or spaces. Apart from what we now know
about the localization of various functions in the brain, Schafer’s claim
seems undeniable except that in his efforts to get the language of psycho-
analysis straightened out he has forgotten that people think as-ifly, with
models, and express themselves as-thoughly, through language, especially
when they speak of matters, such as relationships, that cannot be weighed,
measured, or located in space. In language, mental places do exist. Even
unicorns exist in language! Schafer, who appreciates the danger of reify-
ing abstractions, fails to realize the pointlessness of deliberately literalizing
conceptual metaphors, that is, of setting metaphoric models up as straw
men by attributing literal reality to what, in context, are consensually
understood to be conceptual abstractions expressed through more or less
concrete metaphorical language—as in the phrase “internal objects.”

For Meissner “the issue of internalization lies at the very heart of
contemporary psychoanalytic concerns” (1981, ix). He makes this state-
ment in the context of the emergence of “a more articulated theory of
object relations,” one that “emphasizes the importance of relationships
with significant objects both in development and in current adaptive
functioning,” on the one hand, and the rise of “a psychology of self” on
the other (ix). It does not require much of an argument, says Meissner, to
show that the concept of internalization “is central to the dialectic be-
tween object and self, and that it provides the conceptual bridge between
an object relations theory and a concept of self” (ix). For Meissner, then,
what is at stake is not the legitimacy but the centrality of the concept of
internalization.

One of the things Meissner tries to accomplish is to codify terminology
pertaining to internalization. Such terms as “incorporation,” “introjec-
tion,” “identification,” and “projective identification,” among others, have
been used with so much variation in meaning that standardization proves
difficult. Certainly there is a serious danger posed by unrestrained multi-
plication of taxonomic designations of internalized objects such as Grot-
stein (1982) exhibits in his discussion of object relations theory. He
himself refers, with something less than full awareness, to what he calls “a
warehouse of internal objects” (84). On display in this warehouse, in
addition to a series of six selfobjects, the first of which he calls the
“Background Subject-Object of Primary Identification,” the bedazzled reader encounters—successively—the nutrative object, the poisonous or starving object, the stimulating object, the defective boundary object, the collusive internal object, the scavenger object, the corrupt object, the protective object, the “object with tenure,” the Albatross or defective frontier object, the obstructive object, the corrupt background object, the autistic object, the symbiotic object, the ultimate containing object, the nuclear object, and the orbital object. One need not question the potentially infinite variety of forms internalizations may take in order to doubt the wisdom of attempting to categorize as many types as possible by giving them names.

To say so is not to deny the potential usefulness of typology. Stern calls one of the more interesting types of internalized object the “evoked companion”: “Whenever a RIG [a representation of an interaction that has been internalized] of being with someone (who has changed self-experience) is activated, the infant encounters an evoked companion” (1985, 111). According to Stern, “the evoked companion functions to evaluate the specific ongoing interactive episode” (113), thus serving as an internalized reference orienting response. The seemingly unaccountable experience by an adult of strong emotion, such as love or anger, as a response to a relatively trivial situation involving a comparative stranger might be accounted for by assuming that an “evoked companion” has suddenly been mobilized, however unconsciously. Where else could all that affect come from? What Bollas calls “the transformational object,” an object “experientially identified by the infant with processes that alter self experience” (1987, 14), closely resembles Stern’s evoked companion, the emphasis in both instances being on the reexperience of a pattern of transformative interaction as distinct from a naked, unmediated encounter with a familiar figure. Interesting in this connection is the fact that Hadley speaks of the neurophysiology of attachment not in terms of connections and bonds but in terms of process: “Attachment is the internalized representation of repetitive interactions with caregivers” (1989, 358). In similar fashion, Beebe emphasizes internalization as a process by stressing action schemes (interactional patterns) as precursors of self and object representations: what is internalized in the earliest representations “is not simply the infant’s own action, nor the environment’s response, but rather the dynamic interplay between the two. To expand upon Piaget, representation of the self and the human object is conceptualized as interiorized interaction, rather than unilateral action per se” (1986, 28).
One topic of immense significance for object relations theory is the internalization of personal meaning. Guntrip comments, "The significance of human living lies in object-relationships, and only in such terms can our life be said to have a meaning, for without object relations the ego itself cannot develop" (1969, 19–20). Marris writes about the element of uniqueness in human attachment in contrast to the comparative interchangeability of objects implied by Freud’s libido theory:

The relationships that matter most to us are characteristically to particular people whom we love—husband or wife, parents, children, dearest friend—and sometimes to particular places—a home or personal territory—that we invest with the same loving qualities. These specific relationships, which we experience as unique and irreplaceable, seem to embody most crucially the meaning of our lives. We grow up to look for such relationships. If we do not find them, our lives seem empty; pleasures, ambitions, ideals, career tend to lose their interest or their purpose without this context of unique personal bonds. If we lose these bonds, we suffer grief; and in the depth of grieving, the bereaved cannot be consoled by any substitute relationship. Even the idea of such consolation is abhorrent, because it seems to deny the unique value and meaning of what has been lost. (1982, 185)

Although Marris suggests that "meaning is inherently emotional" (192), he does not speak of the meaningfulness of object relations simply in the sense that they are emotionally important; he asserts that attachments structure meaning in a larger way, allowing us "to make sense of our experience and to direct our lives" (191).

Because attachments structure meaning, says Marris, the loss of key attachment figures tends to precipitate confusion: "When people are bereft of a crucial relationship, nothing seems to make sense any longer. The world seems meaningless" (194). Elizabethans were keenly sensitive to images of global disorder. Shakespeare uses the word chaos in a context both personal and global when he has Othello say of Desdemona:

Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul
But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again.

(3.3.91–93)

As Marris describes it, the experience of "losing someone you love is less like losing a very valuable and irreplaceable possession than like finding the law of gravity to be invalid" (195). The rational course of giving up the lost object at the behest of reality is not available because "grief is a
reaction to the disintegration of the whole structure of meaning dependent on this relationship rather than to the absence of the person lost” (195). By way of supplementing the explanation of Marris, it might be said that the disorientation resulting from some instances of loss involves a loss of self, not just a loss of other. Loss disorients precisely to the extent that the structure of selfhood has been invested in an ongoing relationship with a living other. In those instances, such as the gradual loss of an aging parent, where the bereft person experiences anticipatory mourning, and where the internalization process has been more nearly completed, the death of an attachment figure is less likely to be so disorienting, however painful.

Other psychoanalytic commentators have clarified the fact that meaning is not internalized exclusively in the form of representations of, and feelings about, persons. As Hadley remarks, “We may ‘attach’ to many things, to ideas and ideals, to the self as well as other people” (1985, 547). The emotional investment people make in ideology would be a good example. Faber writes about how the world of culture incorporates internalized attitudes and beliefs that function defensively to provide psychological security for the group comparable to that afforded by the mothering figure in early development of the individual (1989, 33). Riviere remarks that internalization of objects “persists throughout life in more developed forms as a main feature of our mental functioning. . . . In later life, moreover, these objects, external or internal, no longer need to be exclusively persons, but may be represented by non-human, inanimate, or abstract interests” (1955, 351). The object-relational dimension of interests has been discussed at length by Eagle. He argues that “interests are most meaningfully understood as object relations that involve cognitive and affective links to objects in the world and serve some of the same psychological functions [such as orientation] served by more traditionally viewed object relations” (1981, 161). Eagle uses the term “interests” in the broad sense of any focus of attention or activity with deep emotional correlates, such as a pastime or a profession. He notes that in clinical work absence of the development of important interests in a patient constitutes “a negative prognostic indicator” (6). In contrast, “the evidence supports the idea of a strong relationship between security of attachment and independent exploratory behavior” (1982, 169) of the kind that develops into areas of interest in the (superficially) nonpersonal world.

* * *
REORIENTING PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

Whereas Pine (1988) speaks with uncritical syncretism about "the four psychologies of psychoanalysis," Holt (1989)—who is nothing if not critical—writes about the current status of psychoanalytic theory in a mood verging on despair. After identifying the major trends of the mid-1980's as, first, the death of metapsychology, second, the debate about whether psychoanalysis is a scientific or a hermeneutic discipline, and third, "the rise into increasing prominence of object relations theory and self psychology" (324), Holt goes so far as to label the third trend as a fad (338). Without bothering to justify the casualness of his linking of object relations theory with self psychology, Holt goes on, not without some justice, to claim that

despite certain attractive features of both object relations theory and self psychology, they fail to make any serious or searching critique of metapsychology, and—like ego psychology—they retain a good deal of it. As rebellions, they are much too limited to accomplish the needed radical (indeed, revolutionary) change. . . . Fairbairn (1952), Guntrip (1969), and Winnicott (1958), however, all incorporate far too many of the defective parts of psychoanalytic theory to make their corrections much more than cosmetic. (338)

It will be noticed that Holt makes no attempt at this point to distinguish, as I do, between self psychology and the emerging presence of a science-oriented self theory, nor does he appear to be sufficiently aware of the possibility of wresting a sound and healthy person-oriented theory of object relations from the decaying womb of Freud's drive-oriented theory. There is one exception, however. What Holt most notably does do, in a sentence I have purposely omitted from the quotation above, is to say that his remarks do not apply to attachment theory considered as, in his phrasing, "a member of the object relations school" (338).

Part of the problem, of course, is that at present there is no coherent group identifiable as "the object relations school" of psychoanalysis. But perhaps—as I contend—a unified theory of object relations may now be glimpsed on the horizon of possibility. As envisioned in this chapter—however incompletely—such a theory of object relations will be person oriented. It will have dispensed with the assumptions of libido theory and the metapsychological trappings of ego psychology. It will build a theory of motivation and conflict on the foundation provided by an attachment
theory expanded to include all *meaningful* features of object relations theory, classical and contemporary. This expanded theory of object relations will be interdependent with self theory insofar as the two realms of theory share the same concerns about human motivation and conflict. Selfhood will be conceptualized in terms of a systemic model for both branches of theory. And whatever other features it may possess, the systemic model in question will exhibit virtually unlimited capacity to register and process internalized representations of itself, of other, and of the nonhuman environment as it regulates itself and its organism’s personal interaction with the outside world.