I want to thank those who have, directly and indirectly, contributed to this book.

First and foremost: Ina Weiner, without whom, quite simply, this book would not exist—and certainly not in its present form. For her friendship, support, and clear judgment, many thanks.

My cousin Debbie Cymbalista, for being there, for saving me from a wrong beginning, for the many fruitful discussions about the subject matter of this book, and for her insights into the American male gay scene which helped me understand "Tamara."

Chela Bnaya for the friendship over the years, and for her insights into the ways in which individuals are shaped by the myths of their families of origin.

Chaim Omer for his support, and for helping me understand the literary complexity of psychotherapeutic work.

James Fish for the humaneness of his therapeutic approach.

Chai Halevy for his unflagging commitment to restoring individuality.

Irvin Yalom for his encouragement to work and think with a mind of one's own, and to write more openly about encounters with patients.
My students at the clinical program of the psychology department at Tel Aviv University for stimulating me to find ever new ways of transmitting the spirit of psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

The owners and staff of Ashtur Café who were great hosts to many hours of writing and who found ways to deal with my moments of writer's block.

Tamara, Clarissa, Raphael, Daphnah, and Tomi (the names are, of course, fictitious), who gave me the opportunity to accompany their therapeutic journeys. They read their respective stories, gave me valuable input, and I am grateful for their permission to publish these accounts.

I would also like to thank the editor of *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* for permission to reprint material that appears in chapters 1, 3, and 4 and the editor of *Humanistic Psychology* for permission to reprint material that appears in chapters 5 and 6.

---

**PRELUDE**

**THE DEEP SELF AND SELF-CREATION**

Children often fantasize that they could be whoever they want to be, or that one day they will be someone completely different. To some extent this fantasy accompanies us throughout life. The tension between what we want, or could be, and what we are, is one of the defining characteristics of our lives. Nevertheless, adulthood is generally characterized by a growing sense of identity and an acquiescence in the limitations and constraints imposed by one's biography and one's realistic possibilities.

Many of those who seek therapeutic help have not achieved such acquiescence. They are fundamentally at odds with who they are. They cannot bear past failures, pains, humiliations, or mistakes. They feel that the only way to live a worthwhile life is to recreate significant aspects of their selves. They are governed by a powerful protest against the aspects of fate that have shaped their lives in opposition to their needs and desires.

How much freedom do we have in creating our selves? If there is a deep self, a psychic structure engrained in our organisms that reflects our life histories, the project of self-creation is essentially limited. While the deep self restricts our freedom,
it also constitutes the foundation of individuality. Without it personal identity is a chimera, an image that can be changed at will and has no enduring, organizing, and guiding function. Psychoanalysis has always emphasized deep biographical continuity, and it will serve as the theoretical representative of the idea of the deep self.

However, classical psychoanalytic narratives of development and ideals of maturity have come under attack in postmodern cultural criticism. Constraints like those imposed by gender, that were taken to be biologically rooted, have been reanalyzed as social constructs designed to normalize individuals according to the needs of society. Gender, race, social class, and religion do not define the individual's essence, but are materials to be used in the creation of personal identity.

This book explores some strategies of self-creations and the protest against fate that motivates them. It tries to combine the psychoanalytic idea of the deep self with the postmodern belief that the individual should be free to shape her or his life according to freely chosen values and aesthetic preferences. What, then, are the parameters within which the theme of self-creation can be developed?

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE DEEP SELF

Psychoanalysis shows time and again that we cannot escape our personal past. Freud metaphorized the psyche's conservative nature as libido's stickiness and the compulsion to repeat. One's earliest loves and attachments form the cornerstones of character, and these foundations of character never change. Attempts to escape from or deny the importance of the past turns life into an endless repetition of the same themes, patterns, and conflicts. Freedom consists in assuming one's past, not in denying it.

The unconscious is the psychoanalytic metaphor for the deep self. The images of the unconscious are varied. They range from the seething cauldron of drives (Spence, 1987), through the container of childhood terrors (Klein, 1935), to the true self (Winnicott, 1960; Bollas, 1995), or repressed chains of signifiers (Lacan, 1975). The philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1945) formulation that the unconscious is the body captures the essence of the psychoanalytic conception of the self rather well. Psychoanalysis has always looked for ways to describe how the mind grows out of the body. It has been fascinated with the Janus-faced character of human nature: Experience is completely formed by our bodies, and these bodies have particular needs and drives. The psyche is, as Winnicott (1949) put it, the imaginative elaboration of our body schema.

Because we are embodied, the self has depth. The psyche's substratum is physical, and hence subject to laws. The past engraves itself in the body, and the mind arises from the ways in which the body registers and reacts to objects and experiences that come along the way. This past includes not only a postnatal biography. Sometimes, when enough information is available, central motifs in one's parents' childhood turn out to have fateful implications for the individual. One's culture, language, and the myths of past generations constitute the deep structures of the mind, as Lacan has urged us to see.

Every clinician (and every person intent upon observing the psyche) is well acquainted with the psyche's inertia. You can interpret a symptom, pattern of behavior, or mental attitude time and again, and the patient may agree with the interpretation. Nevertheless the psyche continues to function according to its own unconscious laws. The patient often feels like an observer of his own psyche rather than its master. Conscious will cannot shape the psyche by fiat.

Psychoanalytic theory has understood the body, and hence the unconscious in very different ways. Freud, linking romantic fascination with the archaic and biological evolutionism, saw the unconscious as the residue of both a repressed phylogenetic and a personal, ontogenetic past. His basic pessimism about human nature did not allow him to think of the unconscious as anything but a reflection of our animal past recalcitrant to the demands of civilized life. Fixations, transferences, and defensive modifications of unconscious wishes figure more prominently in psychoanalytic writing than the ways in which
the past imbues the present with vibrant meaning and the founda-
tions of life per se. If the unconscious is the foundation of per-
cision continuity, and hence of the deep self, psychoanalysis has
focused primarily on the forms of continuity that put peo-
ple into trouble.

With Jung's departure from the ranks of psychoanalysis the
possibility of seeing in the unconscious the basis of selfhood
had disappeared from psychoanalytic theory. Jung's concep-
tion of the unconscious as a repository of human wisdom was
repugnant to psychoanalytic thinking. It took many years until
Winnicott (1949, 1960) reintroduced the idea that the uncon-
sious might also contain the roots of authentic experience.
This made it possible to think of the unconscious not only in
terms of repressed content, but also as the psychic source of
personal experience and of the deep self.

Recently the most eloquent spokesman of the idea that
the unconscious is at the center of personal being has been
Christopher Bollas (1989, 1992, 1995). He has developed a
rich, evocative vocabulary for the description of nuances of
subjective experience in its various layers. He has argued force-
fully (1995) that no phenomenological theory alone can grasp
the richness of how the psyche generates mental content and
how the textures of mental life can be understood. Bollas' voice
is unique in that he has invested more energy in metaphorizing
and conceptualizing ordinary, day-to-day experience than in
the elucidation of psychopathology. His use of psychoanalytic
theory shows how it can provide a framework for the under-
standing of the self's continuity and not just of the past's inter-
ference in daily life.

Psychoanalysis is one of the most important voices in pres-
cent culture to maintain the importance of individuality. Psycho-
analytic clinical thinking has never yielded to the social and
cultural pressures that demand efficient technologies of
change. Despite the growing competition in the therapy mar-
ket, psychoanalysis has maintained its belief that the self has
depth, that there are differences between authentic experi-
ences linked to psychic depth and desperate attempts to turn
oneself into a socially desirable persona. The theme of self-
creation must be developed on the basis of the psychoanalytic
idea of the deep self.

A FRAMEWORK FOR NARRATING PROJECTS OF SELF-
CREATION

To live a life governed by our desires and by our conception
of a life worth living is to have a sense of authorship over our
lives. For many, the sense of authorship arises quite naturally.
Their talents, temperaments, and desires combine into a more
or less harmonious whole. They are not driven back into an
imaginary core of their selves by an excess of environmental
impingements, nor do they need to clash with external reality
in order to live according to their desires.

For others the negotiation between desire and reality is
far more complex. Too much of who they are, large parts of
their biographies, many facets of their bodies, and many char-
acteristics of their minds clash with their desires, and with their
images of a life worth living. These individuals experience the
recalcitrance of reality toward their desires as fateful.

Sometimes the source of fatedness is the encounter with
external reality. Individuals find themselves in conflict with
their families, branded as deviants by society because of some
temperamental characteristic, mode of thinking, or sexual pref-
erence. Sometimes they clash with the limitations of their own
selves: Their minds or their bodies do not allow them to
fulfill desires which they experience as essential to their sense of au-
thorship.

We are not self-created. Our physical existence is the result
of an act of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman
whom we did not know at that time, did not choose to be our
progenitors or our caretakers. Our minds are the result of a
multiplicity of influences none of which we control. Our ge-
netic inheritance evolves into mental abilities, temperamental
traits, and an emotional disposition which is the substratum of
all we will ever think, feel, and experience. Our perspective
onto the world is invariably shaped by the language into which
we grow, the culture which shapes us, the social class into which
we are born. Our personal relationships are indelibly shaped
by the impact of the personalities of our parents and educators.

If our personality is determined by the complex interplay
between inner nature and external reality, one might expect
that it should not create any problems for us to accept who we are. None of us has ever been somebody else. Our skins are the boundaries of our experience.

Nonetheless, we live in a state of paradox, because from early childhood we are capable of imagining that everything could have been different. Children sometimes live with the sense that they are really not their parents' offspring. They imagine that they have been abducted from an aristocratic, rich family which will one day recover them and restore them to their rightful place in society. Painful and humiliating experiences are often mitigated by the fantasy that if we were bigger, richer, more powerful than we are, we would reverse the situation, take revenge, or impose justice. This ability to imagine that everything could have been different is the condition for human freedom and creativity. We can envisage the nonexistent and therefore transcend what there is—including ourselves (Becker, 1973).

Whence the intrinsic paradox of human individuality: Even though it is not metaphysically possible for any of us to have been other than who we are, we can disidentify with all that we are. We can dissociate ourselves from our bodies, our families, our biographies. We can imagine ourselves as being very different from what we are. The result is that we feel that there is an inner self, the "I" which is more essential to who we are than the accidental characteristics of birth and history which have determined our actual fates.

The fantasy of the self's inner core has found expression in one of the most pervasive themes of religious experience: the idea of the soul, the core of the self which does not perish with the body. The concept of the immortal soul is the most impressive expression of our capacity to imagine ourselves into different realities. This imaginative creation of a self hidden from the outside world and untouched by the fate of the body is one of the paradigmatic strategies of what I will call the ontological protest of subjectivity. It is a centripetal strategy, because its movement is inwards, toward an imaginary inner core. Protest against the unbearably fateful is expressed by the fantasy, "This is not happening to me. I cannot be touched by these events. My true self is an inviolable core, not this helpless being tossed around by the waves of fate.'"

The second basic strategy is centrifugal: We can refuse to accept that we are who we ostensibly are by saying, "I have the freedom and the power to shape myself and external reality according to my desire." The centrifugal strategy is exemplified by the cultural narratives of the transformations from rags to riches, from wimp to muscle sculpture, from misfit to famous artist.

Our basic desire to be individuals often rebels against having to live under constraints and limitations we have not chosen. The project of self-creation is an attempt to recreate the aspects of reality which are unbearably fateful, sometimes in fantasy, sometimes in reality. Some people approach this project consciously and deliberately. The self and its life course are shaped in the fashion of a work of art. More often, though, the forces of fate, the desire for authorship, the multiple layers of pain, desire, anxiety, and rage interact in ways the individual cannot fully decipher.

The effectiveness of the project of self-creation varies greatly. For some individuals the project of reshaping their selves leads along roads opposed to social norms. They choose life-styles that require a conscious choice most of the time, since they are not in the mainstream of society. They sometimes cross the boundaries of gender and they construct new forms of sexual preference. Sometimes persons, after painful struggles, recreate their selves and their lives to their satisfaction, and thus restore their sense of authorship. They lead rich and rewarding lives, they have close and meaningful personal relationships, and they find various ways to express their creativity. Nevertheless the wounds of fate and the insecurity involved in the project of self-creation always leave their scars and anxieties.

Often the protest against fate is much more silent: It is expressed in the individual's nagging, constant feeling that she is not really living her life at all. I remember a woman who sought my help; she did not suffer from any crippling symptoms, but she woke up every morning with the panicky sense that the nightmare had not stopped, that she was still trapped...
in the same life. She once put it succinctly, "I'm sorry, but they sent me the wrong life!" Her protest against being who she was expressed itself in the constant fantasy that the moment would come when she would finally break out of the cocoon which stifled her true self.

The project of self-creation is always motivated by the experience of damaged identity. Individuals whose sense of authorship arises effortlessly do not feel that the acquisition of authorship requires them to fight reality. Neither do they feel that they are not really alive, and that only fantasy provides them with an image of a life worth living. Only those who feel fated must reshape themselves if they want to live their lives fully.

Why do individuals feel fated? How much of fate is an inevitable concomitant of the complexity of life, and how much is a function of social and historical circumstance? The philosophical discourse of recent decades has changed the parameters within which this question is discussed quite radically, and I will now turn to a brief description of some of these changes.

ON THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HUMAN NATURE

In 1966 a highly esoteric book on intellectual history called Les mots et les choses Foucault (1966) became a major sensation in the French intellectual world, and the book sold more than one hundred thousand copies. The final paragraphs of the book became a classic:

One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. . . . [The] appearance of the figure of man was not the liberation of an old anxiety, the transition into luminous consciousness of an age-old concern, the entry into objectivity of something that had long remained trapped within beliefs and philosophies: it was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge. As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.

Foucault was among the initiators of what has come to be termed postmodernism. The major intellectual impact of this movement has been to drive a wedge between the structure of language and the structure of the world. It has shown that metaphysics, the idea that there is an essence of the world as it really is, is based on the assumption that the structure of language somehow reflects the ultimate structure of reality. Wittgenstein's later work and the analyses of philosophers like Nelson Goodman (1978), Hilary Putnam (1981), and Richard Rorty (1980, 1989) deconstructed the very notion of the structure of the world, or the notion of THE WORLD as Rorty has called it.

If THE WORLD is well lost, HUMAN NATURE must inevitably follow. Postmodern philosophy has created the conceptual armamentarium needed to demonstrate that it is impossible to speak about the one, real essence of anything. The essence of humanity is no more knowable than the essence of anything else.

Conceptions of human nature have always been an amalgam of the factual and the normative, statements of facts and statements of value. Their primary raison d'être has always been to say: "Human nature is such and such, and hence we should live like this or that." Human societies have always had the need to legitimize existing power structures and normative conceptions by grounding them in the nature of things in general (a metaphysics) and the place of humans in the general scheme of things (an anthropology).

The deepest significance of postmodernism is that it has undermined this mode of thinking by casting doubt on the necessity of the link of natural structures and normative implications. The very idea that propositions about nature have normative
implications has lost its legitimacy and evidential status. Because we cannot, and need not, look to nature to find out how we should live, postmodern culture consciously understands itself as a creation. Correspondingly, the very notions of mental health and normality are called into question.

The complexity of the current discussion of the meanings of “normality,” “pathology,” “maturity,” and the like is enormous. The growing discontent with these notions has been centered on the questions of gender and sexuality (Chodorow, 1994; Benjamin, 1995). The discussion has dismantled dichotomies which had been taken for granted for a long time: mature love versus compulsive sexuality, intimacy versus fantasy-based sex, normal heterosexuality versus pathological homosexuality. The very idea that nature prescribes the right way of life is being emptied of its content.

This development has highly beneficial therapeutic implications. To the extent that clinical discourse is permeated by the judgments of society, the patient’s experience of deviance and excommunication is reinforced. The individual continues to experience himself as a misfit because of the very fact that he feels different. As Kohut (1971) pointed out long ago, the clinician’s adherence to a morality of maturity becomes in and of itself an impediment to the process of the individual’s building of cohesive selfhood.

It seems to me that the most interesting developments in psychoanalysis are those which renounce the tendency of classical psychoanalytic theory to order the human universe in a developmental hierarchy (Mitchell, 1993; Stolorow, Atwood, and Brandchaft, 1994; Aron, 1996). The integration of psychoanalysis with cultural criticism and feminism has infused it with new creative energies that have generated new narrative and clinical possibilities without sacrificing the notion of the deep self.

STORIES OF SELF-Creation

This book charts some strategies of self-creation. It revolves around the stories of five persons who sought therapeutic help because they felt that their project of self-creation had in some way reached an impasse. The therapeutic journeys were attempts to unravel the multiple layers of biographical, temperamental, and intrapsychic complexity which had led them to become who they were at the time.

Some of them led lives on the edge of the possible. Tamara kept taking serious risks in her relentless pursuit of recreating herself. She was involved in the project of reshaping her life, her childhood, her gender, and her identity. She was a woman with great gifts, and she invested in her intransigent attempt to gain authorship over unbearable pain and insoluble dilemmas in her childhood. It was to take years until she came into contact with her outrage at having been subjected to her parents' attempt to shape her according to their image of what she was supposed to be.

Raphael maneuvered between the various levels of his life. He lived in a state of irresolvable paradox. He was both a devoted husband and father and an inveterate Don Juan; a successful and responsible academic and a perpetual adolescent; a moralist and a libertarian cynic. The therapeutic journey uncovered how this multilayered self expressed his moral outrage against a reality which, through no fault of his own, had burdened him with an existential sense of guilt.

Tamara and Raphael flaunted disdain for social norms. Yet both of them essentially lived lives of moral protest against a social order which had condemned them to a damaged identity. Their strategies were centrifugal, they fought the world in order to protect themselves against aspects of reality which they had experienced as unbearably fateful.

Clarissa had been subjected to terrors and humiliations throughout her childhood. What had kept her alive since the age of 6 was the thought that one day she would not depend on anybody anymore. She embarked on the project of creating a totally independent self as soon as she could, and her project was outwardly successful. She discovered that she needed others, however, and that the possibility of humiliation and pain continued to exist. Her striving for total authorship over her life came to the point where she could not even accept her natural desire to live. She had to know that she could die, in
order to choose to live. In her case the project of self-creation led her to the brink of death—and it pushed me to widen my limits of therapeutic caring way beyond what I had thought possible.

Daphnah and Tom exemplify the centripetal direction of the project of self-creation. Daphnah's fate had been to grow up in a family living in the shadow of the Holocaust. Death and doom were the parameters which had shaped her parents' fates, and she had been caught in the force field of her father's endless grief and her mother's terror of not being able to create and maintain life. She retreated into the fantasy of an inner self waiting to be born under conditions which would allow it to flourish—while in reality her life was governed by unbearable anxieties. It took years of painstaking work to uncover layer by layer the impasses, paradoxes, pains, and terrors which had maneuvered her into living a life she experienced as not truly her own.

When Tom sought help he was seriously involved in the project of living a monkish intellectual existence. Our work together uncovered that this was a retreat from experiences of frustration and pain which he did not know how to handle. We came to understand the structure of his retreat into an inner self. His discovery of the ploys through which he had tried to escape the complexity of sexual experience gradually enabled him to make new choices, and to find a vocation which allowed his creativity to flourish.

How is one to tell these stories of self-creation? There are several genres of psychoanalytic case description. Freud himself wrote narratives that combined two motifs. One was modeled on Sherlock Holmes looking for the missing piece that would make sense of the case. The second was the archaeological dig which proceeds to uncover ever earlier strata of experience. The Kleinian school writes tales of the patient's assault on analytic work and the analyst's unflagging adherence to the analytic task. Winnicott initiated the tale of the analyst's willingness to hold the patient through the regressive descent to his earliest childhood horrors. The existentialist school tells tales of the search for the truly authentic encounter between client and therapist. The Lacanians tell stories of deconstructing the patient's infantile certainties and his release from alienating identifications.

I have been influenced by all of these genres, but, sometimes playfully and sometimes painfully, I am constantly aware that none of them works for all patients, and that the unique chemistry within each therapeutic dyad creates an atmosphere, an interaction, and a process which defies any of these conventions. There is a danger that overadherence to a genre reaches a point where the patient's individuality is lost. This is probably the reason why Saul Bellow complained in his Nobel lecture that the present climate does not leave any room for a notion of character. He related this to "the psychoanalytic conception of character—that it is an ugly, rigid formation, something to be resigned to, nothing to be embraced with joy" (1995, p. 90).

It could be argued that Bellow's characterization of psychoanalysis is unfair. Yet it is remarkable how little psychoanalytic literature has to say about character and individuality per se. In many psychoanalytic case histories the reader only comes to know a set of pathologies. The concentration on the complexities of the therapeutic interaction often leaves little room for the presentation of the character of those who chose to seek therapeutic help. It comes to seem that there is little more to character than the sediments of early object relationships, as Freud once argued.

Freud also had other moments: He said that psychoanalysis had very little to say about artistic creativity, that the psychoanalyst could not tell why one person turned into a simple neurotic, whereas another became as creative as Leonardo (1910). I think his insight holds true for every individual. Ultimately we have no real knowledge about why each individual developed in the particular way he or she did. We try to understand, but the opacity of life defies our desire for total lucidity.

In writing case histories I am therefore torn between the desire just to tell one particular person's story, and the desire to learn something from it. The former desire demands that a story be told devoid of theory. "This is what happened when this person and myself undertook a therapeutic journey." I have tried to do so: In telling the story of my patients I have
shunned the language of theory, and I have not tried to hide how different patients bring out different facets of my own therapeutic self.

However, if we cannot generalize at all, we cannot learn, and the language of theory is an attempt to generalize. No one could do therapeutic work if it weren't for the safety of working in an established profession, which has a theoretical vocabulary designed to categorize and describe persons and the processes they undergo. The narrative of authorship, fatedness, and desire for self-creation is meant to be an addition to this vocabulary.

I have chosen to keep the theoretical chapters apart from the actual case histories, because I want to emphasize the uneasy relationship between individuality and theory. In a somewhat artificial fashion I have chosen to highlight one particular strategy of the project of self-creation by each of these stories, but it is of crucial importance not to confuse the map with the territory. The reader will soon find out that all these patients use all of the strategies, albeit in various mixtures. Human reality is not nicely ordered according to diagnostic and psychodynamic categories—even though the mental health profession is trying hard to turn itself into a well-ordered domain of numbered disorders.

Because I am wary of this tendency I have juxtaposed each of the case histories with biographical sketches of well-known philosophers, artists, and writers. I try to show that they embarked on structurally similar projects to those of my patients, and how these projects of self-creation resulted in some of the supreme achievements of our culture. This might help to maintain a perspective on how much creative effort is often invested in the impossible, and yet necessary, project of being an individual.
I first met Tamara at a social occasion. She was a tall, lanky woman with striking looks, exuberant temperament, and great openness. She was in Israel to do a documentary on a Chassidic group known for its extreme initiation rites. She was a fascinating conversationalist, and told me about her project with gusto and with a remarkable ability to make life-styles and religious experience come alive.

When she heard my profession she asked, "So you shrink people to size for a living?" I asked her: "To what size do you mean?" She answered, "To the size that will fit the clothes they are supposed to wear." "That sounds more like a slimming cure than like psychotherapy," I said. Soon we found ourselves in an animated conversation about the question of whether psychoanalysis was supposed to normalize people.

I spoke with her about the dilemmas I have with my profession, about my queries regarding theories and normative conceptions of mental health. At some point she asked me "Do you also see people who are afraid of being normal?" "Certainly," I replied, "Some of them feel that by not being outrageous they might lose whatever sense of individuality they have." "And what do you do with those?" "I try to find out with them why they are driven, why they do not feel that they have a choice."
"So your ideology is one of inner freedom, harmony?" she asked. "I guess so, yes. But I'll admit that I can't fully subscribe to that without reservation. You also lose something by acquiring the type of calm associated with inner freedom. The surplus of the desire which leads to drivenness certainly provides kicks which are lost in a state of lucidity and peace of mind." Tamara looked at me with a strange smile: "For me inner freedom is not opposed to desire. It is the possibility to desire as profoundly as I want to."

The next day she called me to ask for a consultation. I asked her whether she was aware that there was very little I could do for her during the remaining ten days of her stay in Israel. She said, "Yes, of course. But I would like to see you anyway, I'll explain it to you once I'm there. But please try to give me a double appointment." I was somewhat apprehensive, but agreed to see her for a double session.

When Tamara came to my office I was struck by the difference in her appearance. If at the social occasion she had been dressed with an easy, suave elegance, now she looked like a tomboy. Her movements which had been flowing during the evening had become more disorganized. Her hair was stuffed under a baseball cap, her clothes expressed an almost studied incoherence. A closer look would have discovered her attempt to look like a preadolescent boy—but now I say this with hindsight. She said:

I know we cannot do therapy. I don't know whether I ever want to do psychotherapy again. I have been helped by one therapist in the past, and I have been deeply hurt by another. The reason I wanted to see you is that I got the impression that you are in a dilemma about what you do, and that the dilemma is real, not part of a postmodern façade of openness and sophistication. There might be a chance that you would listen, and not categorize. All I want is a chance to talk and to be listened to. You don't have to help me. Just listen.

During the next two hours I came to know of a life lived on the edge. Tamara told me her life story fluently, with the same precision of descriptive detail and evocative power I had come to appreciate in our previous conversation.

"I am a sexual masochist" was her opening line. Tamara went into a description of her cruising habits. She would go to the raunchiest bars of the West Coast city in which she lived, and she would pick up guys whom she thought of as "capable of delivering what I am looking for." She was looking for men who could play the very rough games which gave her thrills and excitements way beyond anything ordinary sex could do for her. "There are very few who are really good at this; who know how to apply precisely the right amount of violence, to push the pain as far as I can take it, to feel the boundary of breaking my will without breaking my bones."

Tamara was taking great risks along the way. More than once she had misjudged the partners she had picked. She told me with a smile: "There was this guy who had me all tied up. Suddenly he produced all these razor blades, and I saw in his eyes that he was losing it completely. He began to cut me badly, and I thought, 'Well, this might just be it; I may not come out of here alive.' I panicked, but I tried to plead with him, to calm him down." She got away with some bad cuts and a black eye. And yet she did not stop.

Not all of her sex life was governed by S&M. She also had a "more innocent, and less thrilling type of sex." She would target men, and "do them," as she called it. She had an endless supply of lovers. Her work as a documentarian took her around the globe, and there was not a single continent in which she did not have several lovers.

She talked about the enormous number of lovers with pride; yet there was something deeply confusing about her way of telling her stories of conquest. She certainly did not talk about this in the way a woman would talk about the men she attracted. For a moment I thought it was the tone of a male Don Juan talking about his conquests, but that wasn't quite right either. It was completely unclear to me what gender she was assuming in her sex life.

After about an hour she moved on to talk about other aspects of her life. She had become a myth in her profession for taking on the most dangerous and impossible assignments. Tropical jungles and Himalayan treks 6000 meters above sea level were her favorite sets. She was known for pushing her
crews beyond their limits, and she would take enormous risks to get exactly the shot she wanted.

Then there were drugs. She had tried absolutely everything. Cocaine, LSD, Ecstasy were a matter of course. Heroin she had tried for the sake of knowing what it was like. She had even had a shot at crack. "I had to prove to myself that I could try it, and that I could get out of it again. You see, I am not an addictive personality." Most of her drug use was just for fun, though. She was highly adept at mixing "cocktails," as she called them, to produce the type of hallucinations she liked.

Throughout this session I was torn. On the one hand there was the sheer fascination of listening to her tale of a life lived on the edge. Tamara flirted with the limits of the socially and legally acceptable. She lived in a constant confrontation with danger and at times she seemed to be flirting with death. On the other hand I was seriously worried about Tamara. Wasn't she afraid of getting killed? Of AIDS? Of getting hooked on some of the harder drugs she was experimenting with? I wasn't worried about her sanity, though.

I was wondering about my role. The obvious subtext of this session was: "Look at how amazing I am. Look at how outrageous what I do is. Look at my courage. Do you see that I have absolutely no limits?" There was an obvious, exhibitionistic pleasure in telling me her stories. Yet this was unlikely to be the point of this meeting. Tamara had mentioned the large number of very close friends she had. They all knew of her exploits, sexual adventures, and drug use. "I always have someone to nurse me through the days after particularly rough sex. You know; the blisters, cuts; also your muscles are sometimes really sore. Some of these guys can tie you up very badly." It did not sound as if she needed me as a public figure for the time being it was not quite clear whether she wanted more self-understanding. Tamara was gifted with a brilliant intelligence, and she used it in thinking about who she was and why. She was lucid, completely aware of what she was doing, and, to some extent, of why she was doing it. As yet it did not seem that she felt driven by forces she did not understand. She exuded a sense of total control over her wild life, and she was proud of that.

What struck me was that even though Tamara was telling me stories which emphasized her unlimited toughness, she did not come across as hard at all. Behind the tomboyish appearance and the truly outrageous stories I experienced her as intensely fragile. She was obviously trying to impress me—but she was also intent on not infringing on my boundaries. At some point she wanted to take off her sneakers and to fold her legs under her, and she asked me politely whether it would bother me if she did so. She did not give the impression of an intruder in my consulting room, but rather of a guest very intent on respecting her host’s space.

I also felt that behind the façade of her boundlessness, she was monitoring my reactions anxiously. I remembered that she had mentioned something about my having real dilemmas in my profession as the main reason for coming to see me. My hunch was that she was checking whether I was classifying her, whether I would put her into a psychopathological category and thus stop listening to her.

The session was coming to an end, and I told her so. "So, what do you think?" She asked me defiantly. I said:

You have given me your persona, something like "the woman who knows no limits." But that is obviously not why you’re here, since, as you said, there are many people who know this persona. As yet I do not know what to think, since I do not know what you came for. My hunch is that for the time being you’re checking me out to see whether you can move beyond that persona.

She nodded and asked very politely whether she could ask me for something unusual. "There has been a change in my shooting schedule, and I have to leave Israel tomorrow. I’ll be back in a fortnight. Back home I have a video of a low-budget feature I did a while ago. If you were willing to see it, I would UPS it to you. I will of course pay you for the time it takes to watch it. It is like a double session, 90 minutes. Could you schedule me for another double session in two weeks time?"

The film arrived some days later. It was shot in black and white, and called Downtown La Strada. The relationship to Fellini’s La Strada was obvious. It was about a 12-year-old girl who
had gotten lost in the streets of a big American city. She was picked up by a drug dealer who turned her into a Lolita-ish lover.

The feature had a haunting and chilling quality. It was presented entirely from the girl's point of view. The strongest impression it left was the child's desperate attempts to please her caretaker. She participated in his games without understanding why they were supposed to be pleasurable. She went through the moves, anxiously monitoring her lover's satisfaction.

The atmosphere was chilling and heartbreaking at the same time. The girl moved in a world of violence, cruelty, and lack of human solidarity, yet did not lose her innocence and her desperate belief that behind the senseless violence there must be some goodness.

There was one exception to universal senselessness. In one scene the girl finds herself in the apartment of a group of drag queens. These men, who address each other as "girls," are portrayed as pathetic, funny, and yet truly reliable in their solidarity with each other and with the young girl who stays with them for three days. In these three days the heroine experiences the resonance of souls akin to herself. The drag queens depict the world as a strange place which contains so much unnecessary badness, and they know that they must just hold on to each other, because they create an island of friendship in a universe of power relationships. Yet at the end the girl is drawn back to the drug dealer and continues to live a life devoted to pleasing him.

I was moved by the film. It was a profoundly sad meditation on the senselessness of violence and evil. It also seemed to be about the misguided hope that love could have a redeeming quality. I wondered: Tamara certainly would not ask me to see this film, if it did not reflect something about who she was. I was struck by the contrast between her persona of the woman who knew no limits and the film's protagonist. Tamara presented herself as an infinitely tough cookie without illusions and without yearnings for safety. The movie's protagonist, searching for a safe place, was an inveterate believer in the essential goodness of men—even though she could only find this goodness in men refusing masculine roles.

The girl's relationship with the drug dealer easily connected with Tamara's sexual masochism. Yet there was a world of a difference between Tamara's defiant search for "good top men" and the child's anxious participation in her lover's games, and her desperate need to satisfy him. Was the truth about Tamara's relentless confrontation with danger to be sought in a yearning for a sadist who would turn out to be "good" in the end?

Two weeks later Tamara came for her second consultation. She began by asking whether I had seen her film. I said that I had, and wanted to return the video cassette, but she told me to keep it. "So what do you think?" she asked, again in her defiant tone. "I was very moved by it, but I think you should tell me why you wanted me to see it." "Oh, just so you'd see that I am creative," she said. "I don't think so," I replied.

"Well, maybe it is also a way to introduce an important theme in my identity; it is my involvement with the gay scene." And Tamara began to tell me how deeply she was linked to the gay scene of the West Coast. To judge from her stories she had turned into something of an icon of the gay population of the city where she lived. The gay bars and clubs were her real home ground. This is where she found friendship and warmth, where she could truly rest from her wild escapades.

There were more variations in her narrative mode than in the first session. While the motif of her total opposition to bourgeois morality continued to be dominant, there now was a stronger undercurrent of warmth. She obviously loved her gay friends deeply; she would go out of her way to be with those of them who were dying of AIDS, and she was outraged by attempts to curtail their freedom. "People don't understand," she said, "but these people are the only ones in the city who know what friendship is."

The gay community offered a community she could belong to. The sense of solidarity and caring she found there corresponded to her deep desire not to have to fight for her place, to be recognized and accepted for what she was without having to live in a constant confrontation with society. Time
and again she pointed out to me that in the gay community she had found something that simply could not be found in the heterosexual world with its emphasis on territories, competition, and social standing: a community of those who knew that they were by their very nature ephemeral, who did not live the fantasy of immortality through reproduction.

Tamara's wish had always been that sexual desire and the sense of community and solidarity be not opposed to each other. Part of her international reputation was due to her keen observations of social scenes. Years ago she had realized that the development of gay communities was in some respects unique. As she said: “the gay community disproves Freud's idea that civilization is intrinsically opposed to sexual desire. This community was the result of an explosion of desire. Yet desire was the glue of cohesiveness rather than a destructive force blowing it apart.”

Her existential sense of being endangered resonated with the gay community's precarious position. This was amplified by the fact that her entrance into this community coincided with the public recognition of AIDS. People were dying all over the place, and Tamara was involved in organizing support networks for the dying and their companions. One of the documentaries which made her famous was about the gay community's confrontation with death.

She gave me a long description of rituals in which her gay friends would come to her home and dress her up as a boy. They would then go to clubs, and she would have the totally exhilarating feeling that she was a man, a gay man. She looked at me with a strange gaze that seemed to be coming completely from an area of fantasy. “You see, I really can be a boy, if I want to, I really can.” She smiled and continued, “Let’s get this right: I’m a straight woman, I’m not gay myself. What I mean is that I could be a gay man.”

I said, “You know, when you say, ‘If I want to I really can be a boy,’ you really seem to believe this.” She looked at me with this proud, childlike, otherworldly gaze and said, “But of course I can!”

Now it dawned on me: I had been confused about her gender role in her tales of conquest. She had seemed neither woman nor man. The reason was that she lived the role of a gay man—at least in some aspects of her life. This brought me back to the chasm in her love life. There were the raunchy hard men she sought out for S&M, but it seemed that they were very different from her other lovers. I inquired about this. “Of course,” she answered. “The guys I like have a somewhat androgynous quality to them. I hate machos. I can’t stand the creeps who play at being dangerous, who show off their masculinity, their muscles, or other paraphernalia of straight masculine culture.”

“Your ideal would be a gay man who is heterosexual, then.” “She laughed. “Yes, yes, yes. That’s exactly what I’m looking for.” “Let’s see then, whether I’m getting this straight,” I said. “There are the men who give you the real sexual kick. They are hard, they are willing and capable of going the whole way in S&M. Then there are men whom you can love. They are somewhat androgynous, and ideally they should be gay—which of course they can’t be, since you’re a woman.” “You get it.”

“Tamara, do you have any understanding of this split in your image of men? Do you know why you split them into dangerous, cruel animals who inflict pain and into warm, friendly, and sexually ambiguous persons whom you can actually love?”

“What do you mean?” she inquired. “This is how the world is; there are some men who are good at giving me what I need sexually. But they are mostly creeps—even though I found some who are not. And there is nothing you can do about it: Men who are human beings are generally gay. Straight men are simple animals. You have to know what makes them tick, and then you can handle them. But don’t expect too much from them. They can be lovers, they can sometimes be friends—but only up to a certain point. In the end they will let you down.”

Tamara. There is something in you that creates this chasm. I’m not saying that there aren’t any straight creeps. But there are probably gay creeps as well. You are resolving some problem here through this playing with the boundaries of sexuality and
gender. You have created a universe which fits together with your belief that you could actually be a boy, if you wanted to, but maybe we can find out more about this later.

During Tamara’s third visit I had offered to help her find an analyst on the West Coast, and to make every effort to find someone who was truly open-minded. She refused. “I do not want to return to therapy. I don’t need it. These sessions I have with you are quite useful and interesting, and I really don’t need anything else.” Thus Tamara settled into a strange, and yet somehow predictable rhythm of coming to see me in Israel. She was flying around the globe all the time. Sometimes she would take a stopover on the way to an Arab country. Once she did a piece on an extremist group in Israel. Sometimes she would say “I’ll be in the vicinity anyway,” when she was filming in black Africa.

About a year after I had first met Tamara, she came in again and began the session with a look of surprise in her eyes. Strange. I have a memory which might be of some interest to you. I can’t say that it is something I had forgotten, but I haven’t thought of this for ages.

I think I know exactly when I turned into a masochist. I was 7 years old. My father was screaming furiously at me for not having done something exactly the way he wanted me to do it. He was screaming and screaming, I felt pain, sadness, rage, and then I ran away. I took my bicycle and rode through the streets. Then the thought crossed my mind. “If I enjoyed the pain, then I would be at one with him, and he could never hurt me again.” This thought struck me like a lightning. It was so clear. This was the solution to everything. I knew I could come home again, and I would not have to be afraid.

I asked Tamara whether she could tell me more about her family. She was the youngest of three children. She had a brother, two years older, and a sister, four years older than herself. Her father was a Catholic of Czechoslovak origin who emigrated to the United States with the fierce determination to make a fortune. First he dealt in used cars, then he built a production plant for spare engine parts, and by the age of 35 he was a wealthy man.

His next project had been to become socially acceptable. He wanted to marry into a WASP family, but couldn’t do so, because the Presbyterian community saw him, a Catholic, as an outsider. In addition he was considered nouveau riche in the East Coast community where he lived. He found a woman who was of Central European origin herself. She was beautiful, caring, and stylish, and became his partner in their common goal of climbing the social ladder.

Tamara spoke of her parents with respect and love. She described them as very family oriented. They did plenty of things together, they had a lot of fun. She and her brother and sister got an excellent education, they saw the world, and they were bred to make themselves good lives.

I listened to Tamara’s description with some unease. Her memory of how she had turned into a masochist was difficult to reconcile with the way she spoke of her parents. It was unlikely that the memory of the scene which, as she saw it, had turned her into a masochist, was of a unique event. If she could only survive the pain her father inflicted upon her by turning it into pleasure, and if her sex life had become a continuous confrontation with danger, something had to be missing in her description of her early family life. Why had her whole life turned into a ferocious fight with limitations, into the attempt to show that there was nothing she could not do? Why was there such a discrepancy between her rebellious, challenging way of meeting the world and the yearning for softness in her movie and in her love for the gay world? Why was it so important to her to maintain her almost mad belief in the possibility of being a boy?

I voiced my queries to Tamara. She listened attentively. And she gave an immediate answer. “There was a special relationship between my father and my brother. I felt right from the beginning that my brother was expected to do things my sister and I were never going to be able to do because we were girls.”

When I was about 5, I saw my chance. My brother once came home crying because some boy had hit him in the nose. My father was furious: “There was just one of them?” He screamed,
"and you let him get away with it? You didn't hit back? You sissy, you... you female... get out of my sight." I realized that there was a chance for me. If my brother could be a female, a girl, this obviously meant I could be a boy. I could be my father's boy.

I continued to inquire into the family structure. It turned out that the first-born sister was a beautiful girl who was being groomed for style and "sweetness." "You are as sweet as your mother" was the standard compliment she was paid. "All the boys in town will love you when you grow up."

Tamara always felt that she was very much unlike her sister who was of "sweet" character. She also felt that she was unlike her brother, who was terrorized by her father's demands. As the years went by, her father turned away from her brother, who disappointed him greatly. It was clear that he would never turn into the man his father wanted him to be. Tamara was of a quality of her own; neither like the women of the house, nor like the disappointing brother.

"I was going to turn into the son my father wanted to have," Tamara stated matter of factly. Again I saw this strange gaze in her eyes, again it seemed as if she was talking from a space of fantasy quite dissociated from her actual reality. Tamara was obviously not psychotic, and yet she uttered the sentences about her freedom to be a boy with an uncanny sense of total belief. "You see, I had my chance, and I took it!" she said, still with this strange smile coming from somewhere else.

Tamara and I had continued to meet for the next two years at a rate of about six or eight double sessions per year, and an increasingly intelligible picture was emerging. Everything seemed so clear, so lucid. It almost sounded like a psychoanalytic textbook example of the psychogenesis of deviant sexuality. There was only one thing that was strange: Everything Tamara was describing was totally conscious. It sounded as if she had sat down, looked through her options, chosen the one that seemed most advantageous to her, and created herself in the image of this solution. It was hard for me to believe that she had chosen her gender role as the result of conscious deliberation. Neither did it make sense that Tamara would have chosen to live the dangerous, driven life she was involved in out of conscious, calm choice. Something, obviously, was missing.

I shared my musings with Tamara. She said:

Well, it seems quite logical to me. I had a problem, I found a solution! I understand that the session is coming to an end, but there is one more thing that might be of interest to you. In adolescence I was a juvenile delinquent. I stole, I did drugs, I was arrested. I drove my parents nuts, and made their life difficult. My parents screamed at me, threatened me, sent me to a shrink. In the end they sent me to a boarding school for a year. Let's see what you make of that. Anyway, I don't know when I'll be back in this country. But I'll contact you.

While I was jotting down some thoughts about this session, her last sentence reverberated in my mind. "Juvenile delinquent. Her parents couldn't take her anymore." Suddenly it crossed my mind what was missing: the tremendous fear and rage she must have experienced. And, even more so, there had to be a murderous hatred for her father. The situation as I saw it was as follows: Her father seemed to have ruled his family in an autocratic manner. He assigned the roles. Boys were supposed to be real men, girls were supposed to be sweet. If anything, only men were afforded the right to have will and subjectivity. Tamara's elder sister acquiesced in her role. Her brother was probably quite destroyed by failing to meet his father's expectations.

Her father was the source of all value in this family. His will was to be king and ruler. He had views about what it was to be a man and what it was to be a woman. And he had a kingdom to shape. His family was to be formed in the image of his desire, in the same way as he had managed to form his life according to his plans before that.

The way she described him was a totally intransigent man. Not getting what he wanted was totally unacceptable, certainly not when it came to his own family. Tamara, as I had come to know her, was not much less intransigent. Her current life was a constant attempt to prove that she could survive everything, that nothing would break her. This furious determination to maintain her own will, her own integrity, and her sense of individuality seemed to be quite basic to her character.
What had it been like for be a small girl of such disposition facing a father who was as powerful and domineering as Tamara's father had obviously been? She must have been torn between her ineradicable need to stay true to her self and the frantic fear of the rage of a man on whom she depended completely. Moreover, she also loved and admired this man.

The masochist solution indeed made a lot of sense: Tamara had faced a problem almost impossible to resolve. She had to maintain contact with her father without losing her sense of self. On the face of it there seemed to be no way of combining the fulfillment of both of these needs short of squaring the circle. Tamara had done precisely this by turning pain into pleasure, by enjoying the suffering inflicted upon her. In this way her will and her father's will would become the same.

Tamara had indeed become one with her father, but this identification probably went much deeper than she was conscious of. She had adopted his belief that human beings, particularly the members of his family, could be molded according to his will. She was as ruthless to herself as he had been. She did not accept any fear in herself, and she had to prove to herself that there were absolutely no limitations.

We had another session in which we spoke about a deepening understanding of her masochistic sexual practices, her deep involvement in the male gay scene, and her fantasy of being able to be a boy, if she just wanted to. There was a silence. Suddenly she looked at me. Her eyes showed something I had not yet seen in her: fear. "Dr. Strenger, I cannot give this up."

"What do you mean?" "The fight. My life is a fight with the system, with limits, with definitions of gender. With the world. I cannot stop this fight."

"Tamara, I haven't told you that you had to do so. The mandate you gave me was to listen and to help you understand yourself without judging you. But could it be that you yourself have the desire to stop fighting? Is that why you came to see me to begin with?"

"No, I just have one problem. I want to have a child. But I guess that it is too much to ask you how I can combine being who I am with motherhood. I have no idea how to do it myself. Thank you for having given me these sessions. They have been most instructive and helpful. How much do I owe you?"

There was some time left, and I felt she was running away.

Tamara. There is no hurry. Could you explain to me a bit more what you were looking for when you came to me? I feel we have done some work of elucidation, but of course there is no way to help you to find a solution for how to live, to fulfill your desires, through the meetings we have. Maybe we should talk about the possibility of finding someone you could have some therapy with. You need an ongoing therapeutic relationship which would provide the background of safety which would enable you to explore yourself in greater depth.

She replied:

My experience with therapists has not been very good. Years ago I went to see this shrink who had been recommended. I had decided to be frank and open, to really give myself a chance
to explore some questions. I told him about myself, my sexuality. His reaction was to ask me whether I ever had vaginal orgasms, and whether I felt like a grown woman. I felt that with one stroke he erased everything I was, my whole life and life-style. I spent the next three days sitting under a table, crying, crying, crying. I felt this man had pushed a knife into my heart and turned it around three times. He invalidated everything I am with three sentences. I do not think I want to be told by anybody who I am supposed to be and what I am supposed to do.

Don't feel bad about not helping me to change. I wanted to talk, not to change, and you could not reasonably aim at changing me. Good bye, Dr. Strenger, and thank you.

I told Tamara that she should feel free to contact me any time. She left and I was worried that she would not return anymore. Had I overstepped the boundaries she had set for me? Had I touched upon something she could not bear? Did she feel that I did not respect her desire to have sessions that were purely exploratory in aim? Had I indicated that she should lead a normal life? Or was her awareness of the limits of her self-transformation too painful to bear?

I felt respect for the single-mindedness, the courage and the consistency of her life-style. Her willingness and ability to sacrifice a lot for the pursuit of her dreams evoked respect. She lived a life that was very rich in many ways. She was very creative, she had built very close and rewarding friendships with many people. In addition she was truthful; her lucid consciousness of the magical transformations she had attempted since her childhood was almost uncanny.

Nevertheless Tamara left me with a deep sense of concern. It felt as if behind her single-mindedness there was an unbearable pain she could not experience without the threat of disintegration. Even though her life-style was a highly conscious choice, she emitted a quality of drivenness, of almost frantic anxiety. Behind her antics she came across as fragile and ultimately afraid.

I could not rid myself of the need to understand why Tamara seemed incapable of choosing a way of life which was less dangerous and would promise her more calm. My main hunch was that Tamara had split off two aspects of her life. She had no conscious memory of how frightening and horrifying her father was to her in early childhood. Correspondingly, I thought, she had no memory of her horrified childhood self, her fear of either dying if she did not give in to her father's demands, or losing her selfhood if she did.

I was wondering whether Tamara's life was not governed by those childhood horrors. She saw masochism as a conscious choice. Yet it seemed to me that it had been a solution forced onto her by an otherwise insoluble dilemma: She wanted to maintain her sense of self without losing her father's love. Could it be that her current way of life chained her to the fate she was trying to overcome? Did she not turn her early childhood into a perpetual present by trying to deal with it through her masochism?

This leads me to the reason why Tamara sought my help—or at least my attention—at that particular point. The fear I saw in her eyes when she spoke of her inability to stop the fight was not just the fear of having to give up. It was also a reflection of her realization that there was something she could not control. She was afraid that her fight for individuality and selfhood might cost her a price heavier than she was willing to pay.

When she came to see me she was in her late thirties, and there was one biological fact she did recognize as valid: Her childbearing ability was limited in time. Maybe she was also subliminally aware that she could not forever continue to play the game of ambiguities and extremes with the grace she had been playing it. When I met her she could effortlessly switch from suave elegance to tomboyish androgyny. Maybe she realized that in a few years she would not be able to play this game as gracefully as she had up to that point. And Tamara did not seem to be the type who would play a role which would gradually acquire a pathetic quality because of age. A growing sense of finitude was making it impossible for her to maintain her sense of infinite possibility and the endless malleability of her self.

I jotted down these thoughts, and decided to send them to Tamara. I did not expect them to have too much of an impact, but I felt I owed her, and myself, the chance to at least
think about these ideas a bit more. To my surprise I received a fax: "Interesting Dr. Strenger. Interesting. I'm not sure that you're right though. I'll drop in. Tamara."

Several months later Tamara indeed came for another session.

How have you been? I'm on my way to Tibet. Very interesting assignment. I was in Europe, so I thought I'd drop in.

You are wrong. It's all conscious. I remember him very well. I remember my fury, I remember my rage. I remember my fear of choking to death. The fact that I have forgiven my father does not mean that I don't remember. You are caught in some piece of psychoanalytic dogma: You think that it cannot possibly be the case that someone chooses a deviant solution consciously, out of her free will. But this is exactly what I did.

I can even tell you when I made each of the decisions. I knew I was going to be a boy at about the age of 4. I told you about the masochism. That was at the age of 7—and if you want, I can give you more details about this. There was another decision not long after: I, at I would never grow up. The decision to be a gay boy was formed when I moved to the West Coast and came to know the gay scene there, because I felt that they were more congenial to me than any other group of people I'd ever met. And I worked systematically at becoming one of them. Seriously, I went about the creation of my self and my life with the same deliberate determination I have when I make my films.

As Tamara was talking I came to feel that she was much calmer than I remembered her. For the first time I felt that her frantic level of anxiety had subsided, and I told her so.

She nodded.

Yes, you are right. I can tell you why. I have come to the conclusion that I will not have children. I love my life, and it is not possible for me to invest the time and the energy it would take to have children. Maybe I could, if I were to find a suitable partner. But, being who I am, I don't think that there could be such a man. I would have to find a man who could be sexually fulfilling—and you know what that takes, in my case—smart enough not to bore me to tears, soft enough to know how to touch my soul, and caring enough to be a good father. I know that such a combination does not exist. I also know that people live with compromises. Whenever I have come to a point where everything seemed to be saying "impossible!" I set out to find the way that would make things possible for me. This is who I am, I cannot be different.

I have thought of all the possibilities. I even thought of creating some type of communal setting in which a whole bunch of people would take care of the child. But I have lived in communes, I know that they don't work out in the long run. Maybe I have become calmer, because I could admit to myself that there is one element that I cannot integrate into my life. There is actually something I cannot do. But I would have made a great mother, don't you think?

The next time we met she said: "I do have some more memories for you. In that summer, when I was 7, I saw this movie. It was about the adventures of this boy. He was fearless and heroic. There was a scene in which he fell from a wall, and tore his pants. Then he comes home. His father screams at him, and then he beats him up, and the boy just won't cry."

Tamara's strange gaze came back. "I felt that the boy looked like my father. I felt that he was my father. And I knew that I was going to be this boy. You see, nothing is unconscious here. I remember every step. The next step obviously was the one I told you about, the choice to become a masochist."

I had come to conceive of her motivation for our meetings in different terms: She was involved in an act of *apologia pro vita sua*, a justification of her life. She wanted a setting, a relationship in which she could tell her story as fully as possible. She had chosen a life-style that needed justification because she was different from pretty much everybody she knew. She wanted to give an account of why she had chosen to live the way she had.

It was very important to Tamara to convince me that her life had been a conscious creation. She deeply disliked the very idea that there had been unconscious processes. This was not so difficult to understand. In many ways Tamara had indeed created a life the way works of art are created. She had been facing existential, psychological, and, one is tempted to say, aesthetic problems, and she gradually built a solution.
She felt that life had dealt her cards that required her to either give in to pressures and to lose her sense of selfhood, or to reconstruct her self almost from scratch. She wanted to have the full right of authorship over this creation. She did not want to feel that she had in any way been forced into any of these solutions. The knowledge that she was the sole author of the greatest of her creations, her life, was vital to her.

Tamara did not come to see me for about half a year. Then I got the next request for a double session. “There are some additional memories I have about the period when I made the decision to become a masochist. I never linked them to this choice, but now I have the eerie feeling that there is this basement level I have never really dealt with.”

She told me that her parents always kept nannies. They invested much care in choosing them, and they chose well. But the nannies always left after at most two years. Through conversations with her siblings Tamara had found out that these abandonments had been quite traumatic for all of the children.

When she was 7, one of the nannies left after two years of having taken care of Tamara. She remembered her sense of betrayal, of being let down. She thought, “Never get attached to anyone like this.” She then went to play with her guinea pig. She let it run in the garden, ran after it, and then, suddenly, she stepped on it. “I don’t know whether I had done it on purpose. I think I did. I killed it.”

For the first time since I had come to know Tamara I saw her on the brink of tears. The session drifted for a while. Then Tamara suddenly said:

I am not sure whether the nannies left because they wanted to. I have the feeling that my parents did not want us to get too attached to them. They always thought of the family as this tight unit, as something impregnable. They wanted to matter to us uniquely. But they had this social life, they had their travels. The nannies were the ones who really took care of us. So of course they mattered... 

I had never seen Tamara this way. Her expression was dark, there was pain and anger in her eyes.

I zeroed in: “If I get this right, your parents really created a double bind. It was important for their self-perception to think of themselves as good and committed parents, and they wanted you, the children, to validate this self-perception. But in fact they were not willing to make the sacrifice it would have taken to actually be the parents they wanted to be.”

The session came to an end, but we had another one scheduled for some days later. When Tamara came in, the darkness of her expression was still there.

Their love was quite conditional. They made it very clear that if you didn’t fulfill their expectations, they would withdraw their love. And I had living proof for that. My father really dropped my brother when it turned out that he was not going to be the type of man my father wanted him to be. In a way my brother just faded away. He got all the material support he was supposed to get, but somehow he didn’t matter anymore. In a way I always knew that I might lose them, too.

This struck a bell with me. I asked Tamara: “Did you not tell me that at some point you became a juvenile delinquent, and that they sent you to boarding school?” “Yes, that’s right.” “You know, Tamara, it seems to me that you were trying out how far you could go without losing them.”

Her eyes were filled with anger. “Yes. They had created me. In many ways I was fulfilling their wishes. I was becoming the son my father wanted to have. I was as independent as they had wanted me to be. I essentially wanted to make them see who I was; what they had created. I wanted to know whether they could accept this creation of theirs.”

“And the answer you got,” I continued her sentence, “was that they couldn’t. They sent you to a shrink, but they saw everything that was happening as your problem.” She smiled ruefully. “Well, otherwise they would have had to look at who they were. And that was something they most certainly did not want to do. It would have meant to question their most cherished beliefs. That they had created this perfect family. That they had found the right way to educate us.”

While Tamara was talking, it occurred to me that her masochism fulfilled a crucial function in addition to what we had
understood up to that point. "Tamara, it crossed my mind that your masochism is the price you have to pay for the possibility of staying in touch with your parents." She looked at me. "I don’t understand." "If you were to stop enjoying pain; if you were to see pain as pain and not as pleasure, you would not be able to forgive them for what they did to you. You would hate them; possibly you would hate them so much that you could not maintain contact with them."

This time Tamara did not even pause to consider what I said. I felt that I had gone one step too far. Tamara’s memories about the guinea pig and the nannies had brought her to see a deeper level of her personality organization. She seemed to have an inkling of this. She was muttering to herself. "There is something about attachment there. I just can’t see how it fits. Do you see how it does?" she asked me.

I said, "In a strange way masochism is a way of protecting your relationship to your parents. It is a way of denying how much pain you have suffered; of how terrible it was to feel that you could not be their daughter—or their son, for that matter—without bending to their will. No, no. This isn’t quite precise. Let me think about it."

Tamara had gone back to one of her states of intense concentration, of trying to make sense of the unintelligible. She said, "It must have something to do with my decision never to grow up. I just don’t see how." "I think I’ve got it," I said. "In a deep sense you feel that in order to live your life, you need to go through childhood again. You need to go back there and have it done right this time. The way you describe a good sexual encounter, the most important thing about it is that after hurting you, the man really cares about you, right?" She nodded.

So each sexual encounter for you is an act of hope. It is an attempt to return to the unbearable parts of your childhood, but with the possibility of repairing it. This time the man/ther/parent will not be intransient to the end. He will say "That’s it my love. It was just a game. Of course I love you as you are. And you will never lose my love whatever and whoever you are. And you will feel no more pain."

Tamara looked at me with the strange gaze I had come to know as the expression of the aspects of her psyche which were involved in maintaining a fantasy which was crucial to her. "But what’s bad about that? Why should I not have a chance to get things right? Why can I not have a bearable childhood?" And again it hit me how deeply Tamara believed in the possibility of truly creating her self and her biography anew.
Tamara's story ends on a very inconclusive note. I feel the aching need to find an ending which resonates with my sense of a "good" therapeutic story, to know what solution Tamara will find to negotiating the edifice which is her life. Yet I have chosen, with Tamara's consent and collaboration, to write at this stage of limbo.

I chose to do so for several reasons. First, because I simply do not know what the future will bring. Second, because I think there is some value in breaking the convention of the genre of the therapeutic story which ends by resolution of tensions and conflicts and by a life lived happily ever after. Therapeutic processes often end on an inconclusive note. A lot may have been achieved, but there remains a sediment of unnegotiated pain, difficulty, and sheer opaqueness.

Nevertheless I want to embark on some reflections on Tamara's story. They will focus on her project of self-creation and the questions it raises about freedom and bondage, pathology and health, fiction and reality. Many things could be said about the transference-countertransference interaction. It would be possible to discuss various hypotheses about the psychodynamics of Tamara's character, but I will refrain from doing so. Instead, I will concentrate exclusively on those aspects of her story...
which throw light on the relationship between self-creation and the deep self.

Tamara's project of self-creation was aptly summarized in her review of the four crucial decisions she made along the way. The first was that she decided she could and would be a boy. This decision was necessitated by what she saw around her. Women were objects of male desire, subservient to a power structure determined uniquely by men. Ultimately men were the gender which was granted the right to have full subjectivity, and Tamara was not going to renounce her right to full subjectivity. Hence she decided that she had to be a boy. This was her first step toward full authorship over life. She wanted to be a subject, not an object.

The simplest way of living the fantasy of being a boy might have been to become a lesbian, and it is intriguing why she didn't choose this route. There is a simple answer: She simply couldn't because her natural sexual preference is for men. This is not quite satisfactory as an explanation, though, and I want to go one step further.

The central trauma of her life was her father's intransigent rule, his belief in his right and ability to shape the personalities of his children according to his desire. Tamara could never accept that her father's love was conditional on her fulfilling his desires. She felt that she had to find a way to maintain a relationship to her father which was positive, but did not require her to lose her sense of self. She chose the arena of sexuality to enact her struggle for authorship. Hence she had to maintain a heterosexual orientation in order to be able to reenact her painful relationship with her father time and again.

Her picture of her father was split into two. Consciously she remembered her father as a family man with whom she had a lot of fun, and who had given her the possibility of becoming a truly independent human being. Her experience of her father as a dangerous, even murderous figure, who would accept only what corresponded to his desires, was displaced onto the men she picked up in bars to play the dangerous games of submission and pain. With them she could relive the fear of choking with pain and rage, the humiliations and the terror of annihilation she had experienced when her father tried to break her will. Each of these danger situations was an attempt to master a trauma she could not allow herself to remember consciously. Instead she derived pleasure from pain, in accord with her decision at age 7 that she was never going to be afraid again of the cruel will of men as she had come to know it in her childhood.

There was a second split-off aspect in her personality. She had yearned to transform her father from a tyrant into a softer, more accepting person. She needed acceptance of her subjectivity without having to fight a bloody war of attrition. But her father's single-mindedness and determination to have things his own way did not allow for such peaceful acknowledgment of her identity. She therefore split her representation of men into two: Straight men were dangerous, fatal intruders who had no respect for a woman's individuality. She could not believe in the possibility of finding such acceptance in the world of straight men, and therefore she sought it in the gay community.

She felt that the softness and friendship with men which eluded her in the world of heterosexual relationships could finally be found with gays. They gave her the possibility of being recognized without the danger of anybody trying to change her into something else than she was. Hence her yearning for friendly recognition was displaced onto men as different from her father as could possibly be.

There was another reason for Tamara's affinity to the gay community. Even though the city in which she lived had a firmly established gay lifestyle, the gay community continued to live with the sense of being beleaguered and having to fight for its existence. She described the gay community as profoundly aware of its frailty; as a group of people who had to fight a vast, overpowering world of negative stereotypes, hatred, and violent disgust. The depth of friendship she experienced was based on a sense of a cruel, difficult common fate.

Tamara's fight was, in a sense, a political struggle. Her family of origin closely mirrored the structure of gender politics so vividly described by Jessica Benjamin (1989). The reader may have noticed that Tamara's mother was relatively invisible in the conversations with Tamara. Her father was the only clearly defined subject in her family. He was an agent with a will
and a perspective of his own. He defined the gender roles, and he defined the essence of what everybody was supposed to be. Her mother seems to have accepted this as an inevitable fact of life.

His will was backed up by the surrounding social reality. The small East Coast town in which he had made his fortune had very precise notions of masculinity and femininity. Since Tamara’s father was so intent on gaining social recognition, it was of utmost importance for him to shape his children according to these notions. Hence Tamara was faced with the overwhelming threat of losing not only her father’s affection but her place in society if she was to rebel against the fate assigned to her: to be the object of somebody else’s will rather than to have a subjectivity of her own.

Tamara ultimately fought for the right to have her own subjectivity. She waged a war without compromise against the attempts to deny her right to a perspective and a will of her own. She generalized this war into the fight against limitations in general. She felt that a sense of authorship over her life was possible only if she could form her self completely according to her own will. She therefore not only rejected traditional gender roles, but the limitations of biological gender as well.

Tamara felt that she could not stop fighting, because fighting was her innermost essence. If she stopped she would lose any sense of identity. She exemplified the motto of Albert Camus’ *L’homme révolté* (1951): I rebel, therefore I am. To stop the fight would have meant for her to give up. The masochistic solution was almost inevitable. Tamara’s sexual script is a lucid, pure example of the attempt to master fatedness and to establish authorship. First she establishes authorship by the very fact that she is, literally, the author of her erotic scripts. Except for the cases in which a sexual encounter got out of hand, the man who inflicted pain on her was now playing a role in a drama which was of her making. She was no longer the passive victim of an overpowering father on whom she depended and whose love she desperately craved. She picked up the man. She chose him according to her judgment whether he could deliver what she wanted. He served her pleasure more than she served his.

The unbearable fate of being at the mercy of a man who could do to her as he pleased, was transformed into a script of her own at the moment of her original decision of enjoying pain. Her father was no longer an intruder into her selfhood; but he met a desire of hers. She would no longer be a victim of an authoritarian ruler, but she would be the author of a fantasy script which he would, unknowingly, enact.

However, Tamara recognized that her magical transformation could not undo the traumas of her childhood. Hence she made her third decision: to remain a child forever. Growing up would have meant that her past was immutably fixed; that it could not be changed and repaired. The immutability of the past is a metaphysical necessity: We cannot turn back in time. We cannot recreate our past except in magical transformations, in rituals and fantasies. Hence Tamara went about the creation of rituals and fantasies which gave her life a childlike quality. She described to me how she could look for hours for the chocolates she wanted, leaving a whole camera crew waiting. They would let her get away with it, saying “Well, the kid needs her candy . . . .” She maintained it in the cuddling, hugging, and kissing with gay men with whom she could feel safe, because their caring would never be spoiled by the urgency of sexual desire.

One final element was missing: Given that Tamara was an intensely sexual person, she still had to find a gender construction which would fit into her script. This last, missing element in the puzzle eluded her as long as she lived in the conventional and rigid environment of the East Coast town in which she had grown up. There she was condemned to live the existence of an outlaw, because society had no place for her outrageousness.

During her studies on the West Coast she finally came across the solution, through her acquaintance and gradual immersion in the gay scene of the district in which she lived. On a purely structural level the fantasy of being a gay boy was almost compelling. It was like the solution of an algebraic problem. The givens of the equation were her fantasy of being a boy and her female heterosexuality. Together this yielded the conclusion that she had to be a gay man. From the point of view of what could be called the intrapsychic algebra of fantasy,
Tamara’s life made perfect sense. It was, in fact, almost the only possible solution.

Tamara’s project of self-creation carried an aura of fiction. She acquired a sense of authorship, and she mastered the most unbearable aspects of her childhood, but at the price of a constant effort to maintain a life structure based on fiction. It is, after all, undeniable that Tamara was not a boy; and she was no child anymore. Therefore she had to live in a complex world of make-believe.

There was an almost mysterious quality to her belief in being a boy. I want to be more precise here: Tamara never said I am a boy. She always said I can be a boy, if I want to, and this reminded me of a child saying, “I am an airplane pilot,” after having overturned a chair and a cardboard box to create a cockpit. The child, of course, knows that this is a chair and a cardboard box, and not a cockpit. And yet, if no one interferes, the child is able to create a transitional space of illusion, the same transitional space which enables an adult to believe that the two protagonists on the stage are in love with each other, and that they have died at the end of the play.

This space of illusion constituted the primary stage of Tamara’s life. Many people who seek therapeutic help suffer from lack of potential space, from an inability to play. Paradoxically, Tamara was incapable of living anywhere else. By this I neither mean that she was detached from reality (she was a very keen observer) nor that she could not deal with it on a practical level—she had made an impressive career, and she was intensely involved with people. Rather, with some of my interpretations I felt like an adult telling a little boy that it is time to clean up the toys and go to sleep, thus effectively destroying the intermediary space in which there were no toys, but an airplane. I was never quite sure how much of a right I had to intrude into the delicate balance of make-believe and reality in the fabric of Tamara’s life.

**ADDICTION TO THE FIGHT FOR AUTHORSHIP**

Tamara was trying to master the trauma engendered by the danger of losing selfhood. Sexual masochism was one of her ways of gaining authorship over this experience by repeating it under circumstances largely under her control. Yet she pushed her search for authorship much further by embarking on the project of fully creating herself. Some of her choices were motivated by a desire to go against all conventions and even against seemingly inviolable laws of nature. If she succeeded in becoming something nobody else was, a woman living the life of a gay man, she could be sure that her self was her own creation, and that she had overcome her father’s attempt to impose his will. She turned every social convention and natural limitation into an occasion to prove her ability to transcend limitations.

Tamara’s life exemplifies the fight for authorship under fateful circumstances in its purest form. Authorship is not an issue for everybody, because not everybody feels fated. It becomes an issue when a person feels threatened in his sense of individuality. Tamara had been frightened to death in early childhood. She had known the feeling of being subjected to a superior power imposing its will upon her. She had lived the conflict of having to choose between excruciating fear and anger if she stood her own ground and the experience of losing her sense of selfhood if she did not.

The outside observer is often struck by the extent to which the struggle for authorship comes to dominate the person’s life completely. One wonders why the fight must continue even though the fateful constellation has ceased to exist a long time ago, and even though the individual seems to have overcome it. It is as if the trauma has been engrained in the individual’s soul so deeply that the experiences of annihilation, humiliation, and helplessness continue to loom large as perpetual dangers. The individual feels that his integrity is constantly in jeopardy because of this danger. Its active mastery becomes a task which must be pursued endlessly, because otherwise the individual will feel again at the mercy of the forces which have caused unbearable psychic pain in the past.

The fight for authorship is therefore never finished. Indeed, what makes a given constellation fateful is precisely the fact that its impact was strong enough to turn it into a perpetual present. Psychoanalytic treatment is based on the idea that it
is possible to transform fate from a perpetual present into a remembered past. The hope is that such transformation will liberate the individual from the need to spend her or his life trying to master fate. This sometimes holds true, as we will see in later chapters, but it is not necessarily so, as Tamara's life shows.

If successful, the struggle for authorship gives life an intensity and sharpness which are lost if the person gives up struggling. There are many dangerous forms of the struggle for authorship which have this addictive quality. Mountain climbers, motorcycle racers, soldiers in commando units, and others who have chosen very dangerous occupations often experience "ordinary" life as deeply unsatisfying. They feel that they are only fully alive when they have to face real, physical danger.

The fight for authorship is addictive not just because of the need to control fateful dangers, but also because of its pleasures. Paradoxically the addiction to this fight both corroborates and contradicts Freud's idea that the essence of neurosis is fixation to some form of pleasure. The fight for authorship often involves transgression and addiction to highly intense experiences. However, Freud believed that the essence of pleasure is the abolition of tension, whereas the fight for authorship attempts to master high tension. Winnicott once said that people's greatest anxiety is directed toward experiences of psychic death which they really experienced in their past. Those who fight for authorship want to prove time and again that they can meet this experience and survive.

NORMALITY AND PATHOLOGY, FREEDOM AND BONDAGE

It is impossible to practice psychotherapy of any sort without some guiding assumptions about health and illness, maturity and immaturity, freedom and bondage. The clinician must have some way to conceptualize his patient's trouble, and he needs a sense of direction for the therapeutic process. In most cases, these conceptualizations are not problematic, because the patient and the therapist agree on what the patient's problem is. They share implicit cultural assumptions about normality and pathology, freedom and bondage, and they have a common goal of alleviating the patient's suffering.

Tamara sharpened my dilemmas because she refused to define our encounters as therapy. She had no clear wish to change, but wanted to understand herself better. She wanted to tell her story, but her aim was not to alleviate suffering. She quite explicitly said that she did not want to enter a conventional therapeutic relationship, and her past experience gave her good reason for this refusal. She had encountered an analyst who was not willing or capable of meeting her on her own terms and had caused her great pain by imposing his normative conceptions of femininity. She wanted a relationship in which she would not have to defend her life, and could talk about it freely.

Throughout my work with Tamara I was torn between two modes of thinking. One part of me, the orthodox practitioner, adheres to some of the most basic tenets of psychoanalytic theory and practice. The goal of treatment is to increase the patient's inner freedom. Human bondage is caused by unconscious factors, and freedom is increased by self-knowledge. The orthodox practitioner is guided by the Platonic principle that he who fully knows the good, acts upon it; irrational behavior therefore stems from lack of knowledge about oneself. Maturity can be achieved from the full recognition of one's unconscious, and the resolution of unconscious conflict. Driveness, excessive anxiety, and lack of inner freedom are the result of a fixation to some infantile conflict, trauma, or developmental arrest due to early environmental failure.

For most of its history psychoanalysis had a more or less clearly defined worldview, which was based on a simple, compelling idea. Psychopathology reflects fixations to some particular stage of childhood development. The more severe the pathology, the earlier the fixation point. Schizophrenia was a fixation to the earliest stratum of infantile experience, depression reflected a slightly later substage of the oral phase (Abraham, 1924). More treatable forms of psychopathology like obsessive neuroses and hysteria were fixations to the anal or
phallic stages. Later decades changed the specifics of the model, and new types of pathologies moved to the center of attention, but the assumption of development hierarchies continued to be dominant (e.g., Kernberg, 1975). This model enabled psychoanalysis to define psychopathological states as a form of developmental fixation. Illness and immaturity became interchangeable concepts.

The 1960s witnessed the beginning of a process whereby these assumptions came to be radically questioned. The first type of criticism argued that psychoanalytic theories of psychopathology had no evidential foundations. I have discussed this topic elsewhere (Strenger, 1991), and it is less relevant in the present context. The second type of attack mounted on psychoanalysis and on psychiatric thinking questioned the very notions of mental illness and health. Authors like Foucault (1961), Deleuze and Guattari (1972), Szasz (1962), and Laing (1961) showed the extent to which seemingly descriptive diagnostic notions were really expressions of social values. The postmodern movement of the seventies and eighties pursued the systematic deconstruction of the normative assumptions which had guided psychiatric and psychoanalytic thinking about normality and pathology. The postmodern avant garde tried to show that normative conceptions of mental health were nothing but constructions which did not reflect the natural structure of reality.

The postmodern pluralist inside me questions the orthodox practitioner's frame of reference. The psychoanalytic concepts of maturity reflect but one possible ideal of accomplished individuality. The Platonic principle is misleading because it assumes that there is but one good way to live one's life. The psychoanalytic ideal of the mature individual cannot be taken for granted. Self-knowledge does not lead to one predetermined goal of maturity. The psychoanalytic clinical situation offers the patient the opportunity to form himself according to the ideal of the calm, collected, reflective individual, but the patient has the right to question and reject this ideal. Hence, the clinician must be acutely aware that he offers the patient a whole set of values, and not a neutral mirror (Strenger, 1997a). Without such awareness the therapeutic process can become an unwitting indoctrination and imposition of a value system under the guise of therapeutic neutrality.

THE VOICE OF THE ORTHODOX PRACTITIONER

I will present the dilemmas about normality and pathology, freedom and bondage through a dialogue between the orthodox practitioner and the postmodern skeptic. The position of the orthodox practitioner is defined by four major assumptions.

The Assumption of Drivenness

The orthodox practitioner seeks manifestations of the unconscious, such as patterns of irrational action, thought, and fantasy (Strenger, 1991, ch. 4). He looks for evidence of mental bondage like compulsive drivenness. This view emphasizes that Tamara was a very intense woman. She never experienced calm and reflective periods in her life. Even her creativity was compulsive. When she researched a topic, or worked on a script she would work through days and nights until drained and exhausted. Her relationships were stormy. Her mind was constantly flooded with impulses, sensations, desires, and thoughts.

From the orthodox practitioner's vantage point, Tamara suffered from many forms of drivenness. Her life was not an easy one to live. It took tremendous energy to maintain the complex structure of her profession, her friendships, and her sexual life. Tamara emanated a sense of urgency and hauntedness in her whole being. I felt that she had to account for every minute of her life: Had it been sufficiently exciting, outrageous, thrilling?

I could not help feeling that Tamara was suffering from a strong compulsive streak. If there was some open space, a prolonged period without some deep excitement, she became restless. It was as if she could never allow herself to pause and ask what she really wanted, as if demons were haunting her.
Her life was a constant attempt to fight these demons, to keep the enemy in sight. The demons were her experiences of helplessness, of being at the hands of an overpowering force which would break her, and the relentless pressure to conform to some preconceived image of femininity.

The Assumption of Unconsciousness and Lack of Inner Freedom

The orthodox practitioner in me believed that Tamara could not possibly be fully conscious of the reasons for her masochism and her life-style. Full consciousness would have made her less impulsive and wild. I found it difficult to believe Tamara's claim that she really did not want to change. The reason she could not express a desire to change reflected the defenses by which she defended herself against psychic pain engendered by conflict and infantile trauma.

The psychoanalytic ideal of inner freedom has been derived from a long philosophical tradition. Stoicism came into being in ancient Greece, flourished in Rome through thinkers from Seneca to Marcus Aurelius (Nussbaum, 1995), was taken up again by Spinoza, and was the favorite ethical tradition of many Enlightenment authors like Diderot, Voltaire, and Hume (Gay, 1965). It believes in checking one's desire, in building a life based on understanding the forces of fate rather than fighting them. The prize to be gained is peace of mind and serenity.

In Freud's work this ideal found expression in the model that the mind should be capable of refraining from action even when under pressure of an overpowering wish, great anxiety, and painful conflict, and of thinking through the implications of various courses of action. In recent psychoanalytic literature this idea has been reformulated through the metaphor of containment (Bion, 1970). The mature mind has the capability of containing its own contents and processing them, to allow the individual to think and feel fully. Bion particularly emphasized the individual's ability to truly suffer his pain, as opposed to trying to avoid it, or discharge mental energy through immediate action. The capacity of containment allows for the transformation of mental content, the resolution of conflict which otherwise continues to compel the person to act in ways not fully intelligible to her.

Tamara certainly did not share these virtues. Her life was neither peaceful nor serene. Her attitude toward fate was belligerent: She was not willing to accept any aspect of her fate as a given that could not be changed. She could not allow herself to fully experience the extent of the pain, terror, and rage to which she had suffered at the hands of an environment which threatened to annihilate her selfhood. Despite her considerable intelligence and her acuity of perception, she could not allow herself to probe more deeply into the connections between her past and her present.

Self-Creation Is Fiction

Tamara desired to recreate herself. Her life was constructed on the belief that she was free to be who she wanted. No social norm, no conception of gender would have a hold on her. Her individuality was a work of art that she shaped out of the materials of her self. Her past did not constrain her in any tangible way, and her identity was determined by her free will.

This belief clashes with a fundamental tenet of the psychoanalytic worldview, that there is an irreducible tragic dimension to life (Schafer, 1970). It is not possible to recreate ourselves from scratch, and the influences of our past often condemn us to lifelong struggle and pain. The past, particularly childhood, shapes the foundation of our personality, and its traces are ineradicable. Some individuals integrate the sediments of the past organically into their adult personality, and their sense of authorship is not threatened by the ineradicability of childhood. Others feel fated by their past, and this is why they fight against it, repress, or deny its impact in order to preserve authorship.

Modern Freudian theory (e.g., Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1984; McDougall, 1995) has coined a new metaphor for the ineradicability of the past: the difference between the generations and the sexes. There are generations; we all have parents, and this trivial truth shapes our lives. They are our biological progenitors.
They are the providers of care and education, and they have a crucial impact on us at a time of total dependence. They are the authorities who have the right to determine our fates during the most crucial period of our lives.

There are sexes. Our biological nature defines the possibilities and the limits of our sexual experience. Masculinity and femininity are engraved in our bodies, and our bodies form the deep structure of our minds. These facts cannot be changed; they can only be denied in fantasy. Self-creation cannot be a lived reality, but only a fiction based on defensive distortion.

From this vantage point Tamara's life was guided by fictitious fantasies: her belief that she could be a boy, and her belief that she could recreate her childhood. Tamara had to maintain a complex structure of defenses to deny the fantastic nature of her most cherished beliefs. She created a split between her mature mind which knew that she was a woman and could not be a boy, and the infantile part of her mind dominated by the fantasy that she could be what she wanted.

The same holds true for her belief that the masochist scenario allowed her to repair the damage of her childhood terrors. Her past is immutable. If her partners in S&M turn into caring lovers at the end, this does not transform her father into a more accepting and caring person than he was in reality. Tamara invested great effort in maintaining the fiction that this magical transformation of the past was possible. Moreover it did not allow her the work of mourning which could have truly freed her from the demons of the past, and could have helped her to accept the tragedy of the pain of her childhood.

The Assumption of Unfreedom by Fixation to the Past

The psychoanalytic insistence on the tragic dimension of life entails a model of freedom. The influence of the past and of the total dependence in childhood must be accepted. The losses, pains, and traumas of the past must be acknowledged and mourned; we must all come to terms with the fact that we had the particular childhood we had, even though it does not correspond to our needs and desires. Denying the past only enslaves by turning it into a perpetual present. The attempt to undo and avoid pains, trauma and unfulfilled desire condemns us to be unconsciously tyrannized by the past (Wolheim, 1984).

The psychoanalytic ethic is stoic: We must accept the limits of our power. Paradoxically, fantasies of omnipotent repair of early damage weaken the individual. By endowing us with magical powers to change the past, they perpetuate the terrors of childhood. These fantasies deny us the only freedom human beings are capable of: the conscious, lucid acceptance of our limitations, which allows us to actualize our realistic potential.

From this point of view Tamara was deluded about the motivations of her fight with social norms. She considered it as an expression of freedom, and as a relentless pursuit of pleasure. She was proud of truly having created herself, whereas she was really fixated to a traumatic constellation of the past. Her sexual masochism illustrates this most poignantly: She would talk about the incredible intensity of her sexual experience, and gave this as her main reason for the pursuit of men who could provide her with this kick. But Tamara was nowhere less free than in her sexual life. Masochism provided her with the most intense experiences not because it was in itself pleasurable, but because it was her way of proving time and again that she could not be broken. Sex was her way of denying death, of showing that nothing could really destroy her. She was compelled to relive this trauma, because otherwise she would have had to remember the unspeakable.

A second unconscious source of Tamara's masochism was her need to protect her parents from the full force of her accusations. She did not want to hate them for the ordeals of the past, which condemned her to her compulsions of the present. Masochism, which she considered to be her own, free creation of a sexual identity, was an expression of her need to love her father, and this she could only do by transforming
pain into pleasure. Her masochism was an expression of the
tyranny of the past, and not of her freedom for self-creation.

THE VOICE OF THE POSTMODERN PLURALIST

The postmodern pluralist in me raises several quite radical criti­
cisms of the above points.

The Assumptions of Drivenness and Lack of Inner Freedom

Psychoanalysis has always maintained an implicit or an explicit
assumption that deviant sexuality cannot be the expression of
free choice, but is eo ipso compulsive behavior. This holds true
even for open and flexible psychoanalytic authors like Joyce
McDougall who coined the felicitous term neosexuality to de­
ote what are generally called perversions. McDougall discusses
the claim made by many people that their neosexual activity
provides them with pleasures unknown to those who live with
"normal" sexuality only (1989). Yet she does not take these
statements very seriously and instead argues that neosexualities
always have a compulsive element.

Recently authors like Nancy Chodorow (1994) and Adam
Phillips (1996) have argued forcefully that psychoanalytic ac­
counts of sexuality are remarkably sterile. Psychoanalytic writ­
ings work with an implicit assumption that the mature attitude
toward sex is quite relaxed. The mature person is not overly
preoccupied by sex, and does not feel compelled to act on his
or her sexual wishes. Instead he or she should be capable of
renunciation, and be primarily preoccupied with the partner­
ship element of relationship. Excessive search for excitements
and consuming experiences is the hallmark of some type of
developmental fixation. As Phillips says, "Most psychoanalytic
theory now is a contemporary version of the etiquette book;
improving our internal manners, advising us on our best sexual
behavior (usually called maturity, or mental health, or a decen­
tered self). It is, indeed, dismayingly how quickly psychoanalysis
has become the science of the sensible passions . . . " (1996,
p. 87).

The psychoanalytic preoccupation with being sensible has
been traced quite convincingly to the work ethics of the newly
arising middle class in the nineteenth century (Gay, 1984). In
contrast to the working classes, the middle classes had a lot of
respectability to lose. Unlike the aristocracy, it had to work
hard for this respectability, and excessive preoccupation with
passions was detrimental to such work. Psychoanalysis is quick
in classifying behavior as driven which does not fit its etiquette
book. Yet it can be argued that the emphasis on drivenness as
lack of freedom and as indication of pathology is in itself noth­
ing but an expression of middle-class values which are intrinsi­
cally no better than others—even though they are more
conducive to the maintenance of social respectability.

Of course there are many patients who complain of being
driven, and who experience some of their passions as extrane­
ous to their consciously maintained self-image. In these cases
the psychoanalytic attempt to help them in acquiring serenity
is consistent with their consciously held values. Nevertheless it
is not a matter of course that this is the only way to be therapeu­
tic. Adam Phillips (1996, p. 88) argues that the patient could
be better served by finding out that he is a stranger creature
than he likes to think. Instead of frightening himself, he should
come to enjoy his own unruliness. Serenity has its prices: Rollo
May wrote long ago (1969) that all attempts to exorcise the
demonic from the human psyche try to flatten out our lives.
Chodorow (1994) pointed out that normal heterosexuality is
quite compulsive in itself. The insistence of classical psychoanal­
ytics that we should all be calm, loving, and not too wild is
nothing but an anxious attempt to maintain some order.

The ideal of containment and inner freedom is ultimately
just one ideal among many others. It certainly has its advan­
tages. When the mind has inner space which allows for the
processing of conflicts, the mourning of losses, and the con­
struction of reasonable ways of action, the individual is likely
to be more balanced, efficient, and prudent. But these ideals
are not to be taken as a matter of course. We easily forget the
price paid for the calmness and prudence of leading a reasonable life. The intensity of Tamara's life can serve as a reminder of what is lost by minimizing risk and maximizing efficiency.

A postmodern view would argue that Tamara suffered not from her own wildness, but from society's envious condemnation of those who have carved out some freedom for themselves as sick, perverse, and driven. The clinician's task is not to impose an ideal of serenity alien to her conception of the good life, but to provide respite from social judgment which supports her attempt to formulate her own desire without having to defend herself.

Tamara did not complain of her drivenness. She only wanted to understand why she was so different from everybody else. She wanted a place where she would be listened to on her own terms, and she was willing to listen in turn. But she would not accept that anyone, whatever his title, had the knowledge of what the good life is. Because her life was a carefully crafted work of art rather than a hopeless jumble, because indeed she was capable of experiencing more pleasures than most people are, she makes it more difficult to maintain the attitude of enlightened superiority into which the psychoanalytic therapist slides so easily.

Self-Creation Is Fiction

The metaphor of the difference between the generations and the sexes is a thinly veiled defense of social and political conservatism. By using terms which refer to biological facts, many psychoanalytic writers hide their adherence to traditional value. The term difference of generations camouflages respect for established beliefs, theories, and forms of life. It pathologizes all questioning of authority by labeling it "denial of biological nature," and it is suspicious of innovation by claiming that it reflects a fantastic distortion of reality.

"Difference between the sexes" conflates biological fact and socially constructed gender roles. "Being a boy" and "being a girl" are no less definitions of roles than they denote a biological entity. The claim that Tamara's belief that she could be a boy is fictitious suffers from an overdose of literal mindedness. Conventional definitions of gender curtail individual freedom, and Tamara rebelled against such constraints because they denied her full subjectivity and freedom. Tamara's belief that she could be a boy is first and foremost the belief that she is not constrained by social gender constructions. Diagnosing it as fiction is based on the mistaken equation of prevalent definitions of gender with reality per se. Tamara's protest necessitates a fight, because every self-creation which contradicts accepted social norms encounters the judgmental gaze of those who adhere to accepted standards.

This would be the argumentative approach taken by Michel Foucault (1975), who argued, quite persuasively, that the very notion of sexuality is an instrument of power-knowledge, a notion which serves to impose normative conceptions on individuals. By classifying some pleasures as sexual, we include them in a field of force exerting powerful pressures. Gender is one of the most crucial constituents of identity, and hence individuals are subjected to great fears of not standing up to the criteria of being "real" men or women.

Foucault claimed that social definitions of gender are no more rooted in "reality" than the notions of the divine right of kings and aristocratic status by birth in feudal Europe, or the immovable boundaries of caste in Indian society. We simply get used to the "fictions" we cherish most. In later chapters I will indeed try to show that the strategies of the ontological protest of subjectivity and the various modes of self-creation encountered in my patients have their counterparts in art, religion, and philosophy. A strong case can be made for the position that most nonpsychotic forms of the protest against various aspects of reality can be a source of creative inspiration.

The Assumption of Unfreedom by Fixation to the Past

The idea that freedom consists in the ability to process emotion internally, and that the past should not govern us in ways we are not conscious of, is nothing but a reflection of the same type of bourgeois morality discussed above. Tamara's statement
that for her freedom consists in desiring as deeply as she wants and acting on this desire, voices an alternative definition of freedom which is both legitimate and cogent.

Are not those who adhere anxiously to the values they were brought up with as unfree as Tamara? Are we not all fixated in one way or another? Sometimes psychoanalysis sounds as if being fully analyzed means that we are conscious of all our motivations. In reality, it means that we are conscious of all the motivations deemed to be irrational by the standard psychoanalytic conceptions of maturity. The term fixation is irremediably value-laden: It is a professional way of saying that an individual does not fit our conception of maturity.

Classical psychoanalysis sometimes assumes that there is only one mature way to live with one's past, particularly with its noxious, traumatic, and conflictual features. We are supposed to remember, to mourn, and to accept. Those who, like Tamara, fight to overcome the past, do not fit the “etiquette book . . . of internal manners,” to use Phillips' words. Tamara's fight was indeed ferocious: She did not want to accept that the past imposed any limitations on her. For her to be free meant to live in a way she experienced as uniquely her own, without any inhibitions.

Tamara's conception of freedom certainly has its price. She takes high risks, and it is not a matter of course at all that she will never be harmed. She lacks the more serene emotions which are often associated with a stable, calm form of life. Yet she is free in a very tangible way. She has no fears and inhibitions in fulfilling her desires—whatever they may be. Compared to hers the ordinary bourgeois life is pale and predictable. In saying so I do not mean to exalt her conception of freedom, but to enhance our awareness that the psychoanalytic value of inner freedom has its drawbacks. The lucidity to which psychoanalytic treatment aspires often does not allow for the intensity of experience that can be associated with what psychoanalysis calls drivenness.

THE DEEP SELF AND SELF-CREATION

The dilemma between the orthodox practitioner and the postmodern pluralist reflects my queries about the freedom we have to shape our selves in radical ways. I cannot help accepting the basic, psychoanalytic belief that the past shapes us in an ineradicable way. Without being committed to any particular theory of the unconscious, I believe that the self does have depth. For better and for worse we carry past object relations, meaning structures, and cultural assumptions in our psyche. In every thought and emotion the past reverberates. The meanings, schematas, and Gestalts by which we assimilate our present are the living embodiment of past experience. I sought the continuities, and I tried to find the deep structures of Tamara's self. I kept assuming that her choice was not as free as she presented it. I tried to find the roots of her project of self-creation in early childhood experience.

What about self-creation, then? Tamara may have gone as far as anyone in her attempt to shape her self according to her desire. Through our encounter she came to accept that there were deeper continuities between her project of self-creation than she had fathomed. Does this mean that her adult identity is nothing but a defensive structure designed to deal with early trauma? Is it indeed fiction rather than reality?

I do not think so. Tamara's mind, her creative transformation of childhood pains is not a fantasy structure, it is a lived reality. It is no less real than her art and her professional work. Tamara formed her self according to a particular aesthetics of individuality. She had a clearly defined view of how to live with the past. She wanted to prove the self's resilience by fighting limitations at every point. Tamara consciously structured her life as a rebellion against the constraints accepted by most of us. Her growing insight into the deep continuities between her past and her present life-style did not change her resolve to stick to her choices. She rather felt that now she had a deeper, more conscious grasp of the motivations that were fueling her project.

Tamara's choice, therefore, need not be seen as a denial of the deep self. She chose to deal with the deep continuities of her life by trying to prove to herself and the world that deep pain need neither victimize nor cripple the individual. She wanted the freedom to transform her deep self according to an aesthetics that appealed to her sensibilities. She found this aesthetics in the male gay culture and the world of consensual
INDIVIDUALITY, THE IMPOSSIBLE PROJECT

S&M. She could identify with its experimentation at the boundaries of gender and identity, and with its principle that terrors need to be explored, staged, and dealt with actively.

Tamara reminds me of Michel Foucault (with whom I will deal in greater depth in a later chapter) in many ways. That both of them were deeply immersed in the world of S&M is an obvious starting point. Much more important is that both deliberately and consciously went about shaping their lives as works of art. None of their central choices was made out of sheer inertia, convention, or routine. Their strongest desire was to live lives that corresponded to their strongly developed need for authorship.

Tamara’s life shows in sharp contours how self-creation merges with the deep self. Tamara’s sexual identity and lifestyle were an attempt to create an aesthetic that could provide solutions to the dilemmas created by the anxieties, rages, loves, and attachments of a lifetime. The project of individuality is an attempt to give form to materials that are given by the individual’s fate. To live a life is therefore rather analogous to the work of the bricoleur. Unlike the studio artist, the bricoleur does not buy in stores geared to fulfill an artist’s needs. He roams through junkyards, cellars, and attics to find the materials for his works that, in turn, take shape through his meeting with the objets trouvés, because he cannot and will not use materials designed for the creation of art.

What gives the project of individuality its particular poignancy is that we can never start it from scratch. Central structures have been erected without our conscious or active participation. The deep self’s basic contours are provided by one’s parents’ character, by their loves and hates, as well as our own. The validity of Freud’s concept of the Oedipus complex may not reside in the particulars of his elaboration, but points to an existential deep structure of human life. To acquire a mind of one’s own and some authorship over one’s life means to assume a past that reverberates in the psyche. The deep self does not preclude a sense of authorship. If anything it constitutes its necessary condition.

I picked up the phone. “My name is Clarissa. This is the first time in my life that I have to say, ‘I need help.’ Could I get an appointment?” Thus began an encounter which led me to face the poignant question of why individuals want to live or to die.

Looking at Clarissa you would never have suspected that she was going to be on the verge of suicide a year later. She was an attractive, well-groomed, smart, successful and entertaining 30-year-old woman when she entered my practice.

The facts were as follows: She was separated from her husband of two years whom she had never loved. She was a brilliantly successful lawyer, a junior partner in a firm specializing in corporate law. She had graduated from one of the best law schools in the United States, and had come to Israel three years earlier, after a successful stint in a well-known law firm in New York. Her eyes gleamed with humor, liveliness, and charm, her appearance was that of a successful, self-assured Yuppie, she obviously had a tremendous gift for languages, as her Hebrew was almost flawless and accent-free.

What was the problem, then? She suffered from an unbearable sense of loneliness, a total lack of sense of direction, a deep sense of meaninglessness. During the first few sessions
she told me the basic facts of her life. When I suggested to her that much of her suffering might have originated in her difficult childhood, she was irritated at first: "You know, I don’t believe in psychology. It’s always the same shtick isn’t it: You’re supposed to get to hate your parents, cry, and then everything will be okay. Right?"

Clarissa had never wasted a single moment of thought about such a possibility, she wanted no connection to her childhood. She remembered one thought since age 6: "I want to grow up quickly, and then I will never, ever again depend on anybody." She had gone on to realize this wish as soon and completely as possible. The moment she could leave home she did. She went to college, then to law school, and managed to pay her way through it by means of hard work and scholarships.

Nevertheless Clarissa soon gravitated toward talking about her childhood. For about half a year she would tell it, bit by bit, in almost obsessive detail. She presented it as a set of curiosities, memorabilia of a crazy family, The amused glint in her eyes was to persist for almost a year. She would tell her memories, I would be stunned and shocked, and she would, for a long time, not understand what I was making a fuss about.

She had grown up in a small Jewish community in the United States, where everybody knew about everybody. She was the poor little girl whom the mothers of other girls did not want to have around. For a while Clarissa’s memories revolved around being humiliated by the gaze of other children’s mothers which made her understand that she was not wanted there. She felt like someone with an infectious disease, and that they did not want her around their daughters. Clarissa’s life was a complex game of hide and seek. She tried to hide what was going on at home. She tried not to react to the whisperings of the other children when they were playing in the park.

Everybody knew that something was badly wrong at the Schindlers’ house. It looked like everybody else’s house in the suburban neighborhood, but the Schindlers had the bad habit of not being able to keep up appearances. No one was ever invited into the house; but those who had walked close by talked about a biting stench coming from the house. Sometimes the neighbors would hear the screaming in the house.

Sometimes Clarissa’s father would leave the house, his wife coming after him, yelling at him.

One detail Clarissa remembered vividly was the blood dripping from her mother’s body while she was out on the street screaming, because she would not take care of herself during her period. The police got involved because of her brother’s physical fights with mother, and on one occasion her mother had to get her head stitched. Her brother soon moved to a home for disturbed children.

About half a year into the therapy, Clarissa dared take me into the house figuratively speaking. It turned out that the neighbors had no idea how bad things really were. Her parents were involved in a strange war of attrition. Her father would not buy food for her mother, and her mother would not make food for the children. Clarissa remembered how one night—she was 6 years old—she was very hungry, and there was only food in the refrigerator which belonged to her mother. Her mother sat there, with an evil grin, saying: “This is my food. You can wait for your father; he can bring food for you if you like.” At another occasion her mother screamed when she came back from school: “What? You’re back? Who needs you here!”

Clarissa felt abandoned, let down, and disappointed by her mother. But she also felt deep pity, because she felt vaguely that something was very wrong with her mother. Sometimes her mother did not have the strength to buy food of her own, and her father would not allow her to eat “his” food. Clarissa would save some of her own meal, steal into her mother’s bedroom, and bring her something to eat.

It took some more time until Clarissa told me about this bedroom. Her father had moved out of there when she was about 5. She dreaded entering it. The room resembled a garbage dump rather than human habitat. It was full of decaying food, junk, tons of rotting old newspapers. Whenever she went in there, chances were that something would jump at her. The cockroaches were the nicest; she could deal with those. She had more problems with the mice and the rats. When her parents finally divorced—Clarissa was 8—two truckloads of garbage were shoveled out of the house.
Obviously Clarissa's mother was mentally ill, and it turned out that indeed she had been hospitalized during Clarissa's adolescence. I never knew the precise diagnosis, but my hunch was that she had suffered from schizoaffective disorder, as Clarissa's descriptions of her symptoms fitted both depressive and schizophrenic features.

Clarissa told these stories in the style of an American comic. She always managed to find a humorous angle, and she made them sound like episodes of some funny soap opera. She described her own state of mind as surprised, and sometimes as somewhat angry, but I felt that there was a deep schism between the terror of a childhood flooded with madness, rage, and shame and Clarissa's ironical detachment from her biography. When I tried to imagine what her childhood must have been like, I felt hopelessness, dread, rage. At the same time I always wondered how that child had developed into this charming, humorous, sparklingly intelligent, well-groomed young woman. Clarissa was endowed with an exceptionally strong character, and she had managed to dissociate herself from her childhood experiences.

The price she paid was that she unconsciously continued to live in her past despite all her success. A close look at her present life proved it to be a continuation of patterns from her past. Her whole life was a game of hide and seek. She had left her home country, so no one would know who she was. She had no intimate acquaintances, because she dreaded the moment anybody would ask her about her childhood, about her family. She was afraid that if she were to divulge the facts of her past, she would again be exposed to the humiliations of her childhood. It was as if she had never left the stinking house of her parents. Her achievements, her actual appearance, abilities, her natural charm seemed to her like a thin façade barely covering up the truth.

In my private musings I went further: Clarissa was in touch with the sense of humiliation, with the shame she had experienced. But what about the anxiety? What about the dread she must have felt when she looked into her mother's mad eyes? My feeling was that after about nine months of treatment we had not yet come close to touching the bottom of what must be hidden in her soul. It was to turn out that I was right—only much more so than I had suspected.

At some point Clarissa talked about what had happened after her parents' divorce. Her brother was in a home for disturbed children. Her mother of course could not get custody of her. Her father, wary of the fact that the whole community knew about what had happened in his house, moved to a neighboring city with his daughter. Clarissa was relieved: At least the new apartment was clean. Her home had ceased to be a madhouse. She adored her father, who seemed to her the epitome of perfection. She tried to disregard minor imperfections. For example, there was no food at home. She remembered days in which she ate nothing but crackers and mustard, because that was what she could find. Why did she not ask her father for money, for food? I asked. He was working so hard, he had gone through so much trouble, she could not cause him any grief, she answered.

In the new town she applied lessons from her past: She did not go to other children's homes at all. She built a mystique of being constantly busy. She took care not to speak to anyone about her past. When she was 12 her father announced that he was going to get married again. Clarissa was thrilled. Finally she would have a home like all the other children.

But things turned out to be different (quite often her stories reminded me of Dickens' novels; things always turned out for the worst). Her father's new wife was less than thrilled about having a child in her home. Clarissa got a small back room; she was told that she was to do her own laundry. She was at best a second-class citizen in the new home. Clarissa waited for her father to stand by her side. But he wouldn't. She tried to fight for her rights on her own, only to be defeated and humiliated. This was when a new thought got hold of her mind: "If I cannot bear it any more, I can always kill myself."

I felt uneasy about the therapy. Clarissa did not miss a single session, yet I felt that she was remote, and that the therapeutic relationship had not become truly significant to her. At times she would say: "I keep coming to you because they say it's supposed to help. I can't say that I feel anything is changing. I am only surprised how important it is for me to tell you my
story. But, frankly: it's like taking aspirin for me. I cannot see why it should work."

I felt deep sympathy for Clarissa, I had profound respect for what she had achieved, and for the way she had formed herself with no support. I often felt flooded with the feelings she did not feel—rage, anxiety, and humiliation, terrible disappointment at her parents' failings—and I accepted that as a necessary feature of this treatment. I assumed that it was going to take some time until she would be able to face her own inner world, and for the time being, I was the container of all the feelings she could not bear.

Gradually Clarissa began to speak about the multitude of ways in which her father had let her down. He had been the one person in her life she had always trusted. It seemed that she could simply not allow herself to see what a weak and self-centered man he was, because her whole psychic balance depended on her idealizing him. Gradually, however, this idealization began to crumble. She remembered how throughout law school the fantasy that kept her going was how proud her father would be when she received a summa cum laude at the graduation ceremony. When she had finally made it, her father came late, and sat there yawning, grunting, and mumbling how boring it all was.

For the first time Clarissa cried. For the first time it began to dawn on her that there was nothing funny about having been let down by everybody she had ever trusted, including her adored father. Whether by coincidence or not, this insight occurred when she found out that the man she was currently seeing was not trustworthy, and she began to feel humiliated by him.

From that moment on, things began to change quickly. Clarissa mentioned in passing that suicide thoughts were crossing her mind again. I was worried. I felt that Clarissa's despair during the last weeks had grown way beyond what she had told me. Her life seemed to her to be one black expanse of hopelessness. She came to the conclusion that death was her only way out, but was scared to tell me about it, because she was sure that I would hospitalize her. And yet, she said, to her own surprise, her first impulse after waking up was to call me.

I asked, "How likely are you to make another suicide attempt?" She looked at me and said without expression: "I will probably do it again." I said to her: "Look, Clarissa, I expected worry about; but I felt uneasy. I suspected that Clarissa's pride would not allow her to call me even if she felt the need for it, and during one weekend I decided to call her to find out how she was doing. She was surprised, and told me there was nothing to worry about. When I saw her on the following Monday, she looked okay, and I felt a bit calmer.

Two days later the descent into hell began. At noon I got a phone call. Clarissa's voice was weak, her speech blurred. "I've just woken up. I don't understand why it didn't work."

"What happened?" I said, alarmed. "Twelve hours ago I opened the gas; I don't understand: I closed all the windows, I put scotch tape around them. I don't understand why it didn't work." I told her to get in a taxi and come to my office immediately. I made some phone calls to reschedule other sessions, and while I waited for Clarissa my mind raced a mile a minute. What support could I count on? Her family did not live in the country, and even if they had I doubted that they would have been of any help.

I knew that by hospitalizing Clarissa I would underwrite her death warrant with my own hands. She was a proud young woman; her whole life had been a fight with feelings of unbearable shame, and she would never accept the stigma of having been hospitalized. So how could I protect her?

Clarissa arrived. I felt torn between feelings of compassion, of having been cheated, and the dreadful sense that this had been a very close call indeed. I had no doubt that she wanted to die; this had not been an S.O.S. signal or an attempt to evoke sympathy.

I tried to stay as calm as possible, and listened to what had happened. It turned out that Clarissa's despair during the last weeks had grown way beyond what she had told me. Her life seemed to her to be one black expanse of hopelessness. She came to the conclusion that death was her only way out, but was scared to tell me about it, because she was sure that I would hospitalize her. And yet, she said, to her own surprise, her first impulse after waking up was to call me.

I asked, "How likely are you to make another suicide attempt?" She looked at me and said without expression: "I will probably do it again." I said to her: "Look, Clarissa, I expected
all along that at some point your defenses would break down. What is happening to you now is necessary. You have spent a lifetime fighting the experiences of dread and hopelessness which are flooding you now. But you should not decide now whether to live or not. Give the therapeutic process a chance.”

She had one friend who knew about her life and her plight. She agreed that I should call this friend, who came to my office immediately. I thought that Clarissa should stay with this friend for some time, because it was clear that she could no longer bear her loneliness. Clarissa refused. And she refused to see a psychiatrist to get antidepressive medication. This did not surprise me: even though we had not talked about it much, I was aware that the fear of madness, of ending up like her mother was one of the darkest specters in the Pandora’s box of Clarissa’s psyche. Taking psychotropic drugs symbolized to her that the worst had come true, that she had inherited her mother’s illness.

Thus began three months which I will probably always remember as being among the most significant, and among the most difficult periods of my life. I was torn between three impulses: One was the simple professional responsibility for her life. It was my duty to do everything to protect her. The second was that I have a profound distaste for infringement of any person’s freedom by mental health professionals. I do not believe in principle that we have a right to prevent someone from taking her life, if that is her sincere wish. The third was a deep conviction that Clarissa was capable of living a good, rich life if she could somehow overcome this crisis, and that her suicide was not rationally justified.

There also was a legal problem: Did I have the right not to hospitalize her? She was not mentally ill; I had no doubt about that, and hence the law did not require me to commit her. But there was a nagging voice which told me to cover my ass. I hated this voice, because it was opposed to my ethical belief that I had to do what I took to be the best for my patient according to the best of my knowledge and conscience.

In my calmer moments I knew that the one thing I could do was to stay true to my understanding of my task: to help Clarissa to find words for the terrors of her soul which she had managed to repress successfully throughout so many years. The problem was that I kept feeling terrified without quite understanding why. I often felt that there was a part of her I could not get to: There was a deep attraction to death which at times made me think in mythological terms as pure death wish, a desire for destruction. Clarissa often talked of her fear that her instinct for survival was going to prevent her from committing suicide even though she would really want to die. She would say: “It is as if I had some gland in me which secretes some will to survive at the wrong moment.”

I failed in all my attempts to get her to see that this will to survive might be the expression of her deepest wishes rather than some blind biological force. It was to take me a month in which I saw Clarissa seven times a week, usually for one and a half or two hours, and another suicide attempt, to understand my terror, and to understand why survival was not Clarissa’s deepest wish.

Her days were bearable if she managed to numb herself into a state of working automatically, without feeling, without truly being alive—“I’m just functioning on automatic pilot.” She did everything to forget that at night she would return to her hell of loneliness. During those nights she had flashbacks of near-hallucinatory intensity; suddenly some texture reminded her of the play of shadows in the bedroom of her childhood. She was afraid of opening some of the cupboards, because she feared that some animal would jump at her, as in her mother’s bedroom. She would stand in front of the mirror, trying to prove to herself that she did not look like her mother, but like her father—a device of her childhood which was supposed to calm her fears that she would end up mad like her mother.

Then she would remember the cruelty with which her father humiliated her when she wanted to leave her new stepmother’s home, but could not find a place to stay. “You see, you have nowhere to go! You want to go to your crazy mother, huh? Are you going to be bearable now, or do you still want to leave?”

I thought that Clarissa’s only chance to survive was to experience once in her life that someone was really willing to meet
her needs. I did not feel manipulated in the least, because Clarissa did not ask me for total commitment—she was almost reluctant to accept it. Nevertheless I had moments in which the tension was almost impossible to bear. I would say to myself: “She is like an infant whom you found on your doorstep. Now that you have picked her up, you must take care of her.” I hoped that Clarissa was undergoing a process of cleansing which might help her to feel that life was worth living.

We did some fruitful work during that period. We found words for the utter terror of loneliness she had experienced for so many nights in her life. Everybody else went home after work, having a legitimate place to stay. She was the only one who had to go to a small raft floating out there in the sea throughout the night. She was terrified of the wave which would capsize her raft and the sharks which would tear her to pieces.

Clarissa described her inner, mental space as a closed, black room. It had several doors, but all of them were locked. She was in deep panic and she could only think about how to get out. And there was only one way out: death. She tried to explain something to me which I was frightened to hear. Since age 13 the possibility of suicide had been her only comfort. She had felt fate to be unbearable, and life itself and her own will to live was an unbearable fate for her. She experienced the possibility of suicide as the one act that proved she was free, that she had control over her life.

I made an agreement with Clarissa that she would call me during the day at fixed times. One Saturday she did not call. Instead I got a phone call from her friend. “I think she killed herself. She has disappeared.” The friend had gone into Clarissa’s apartment and found pages and pages of writing in which Clarissa had poured out her despair, her rage. I went to meet the friend. We looked for Clarissa in the office, and gradually began to believe that she was dead. Her friend said: “This was a crazy race between the good ones and the bad ones inside her. I think the bad ones won.” I took her back to Clarissa’s apartment, because her car was there. Suddenly I saw Clarissa’s car swerving into the street. I went after the car. For about ten seconds I planned to overtake her and to force her car onto the sidewalk, when it crossed my mind that there was no way she could commit suicide with the car in the streets of Tel Aviv.

After several hundred meters Clarissa stopped her car. I went to the door and asked her to get out. She looked dreadful, panicky. She said, “Please, no, I can’t.” I waited for several minutes. I had promised to myself that if I was ever going to see her alive again, I would hospitalize her immediately.

Finally she opened the door of the car, and stepped out. At that moment my whole resolve switched back to my previous state of mind. I saw her terror, her loneliness, and I found myself standing in a dark street in Tel Aviv hugging her. I told her friend to take Clarissa’s car, and drove Clarissa to my office, where we had a two-hour session. She told me that she had spent two hours in her car above a cliff, deliberating whether to drive into empty space. “I just couldn’t do it. I’m terrified. If I can’t do it, I am lost!”

My experience with Clarissa can be better understood if I relate an eerie fact: In the midst of all this madness, I mostly experienced Clarissa as totally lucid. Throughout our fight with death, we often exchanged jokes of dark humor about what was going on. I was totally firm in my conviction that Clarissa was not in the least mad, but going through an existential struggle in which she was trying to find out whether her life could really be worth living. But the demonic attraction of death continued to hover in Clarissa’s mind.

A week after the car chase I got another phone call from her friend. “She tried to kill herself again. And she’s scared to talk to you, because now she’s sure that you will hospitalize her.” Suddenly it dawned upon me. The possibility of hospitalization was pushing her into death. And a second thought dawned upon me: I had never truly accepted that for her suicide was the proof that she was truly free, that her greatest fear had been that she was trapped in life, and that she might not be able to die. I also understood why I had been afraid to fully accept this: If I accepted this, I might have to accept that for her suicide was the one and only act of freedom open to her.

I decided to go all the way, and be consistent. I called the official district psychiatrist and asked him to send me a fax that under the circumstances (being that she was not mentally ill
to my best judgment) I was allowed to take the risk of her killing herself. Then I called Clarissa's friend and asked her to get Clarissa to call me. I told the friend to give Clarissa my promise that I was not going to hospitalize her under any circumstances.

Clarissa called, and I told her:

Clarissa, I want you to know that I have understood something now which I didn’t before: For you suicide has been the assertion of the fact that you are free; that you are not a plaything of fate. I also understand that life for you has been a trap. I want you to know two things: First, I will not hospitalize you under any circumstances, because I know that this means that I will kill you. Second, it is not my intention to keep you alive at any price. I know that you are afraid to be trapped in life. I will truly leave you the option of killing yourself if you come to the conclusion that life is not worth living. I just propose that you give yourself a chance to find out whether life is indeed a trap. You can die whenever you want; suicide is not going to run away from you.

Clarissa tried to understand whether I genuinely meant it. Once she felt that I did, she calmed down. We fixed the time for the next session the day after, and when Clarissa came in she was composed. She told me that this time she had tried to electrocute herself. The only reason she was alive was that the fuse had blown. She looked at me and said: “Look, now I know that I can do it if I want to, now I can wait and see.” Within a month of that session, Clarissa assured me for the first time that she had no immediate intention to kill herself.

The rest of Clarissa’s therapy was more like ordinary psychotherapy again: It was centered primarily on her character trait of instinctively feeling that she had to hide, that she had to be ashamed of herself. During this period she formed a close relationship with a man who was her equal in many ways, and with whom she gradually built a somewhat stormy but satisfying relationship.

I learned from Clarissa that the desire for authorship can, paradoxically, be stronger than the desire for life. From early on I saw that her life had been governed by a deep yearning for authorship which had led her, from age 6 onwards, to strive to dissociate herself from the ugliness and madness of her family life.

I did not understand for quite some time that the desire which had helped Clarissa out of the dreadful life of her family of origin was also what pushed her to suicide. She wanted to feel that authorship is stronger than fate, that she was not a plaything of anything, not even of her own instinct of survival. Clarissa had to make two suicide attempts to prove to herself that she was not trapped in life. If she survived by chance, she would know that she was truly free to die. This would allow her to decide freely to live.

My desire to keep Clarissa alive simply did not allow me to fully realize how desperately important it was for her to have the freedom to die. I deeply believe, and I believed before Clarissa’s treatment, that what makes life worth living is an individual’s sense of authorship. In the past I had taken certain risks, primarily with adolescents, to whom I permitted a great deal of acting out, because I felt that this was their only way to find out who they were and wanted to be. In Clarissa’s case this was far more difficult, because for months her hovering between life and death was not in any way metaphorical.

I have often asked myself whether the suicide attempts could have been avoided, and I discussed this question several times with Clarissa at later stages of the therapy. Her own view is that neither of the two attempts could have been avoided. She feels that she had to prove to herself that she could die, and that the first attempt had not provided her with this proof. To this very day the thought that Clarissa is alive by sheer chance makes me shiver. I can certainly not ascribe this to my therapeutic acumen, because I think that both attempts were (literally) dead serious.
I am aware of having made mistakes in this therapy, and this was corroborated by discussions I had with Clarissa. In particular I think that if I had had the strength to accept that suicide was the expression of Clarissa's sense of authorship, and if I had been able to elaborate on this with her after her first suicide attempt, the second one might have been prevented, even though she thinks otherwise. She later said that she had felt desperate because I could not understand and legitimize her need to know that she could die. I do believe that if I had not finally accepted the legitimacy of her desire to be able to die, if I had not come to the conclusion that this desire was as truly hers as any other, I might have made it impossible for her to decide to live.

I have often asked myself whether I continued to work with Clarissa the way I did because I had the need to be heroic, because I wanted to help her against all odds. I cannot discount this possibility completely, but my core experience was quite different. During the crisis I kept feeling that this was a nightmare, and I cursed the moment I had gotten myself into this situation. I felt that I was trapped, that my beliefs and values did not allow me to change my course of action. The image of the infant you find on your doorstep and cannot put down once you have picked her up probably reflects my state of mind best.

I consulted several times with colleagues who all said the same: They understood why I was willing to go through the terror of trying to hold Clarissa, but they did not think it was a very good idea, since I was not likely to stand the strain for long. What kept me going was Winnicott's narrative of the regression to dependence. Winnicott believed that patients who had protected themselves with a false self layer throughout their lives had to go through a period in which they regressed to a state in which the therapist had to care for them in more concrete ways in order for them to find their way to living on a true self level. In terms of my own account, I would put this as follows: The sense of authorship can only evolve on the background of the experience that at moments of need someone is there for the patient. Otherwise the patient feels that the gap between her needs and the world is unbridgeable, and that there is no way she can live a life worth living. Clarissa had been failed completely by her mother and badly by her father. I felt that it was of crucial importance that she would for once experience that someone was willing and capable to meet her needs.

In later stages of the therapy Clarissa and I often reminisced about those three months in which death had accompanied every step of hers, and many of mine (I woke up quite often in the middle of the night asking myself whether she was alive). She often said: "Only when you went out of your routine of seeing me twice a week for forty-five minutes did you and the therapy begin to be real for me." The other thing she said was: "There were times in which your hope was the only thing which kept me alive."

I must emphasize that I do not claim that the way I worked with Clarissa was the best or the only possible course of action. During the period of her suicide attempts I did not feel in control of things, and I do not know whether a different strategy would have been more helpful. The reaction of colleagues to this account varied widely. Some thought that I should have adhered to a more orthodox approach, that because I went out of my way to help Clarissa, she became more frightened. Others told me that they had had similar experiences. They corroborated that such periods of holding a patient through extreme crises are extremely stressful. They also shared my own feeling that I may not be capable of doing anything like this again. There are things you do only once.

I have chosen to tell the story of my work with Clarissa with all its unorthodox deviations from standard technique, because I think that it is important for such cases to appear in print. All too often published case histories make it seem as if all good therapeutic work is conducted in an atmosphere of professional calm. Even the descriptions of difficult periods in therapy often sound as if the clinician knew that everything would turn out well.

The predominance of such accounts creates a therapeutic underground. Practitioners feel ashamed of the ways in which
they lose control, and think that this is their own personal problem. By and large I do believe that stamina and calmness are laudable characteristics for a therapist. Cases like Clarissa are rare, and this therapy is not representative of my usual clinical style. Nevertheless this story reflects something about the unruliness of life and therapeutic work, and if it helps some colleagues through similar dire straits, it has been worth telling.

The ontological protest of subjectivity and the desire for self creation sometimes create insuperable difficulties for the therapist. When an individual is simply not willing to accept certain limitations of her life, no therapeutic technique may be capable of softening the pain and rage torturing the patient’s soul. Loewald (1979) has described the plight of those who are intransigent in their demand for radical solutions to the basic dilemmas of life succinctly:

They often give one the feeling that they are struggling with basic, primary dilemmas of human life in forms and contents that seem less diluted and tempered, less qualified and overshadowed by the ordinary, familiar vicissitudes of life, than is generally true of neurotic patients. . . . They seem unable or unwilling to let go of it, to be less single-minded and turn to matters less intractable, or to come to terms with it step by step, by allowing the unfolding of more complex developments and temporary solutions, with detours, failures, accommodations, and renunciations along the way (pp. 399-400).

Clarissa’s high sensitivity to humiliation had developed because she had come to experience dependence as a source of cruel abuse. She could therefore not accept that our dependence on others makes us vulnerable, and it became imperative for her to know that she could escape neediness and dependency. Death was the only way out she could envisage in her state of despair. As long as she felt that her own instinct for survival locked her into an existence she considered to be unbearably humiliating, she could not rest. She could not experience a life without a sense of authorship as worth living, and she had to know that she could choose whether to live or to die.

I suspect that in the end no therapeutic attitude, existentialist, psychoanalytic or other, is capable of successfully meeting all patients’ needs. Clarissa’s treatment, even though ultimately helpful, constitutes a powerful reminder of the limitations of therapeutic influence. I have no illusion about having saved her life. Her two suicide attempts were serious, and her survival was primarily due to lucky coincidences, like the good functioning of an electric fuse, rather than to my therapeutic wisdom or acuity.

The goal of these remarks is certainly not to foster therapeutic pessimism. By and large my experience is that the needs of many patients can be met to a considerable extent. I think, though, that quite often it is important to accept our patients’ fight with life as a genuine, existential choice rather than trying to interpret it reductively. They often rebel against the deep structure of human life, and no morality of maturity can soften their painful plight. If anything, empathic acceptance of their rebellion may help them to find an authentic way to accept that we are not self created, and that we must live with many more imperfections than we would like.
CLARISSA AND THE LIMITS OF SELF-CREATION

Clarissa exemplifies the dynamic of the ontological protest of subjectivity in many of its variations: During her childhood she came to disidentify with her actual life completely. What kept her going was the image of a life in which she would not anymore have to depend on anybody, and her early adulthood was an extended attempt to create herself in this image. In this way she gradually built a sense of authorship, but the price she paid for this strategy was heavy, because it left her very lonely. Before she sought therapy no one really knew who she was and what she felt. Most of her biography had become nothing but an impediment for her. She experienced her whole past as nothing but one big piece of shame, humiliation, and suffering. Not unlike the hero of 9½ Weeks (Lyne, 1986), whom I will discuss later in this chapter, she felt that she had to create herself from scratch, and to disavow any connection to her own past and to form an identity she could feel proud of. As a result she had come to function like an automaton. For most of her life emotions had been unbearable, she had settled for false-self functioning, and did not feel really alive. Her need for total control made her even experience her own desire to live as fateful.
What leads certain people to adopt the desire for self-creation as their central existential strategy? Why do people like Tamara and Clarissa choose a relentless fight rather than a peaceful mode of life? This is certainly not the only way of dealing with a painful childhood. Clarissa's brother, for example, dealt with the same home by becoming manipulative and cynical. He had learned that the world was a madhouse in which one must grab what one can get. Clarissa herself never accepted the reality of her early upbringing. She was endowed with a need for fairness and self-respect which prevented her from adapting to a reality which she found unbearable. She had to clean herself thoroughly of the ugly, desperate atmosphere of her home, and wanted a "clean slate," a fresh start. I experienced Clarissa as a person for whom self-respect was of utmost importance. She was mortified by depending on favors that could either be granted or withheld, because her life had taught her that those willing to abuse power would invariably humiliate her.

Individuals who deal with pain by trying to recreate themselves share several defining character traits. They are highly sensitive to humiliation and to infringement of their autonomy. They combine strong individualism and emotional vulnerability. They are less capable than others of accepting that life sometimes requires compromise for the sake of relationships and belonging to groups. Their tenaciousness does not allow them to give up on any of their central desires without feeling that they have been obliterated as individuals.

Clarissa's story shows how vulnerable the newly created self can be. The demons of the past which she tried to shut off loomed in her psyche, waiting to take over. To the extent that self-creation involves denial rather than transformation of one's biography, the danger of being flooded with the repressed is imminent. The past which has been left behind often governs lives seemingly remote from the pains of childhood the individual has tried to overcome.

CULTURE AND SELF-CREATION: AUTARKEIA AND THE CARTESIAN PROJECT

The project of self-creation is not confined to people who seek psychotherapeutic help. It is motivated by a human experience common to all of us. The search for authorship is, by the nature of things, bound to encounter limitations. The desire to recreate the self is a reaction to fateful interference with the need for authorship, most of all dependence on others. Given that this dependence is undeniable, it is remarkable how many cultural manifestations and established forms of life protest against it. The desire for self-creation, and the denial of essential limitations seems to be ineradicable. In this respect Winnicott's thesis that the psyche can never fully accept the limitations imposed by the external world seems empirically correct.

What follows is a kaleidoscope of cultural manifestations of the desire for self-creation. I juxtapose the sublime and the base, the spirit and the flesh, the intellectual and the physical expressions of this desire. The desire for authorship cannot accept the realistic limitations of human life completely, and culture is replete with expressions of the ontological protest against the human condition.

In the last fifty years or so it has become commonplace to see the epitome of happiness in relatedness. The most popular philosophy of life nowadays is the eschatology of intimacy: Intimacy is the true meaning of life. It is instructive to remember, though, that Western philosophy has a long tradition of seeing autarkia, maximal independence of the subject from all external factors, as the highest goal a human being can aspire to.

The tenth book of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, one of the most important works of ethics in the Western tradition, considers contemplation to be the highest goal of life. Human beings are closest to God when they are completely detached from any immediate concerns, independent of external surroundings, and engaged only in contemplation of the eternal hierarchy of ideal forms. This is the cherished state of autarkia, complete independence.

In the context of current culture, this idea may seem bizarre. Nevertheless it has carried great conviction, and exerted attraction for millennia. The individual's purest essence is actualized when petty concerns are overcome. Pure contemplation and detachment are the road to salvation. Most religions have a place for the saintly (wo-)man, the individual who is able to shed the limitations of this world and to achieve the purest
state of mind humans are capable of. This was the ideal of spirituality, even though it was never considered to be achievable for the masses. The rejection of the world, the striving for an otherworldly existence on earth is a radical form of the ontological protest of subjectivity. Its historical staying power shows the extent to which subjectivity can experience the limitations of earthly life as alien to its innermost being.

Descartes' philosophy is probably the most lucid philosophical expression of the desire for self-creation. His program is to achieve a state in which the self is cleansed of the impact of the body, the past, and the external world. The mind must become completely transparent to itself, the individual must own himself completely.

His *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) begins with the author's discovery that many of the opinions and theories he has been taught are false. He wonders whether there is a way to build his knowledge on totally secure ground, and concludes that his criterion for the acceptance of any belief will be that it withstands the most radical doubt. In a famed sequence of arguments Descartes rejects first the evidence of the senses as unreliable (because there is no way to ascertain that you're not dreaming). He radicalizes his doubt because not even mathematical reasoning is foolproof. It might be that I am systematically deluded in each of the steps of my reasoning.

His conclusion is that there is only one truth which withstands even the most radical doubt: *Cogito ergo sum.* Even if there were an evil spirit deluding me in every respect, it is not possible for me not to exist, given that I think. In the *cogito*, the state in which nothing but my own existence is certain, the individual has finally freed himself from all external dependence. Nothing except my thought counts. Nobody and nothing external to myself has any influence on what I think, and I will build my view of the world on nothing but what seems irrefutably true to me.

The fact that I have been born may be an illusion. I may not have any parents, there might, in fact, not be any external world. Even if, through sheer reasoning, I come to the conclusion that there is an external world, it will not be a world forced upon me. Instead it will be my world because I will understand it completely. It will be totally lucid, nothing will be opaque. My relationship to this world will be different, because I know that I once destroyed it completely, and that I reconstructed it according to my own free will.

From there Descartes proceeds in a sequence of arguments to reconstruct the world on the foundation of the *cogito* by trying to prove the existence of God from the very fact that my mind contains the concept of God. Since a finite mind is incapable of creating the concept of an infinite being, such an infinite being must exist. And since God is all good and all powerful, it cannot be that he deludes my senses systematically. Ergo the external world exists.

Descartes' reasoning has been under attack for three and a half centuries. It has been shown that the very idea of the radical doubt is self-defeating. It has been argued that the idea of reconstructing knowledge on the foundation of methodological solipsism severely misrepresents the actual structure of knowledge (Williams, 1978). And of course his arguments leading from the *cogito* back to the external world have been shown time and again not to hold water.

Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and the whole twentieth century philosophical tradition which is based on them have turned Descartes into the bad guy responsible for all the ills of modern philosophy and half the illnesses of modern culture: the mind–body split, the divorce of nature and culture, the soullessness of modern science, a wrong-headed epistemological investigation of more than three centuries, and a misleading philosophical anthropology (Heidegger, 1927). All of these criticisms are largely valid. The Cartesian project is impossible: neither can human beings become fully transparent to themselves, nor is it possible to build science on absolutely certain foundations. Descartes' project of cleansing his subjectivity from any external influence has failed as an epistemological device (Putnam, 1981).

After all this is said the question arises why the Cartesian project has exerted such a tremendous hold over the philosophical imagination well into the twentieth century. The mainstream of epistemological and metaphysical reasoning of three centuries remained deeply Cartesian. It is a fascinating
experience to teach Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*. There may be no other text in the history of philosophy that captures the minds of beginning students as easily as the first two meditations which delineate the method of doubt and the retreat into the *cogito*.

The essence of the Cartesian project is the liberation of the individual into total epistemic autonomy. It is an expression of the protest of human subjectivity against having been formed by factors outside itself. Descartes wants to own his mind fully. He strives for a subjectivity not conditioned by the particular family he was born into, the culture which has formed his thought, and historical circumstance which determines his fate. He wants a punctual subjectivity devoid of history, content, belief, and habit. The individual must be the ultimate arbiter of what is reasonable and true. The mind's autonomy must be safeguarded by exclusive reliance on incontrovertible evidence. Cultural influence and social pressure must be neutralized by the method of doubt.

Descartes' philosophy is the radicalization of the ideal of autonomous individuality which took shape during the Italian Renaissance. The self-created individual proudly stands up against any tradition and doctrine and questions it with his power of judgment. Descartes pushed this ideal to its utmost consequence. His method was to guarantee that the subject did not take anything for granted. His picture of the mind implied that an individual could fully own himself. The *cogito* is translucent consciousness which does not contain anything the subject is not conscious of. Descartes fully acknowledged the existence of the passions of the soul (1649), but he hoped to show that they can be controlled.

In our post-Freudian age this idea may sound hopelessly illusory. Psychoanalysis has shown the extent to which the past permeates the mind. The unconscious is like a geological structure that retains sediments of every developmental phase. Structuralism has shown that the individual mind is shaped by linguistic structures reflecting cultural experience. Sociology and social psychology show how every detail of our thought and feeling is conditioned by forces external to the individual. The philosophical failure of the Cartesian project shows that we can never fully own ourselves: neither are we translucent consciousnesses, nor can we recreate our minds from scratch by erasing every trace of the past.

The value of Descartes' project does not reside in its actual feasibility, but in the radicalization of an idea constitutive of modernity. The individual has the right to independent thought vis-à-vis every tradition. No group can legitimately demand unquestioned adherence to its beliefs and values, and deny freedom of mind. Descartes pushes the desire for autonomy to an extreme bordering on madness. To be truly free I must be willing to entertain the thought that nothing except myself exists. Thus I can truly come to own my mind. Paradoxically this madness is motivated by the wish for true sanity. The mind rebels against being conditioned before it can differentiate between right and wrong, reasonable and irrational, and it insists on the right to its innermost core: thought.

**9 1/2 WEEKS, SEXUAL FANTASY AND SELF CREATION**

*Nine and a Half Weeks* with Mickey Rourke (John) and Kim Basinger (Elizabeth) shows an interesting form of the project of self-creation. A mysterious man, John, enters Elizabeth's life through a chance encounter. Their intense erotic relationship is based on games, impersonations, and the enactment of scripts which are not linked to their actual identities. John portrays himself as a man without a past. Elizabeth just knows that he is a stockbroker, that he lives in a highly stylish loft, that he is extremely good looking, and endowed with radiant masculinity.

Toward the end of the movie, Elizabeth tries to penetrate and understand John's personality, and she encounters violent opposition. Only when Elizabeth decides to leave John, does he make a last, pathetic attempt to tell her about the human reality behind the fascinating façade. He is the son of simple parents whom he now supports, he has brothers and sisters, etc. But it is too little and too late, and Elizabeth leaves.
The message of 9 1/2 Weeks is, in the end, human and venerable: Running away from one's history and from the complexities of human reality inexorably generates a dehumanized universe without stable human relationships. The power of 9 1/2 Weeks does not of course reside in this true, albeit somewhat banal message, but in its depiction of the erotic power of scripts reflecting the desire of self-creation. In enacting an erotic relationship devoid of history and human feeling, the two protagonists play at overcoming limitations imposed by birth, social class, and fatedness itself.

John hides his humble beginnings behind the high-tech design of his loft, the large cupboard with meticulously pressed designer suits, and the huge office from which he conducts his brokerage business. He is fascinating because he seems to be capable of being who he wants to be, and he promises Elizabeth that she can do the same. He can even help her to transcend the boundaries of gender. When she wants to know what it is like to be "one of the guys," he organizes an outing in which she is dressed up as a man.

The motif of total control also enters their love making: Elizabeth is blindfolded, and John comes up with ever new surprises, sensations, and games which she had never even dreamed of. Throughout the nine and a half weeks they spend together fantasies are turned into realities. Elizabeth, initially portrayed as sexually inhibited, becomes capable of a rousing strip tease, she can do anything she desires.

The break occurs when John pushes his desire to mold Elizabeth too far. He wants her to enact humiliating scenes: He wants her to crawl on all fours and to pick up one hundred dollar bills he has dropped on the floor. He tries to be the man of his own dreams: a man whose power can get him anything he could possibly want, who will never feel unfulfilled desire again. This fantasy receives its ultimate expression in the movie's final scene: Elizabeth has told John that she is leaving, and that the relationship is over. After she is gone John stands in his apartment and mutters to himself, "Come back Elizabeth, I am counting to fifty, and then you'll be back." He counts, convinced that she will return, that she cannot evade the sheer power of his will.

Nine and a Half Weeks is about the power of the fantasy of self-creation. It was made in 1986, during the heyday of the Reagan era, when thousands of young people were catapulted by Wall Street into being millionaires at age 25. New York in those days seemed to prove that the self can be recreated at will, that there are no limitations as to who one can be.

Nine and a Half Weeks is also about the role of fantasy in erotic life. Psychoanalysis—except for Lacan—has maintained that a fully "healthy" and "mature" erotic life is based on intimacy between two partners. If that were true it would mean that the majority of the population is erotically impaired. Empirical studies (Hite, 1989) indicate that a very high percentage of women and men fantasize during intercourse with their partners. This seems to corroborate Lacan's thesis that 'il n'y a pas de relations sexuelles," that sexual intercourse is always between two subjects fantasizing each other.

Sexual fantasy seems to be mostly about power. This corroborates Robert Stoller's (1985) intriguing thesis that all sexual excitement is generated by the desire to harm one's sexual partner. He believes that sexual fantasy is an attempt to deal with infantile pain, humiliation, intrusion, trauma and frustration. This idea had originated in his study of perversions, but as time went by, Stoller came to think that the continuum between the dynamics of perversion and "normal" sexuality made any cut-off point problematic.

It might well be that the desire for authorship is of more crucial importance in sex than the theories which see sex as being about mutual pleasuring are willing to recognize. The demonic force of sex is not rooted in the search for pleasure, but in the passion engendered by issues of life and death, as Joyce McDougall (1995) has shown. In our sex lives we enact the drama of authorship and fatedness, the desire for a life fully lived and the attempt to deal with the unbearability of fate. Perversions are simply a more dramatic form of this fight, because some individuals experience a larger chunk of reality as fateful, and need to construct a more intricate script to maintain their sense of authorship.
BODY BUILDING

One of the most tangible and popular expressions of the desire for self-creation in Western culture nowadays is bodybuilding in its various forms. Its professionals, who pile enormous muscle masses onto their bodies, are the tip of a pyramid which has a wide base (Fussell, 1991). Daily, throughout the postindustrial world millions of people sweat, moan, and fight with free weights and weight machines and go through arduous routines of aerobic exercise.

In professional bodybuilding the body is turned into a sculpture. The natural body is just the material for the ideal shape one always wanted to have. One must watch the spectacle of two men helping each other in free-weight exercise to understand the secret behind the willingness to stand the pain involved in bodybuilding. One of them is coming toward the eighth or ninth repetition in a biceps exercise, his body gleaming with sweat, the veins of his forearm on the verge of explosion, face contorted with pain. His partner screams at him “Big arms, you can do it, BIG ARMS!” The image of the body which will be formed according to his desire motivates the weight lifter to squeeze another two arm curls from his aching biceps.

The physiological explanations of the addiction to bodybuilding, the endorphin highs generated by going beyond the threshold of pain, are a very partial reason for the fascination of bodybuilding. It is based on the promise that such limitations can be overcome, that we can create ourselves in the image of our own desire. The photographs of accomplished bodybuilders placed on the walls of many gyms (between the mirrors, of course) remind us that some have actually done it, that the body is indeed a potential sculpture.

Discarding the bodybuilding culture as an expression of infantile narcissism and an excessive need for mirroring misses the existential depth of the desire for self-creation. The desire of the bodybuilder bears a family resemblance to the Cartesian desire for mental self-creation and the artist’s attempt to create a persona which will become her or his personal identity. In bodybuilding this desire finds a less sublimated form, but its motivation is the same. It is an attempt to transcend limitations through self creation, even at the price of the risk involved in using steroids. The body builder exemplifies the principle that it is better to pay a high price for a sense of authorship than to accept the limitations of fate.

THE BATTLE FOR LOVE

One of the most commonly encountered dynamics of love life is a version of Groucho Marx’s saying, “I don’t want to be a member of a club which wants me as a member.” Individuals feel that they can only truly fall in love with a certain type of the other (or the same) sex, and most regularly these love objects do not return their love. They often know subliminally that their criterion of choice is that they will be rejected. My hypothesis is that this pattern is often the expression of the individual’s battle for authorship. This seems on the face of it strange. A priori any field would be more appropriate for this battle than love: athletics, business, one’s career are all much better suited to the development of authorship.

One of the reasons that love is the central battleground for authorship is simply that our genes push us in this direction. The sense of authorship hinges on the fulfillment of one’s desires as females or males. The ambition of males to conquer females and to maintain a territory of their own may be crucial to their sense of aliveness. The desire of females for powerful males who will father and protect their offspring might be one of the most important motivational structures of female psychology (Wright, 1994). The battle for love may be no less than the attempt to maintain a sense of being alive as a male or female.

Cultural images of accomplished selfhood are grafted on the bedrock of biologically entrenched motivations. Many women come to see the love of men as the ultimate goal, and images of accomplished femininity begin to haunt their imaginations. The same, of course, holds true for men: Being a strong, attractive male is a motivation that becomes independent of its genetic survival value. The failure to realize one’s
The second reason is more subtle, and possibly more radical. Hegel showed that love is a form of recognition, and Lacan developed this idea further. We become self-reflective individuals by being part of an intersubjective field. Authorship, the sense of living a life worth living, depends largely on being recognized as valuable by others, and love is one of the most important forms of recognition. Those addicted to the conquest of love try to heal wounds of earlier humiliations. They try to undo the unbearable scenario in which they have been denied recognition by conquering the love of those who are initially disinterested in them.

This is why the addict to the conquest of love is hurt more by indifference than by the experience of being taken on as a worthy adversary in the war of the sexes. Indifference means that his or her desire is not even being taken as something worth fighting; he or she is not a worthy adversary. If the object of desire enters a power struggle, the subject feels recognized.

The third reason is that the fated individual often cannot accept his limitations, but sees no realistic fashion of transcending them. We will see this in the case of Tom who wanted desperately to be the shining male of his dreams, but knew deep down that there was no way he could become what he wanted to be. For him gaining the love of the most attractive girl at the newspaper became the magic transformation which would have proven that he was not subject to the limitations he hated. Gaining love which was first denied becomes the symbolic triumph of authorship over fate. It is as if the individual said, "I cannot become who I want to be, but I will gain the love of the woman/man who could only fall in love with whom I want to be, but not with my hated actual self."

The battle for love is complex because the other's freedom is involved. For the addict of conquest love is a danger which has to be tackled in the same manner as Reinhold Messner, the greatest mountain climber of our times, attacks the Eiger-Nordwand or the Nanga Parbat, on his own. Conquest becomes the proof that the other's freedom can be overcome. The uncontrollability of love, its very unsuiteness for battle makes it into the prime site for the quest for authorship: Love and recognition can only be bestowed out of freedom. Love is the ultimate danger, because by loving the subject renounces the control so necessary to his or her sense of authorship. To love is to put one's well-being at the mercy of the other's freedom. As Sarastro tells Pamina: "Zur Liebe kann ich dich nicht zwingen, doch geb ich dir die Freiheit nicht" (I cannot force you to love, but I will not give you freedom). Love is, in a sense, also the ultimate prize: It is the one place where a tiny piece of the universe, the beloved, reacts to us out of its own free will. Paradoxically the sense of authorship depends to a high degree on love, something that cannot be forced—and hence the sense of authorship is always precarious.

THE ONTOLOGICAL PROTEST AND GENDER

Simone de Beauvoir tells us that she started working on *The Second Sex* after she had once wanted to explain herself to herself. The first sentence which came to her mind was "I am a Woman" (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 3). This insight struck her: She became aware of the overwhelming significance gender has in our lives. De Beauvoir's life work was to search for new ways of being a woman. De Beauvoir and her followers ask how women can take the freedom of creating themselves. They protest against the idea that there is a natural order into which women must fit if they want to be considered healthy.

One of the most basic givens of human existence is that every individual has biological gender. Every known society is organized around this datum. Men father children, women bear them, and civilization must impose some structure onto these biological links. The last decades have witnessed the flourishing of two movements, feminism and gay liberation, which refuse to accept anatomy as destiny. Feminism rebelled against images of womanhood taken to reflect an eternal natural order. Gay liberation refused the very idea that gender entails normative consequences about sexual preference.
The success of the gay liberation movement in forcing the psychiatric establishment to remove homosexuality from the list of psychopathologies is of great significance: It was a first indication of the emancipation of the human mind from the idea that culture must limn the structure of nature. We have the freedom to use nature as the material onto which the works of art of culture and individuality can be grafted.

Psychoanalysis is undergoing a transformation in its relation to what is generally called perversion. Robert Stoller has been the most tireless investigator of sexual perversion in the last decades, and it is fascinating to watch the development of his writings. Stoller's explanation of perversion has always been that it is an attempt to master early trauma, pain and humiliation. His detailed analysis of sexual practices and fantasy scripts shows how they are carefully crafted attempts to gain authorship over what was unbearably fateful in the past, mostly the distant past of childhood. Stoller is remarkable for his sustained attempts to progressively open his perspective (Stoller, 1991a,b) and to clean it from the preconceptions of normality and pathology. A fruitful investigation of the perversions or neosexualities will have to refrain from the implicit moralism which has informed much psychoanalytic writings on the topic, as Nancy Chodorow (1994) has shown in detail.

"DON GIOVANNI, A CENAR TECO!"

Don Juan is a much maligned figure in psychoanalysis: He is a latent homosexual, involved in manic denial of his own castration anxiety, trying to maintain an unstable narcissistic homeostasis by obsessively pumping up his self-esteem through new conquests.

I would like to have a different look at this figure, through Mozart's Don Giovanni, the greatest opera ever written. Kierkegaard (1843) noted long ago that Mozart's sympathies are clearly with Don Giovanni and Leporello, not with the victims of their ploys. Don Ottavio, Donna Anna's fiancé, sings some sweet tenor arias, but he is portrayed as a somewhat pathetic figure whose devotion to Donna Anna turns him into a wimp. His moods depend on hers "Dalla sua pace la mia depends," he hardly has any life of his own, he is a servant to her slightest whims. In his second major aria ("Il mio tesoro") in which he heroically announces that he will avenge Donna Anna, he emanates self-righteous sweetness rather than manly heroism.

Donna Anna's arias of outrage are somewhat shrill. Mozart portrays her as deeply perturbed by what she has felt in her brief encounter with Don Giovanni. She has suddenly encountered true passion, the thrust of a man who challenges her sensuality rather than being at her feet. At the end of the opera she tells Don Ottavio that he'll have to wait for another year; it is as if Da Ponte and Mozart want to insinuate that she does not really desire Don Ottavio, now that she has experienced a different type of desire. It will take her a year to acquiesce to the nicely ordered existence Don Ottavio offers her and to forget the depth of excitement she has come to know through Don Giovanni.

Don Giovanni himself is portrayed in an ambivalent manner. At times he is a fairly pathetic womanizer who does not shun any means for the sake of a further conquest. He loses in stature by the nature of his ploys. He does not invite women to join him in a quest for freedom and sensuality. Instead he promises them marriage, conventional happiness ("la ci darem' la mano"), and turns himself into a cheap liar. He gets his due for it: In the course of the opera none of his seductive ploys work, and his failures give him a slightly ridiculous and comic angle. This is why Leporello's catalog of Don Giovanni's conquests does not command respect, but at best amusement at his master's proficiency at the game of seduction.

If Don Giovanni can command respect it is by his defiance, not by his talent as a seducer. He acquires greatness in the final scene. He has Leporello invite the statue on the grave of the Commendatore (Dona Anna's father whom he has killed at the beginning of the opera) for dinner. When the statue bursts through the wall challenging Don Giovanni: "You invited me for dinner, and I have come," Leporello goes into a frenzy of fear, but Don Giovanni stays cool, and invites the statue in. When the statue says: "Da mi la mano," Don Giovanni feels the
stony grip, and he knows his end has come. The statue shouts "Repenti ti!" (repenti), to which Don Giovanni replies, "No!" disregarding Leporello's pragmatic warnings.

Don Giovanni refuses to disavow his beliefs in the face of death, and dancing devils pull him down to hell. In this scene Don Giovanni grows from a womanizer, who at times lacks grace and courage, to a figure of metaphysical grandeur: He is willing to pay the ultimate price for his belief, "viva la liberta." His life is an assertion of the right of the individual to total self-determination. His belief becomes credible when in the last scene he refuses to be governed even by his natural fear. He defies the rules and regulations not just of society but of nature.

This is why psychoanalyzing Don Giovanni's mode of life in terms of repressed homosexuality or castration anxiety misses a crucial point: Don Giovanni deals with an ontological problem; he simply will not accept the limits imposed on him by nature and society. It could be pointed out, correctly, that this interpretation of Don Giovanni is not sufficient. Every human being who defies death and explores the limits of his possibilities is engaged in the struggle with our natural origin.

Don Giovanni's version of this struggle consists in seducing women. For a heterosexual man women have the twin characteristics of being the embodiment of his own origin and of being the object of sexual desire. This twofold aspect of the male representation of femininity gives Don Giovanni's struggle its deeper meaning. By seducing women he tries to disprove the power of the nature which brought him into being (Paglia, 1990).

This brings us to Don Giovanni's central limitation. He turns women into the embodiment of the natural order against which he protests. He lives according to the principle put simply by Jorge Amado: "It is not possible to fuck all the women of the world, but you must try." Don Giovanni fails to recognize that women are no more pure nature than he is, that they are subjects and not objects. The pain he inflicts turns him into a rogue rather than a knight fighting a metaphysical battle.

In this he is similar to his more demonic counterpart, the Marquis de Sade, who with endless rage tries to mold nature anew by inflicting terrible sufferings on his victims. Putting aside moral outrage and the difficulty of stomaching his more extreme descriptions, it is important to see where the Marquis fails. His goal is to be a true libertin, but he is nothing but a butcher trying to be a sculptor, and he is not even a good writer (Khan, 1979). His endless attempts to subjugate nature by reshaping it create no more than carnage. He neither overcomes nature nor does he reshape it. He just mutilates.

Both Don Giovanni and the Marquis de Sade fail because they do not see that the uncompromising assertion of the right to individuality entails respect for the individuality of others. They commit the same fallacy as the master in Hegel's dialectic of master and slave: The master tries to assert his individuality by denying death and by turning the other into a slave. His ultimate goal is recognition. The intrinsic weakness and inner contradiction of the master's position is that only recognition by a free agent would fulfill his desire. Hence his attempt to gain recognition by someone whom he enslaves creates the paradox that he both accepts and denies the other's freedom without which recognition has no value.

PICASSO, CREATOR WITHOUT LIMITS

Pablo Picasso has become the symbol of artistic creativity and creative selfhood of the twentieth century. In the late eighties the myth of Picasso was reassessed by Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington's biography (1988). Her book focuses on Picasso's relationship with women. It is not tabloid in nature, it does not seek simple sensationalism, but adds an important element of depth to our understanding of the motivations behind Picasso's achievement. She draws the portrait of a fairly appalling man who enjoyed his domination of women for its own sake. He would engineer situations in which several of the women he was simultaneously involved with would inevitably meet, and he greatly enjoyed the ensuing scandals and scenes between them.

The question is whether we must split Picasso's biography into two stories: the man who was the genius of twentieth century art, and the man who had a perverse pleasure in destroying
women. Are these two aspects united in the same individual by chance, or is there some deeper connection between the two Picassos?

Huffington's attempt to link the two is not sufficiently developed—she dwells more on Picasso the destroyer than on Picasso the creator—but her general argument is interesting. Picasso's first great stylistic invention was analytical Cubism. The basic idea behind it was to dissect objects into planes and volumes, which then could be put back together regardless of the laws of perspective. It would be possible to see the object both from the front and from the side without changing point of view. In a sense analytical Cubism tries to appropriate the object of sight much more radically than any previous figurative approach. It tries to overcome the limitation of a particular point of view, and hence of a particular appearance of the object, and to paint its essence. The famous Picasso style which was essentially codified at the time of Guernica in 1937 relies radically on the combination of figuration and dissociation: The unmistakable Picasso woman is drawn from several perspectives at once and put together by Picasso according to his own design.

Picasso is remarkably consistent in making no attempt whatsoever to ideologize his art: He paints, paints, and paints. He takes the body apart—rips it apart, one is sometimes tempted to say—and remolds it, destroying and creating in the very same act. He never goes beyond nature: neither is there any transcendental intimation in his work, nor did he ever move toward abstraction. His major themes are deeply, strongly, and essentially sexual: the painter and his model (and it is necessary for the painter to be male and the model to be female), portraits of women, some mythological themes, particularly the minotaur, and of course bullfighting. His women are quintessentially female; his men are quintessentially males in an unabashedly nonegalitarian manner; the painter dominates his model; the male kisser intrudes deeply into his female counterpart.

Picasso's work reflects his consciousness of his place in the history of art. He became a myth in his own lifetime, and he was as instrumental in creating the myth as he was in creating his paintings. The image of Picasso, the Godlike creator working from inexhaustible supplies of creative energies, was shaped of the material of the man who had been born Pablo Diego Jose Francisco de Paula Juan Nepomuceno Maria de los Remeis Cipriano Sanissima Trinidad Ruiz y Picasso.

Picasso may have come as close as anyone ever has to modeling himself according to his own desire. As opposed to most artists who created themselves in their art, but lived fairly secluded lives, Picasso built his own world. Like a tyrant statesman he used his money to build little fiefdoms out of women, maids, the children he fathered and the castles he bought. Like a dictator he controlled the publicity to craft the image of Picasso the Godlike artist.

His fascination with the motif of the painter and his model reflected his infatuation with his own ability to create worlds both on canvas and in life. Only with his women did he project of creating himself and his environment not really succeed. For brief periods he turned some of them—particularly Marie-Thérèse Walther—into willing objects of endless sexual experimentation, but these projects always turned sour. Either they started to bore him, or the women could not or would not take the strain of his tyranny anymore. He was forced to go further, and to destroy them, as he did with Dora Maar. Only one of his long-term lovers, Françoise Gilot, managed to escape the Picasso household with her soul and her own creativity unharmed.

The magnetic attraction of his personality and his work and the horror at his inhumanity stem from the same source. Pablo Picasso was not willing to accept any limitation, social or natural. He turned women into the embodiment of the natural order he was not willing to accept. He tried to tear them apart and to recreate them. In his art he did so successfully. In his life he never quite accepted that he was not God. He could not quite see women as persons. He only saw them as the principle of the female in nature, a nature which he hated, because it condemned him to mortality, and limited the possibilities of self-creation.
CAMILLE PAGLIA: CELEBRATION OF THE DESIRE FOR SELF-CREATION

In 1990 Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae* was published, a 700-page Leviathan of scintillating, ruthless, disrespectful, courageous, iconoclastic writing. Paglia does not argue; she states. Academic carefulness, restraint and modesty are as foreign to her as acceptance of social norms. At the end of the twentieth century only a woman could have written a book like this. Only a woman could get a hearing for equating the Apollonian, culture, the desire for form with the masculine, and the Dionysian, nature, the chthonian merging with the formless, with the feminine. In many ways one of Paglia's most striking creations is the persona of Camille Paglia. In a time in which being politically correct is the hallmark of feminism, Paglia enjoys the outrageousness of her position to the establishment of political correctness.

None of Paglia's theses is new: The equation of form with the masculine and matter with the feminine is at least as old as Hellenistic philosophy; it found expression in the Talmudic literature and was used for millennia to justify a social system in which women were subjugated. The radical novelty of Paglia's approach is that it is the statement of a woman well versed in the feminist literature, totally conscious of the history of relations between the sexes, and not trying to defend the social subjugation of women by men.

Paglia claims that the bodily nature and essence of men (males) is what made them dominate human society, and to create the vast majority of great works in any field from architecture to warfare to music and literature. Male sexuality is essentially a fight against the forces of nature: Penile erection is defiance of gravity, standing out into space, a fight against formlessness, flaccidity, and rest. The male by his very nature must fight: He does not rest inside himself and must assert himself against the forces of nature in order to be who he is.

The transformation of the basic nature of male sexuality into the Apollonian will to form is what has created culture: Anything from machinery to art is an expression of the male desire to see and hence to control. Visual art for Paglia is the expression of the essence for art. Our desire is for icons, images which make the hidden visible, accessible to the phallic desire to see.

The essence of female sexuality is fusion with the forces of nature: to rest inside a body attuned to the rhythm of vast forces. For Paglia woman is the expression of the chthonian principle. Receptivity is her essence, and merging into nature her striving. She receives semen to grow it inside herself. Like the ebb and flow of the sea she is subject to forces beyond her control, a fact dramatized by the monthly process of menstruation, which reminds woman of the inexorable fate of being a part of nature.

Since woman rests inside herself, she is not driven to conquer, to create, to achieve, and to form. Hence the vast asymmetry between the achievements of men and women is unavoidable. Paglia obviously does not say this either to discourage women or to give herself a reason not to strive for achievement. She proudly announces that *Sexual Personae* is the biggest book ever written by a woman, and gladly takes on the whole establishment of current literary criticism by denouncing its heroes as cultural junk bond raiders selling crap.

When writing about *Muscle: Confessions of an Unlikely Bodybuilder* (in itself a fascinating document) she takes a most unpopular stand. Samuel Wilson Fussell, a Princeton bred WASP, describes the process in which his anxieties led him to embark on the career of a bodybuilder. He gives a fascinating picture of the world of steroids, the willingness to suffer thousands of hours of mind-deadening pumping of iron, the strenuous diet necessary to get rid of every gram of fat before competitions, and the minutes in which each competitor tries to show every bulge of his body.

Fussell's book ends on a note of regret, of coming home to the world of culture after having had a spell of addiction to the aberration of a crazy world of perverted drives. As Paglia points out, Fussell's voice is ultimately that of psychotherapeutic culture. Straining for the top is taken to be a function of exaggerated anxieties; the renunciation of this desire is understood as a return to health.
Paglia identifies with the heroism of the world of body-building: She sees it as an expression of the Apollonian impulse for self-formation, as the male desire not to accept the limitations of nature and to form it instead. Her disdain for Fussell's quitting after only taking second place in the two contests he goes for is hardly disguised. She would have respected him more if he had continued the arduous route toward taking the first prize.

This is an expression of a much wider tendency in Paglia's thinking. She relentlessly refuses to accept the highbrow distinction between "real" high culture and "low" popular culture. She is as willing to write an ode to Rita Hayworth or to the shining masculinity of Marlon Brando as an analysis of Spenser's *Fairy Queene* or Emily Dickinson's poetry. For her Milton's poetry is an expression of the same will to form which guides the bodybuilder's hours of pumping his biceps into the right size and shape. Liz Taylor's sultry look, which melts every man's heart, is as much of an object of admiration as Brahms' fourth symphony. She says unabashedly that America's greatest contribution to world culture is Hollywood. One of Paglia's most impressive virtues is her success in moving away from the moralistic overtones of art critics who disdain Hollywood's mass production and decry the fact that "real" culture has no sufficient audience to be financially viable.

The fact is that Hollywood sells. Arnold Schwarzenegger is one of the greatest box-office magnets nowadays, a man who has spent a high percentage of his waking life pumping iron, and became Mr. Universe nine times before becoming a movie star. Paglia's argument is that Hollywood sells because it speaks directly to the archaic, pagan level of our psyche which ineradicably remains the prime motivator of human beings. She lashes out mercilessly against the "do-gooders" and "cry-babies" who think that the world should be different. She calls upon them to admire its beauties and participate in the feast of creating more icons and strive for higher achievements.

Paglia's *oeuvre* and personality are a celebration of the principle of self-creation. Her admiration for the Apollonian principle is expressed in her avowed affinity for the male gay world, which, in her view, is the epitome of the striving for self-formation. Most of all Paglia celebrates her own possibility to cross the boundaries of accepted social identities: She is both feminist and believer in biological inequality; committed intellectual and opponent of highbrow culture; pagan believer in the ineradicability of natural cruelty, and political liberal. Her work is an epiphany of the self's possibility to shape itself without denying the powers of nature.
PART II

THE PROTEST AGAINST THE MORAL ORDER
Raphael's presence in the consulting room was quizzical: He was serious and yet he somehow created a jocular atmosphere. This was a meeting between the guys, right? We knew what women were about (sigh).

Raphael was of South American origin, in his early sixties. He was powerfully built, slightly stooping, but more in the way of inquisitiveness than age. "You know, my wife gave me an ultimatum: either I go see a shrink, or she kicks me out of the house. And the children are on her side. I can't blame them. I admit; my behavior has been scandalous."

Raphael's story was seemingly simple: Months ago he had fallen in love with one of the graduate students in the department where he taught. "If only I could say I could be her father... I could be her grandfather, can you imagine?"

Raphael was extremely entertaining. His Hebrew was tainted with a slight South American accent, and sprinkled with juicy Galician Yiddish. He told his story in a tone of exasperation, but with a constant, subliminal indication that nothing was as serious as it looked.

Life's a joke, right? And we men are on the run from women forever, right? That's the way life is, and anyone who makes a
tragedy of it is simply a fool. So what if my wife threatens to kick me out of my own house? Okay, okay, so I come to see a shrink; no problem.

You know, I do believe in shrinks. I've read lots of books about this stuff. It's not my field, but I'm interested in it. I'm more from the natural sciences. (What do you do?) Ah, nothing serious. (It would take me some time to find out that he was highly respected in his field, ecology.) Ah, leave me alone. I don't do the high powered stuff; the big guys nowadays do molecular genetics. That's where the future is. But I am not from the future, you understand? I am from the past.

The mild amusement I had felt up to this moment disappeared instantly. Raphael's gaze, all twinkly, ironical, funny, had, for just a moment, given way to a gaze of infinite melancholy. It seemed as if he had looked back far away into a distant past, and that all he could see was sadness.

But this was but an instant. Raphael very quickly reverted to irony. Or was it irony?

As time went by I got more of the sense of facing an adolescent who feels locked in, chased, and tries to wriggle himself out of some accusation hanging over his head.

The story was roughly this: Raphael had been told months ago that he had lymphatic cancer which had already metastasized. The doctors had told him that their treatment might work, but that it would take about half a year to know whether he would live or die. Shortly after this announcement Raphael had fallen in love with Hannah, the graduate student. His infatuation was total: He stopped being cautious. Everybody in the department knew about the affair, and, he added cheekily, everybody was obviously laughing at the old moron who was making a fool of himself. Of course his wife had heard about this ("Everybody's been talking about it"), and was furious at him. Not the least because he was beginning to consider leaving the house and living with "that little slut" (as he called her himself).

So far Raphael looked like a textbook case of denial of illness and death. His life was in danger, but he wouldn't even think about death. His might die soon, but he was planning to go and live with a woman forty years younger than himself.

I was wondering whether the adolescent tone of voice, the cheekiness, the tone of male complicity he adopted toward me were all part of the same strategy of denial of illness and death. As if he was saying "Come on Doc, all this talk about death is stupid. Love and women, that's what matters. And my wife is just giving me hell. But we know what it's all about, eh?"

The first sessions were spent talking about his present life circumstances. In particular I was asking him about the precise implications of his medical condition, whether he knew what his chances of survival and recovery were. Not surprisingly he hardly had any information. He had not really asked any questions, and his perception of his state of health was as if through a thick fog. So I advised him to go and ask his doctor what was likely to happen with him. I assumed that dealing with his condition on a more realistic level would help him to come out of the state of denial with the underlying panic. The result would probably be that his present condition of manic denial and the adolescent regression with the unrealistic and irresponsible acting out would subside.

This was indeed more or less what happened: His doctor told him that chances of getting the cancer under control were fairly high. Within months they would see how he had reacted to the treatment, and then his survival chances could be estimated much better. Within weeks Raphael was talking about his plight in a more reasonable manner.

In a sense the change he underwent was painful to watch. The adolescent rogue gave way to a man in his sixties who was afraid to die. He was often covered with sweat during the session, his complexion was pale and strained.

He told his wife that his plans of moving out were stupid; he apologized for having behaved in such a humiliating way, and promised he would end his affair with Hannah in no time. Within two months it became clear that he was reacting very well to medical treatment, and that his chances of survival were very high.

Raphael felt that Hannah was the swan song of his life as a male. He had been a great womanizer in his day. He had loved many women, and many women had loved him. He still was a truly charming man. I had come to experience him as a
strange combination of a big soul endowed with an overflowing warmth, an intelligence which I would best characterize as musical—and something strangely evasive which characterized his whole being. My sense of facing a furtive adolescent persisted even after his manic denial and his panic had subsided.

He was the embodiment of the Latin macho: He knew how to woo a woman, and, more than anything, women probably felt that his charm hid a deep yearning for their love and affection. This, together with an imposing physique and an effusive, though not flaunted, masculinity had made him into a ladies’ man throughout his life. The motif of the swan song struck a deep chord in him. There had been moments of real passion with Hannah. His desperation together with his charm had at times swept her off her feet and she had gone along with his fantasy of the life they could have together.

"It was quite a dream. Quite a feat for a man at the end of his career, eh? Quite a feat for a man who might die soon . . . ," he added sadly. He decided to stop the affair with Hannah. It turned out that he felt deeply attached to his wife with whom he had had a turbulent but rich and satisfying marriage of thirty years. He did not want to continue hurting her, and informed her that the story with Hannah was over, which, practically speaking, was true. But he continued to be obsessed with Hannah. He dreamt about her. He fantasized about her. It drove him insane when he saw young students flirting with her.

My feeling was that at this point the difficulty of letting go of Hannah reflected something deeper in Raphael’s personality. Since the situation with his wife had stabilized and he was in less danger of ruining his marriage and his reputation in his department, I felt that we could enter a more leisurely pace of work.

The sessions were now held in a more associative frame of mind, and we began to gain a wider perspective on Raphael’s life. Hannah turned out to be the heir to a series of women he had been in love with throughout his life. They all had something in common; he described them as slender, girlish, lost creatures. They were delicate and fragile, and none of them had much of a grip on earthly reality. He experienced them as gazelles, always on the run, with a furtive look in their eyes, afraid of the world, seeking shelter and protection.

The image became progressively more lucid as he found out that Hannah was very different from the fantasy he had about who she was. "You know; she is not what I took her to be at all. She is much more of a calculating little bitch; knows quite well how to turn them on and then keep them by their balls. So how come I can’t get her out of my mind, God-dammit?"

For some time, his obsession with Hannah continued to be the focus of our work. One day he came to his session in a strangely agitated state. He had dreamt that he was in the village in South America where he had grown up on his father’s farm. He walked over the hills and suddenly saw the daughter of one of the neighbors, a girl of perhaps 8 years. He came closer and saw that she was crying and said to himself, "I must take her into my arms, I must comfort her."

He said:

That’s it. That’s the prototype of all the women I have loved. I really did know this girl more than fifty years ago. She was the neighbor’s daughter. One day her father died, and they were looking for my father to help. He wasn’t there, so I went there. I was maybe 9 or 10. She was there, crying. I didn’t know what to do; so I held her, I went for a walk with her. And we became friends. Well, if we hadn’t just been kids at the time I would say: We became lovers. We often huddled together, giving each other warmth and comfort. I don’t know what became of her. I wonder . . . where is she now? She was such a lost child.

In the next session Raphael was his old self. “Good job Carlo; classic, eh? Fixation to an old love; yeah.” Our work seemed to be going well. We seemed to be asking the right questions. Nevertheless I had mixed feelings about this therapy. I felt as if I did not really know Raphael—or, more precisely, that he wasn’t really there. It was as if he were hiding. There were fewer attempts to involve me in masculine complicity. It seemed to me that I had become an authority figure who had to be cheated.
I told him that, and inquired on why he continually felt that he had to hide. His answer was quick to come: “Yeah, you’re right; absolutely. I am always very evasive, I sure must feel attacked, right?”

I felt curiously uneasy about his quick assent to my intervention. After several sessions in which this continued I told him: “Raphael. Even when you agree that you’re evasive you continue to be haunted. I feel like a teacher disciplining a boy. You are like an eel, you slip away from me. We must find out why. You are like a fugitive on the run, and I feel as if I am just one more agent that tries to tie you down.” As he tried to wriggle his way out again, I stayed adamant. “Raphael, I am not helping you. Please, don’t concentrate on finding an answer to what I am saying. Just try to experience for a moment to what extent you are trying to run away.”

Raphael leaned back. His face became gray and tired. “Yes. A fugitive on the run.” I spoke to him in Yiddish. I said: I feel like the poritz (Yiddish term for gentile landowners) who is persecuting a poor Jew. And you, the Jew, feels that there is no way he can win. He can only fool the poritz into letting him go for one more time. Sometimes he must be servile, sometimes he must try to argue. But he knows he and the poritz will never be friends. The poritz will do to the Jew as he likes, anytime.

Raphael didn’t say much. But I felt that something was happening. Here we were, two Jews in Israel, neither of us familiar with the actual experience of persecution. Nothing in our concrete situation was reminiscent of the haunted Jews of Galicia. But something about my understanding that his experience was that of the haunted Jew who was humiliated, never safe, never at home, something in my speaking to him in Yiddish must have given him the feeling that maybe indeed I wasn’t the poritz who was trying to nail him down. From this session on I felt that we were actually working together. But the motif of being homeless and haunted was to prove the key to the understanding of Raphael’s life.

Raphael’s presence was different now. This was neither the charming womanizer, nor the furtive adolescent. His eyes were filled with tears; his gaze was directed far away, as if into the past. He exuded great sadness. He was not yearning for the past, but he seemed to experience pain about something which had happened sometime in his past. Was it just the memory of the neighbor’s daughter? Was it something about death?

In the following sessions Raphael’s past came to the surface. His parents immigrated to South America from Poland, shortly before World War I, where others from their village had settled as farmers. His father, he remembered, was perpetually under pressure. He never quite made it:

You know, Carlo, he wasn’t much good as a farmer. He was just a Jewish boy from the shtetl. He tried, he tried hard, but not much came out of it. He was angry; he was frustrated; he was ashamed; he was hopeless. He didn’t have much time for me. And certainly not much love. All I remember was his screaming “Raphael, have you fixed the fence?” “Raphael, have you collected the straw?” And then he would hit me.

Silence. I could detect that squirming, evasive adolescent quality in him again. He said:

My mother, my mother never felt that South America was home for her. I remember her sitting in the house, her feet in a pot of water, in pain, sighing “Ich hob motz, Gottenu, ich hob nisch ka koch.” [I am scared, God, I have no strength left.] Her eyes were full of panic. It was all too big, too difficult for her to take. She had no family of her own; she didn’t have the strength to raise four children; she did not feel that she was building a home. Deep inside she had given up. She wasn’t even there. She looked at the goyim around, and she didn’t understand what she was doing there.

Raphael looked very tired. I was beginning to enter the experiential world of a boy who felt he had no parents. Their souls had remained in Galicia, even though their bodies had traveled to South America. They owned the soil they cultivated, but they did not feel that they belonged there. They were not persecuted, but they felt devoid of protection. They had four
children, but they felt like children themselves, in need for guidance, support, and strength. Raphael went on:

I had a sister, she was less than a year older than myself. My father loved her. I don’t know actually. He . . . he probably loved her the wrong way. I’m not saying he did anything to her. But she was frightened of his approaches, of his caresses. She would come and huddle with me in my bed. We would hug and kiss, and for some hours the world felt safe. Her look was furtive, like that of a gazelle in flight. She had long red hair, very light hair which waved easily in the wind. She was the only living soul to whom I felt close . . .

Raphael stopped. He looked haggard, surprised and pensive. “The prototype of all my loves is not the neighbor’s daughter. It is my sister . . .”

Raphael’s memories did not indicate that the attachment to his sister was incestuous. The feel of his stories did not reveal anything of the sort either. Nonetheless, he felt that he had committed an unspeakable crime, that he had outlawed himself forever, that indeed he was a fugitive on the run, wherever he went, whatever he did. Memories about stealing sweets, pieces of wood began to emerge. “I was angry. Angry for not having any parents. Angry at my father for being angry with me all the time. I had to get love from somewhere! The neighbor’s daughter was my sister’s heir.”

Then came the surprise: “How could I have left her! I don’t know what my father did to her. I should have protected her. Leaving her was treason! Ah, what a human being I was. How could I have left her there! You see. She’s a nut now; a psychiatric case. Maybe if I had protected her, she would not have ended up this way. But I ran away.”

“What do you mean?” I asked and he replied. “I came here, to Israel. There was a Zionist organization trying to recruit young people to come to Israel. I had nothing to lose. My family wasn’t much of a family. I had never felt at home in the village—my parents hadn’t either. They described Israel as the place where you could feel at home as a Jew. So I came.”

So Raphael had come to Israel at the age of 14. He was put into a school, but soon the 1948 War of Independence broke out. Even though he was only 17, he was mobilized, like everybody else. He fought; he killed; he functioned. But he could not bear what he saw and what he had to do. “There was no choice. They were attacking from everywhere. But there are pictures in my mind which I can neither forget nor digest.”

Raphael was gifted. He went to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and later to the United States to get his Ph.D. in biology. He specialized in ecological systems and became an authority in his field. He got married. “My wife had this furtive look; she was in trouble when I met her. I raised her; I helped her—she helped me too.”

His academic success brought many visiting appointments and “At least one affair per appointment. I have women all over the globe. They loved me; I loved them.” But there was no peace to be found. Toward his wife he kept feeling like a criminal and a traitor. “But it was stronger than me. I had to leave again and again.” There were contracts with foreign governments who brought him in to analyze their ecoproblems. “She hates me for having left her alone so often. She says she raised the children on her own. She is right. I was a shnuck, I was a funigel [the Yiddish term for a philanderer]; and it continues to this day.”

Raphael began to be inundated with dreams. One of the central motifs of his dreams was his briefcase. “I love this briefcase. I got it from my oldest son. It goes with me wherever I am.” The other central motif was that he was being displaced.

I am in a big house, with a lot of rooms; not very beautiful, but functional. I meet my family there. I put my briefcase and my washing utensils in one of the rooms, and meet my family in the patio. Suddenly it turns out that all my personal belongings have disappeared. I look for them. I enter into the landlady’s neat and orderly room.

Then the movers who have removed my belongings are called and told to return my things. They are all there, but one of the sides of my briefcase is ripped open.

Raphael’s associations were:

The house is not like ours. We have a very warm and beautiful house. But the landlady reminds me of my wife. Sometimes
when she attacks me, I feel that she is ripping open my insides. I feel totally helpless when I am accused. And God, she certainly has reasons to accuse me.

I feel that my house isn’t really mine. I built it; some of it with my own hands. But it isn’t mine. I am like a guest who stays over. At any time I can be removed. And they can even take away my personal belongings; I was terribly hurt because they had damaged the briefcase, which I love deeply.

The briefcase, and sometimes a bigger suitcase which looked like it, accompanied him through the dreams. “I am a fugitive on the run; don’t forget,” he said. “The briefcase is all I can count on in life. . . .”

In other dreams he put his suitcase in a room, as if to establish residence. But he kept being afraid that the security men would take it away. Other dreams sent him back to the war of 1948. The motif was similar: He was on what was supposed to be his own soil. But there was always someone who came to drive him away. Or, he came to his office at the university, and found that it had been occupied by someone else, and there was no one who would help him.

During these months the therapeutic space turned into a dream space. Raphael would come to the sessions and start recounting his dreams, and within minutes the room would be engulfed by the dream’s atmosphere: the homelessness, the drivenness, the feeling of helplessness, and the inability to defend his right to stay.

I cannot say that we interpreted the dreams in the more standard way of the word. We lived them. The language we spoke was the dream language. Interpretations were unnecessary, because the meanings of the dreams were so lucid. The persecution, the guilt, the feeling that he was at best an overnight guest wherever he was—be it in his own house, in his own office, in his country—permeated every minute of the sessions.

Raphael’s evasiveness had disappeared. I was the anchor which allowed him to enter his dream space without losing touch with reality. From time to time we summarized briefly what seemed quite obvious to both of us: He had felt that he must have been a very bad child indeed if neither of his parents loved him. They gave him the feeling that there was no home to be had anywhere. He came to see more clearly how his sister and the neighbor’s daughter were his only source for warmth. It became clearer and clearer that his endless series of love affairs was an expression of his hauntedness. Only when a relationship was illegitimate could he feel that the center of his soul, the part of his self that felt irretrievably excommunicated, was involved. The women he courted were always lost souls. Their hauntedness made him feel that he had found sister souls; he could try to nurse his own pain, his feeling of homelessness, his desperate knowledge that he would never be at peace.

His affairs also perpetuated his status as an outlaw, and they added to his guilt. By sleeping with other men’s women, by cheating on his wife and neglecting her, he ensured that he remained a fugitive on the run. “At least I knew what I felt guilty about! I’m like Kafka’s Joseph K, who would feel a bit better if he just knew what he is accused of,” he would say bitterly. He felt that nothing would alleviate his basic existential guilt. He was guilty by his very existence, by being de trop, superfluous, an additional burden on parents who had hardly enough strength to stay alive themselves.

I felt great sadness in the sessions with Raphael. I was looking forward to them, even though in a sense I always felt that he was alone in the room. He was living in his dream space, reliving a past which had turned into a perpetual present. Even though I often felt that he hardly acknowledged my existence, I never felt abused, because the tragic dimension of his life was so tangible.

Then one day he sat down on his chair, looked at me and said: “Tonight I died.”

I am condemned to death. The sentence will be executed by an injection. The dream begins briefly before the execution. My wife, myself, and another woman, not quite defined, but dark—she will give me the injection—we sit in a waiting room. At the designated time we get up and walk silently through a long corridor, me between the two women. I call the strange woman “Mother” but I know that she is not my mother. We
turn from the corridor into an empty, gray room with an examination couch and a light above it. I lay down on the couch, and the lower half of my body is naked. Meanwhile the nurse [the Hebrew word is the same as that for “sister”] prepares the injection with the lethal liquid. There is a clear atmosphere of acceptance of the sentence—no argument, a feeling that the sentence is just. Both I and my wife accept it. My wife takes the situation heroically. I look at her, and see deep sadness in her eyes. Before I get the injection she tells me “This is so terrible for me!” I know I will get the injection in a minute, and then I cry my last sentence to her: “Get married and be happy!” and I wake up.

Raphael told me that he had experienced this dream as real as his waking life. What struck him most was his acceptance. He was not afraid, just tremendously sad. He did not want to die; but he felt that he could die; that he had ceased to be a fugitive on the run.

It is very difficult to describe the atmosphere in my office at that moment. There was a deep calm. It was as if through this dream, everything we had been talking about for one and a half years had been condensed into a single scene. His tremendous sense of existential guilt; his knowledge that there was no way in which he could defend himself against any accusation leveled against him. His rejection by his mother. His illness which continued to constitute a vague but constant threat to his life. And ultimately: mortality itself and the painful, but unquestioning acceptance of the finitude of life.

There was one, crucial redeeming feature: Throughout his marriage he had been very jealous of his wife. He always knew he loved her deeply, despite all his escapades, and he knew she knew it. In the dream his love for her came to its fullest expression: The last sentence he spoke in his life was that he wanted her to marry. He transcended his own possessiveness in his wish for her happiness.

After this dream the therapy rapidly came to its end. In one of the last sessions Raphael told me: “My whole life has been like a ride on a narrow, wild river full of rocks and rapids. Now I feel that I have arrived on a beautiful, calm lake. I can see the end of the journey, but I can sail calmly toward it.”
system. The clinician mostly sees patients who overtly stay inside the limits of the legally acceptable. Yet it often turns out that the most defining aspect of their self-experience is that of being deeply immoral or amoral. Frequently their questioning of the moral order takes the form of a cynical attitude toward moral obligation, the social order, and personal loyalty. Their identity is defined by their opposition to the moral and social order in which they live. The result is that they feel like haunted fugitives who have no legitimate place to stay anywhere.

Overt cynicism, rage, aggression, and amorality often cover a deep moral outrage against the moral order of society as experienced by the individual. Many patients rebel against a fate which has condemned them to feel bad, illegitimate, or otherwise deviant. Their overt cynicism is the expression of a moral stance they take: They question the validity of a moral order which has hurt them irremediably.

These patients have a problem with the therapeutic process: They want to feel better, but their identity has become so deeply tied to the attitude of protest, that relinquishing their rebellion is equivalent to losing their individuality. They feel that becoming "normal," "legitimate," is equivalent to giving up in the fight they have come to experience as constitutive of who they are.

As many authors (Frank, 1961; Szasz, 1965; Phillips, 1996) have argued, it is not easy for the practicing clinician to avoid taking the position of social authority by which society endows the psychotherapist. Kohut (1971) has shown long ago how deeply ingrained moral conceptions can be in psychoanalytic theory and practice. This is particularly true with respect to patients whose characters have a streak of amorality. If the clinician does not hear the patient's moral outrage against her or his fate of excommunication, he is likely to be experienced as a representative of the moral order that has caused the patient so much pain. The result can be that the patient will forever experience himself as branded, like Cain, to spend his life, east of Eden, excluded from the community of those who have a legitimate place on earth.

I will exemplify this constellation by two writers and one philosopher, who made the protest against being condemned to deviance and badness into a central theme of their work. Jean Genet cultivated his marginality, because he could not forgive society for having branded him as illegitimate. The central theme of Philip Roth's work from *Portnoy's Complaint* to *Sabbath's Theater* is the problem of Jewish men whose development toward Western, secular liberalism brings them into conflict with the traditions of their upbringing. Finally, an analysis of central themes in the life and work of Michel Foucault will show the extent to which he felt compelled to recreate his self from scratch, because the existing moral order had left him with an essential sense of deviance. In doing so Foucault attempted no less than the destruction of the very order that had condemned him to the identity of an outcast.

Focusing on the subjective experience of the moral order could be an important addition to the object relational aspects of the psyche that have been in focus for the last decades. The vocabulary I will use is inspired by existential-phenomenological analyses of the total experience of being in the world. This can serve as a complement to the focus on the social mechanisms which define personal identity introduced into psychoanalytic discourse by cultural criticism and feminism. I hope to show that the subjective experience of these forces, as reflected in the representation of the relation between the subject and the moral order, is an important determinant in intrapsychic and interpersonal processes that are of clinical and theoretical significance.

The concept of the moral order is not meant to denote an objective, social entity, but a structure in the individual's *Lebenswelt*, i.e., the experiential world within which a person lives. The rehumanization of the excommunicated individual is an experiential process in which a change in the *Lebenswelt* occurs. The experience of excommunication is that there is an impermeable boundary (Lewin, 1935) between the individual and what he or she experiences as the community of those connected by shared morality. Mutuality in the therapeutic relationship creates a bridgehead that allows the excommunicated individual to renegotiate his or her place vis-à-vis the moral community.
The last decade has witnessed a growing interest in the therapeutic importance of the patient’s experience of the analyst’s actual subjectivity. The emphasis on transference distortion has given way to concepts like Bollas’ (1989) dialectic of difference. Ferenczi’s (1989) experiments in mutual analysis are being reevaluated seriously, and mutuality is becoming a dimension of growing importance in the analytic literature (Aron, 1996). I am intrigued by the fact that these developments implicitly initiate a rapprochement between psychoanalysis and the existential tradition, which always put the notion of encounter into the center of its understanding of the therapeutic relationship. From Buber (1927) through Medard Boss (1970) and Irvin Yalom (1980, 1989) existentialist writers have argued that an authentic relationship is the crucial therapeutic agent in psychodynamic therapy. Reevaluating this claim in terms of psychoanalytic clinical theory should prove to be an interesting and fruitful undertaking.

THE MORAL ORDER AND INDIVIDUAL PSYCHE

Freud’s structural model of the personality offers a powerful metaphor for the representation of the moral order in the individual’s psyche. The superego, based on the internalization of parental authority, is the agency which condemns and approves, judges, and provides encouragement. Because psychoanalysis tends to focus on infantile precursors of the moral sense, it primarily investigates the highly personal aspects of the superego. This is particularly true in object relations theory which emphasizes processes of early internalization. These internalized object relations are mediated and characterized by the varieties of guilt and shame which have been one of the prime topics of psychoanalytic investigation. Clinically they are manifested in transference enactments that have been interpreted along object relational lines.

Feminism and cultural criticism have introduced an additional dimension to the psychoanalytic understanding of the relationship between the individual and the moral order. The individual from birth onwards is enveloped in social, cultural, and linguistic meaning systems. These systems define personal identity by way of gender, kinship, social class, nationality, ethnic and religious affiliation.

In addition to personalized introjects, individuals also have an inner image of the moral order at large (Kohlberg, 1981). This image evolves along with the individual’s cognitive and affective abilities. One of its aspects is a cognitive representation of the actual structures regulating social life; for example, the educational, legal, and political systems. Another is a conception of the source of moral obligation and social rules, which Kohlberg (1981) has investigated from a Piagetian point of view. This representation can be more or less accurate, differentiated, and useful, and it also comprises practical knowledge of how to deal with the social system.

The inner experience of the social order has a second aspect that is more experiential and has strong affective components. The individual places himself experientially in the force field (Lewin, 1935) of the group united by common moral standards. This field can be a source of strength for the individual, because he or she feels protected by the communality of those who feel justified by the existing social and moral codes. It can also condemn those who feel excluded to an existence in which they feel threatened by ostracism and by being denied the right to a legitimate place in society.

I propose to call this experiential force field the moral order. It has been investigated by writers in the phenomenological tradition like Martin Heidegger (1927), who argued that there is an irreducible component of human existence which he calls being-with. Dasein (his term for human beings) is characterized by the experience of being-with-others. The experiential moral order is in part a reflection of the objective social order. It is generated by the common practice of shared forms of life (Wittgenstein, 1953). The experience of shared practice can lead to various forms of being-with. It can be harmonious, based on a sense of communality and shared humanity. It can also have the basic color of antagonism and strife.
The modality of being-with to be investigated in this chapter is that of excommunication. There are individuals whose basic sense of being-with is being-against. They experience the moral order of society as a field of force that is antagonistic and a source of pain to them. They do not feel linked to society by way of community and belonging, but that the moral order has injured them irretrievably. They protest against this injury by denying that the social order is itself morally justified.

The sense of individuality is tied to having rights, a place in the social and moral order. Social identity is based on belonging to a family and ethnic, national, and religious groups. The moral order is the most important protection of individual integrity, but it is also the source of the deepest wounds inflicted on subjectivity. The moral order protects, but it also classifies; it bestows rights, but it also condemns. The community of moral subjects is the sanctuary of individual rights, but its judgment can excommunicate persons from legitimacy and moral goodness. If an individual has been branded by the moral order, personal identity is of necessity damaged. Sometimes the sense of being outside the moral order is perpetuated even though the individual has the possibility of finding a legitimate place in the actual social order. The inner experience of the moral order can continue to be that of a community with whom the individual is at war.

This sense of community is defined by the relationship of inclusion and exclusion. The individual who feels excommunicated does not feel included in the community of those tied together by a common moral code. Personal identity is deeply tied to the representation of one's place in the moral order. Those who have succeeded in finding a place in society represent themselves as defined and protected by the social order. Their mode of being-with is essentially harmonious, and their identity is tied to being inside the moral order. Those who subjectively experience themselves as excommunicated represent themselves as outside of and opposed to the moral order. The subjective images of the relationship between the self and the moral order are depicted in Figures 6.1 and 6.2 for the legitimate identity and the identity of excommunication.

There are many aspects to Raphael's story and I will focus on what is relevant to the present theme. The protest against moral order was a subtle but pervasive element. It was directed against a fate that had made him feel that he had no right to stay anywhere. Raphael's suffering was generated through a complex interplay of historical forces. The situation of Jews in Poland had made his parents move to South America, and they
were never capable of making a home for themselves there. They were challenged beyond their resources, and Raphael felt a useless addition to a family which did not have enough to eat anyway. His parents were drained of energy, and this made him grow up in a state of emotional dehydration.

As happens so often, his attempt to find the warmth he needed turned into a further source of guilt. The moral order condemned his attempts to find comfort and warmth as a sign of juvenile depravity. This increased his sense of excommunication, of not being part of the legitimate community of human beings. His search for physical and emotional warmth, first with his sister and the neighbor's daughter, and then with the long series of women, sealed his fate of feeling like an outcast.

Raphael's presenting role was that of the perpetual adolescent who experienced the social and moral order as a somewhat funny and ridiculous imposition. He had married and raised children, but one part of him felt that the whole thing was a joke. He turned his wife into a representative of this order and the need to hide his affairs gave him further reason to feel that his existence was illegitimate. Therapeutic work was a bit of a joke, too, and he tried to engage me at the level of male complicity against the seriousness with which women took everything. Raphael never turned into an overt rebel against the social and moral order. Consciously he experienced himself as an inveterate lover of women who simply could not do without his many love affairs.

It turned out, though, that this hedonist ideology was an expression of moral outrage: Raphael felt that being part of the Jewish people meant to be condemned to suffering. His upbringing had left no place for joie de vivre. Sensuality and sexuality were inherently sinful. Raphael rebelled against an unbearable dilemma: He could either suffer or be a moral outcast. His seemingly amoral behavior was ultimately a moral protest against being denied the right to live fully. The price of this protest was that Raphael permanently felt like an outcast. The therapeutic process uncovered the layer of experience of a haunted fugitive on the run, a man who had no habitat, no place where he could legitimately stay.

Behind his adolescent façade, Raphael was desperate: He had felt condemned to be guilty throughout his life, guilty for his very existence and for making demands on his parents they could not fulfill, guilty for seeking comfort in the arms of girls, and for making his wife suffer. His life was governed by a protest against this guilt, because he felt that he never had a chance to choose not to be guilty. Paradoxically the form his protest took reinforced the very guilt against which he was rebelling. He never really turned into the cynic he wanted to be, and his life was torn between an attempt to reject the moral order which had made him suffer so much and the desire to finally find a legitimate place in it.

REHUMANIZING THE EXCOMMUNICATED INDIVIDUAL

Patients whose self experience is crucially determined by the protest against the social order present a particular challenge to the analytic attitude. Their transferential situation is inherently complex. On one hand the therapist is the potential bridge out of the experience of excommunication to that of a legitimate place in the moral order. A truly safe atmosphere allows them to open up the areas of their personality in which they have always felt bad, outlaws, and rebels.

On the other hand the therapist is a representative of the moral order. He is perceived as having the knowledge of what is normal and what is not, he is supposed to pass judgment on legitimacy and deviance. Hence cooperating with the therapist is inherently dangerous for someone whose identity is built around the fight against the moral order.

For patients with a strong sense of excommunication the desire for rehumanization is intrinsically conflictual. They may desire it, because they want to change their mode of being-in-the-world, and to feel more at home in their lives. Yet their self-representation is intrinsically tied to being opposed to the moral order. For most of their lives they have subjectively experienced the moral order as irrational, willful, and unjust. This has given a positive meaning to their sense of deviance and their opposition to the existing social order.
The fight against the moral order has become an intrinsic part of the identity of those who have spent their lives fighting the moral order. Like Genet, they feel that accepting the offer to become fully legitimate members of society means to abandon a central element of who they are. Tamara (cf. chapter 1) described this dilemma poignantly. She said that becoming “normal” would mean giving up a fight she had been involved in throughout her life. She would be like a wrestler who would not submit just because he is in pain.

To accept a legitimate identity means they must reconsider their representation of society and its values. This may be a painful process, because it means that they must probe into the sources of their opposition to society. They may have to face deep feelings of shame and guilt, and to reexperience helplessness and rage they have suffered in childhood when they first came into opposition with social morality.

The therapeutic relationship acquires its special importance because it can enable these patients to renegotiate their place in the moral order. They have the opportunity to change their representation of themselves as opposed to and excluded from the community of human beings.

This process of rehumanization is made possible when these patients feel that they can establish a relationship of solidarity and mutuality with the psychotherapist. The therapist then acts as a bridgehead between the community of human beings and the excommunicated individual. By establishing a common humanity between himself and the patient, the therapist makes it possible for the patient to experience the possibility of a benign relationship with the community represented by the psychotherapist.

This experiential process is illustrated by one of the episodes in Raphael’s treatment. At the beginning of the therapy he experienced me as part of the moral community and himself as outside it. There were but two possibilities for him. The first was that he could bond with me outside the moral community as he experienced it. He tried to do this by trying to engage me on the level of masculine complicity against the bourgeois order, by turning psychotherapy, serious thinking about oneself, and the notion of personal obligation into a joke.

The second possibility was that I was inside the moral order, and he outside it. This meant that I would judge and condemn him. After I did not enter the relationship of masculine complicity, he began to behave as if the therapy were a criminal procedure where he had to try to escape prosecution. This created an exasperating deadlock, because I felt that Raphael tried to look cooperative, but really tried to evade true contact with me and insight into his own motivations.

Raphael could only allow the emergence of a significant therapeutic relationship after he had come to experience me as being humanly on a par with him. My switch to Yiddish and the use of a common level of Diaspora experience constituted a step toward reaching Raphael on the level of mutuality. Another element that contributed to establishing mutuality was that I became exasperated because I could not reach Raphael. I tend to think that these moments made it clear for him that I was a human being trying to do a job and to be helpful rather than a representative of a social order he experienced as inherently painful and persecutory. This created an atmosphere of fellowship on a journey (Figure 6.3).

It seems that patients with a strong sense of excommunication need some rather immediate experience of mutuality. They feel that they fight the whole world in a lost battle, that they are always in the wrong, and are ultimately isolated. This
makes it more difficult for them to develop a relationship essentially new for them: that of common humanity of two people involved in a common project. Only when they experience their ability to touch the therapist, can they envisage the possibility of allowing a common journey through their inner space of excommunication.

This creates a paradox for the analytic therapist: You cannot especially create a communality (like Yiddish) or an emotion like exasperation for the patient. But it is possible to choose an appropriate moment for the communication of countertransference. One of the functions of this communication is to make them aware of their impact on the therapist (Gorkin, 1987, ch. 5). Patients who suffer from a strong sense of excommunication need an experience that alleviates their sense of standing alone against the moral order. A direct experience of their therapist’s humanity is probably one of the most effective ways of establishing the type of solidarity these patients need.

I am certainly not arguing for uncontrolled disclosure of countertransference. I think that the therapist must, so to speak, earn the right to be exasperated, angry, or to express any other emotion by sustained attempts to do his job of analytic exploration over a long period of time. Bollas (1989) gives an interesting example where he tells a patient who has tortured him for months that she is a monster. Had he said so at the beginning of the treatment, he would most certainly have lost her. The fact of having been willing to bear her attacks over such a prolonged period of time turns his—quite unusual—intervention into a turning point in the therapy.

After the initial deadlock with Raphael was overcome, the therapeutic process did not primarily turn into an analytic investigation of his conflicts, transference distortions, and interpersonal styles and strategies. I experienced what ensued as a common journey through his inner spaces of excommunication. Interpretive interventions were almost superfluous. Through his dreams the sediments of his past were actualized in the consulting room. It seems that the therapeutic process consisted in his reliving aspects of his loneliness and excommunication together with another human being.

One of the most poignant forms of damaged identity is to be an illegitimate child. In a social order which places individuals first and foremost in their families, those who do not have a family are per definitionem illegitimate. The biography of the novelist and playwright Jean Genet, who was an illegitimate child abandoned by his mother to the French authorities, illustrates this fate. As an adolescent Genet embarked on the career of juvenile delinquent. Later in life he tried to justify this as resulting from the cruelties he had been subjected to by foster parents and by the elaborate French welfare system. However, as Edmund White (1993) has amply documented, Genet’s fate was comparatively benign: The foster families which took care of him treated him decently, and the welfare system made remarkable efforts—certainly by the standards of the beginnings of our century—to rehabilitate him. Nevertheless Genet’s whole life revolved around his identity as an outcast, and to the end of his life he identified with disadvantaged groups, even though he had become a respected cultural icon.

In his autobiographical writings Genet linked his first impulse to steal with the discovery of his homosexuality, and this hypothesis makes sense. Genet had been marginalized by the circumstances of his birth. When he found out that his sexual orientation would excommunicate him doubly, his whole existential attitude became that of an outcast. He had been assigned a doubly damaged identity, and he reacted by denying the very legitimacy of the system that had done so. He turned this protest into the inspiration behind his lifework.

Genet cultivated his illegitimacy. If he had ever accepted the comfortable place offered to him once he had acquired fame, this would have meant that he was willing to accept that the social order was morally justified. Individuals like Genet cannot do this, because they cannot—and do not want to—re­nounce their moral outrage against a value structure which condemns them to a damaged identity. Ceasing the fight which has become their raison d’être would break their very sense of identity and individuality.
THE PROTEST AGAINST GUILT: PHILIP ROTH

There is another constellation which fates the individual to a sense of guilt that cannot be overcome. National, ethnic, and religious traditions demand loyalty to their history and values. Those who leave these traditions for the sake of personal freedom are branded as traitors and heretics, and they are caught in an insoluble dilemma of how to combine moral goodness and authenticity. One solution is to give up freedom of mind for the sake of obligation to the tribe, the family, the nation, or religion. The price paid is an inauthentic life, and a loss of individuality.

The second solution is to rebel against tradition. The price paid here is to feel like a heretic, outlaw, or traitor. The tragedy of the heretic is that one part of his mind, what Freud calls the superego, is indelibly formed by the tradition he grew up in. This aspect of his psyche inevitably continues to adhere to the moral standards of the tradition. Even though his mature self is governed by the new value system adopted, internalized voices of the past condemn the central self for having left the tradition of his upbringing.

These people are often involved in a moral war against a fate which has condemned them to feeling unbearably guilty. They cannot sever the ties to their families, ethnic group, or religious tradition completely without experiencing something akin to mental amputation. They would have to forget the voices, smells, sights, songs, and stories of their childhood, because each of them is associated with the accusation, "How could you do this to us."

The moral order is a creation of the human community, but it is also a condition for a sense of community. Rights, obligations, and respect for individuality, constitute the infrastructure on which community rests. When individuals feel that the moral order has assigned them a place where their right to individuality and respect has been thwarted, they can come to doubt morality as such. The cynical destruction of human significance often hides desperation: It may never be possible to gain a wholesome identity. The yearning for a sense of harmony with fellow humans is deeply hidden behind the layers of distrust, disbelief, and outright hatred for the moral order.

Sometimes, when the psyche cannot bear the endless guilt, it chooses an extreme solution: It empties human relationships of meaningfulness altogether. This strategy is in fact quite intelligible: If the experience of moral obligation is fraught with unbearable guilt, there seems to be no way to live in a moral universe without being crushed by its obligations. The only way to stay alive is to negate moral obligation altogether. The result, superficially considered, looks like sheer cynicism.

Cynicism easily hides its pain behind intellectual justifications. Freudian psychoanalysis, and nowadays evolutionary psychology, can be used as intellectual ammunition for cynicism. The cynic can always point out that the thin layer of moral experience, values, and commitment is but a cover-up for the basic realities of life. He argues that human affairs are riddled with egotism, power motivations, self-aggrandizement, manipulation, and a search for safety and dependence.

Philip Roth's novels from *Portnoy's Complaint* (1967) to his later *The Counterlife* (1986) and *Sabbath's Theater* (1995) depict the painful struggle against an order which imposes unbearable guilt and smothers individuality through obligation. Many of Roth's novels revolve around their Jewish protagonists' rebellion against their upbringing by first generation immigrants from Eastern Europe. Their parents are simple people, attached to their kin and tradition. They work hard to support their families, and their horizons are limited, because they never had a chance to get an education.

Roth's heroes despair, because they do not want to be bad. Nevertheless they cannot escape their sense of badness, because their psyche is too deeply formed by the Jewish tradition into which they were born. The result is that they begin to identify with their damaged identity: They become enfants terribles, incapable of stable attachments, cynical and haunted. Like Raphael they become obsessive, inveigle lovers of women. Zuckermann, the hero of several novels, becomes a sophisticated American, well versed in Western European culture. He feels that his family stifles his need for freedom of mind and an open life. This need in itself turns into a source of guilt: His father had to sell thousands of insurance policies to enable him
to get his degree in literature. He knows that his freedom has been bought by the sacrifices of the previous generation.

His family and the Jewish tradition exert an inexorable demand for loyalty and his striving for independence of mind is seen as treason. When Zuckermann publishes *Carnovsky* (a thinly veiled allusion to Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*), the Jewish community brands him as a traitor. How did he dare describe his family in such a satiric manner? How could he disrespect those to whom he owes everything?

Zuckermann, like Roth himself, has made it: He is famous, he is financially well-off. Yet he never feels at home anywhere, and he cannot rest. Women dote on him, but he cannot settle down. He is plagued by psychosomatic ailments (*The Anatomy Lesson*, 1983), and he cannot understand why his restlessness will not abate. He continues to feel haunted and persecuted, he cannot find peace because his identity is constituted by fighting and struggling.

In *The Counterlife*, Zuckermann tries to break out of the Jewish moral order completely by committing the ultimate sin: He marries a gentile woman, a shiksa. His flight to the cooler emotional climate of England is an attempt to leave the hot-house of Jewish guilt behind. Yet a substantial proportion of the novel is about the protagonist's dealings with the Jewish state of Israel. The fatedness of Jewish provenance will not leave him alone.

The protagonist of *Project Shylock* is called Phillip Roth. He finds himself chasing his double, who travels around the world trying to sell a weird project. He wants to repatriate Israeli Jews to their Eastern European countries of origin, to reestablish the diaspora. Roth here deals with guilt engendered by the very existence of the state of Israel in Jews who do not choose to live there. Being Jewish for Roth is the essence of his identity as a writer, but it is also the source of an unending conflict. None of his heroes ever manages to extricate themselves from the dynamic of guilt and excommunication engendered by their desire for independence of mind.

*Sabbath's Theater* is the story of a man condemned to a damaged identity because his elder brother died as a war hero. His mother cannot overcome the loss, grieves eternally, and leaves Mickey Sabbath with the guilt of having stayed alive. He sees no choice but to run away. He escapes physically by joining the merchant navy, and embarks on the career of an insatiable womanizer who does everything he can to flaunt his immorality. He is charged with obscenity as a young puppeteer, and later in his life he is sacked from his university for seducing students.

Sabbath is not a hedonist. He works hard to keep his rage alive. He does everything he can to forfeit the possibility of a quiet life. In his mid-sixties, as a poor and dejected man, he makes tremendous efforts to betray the friends who try to help him, to flaunt immorality. He ends up penniless, arthritic, and desperate on the streets of New York, but he knows that he will carry on, because he has not yet run out of things to hate.

Roth's unique voice expresses the plight of moral badness engendered by a tradition which one does not hate, but cannot adhere to. This voice often comes close to cynicism but refuses to fall into it. Roth's heroes want to be good. But being good in the sense demanded by the Jewish tradition would obliterate their individuality. They make fun of their tradition, but they continue to be haunted by the sense of being outcasts.

The rougher edges of Roth's voice are an expression of the pain engendered by morality. His heroes protest against Judaism's demand for allegiance with every fiber of their being and with every word of their writing. They do not accept the fate of excommunication by which they are permeated, and their protest engenders a quality of wildness. Roth himself has characterized his writing as geared toward the "explosive moment." The explosion is always a form of moral outrage against the fate which denies his heroes the option of being good.

**MICHEL FOUCAULT: THE DECONSTRUCTION OF ORDER**

Sometimes the protest against the moral order can become the motivating force of stupendous intellectual achievement. Michel Foucault's work was, as he indicated several times, a way to deal with the major traumas of his life. He wanted to
dismantle the moral order which had condemned him to a permanent sense of deviance. Foucault is exemplary for the ontological protest of subjectivity in that he truly wanted to invalidate the moral system which had inflicted pain on him. He is extraordinary because he succeeded in transforming the rage behind his protest into a philosophical oeuvre which has constituted an intense, intriguing, at times enigmatic, and powerful presence in the intellectual scene of the last thirty years.

Foucault is exemplary in other ways, too. Biographical evidence shows that he lived a truly philosophical life. He turned his self into a work of art. He was a man who wanted to write without a face, and whose quizzical, sharply delineated face with the shaven head became instantly recognizable in France. He was once waiting for the Métro after a demonstration, and a policeman was on the verge of attacking him, when a bystander called out "Mais laissez-le, c'est Foucault," and the policeman backed off.

One of his main achievements was his success in defying classification. He took tremendous joy in the confusion he engendered. Communists saw him as a conservative reactionary; conservatives as a leftist subversive, and Marxists as a bourgeois structuralist. He defied the social need for classification by becoming a category in his own right, a gravitational center in the field of force of intellectual possibilities at the end of the twentieth century.

Several Foucaults have been painted: Dreyfus and Rabinov’s (1983) Foucault is a professional philosopher who attempts to create a framework for the understanding of man and culture “beyond structuralism and hermeneutics.” Macey’s (1993) Foucault is torn between the desire for anonymity, and the desire to conquer the central bastions of French culture.

James Miller’s (1993) Foucault is the most fascinating and demonic: a man driven by the desire for transgression of limits and a fascination with death. Miller’s biography is in itself a magnificent piece of writing, an imaginative recreation of the soul of a man haunted by the threat of madness and the attractions of suicide. Miller’s Foucault embodies the romantic ideal of the unity of life and work: He experiments with mind and body alike, to deconstruct normative notions of sexuality not only in theory but also in practice.

The key to Miller’s Foucault is to be found in the three childhood memories which had haunted Foucault throughout his life. He related them to Hervé Guibert, possibly his last lover, on his death bed.

The first memory was how, when he was 8 years old, his father, a doctor, took him to watch the amputation of a leg. He thought that this would be useful in turning his son Paul-Michel into a real man.

The second memory was the story of the *séquestre de Poitiers* Foucault had heard as a child. He was shown the house where a young woman had been locked up by her family for twenty-five years because of an extramarital pregnancy. She was found by the authorities, living in her own excrement and in rotting remainders of food, half-blind and debilitated.

The third memory was that as an adolescent he had been the class leader at school. In 1941 a number of Jewish boys who had fled Paris came to Poitiers, and joined Foucault’s school. In no time the previous class leader Paul-Michel was dethroned, and he cursed those Jewish boys. Shortly after, the Nazis deported them to a death camp, and Foucault was left with excruciating feelings of guilt.

Foucault’s fascination with the world of consensual S&M is elucidated by this set of memories. S&M is often understood psychoanalytically as an attempt to master an early trauma by reliving its contents under controlled and safe circumstances (Stoller, 1985). The props of S&M are taken from the world of incarceration. Foucault’s imagination had been terrified by images of incarceration throughout childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. He knew that he was deviant, because he was homosexual. The story of the *séquestre de Poitiers* proved to the child that anyone who did not correspond to society’s sexual mores could spend his life without ever seeing daylight again.

S&M also tries to master the fear of mutilation. By bearing pain and minor mutilations under controlled circumstances, the masochist proves to himself time and again that the terrors of his imagination can be survived. Foucault had been forced
by his father to see physical amputation. What went through the child's mind when he underwent this mindless act of cruelty? His father was a doctor, and Michel must have felt endangered by a father who was so insensitive to his son's psyche, particularly because he must have assumed that his father himself cut limbs off people.

Foucault tried to deal with trauma both through sex and through philosophy. In May 1981, he said: "In a sense I have always wanted my books to be fragments from an autobiography. My books have always been my personal problems with madness, with prisons, with sexuality." And a year later he added: "Each of my works is a part of my own biography" (Macey, 1993, p. xii).

It is easy to correlate Foucault's characterization of his books as autobiography with some of his work: His problems with madness were tackled in *Folie et déraison* (1961), his fear of incarceration in *Surveiller et punir* (1975), and his lifelong preoccupation with sexuality came to fruition in his *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976). His second major work, *La naissance de la clinique* (1964), opens with a nauseating description of the dissolution of a hysteric's body "treated" by a week-long bath in the eighteenth century. Thus Foucault could begin to deconstruct the medical gaze his father had forced onto him at an early age.

The autobiographical element is not evident in what is probably Foucault's greatest work, *Les mots et les choses* (1966), a difficult and enigmatic book on European intellectual history from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Its main thesis is that the natural, social, and human sciences of historical periods are governed by unconscious, systematic structures Foucault calls *epistemes*. He shows how these structures change completely within a short time span, first in the seventeenth, and then again at the end of the eighteenth century. He argues that the semblance of continuity between the classical age and nineteenth century though is illusory. They are governed by completely different *epistemes*.

How can a work as abstract as *Les mots et les choses* have deeper personal significance? The claim most important to Foucault is that there is a total divorce between the realm of meaning and the realm of nature. Meaning is generated by discursive structures which are totally autonomous and do not reflect the structure of nature. The relationship between signifier and signified entails that the order of words is arbitrary, and therefore no discursive structure can claim eternal truth. This thesis contains the key for Foucault's deepest desire, and the logical foundation for everything else he has done.

Foucault ends *Les mots et les choses* with the famous dictum I quoted in the Prelude:

If those arrangements [the appearance of man as the central concern of philosophy, C.S.] were to disappear... if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility—without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises—were to cause them to crumble as the ground of Classical thought did at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea [1966, p. 387].

This striking image at the end of a major work caught the public's imagination. If the order of things is in no way related to the order of words, the preoccupation with man is bound to disappear, leaving nothing but another historical configuration of thought. This would mean that current theories of human nature are likely to turn out to be as arbitrary as the Indian caste system is from a liberal democratic point of view.

All major interpreters of Foucault have played down the importance of his homosexuality—maybe because it is nowadays to relate to gayness as a matter of course. This perspective misses what it must have been like to grow up as a homosexual in a small, ultraconservative, Catholic French town in the 1930s. The sense of sin, of inner rottenness, and of being an outcast must have penetrated the boy's very core.

Foucault's work is about the wounds social classification inflicts on human subjectivity. Yet this claim is prima facie absurd: Foucault is an antiphenomenologist; subjectivity almost never plays a role in his writings; and where it did—as in the preface of the first edition of *Histoire de la folie* (1961)—Foucault took care to eradicate it in later editions (1969). His books
abound in descriptions of practices and classificatory systems without ever mentioning the impact they had on subjectivity. Foucault's style is one of carefully preserved alienation, even when he describes unbearable atrocities, as at the beginning of *La naissance de la clinique* (1964) and *Surveiller et punir* (1975).

Paradoxically, Foucault's moral impact derives from his arid, totally external description of the apparatuses of classification, division, and discipline. He does not appeal to moral sense by entering the minds of the humiliated, the tortured, and the outcasts. Instead he gives descriptions without a soundtrack: The shrieks, the moanings, and the horror are blanked out. The subjects are silenced, as are those of human beings condemned to the electric chair, such as to make their pain both invisible and inaudible.

For me Foucault's strange twin brother is Winnicott, the psychoanalyst whose lifework was a poetics of the yearning for unhindered play and subjectivity without constraints. Winnicott's strategy is the negative of Foucault's: He only writes about subjective experience, devising a language of pure subjectivity. Foucault's aesthetic sense demanded gemlike hardness of style, argumentation, and presentation. His desire not to be pinned down, not to be identified and classified, led him to stick to the externals, and leave the inner experience to the imagination. But in his own distanced and objectified way, Foucault has become one of the most forceful spokesmen of the ontologist protest of subjectivity.

Foucault wants to be left alone; he wants to have his secrets. The impression generated by Miller's biography is that Foucault's deepest secret was that he suffered a great deal of pain. He tried to deal with this pain intellectually by unearthing the "somewhat dusty archives of pain" (1961, p. ix). Existentially he met it by subjecting himself to the discipline of bearing pain with joy in the carefully crafted world of complicitous friendship and mutual help of consensual S&M.

For most of his life Foucault refused to talk about his pain. It would certainly not have fitted the persona he worked so hard to develop. It would have given an all-too-human face to a man who wanted none—or only a face carefully crafted. He was afraid of the dissection of his pain. He showed that the psychoanalytic interview at its worst can be but a modified form of the *aveu de la chair*. It can be a dissection of subjectivity by the objectifying gaze of the doctor of the soul, waiting to classify the patient's desire by the various fixation points presumed to exist by her theory. Foucault knew about the gaze of the clinician, disinterestedly interested in classifying aberrations and symptoms to make them amenable to diagnosis.

Foucault showed how the nineteenth century began to identify the individual with her desire, which became the prime seat for the ascription of pathology. A brief look at Krafft-Ebbing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) exemplifies the psychiatrist's moralizing gaze at the aberrations from the norm. Even Freud's attempt to link these aberrations with normative psychosexual phases did not free us from this gaze: Sin for Freud was not to desire what was not normal, it was to be fixated to the pleasure principle and early psychosexual phases.

Foucault's strategy of fighting this gaze was not to amplify the moans of the victim, but to try to destroy the foundations of the machinery which inflicted this pain. He went about this destruction as coldly, objectively, and lethally as the machine itself operated. This strategy has been taken up by Claude Lanzmann in his film *Shoah*, which derives its power from the coldness of sticking to external description of techniques, circumstances, and architectural details of the mass-murder industry of the third reich. He left the cinematographic recreation of the screams of the victims to Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. Foucault's work is to liberators of humanity like Herbert Marcuse and Norman Brown as Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* is to Spielberg's *Schindler's List*.

Foucault's major weapon was genealogy, the systematic uncovering of the historical genesis of the current modes of classification (1971). Foucault never tries to show that any of the accepted classificatory system is wrong. His strategy is to tell the doctor, the psychiatrist, or the official of the penal system: "Look, this is the way you have come to think the way you do." The story he tells is full of quirks and bends, showing that our current positions have not been arrived at by rational deliberation, but by unconscious historical forces. He wants to point to
the “humble origins” of all received wisdom, leaving it as naked as the proverbial king in his new clothes.

Foucault’s argumentative position is difficult. We tend to reject earlier truths only for new ones. If the ideal of the potent, self-controlled man without feelings is replaced by the norm of the infinitely sensitive, caring, and psychologically minded new-age man, again one form of procrustean normalization is replaced by another one. Once the truth of vaginal orgasm as the hallmark of femininity is gone, we need another truth to supplant it, e.g., that of the unlimited orgasmic potential of women. The result is that the terror of the vaginal orgasm is replaced by the terror of the multiple orgasm supposedly characterizing “healthy” women. Foucault explicitly refuses the role of the prophet who announces the new man, the new woman, or the new age. He refuses to usurp the role of the specialist, and his utopia is a state without terrorism of classification.

In the first volume of his History of Sexuality (1976) Foucault goes about the task of clearing a space for self-creation: He argues that the whole rhetoric of liberation of sexuality is a hoax. The deepest claim of the book is that the very notion of sexuality is ultimately an instrument of classification and domination. By classifying certain pleasures as sexual and others as nonsexual, a whole field of injunctions and interdictions is brought into play. The notion of sexuality itself invokes a grid of the required and the forbidden.

Miller’s biography gives Foucault’s formula that discourse of sexuality should be replaced by discourse of bodies and pleasures, which can be combined at will, an uncanny concreteness. During the seventies Foucault had immersed himself in the gay scene of California—and more specifically, in the world of S&M as he found it in the clubs of the Castro district of San Francisco. The bourgeois imagination shudders at the thought of the practices of the world of S&M—I will admit that I was no exception to that. It is very easy to relegate this phenomenon to the realm of the pathological which must be diagnosed and cured, and to refuse to make an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the experience behind it.

Miller’s investigation of the meaning-space of consensual S&M is courageous and thought-provoking (1993, ch. 7). His thoughts on the matter should be combined with the writings of the one psychoanalyst who dared to leave the safety of the consulting room and try to understand the world of S&M in its own terms, Robert Stoller (1991a). The picture which emerges is intriguing and far more complex than is suggested if one hides behind the safety of judgmental set categories. The first, highly surprising, result is that the masochist (the “bottom man” in the lingo of S&M) is the one who gets the real treat. The top man does fairly hard work. He must be extremely sensitive to the limits of pain the bottom man can take: If he doesn’t push hard enough, the experience will not be extreme enough, if he pushes too hard, he will kill the experience.

The goal of S&M is to completely resuffle basic categories within which we live. The masochist seeks the point where pain and pleasure lose their distinctiveness. In fisting fucking the boundaries of inner and outer seem to be lost. In techniques of bondage and asphyxiation the experience of selfhood dissolves.

While reading Foucault and listening to Tamara I was struck by a sudden insight: The terms, which describe the experience of the bottom man (or woman), are the same as those used by the mystics of all cultures and ages. Is not the blurring of pain and pleasure, the abolition of the distinctions between inner and outer, self and nonself what the mystics always sought? Once this thought had struck me, I finally came to the point of understanding Foucault more deeply: We associate mysticism as a state of saintliness and purity, whereas most of us regard the world of S&M as the epitome of depravity and decadence. Mysticism is supposed to be purely spiritual—S&M is taken to be one of the greatest excesses of sexuality.

Once the simple categories by which we prevent ourselves from thinking and feeling acquire some fluidity, further links are created: Are not the descriptions of mystical experience fraught with sexual metaphor? Is not Cabala often a description of an intensely erotic relationship between God and the people of Israel? Are not the prayers of many mystics for Christ to penetrate them ultimately sexual in content? It is precisely this
reshuffling of entrenched categories, the opening of the possibilities for new readings of the world, that Foucault aspired to.

In the last years before his untimely death, Foucault began to investigate the idea of an aesthetics of existence. His historical studies of various aspects of Hellenistic ethics brought him to the conclusion that there seems to be no life which is not governed by the techniques d'assujissemens, disciplines through which the individual forms himself (Foucault, 1983). He abandoned the more Dionysian hopes of his early work, and argued that an aesthetics of existence always demands traditions of self-formation. The aesthetic metaphor was meant to defuse the possibility of turning these techniques into instruments of social dominance again, but Foucault never had the chance of developing these thoughts sufficiently.

Foucault exemplifies the ontological protest against the moral order at its highest level. He suffered from the beginning of his life from being classified as deviant, and this suffering pushed him to the brink of both madness and suicide. Foucault's lifework is the attempt to dismantle the foundations of the moral order which inflicted so much pain on him. The seeming detachment of his writings, his stance of the dispassionate intellectual historian, hides the fact that his politics of subversion expresses a moral protest against the tendency of the social order to excommunicate, stigmatize, and marginalize.

Foucault's search for an ethics in which the individual is invited to structure her life like a work of art, not only to rethink but truly to reshape the self, is one of the most profound expressions of the desire for self-creation. Foucault systematically showed through his genealogical writings that our formulations about the essence of human nature are essentially fictions. Foucault's experience of deviance made him want to be anonymous, a philosopher without a face. He fulfilled the desire to recreate himself from scratch not by becoming faceless, but by creating the persona of Michel Foucault. His moral and intellectual stature enabled him to carry his protest into the College de France, the center of French learning, and to create his unique identity as a defender of the right to individuality.
Daphnah, the Woman Who Sought Authorship

Daphnah was in her late thirties, soft-spoken, with a presence that exuded cultivation and breeding, combined with a quiet type of femininity. Her problem: She had terrorized herself and her family for years with phobic fears around contracting illnesses of all sorts, and her three children and her husband could not take anymore the obsessive rituals of sterilization and of stern questioning of what they had eaten and where. She herself lived in an almost constant state of anxiety which made life difficult to bear.

She had seen some other psychologists before seeing me, and had left them after a session or two. She felt that they were banal and uninteresting, that they had not said anything of any interest to her. I did not say a lot in this first session, and it was going to take a long time until we understood what she had been looking for, and why I stood the test.

In the second session Daphnah told me more about her biography. Her father had been a well-known professor of physics who had survived Auschwitz, but had lost his parents and his siblings there. Her mother had arrived in Israel in 1941 under tragic circumstances: The Jewish Agency had rescued her and her young sister from Eastern Europe, and the last
words she had heard from her mother had been: “Take care of her!” They arrived in Israel, but after less than a year her sister was killed in a tragic accident in front her eyes.

At the age of 5 Daphnah was on a playground with her mother, slipped, and fell off an iron ladder. She was rushed to a hospital. The diagnosis: a skull fracture and a severe concussion. For some weeks it was unclear whether any permanent damage had occurred. When Daphnah regained full consciousness her speech was slightly slurred. The doctors had tried to calm her mother down, but Daphnah remembered how for years afterwards her mother would jump at the slightest indication that her daughter had a speech problem, or that her mental development was in any way impaired—even though there was no indication of any damage.

During the following sessions I was quite impressed at the sense of doom under which Daphnah lived: Her children, gifted, healthy, vital, were under constant scrutiny. Anything that could be interpreted as a sign of illness sent her into wild panic: She would run them to the emergency room time and again. The doctors already knew her, and were mostly resigned to, “Oh God, there she is again!”

I told Daphnah:

It seems to me that you live under a constant sense of having been doomed. And it also seems to me that your constant preoccupation with your children is an attempt to give some manageable interpretation to this sense of doom. Yet nothing ever calms you down—and my hunch is that your early childhood was spent under the sense of doom your mother must have lived with: She lost her family—and the sister she was supposed to take care of died. She must have felt that her whole family was doomed not to live. When you fell off that ladder, this must have confirmed her fear that indeed she was not capable of keeping anything or anyone alive and unharmed. So your health and mental development became the touchstone of her sense of whether indeed she was doomed or not.

Daphnah was struck; she felt that the deep structure of her life had suddenly become visible. She told me that for days she walked around repeating to herself, “The sense of doom, the sense of doom, I have lived with doom all my life.” A very quick process of symptomatic relief set in: First she stopped interrogating her children about their whereabouts and eating habits, and within about two months she stopped her nightly visits to the emergency room. “I think,” she said smilingly “that they will have to fire some doctors there; their workload has been cut down drastically.”

It looked as if a massive piece of work had been done in a very brief period of time. But, as it turned out, this was only the beginning of Daphnah’s treatment. Until that point, about four months after Daphnah had arrived, the sessions had been fairly focused: Most of them were centered around Daphnah’s fears as they manifested themselves in her daily life, and around particular aspects of her childhood which were quite obviously connected to her sense of doom. Then came the first time Daphnah called me in panic. She felt flooded with nameless dread she could not connect to anything. She had to see me as soon as possible. I gave her an appointment at the end of the day. She arrived, shaking with anxiety, in a state worse than I had ever seen her before. But within minutes she calmed down.

She said:

I had this fantasy, I was on a beautiful lawn, in a flowery dress; I was a girl. I knew that my father was waiting—and I ran toward him. As I was flinging myself into his arms, I suddenly saw that it was you. [She blushed] This fantasy has been important for me in the last weeks, whenever I felt anxious. And now, once it looked as if the therapy was going to be over soon, I saw how much I dread losing you.

I did not understand sufficiently what was going on, but I told Daphnah that there was no pressure at all to terminate treatment on my side, and that we would take the time it took to work through whatever preoccupied her. It turned out that Daphnah felt that without the therapy her life would be completely empty. She largely experienced her life as a failure. She felt that she had never done anything she really wanted, but only what she felt she was capable of
doing. She had wanted to become a writer, and she became a high-school teacher instead. She had dreamed of a marriage based on intimacy, an intellectual companionship, and instead she was involved in a marriage that for her had always constituted a compromise. She respected, and in many ways loved her husband. But she felt that her choice of this man had been primarily an attempt to prove to her parents that she was not damaged, that she could marry a respectable man and build a healthy, normal family. Her life had been a fight to prove to her parents—particularly her mother—that she was "okay," not damaged. One of the ways to prove this was to find a husband who was "okay," who was a success, who would prove to the whole world that Daphnah was capable of building a real home. Her husband, Ben, was a success, in all possible respects. He had an engineering degree and an MBA, he made a lot of money.

Daphnah had been lucky in her choice in many ways. Ben was a warm, caring, loving husband, who put up with Daphnah's anxieties and quirks with more calmness than could possibly be expected. Yet there was a price to be paid for his tolerance. Ben had established an unspoken yet clearly defined role-structure in their marriage. He was the successful, gifted prince, uncontested in his human value, achievement, and status. Daphnah was the woman who had been granted the favor of living with a man as wonderful and caring as he was. This, of course, fed into Daphnah's own dissatisfaction about who she was and what she had achieved.

There was a subtle quid pro quo in this marriage. Even though Ben was more overtly devaluing, Daphnah lived with a silent refusal to accept Ben fully as who he was. He was too down to earth in his whole orientation, in his gregariousness and innocent joie de vivre. She felt that he did not have any of the romantic, somewhat fleeting quality of mysteriousness which had always attracted her.

In her teens and twenties she had secretly been in love with some men with a more intellectual and artistic bent, but she had never thought she could be attractive to any of them. She thought she was not sufficiently interesting and gifted. And even though she was a good-looking woman she had always been afraid that she would physically repel them. She had a whole list of physical shortcomings which she used as reasons why she could not risk approaching any of these men she had been in love with.

This had left Daphnah with a constant, nagging feeling of incompleteness, of having lived her life according to the demands of necessity rather than according to her heart's desire. She often suffered the pain of feeling that her limitations had been fateful, that she had not formed her life along her deepest wishes because she simply had not had the possibility of doing so.

This was reflected in her experience of myself. She now told me why she had chosen to stay in therapy with me. She said: "The other therapists I saw were somehow transparent; I could figure them out easily. They could have been my neighbors. Nothing in them fascinated me. You have this European polish to yourself; the art in your office is different; the books you read are different; your way of talking is different. You left something to figure out, something to fantasize about."

The dark side of her experiencing me as somewhat mysterious was that she lived under a constant terror that she would not be able to fascinate me sufficiently for me to keep her in therapy. She felt that she had to tell her story, not only because she wanted to tell it, but also because she knew that the day she had nothing left to tell, she would have to discontinue therapy. It became clearer and clearer that the transference subtext of this therapy was that of finally fulfilling her desire to gain the love and attention of men of a type she had experienced as out of her reach throughout her life.

The subtext, the underlying narrative, of this therapy soon turned out to be the story of Scheherazade. Daphnah was keenly aware from the earliest stages of the therapeutic relationship that it was going to end at some point. She did not envisage this end as a function of a process which would come to the point where the work we had set out to do would have come to an end. She felt that, like Scheherazade, she had to make each session worth my while. She had to tell a story which was interesting enough for me to keep her in therapy.
The analogy to Scheherazade was compelling because she envisaged the moment at which I would tell her that we were done as the end of her life. The therapeutic relationship became equivalent to "real life," as opposed to the not-quite-real life she was living.

Telling and retelling her life turned Daphnah's central project. The search for authorship was crucial to her on several levels. First, her autobiography, the way she had been telling her life up to this point, made her life into a failure. She was telling her life as a story of doom and failure. Finding a richer, deeper narrative was the only way in which she could possibly escape her crippling sense of limitations. Second, telling her life became the way of maintaining my attention and keeping the relationship with me alive. It was yet to take some time until we would come to understand the motif of Scheherazade at some depth.

THE GREAT REGRESSION

Daphnah's anxieties about her children were more bearable. She was making tremendous efforts to stop terrorizing them, and she was quite successful in doing so. Yet a new symptom was soon substituted for this. A sore throat became the beginning of a rampant cancerophobia. Daphnah became convinced that she had contracted cancer, and nothing would calm her down. The sessions with her became more difficult, and her anxiety grew beyond bounds after I had returned from a lecture trip. She had managed fairly well during my absence and not contacted the colleague I had referred her to in case of urgent need. But within a week after my return she slid into a state of pure terror.

She had created a Catch-22 situation for herself. Her two anxieties, of having cancer and putting me off with her anxiety, created a vicious circle. On one hand she felt that only talking to me could calm her down, hence she needed to see me more often. On the other hand, she was terrorized by the idea that she was becoming bothersome, pestering, unbearable. Within a week of my return her anxiety was so unbearable that she would often wake up her husband crying, "Please hospitalize me, I cannot take it anymore, I cannot continue to live." The level of anxiety was impressive, even though I was convinced that there was no psychotic element in it. It was rather as if some nameless dread hidden in Daphnah's psyche was coming to the fore.

Within this period there were weeks in which I would see Daphnah for six sessions, sometimes in the middle of the night. Within those sessions it was very difficult for me to be helpful to Daphnah. There was absolutely no inner space left to contain her anxiety. She would be totally immersed in either or both of her anxieties, and her whole psyche seemed to be nothing but one or two questions: "Do I have cancer?" and "Have I become totally unbearable?" She wanted nothing but concrete soothing and appeasement. When I said something she would listen intently, but mostly she would lament ragingly: "You are not helping me. What you say does not help me at all!"

I was torn between conflicting feelings. The intrusion into my life was at times difficult to take. The sessions themselves were not easy either. Mostly it was hardly possible to talk to Daphnah, because her whole universe seemed to have collapsed into one of her two preoccupations.

I felt, however, that something extremely important was happening. I knew from her previous descriptions that during early childhood she often felt that her mother hated her, that her mother experienced her as defective. My hunch was that Daphnah saw real hatred in her mother's eyes and that her mother experienced her daughter as an embodiment of her own failure to create and maintain life. Daphnah had often desperately wanted to be picked up and soothed, to receive reassurance. A destructive dynamics seems to have ensued regularly: The less her mother reacted, the more Daphnah would go into a rage, and she would start to feel hopelessly bad, ugly, and repellent. Daphnah seems to have constantly looked for reassurance about not being defective and hateful, without ever getting it.
I assumed that her present state was a reenactment of her childhood anxieties. My continued listening to her was supposed to prove to her that she was valuable. And I was to provide the soothing and holding which her mother had failed to provide. I experienced her as a child who flew into a combination of rage and anxiety, and had but one wish: She had to feel that the "bad girl," the girl who was unbearable, full of rage and longing at the same time, could be held and contained. It was no good to her that the "nice" girl was loved, since deep down she identified herself with the "bad" girl.

It was absolutely unhelpful to interpret this to her. I understood this in Winnicottian terms as a regression to a traumatic constellation. Daphnah had to feel that I was indeed capable of bearing her "bad girl" self, and, since no interpretation would be helpful anyway, I thought that my task was simply to wait it out.

I had an additional hypothesis: Some of Daphnah's descriptions of being "in a dark space, full of terror, and no one being there to help her" were enactments of a trauma: After her head injury she spent several weeks in a hospital. In line with the policy of hospitals at that time, her parents were encouraged not to see their child. Her concussion and head injury, together with the lack of parental care, must have made these weeks in the hospital a hell of constant and deep terror. I assumed that Daphnah was getting in touch with the unprocessed trauma of that hospitalization.

I am never confident about the truth-value of such speculations, since I am skeptical with respect to all theory. Nevertheless at crucial, difficult moments we need a story which makes sense to us, which provides meaning at junctions in which opaqueness and difficulty reigns in a therapy. These stories, or should I call them myths, carry us through these dire straits. Yet we can never know whether the sheer stamina did the job or whether the truth of the hypotheses was curative.

Notwithstanding the truth of my hypotheses, after about six weeks of relentless terror, Daphnah’s anxieties began to subside, and she regained her usual self. This initiated the phase of the therapy in which the existential structure of Daphnah’s life came under closer scrutiny. Up to that period Daphnah had experienced her life as totally governed by the adversity of fate. She had grown into a sense of doom which had little to do with her personally, but was an extension of the fate of her parent’s families, in part even the fate of the Jewish people. The interplay between her acute sensitivity and need for love and approval, and the aspects of her parents’ histories and personalities which prevented them from providing this love, had acted together in the concerted manner of a well-crafted tragedy: They had inexorably led to Daphnah’s experiencing herself as unlovable and damaged.

During the months of her excruciating anxiety Daphnah relived some of the most central constellations of her life. She actualized trauma in order to master it, thus trying to gain authorship over her fate. She forced her anxiety, her sense of being unbearable and bad onto me, and she forced me to become involved at the point at which her mother had failed. By becoming an unruly patient, unable and unwilling to function on the symbolic level which makes normal therapeutic processes possible, she could once again experience how terrible it had been to be the girl shaken by fear and rage without finding anyone to contain these feelings.

Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if I had not been able to withstand this onslaught on my patience, my time, and my nerves. But I have the feeling that behind the chaos Daphnah maintained a not quite conscious sense of how far she could push without straining me beyond my breaking point. Therefore, looking back, I think that Daphnah lived a well-crafted attempt to master the major traumas and pains of her life within a single, concentrated period. I am not imputing conscious manipulation to her. I just think that Winnicott tends to take the idea of regression too literally: Patients often have more of a sense of what is possible than the idea of regression to dependence implies.

1 For an in-depth discussion of this problem, see Strenger, 1991, chapter 5.
Daphnah was capable of living a normal life again, but she felt empty, and that there was no reason to get up in the morning. She experienced the therapy sessions as the only meaningful events in her life, and Daphnah turned this into a Catch-22 situation again: She wanted to finally get well, but getting well meant losing me.

I felt that she was on the verge of recreating the feeling of being sticky and clinging. In order to prevent an additional crisis I tried to create a space for therapeutic work. I told her that as far as I was concerned she did not need any anxiety symptoms as an excuse to be in therapy. She could stay and work with me as long as she felt any need for it. Daphnah's anxieties were incomparably less intense than they had been before. She had developed ways to cope with them by calming herself down. But these were only partially effective. A dark cloud of threat hovered over her horizon, and her sense of doom continued to accompany her.

Why was Daphnah's world so threatening? Why did she feel that there was no safety anywhere once she went into a panic? Whence came the terror which led her time and again to say, "I cannot live anymore, I must die, I simply cannot take this raging fear anymore!"?

Daphnah had a series of dreams in which she was surrounded by death. Once she came to a session and told me: "I counted them: There were eighteen of them altogether. There were eighteen dead people with whom I grew up." She had sat down and calculated how many close family members her parents had lost, most of them in the Holocaust, but also including her mother's little sister. Daphnah came to understand the significance of a fact she had always known: Her mother had named Daphnah after the middle name of her dead little sister. In many ways she, Daphnah, had been an attempt of her mother's to undo the failure to keep her sister alive.

It turned out that Daphnah had not told me that her fear of cancer had not completely subsided. She seemed to have settled for a way of life in which she had found a manageable expression of her sense of doom, the permanent feeling that she was in some danger. I discussed with her why she would not see a doctor and have a biopsy. Her answer was that she believed she would simply not survive the time it would take for her to get the answer. I could understand: This period of waiting for her was the epitome of the sense of doom, her fate of waiting for the most terrible news of all: that she was condemned to death.

Something had to be done about this. Daphnah could not spend the rest of her life waiting passively for the moment at which doom would materialize in one way or another. I decided to use a strategy untypical for my therapeutic style. I proposed the following to her:

Daphnah, your whole life has been governed by the fate of traumas—yours and your parents'—which set the tone of your life. I would like to propose that you take the bull of fate by the horns. You should have a biopsy, but not wait for its results anxiously, like someone who waits for her death penalty. You should use this time to make a feast of it; the feast of finally taking your life into your own hands. When you walk out of the doctor's office, you should not feel that you must be in a hurry to get the answer of the test, because the days until you get the answer will be of great importance to you:

You should meditate for some days on what you would do with your life if you have cancer. In fact, imagine that indeed the answer is positive! You should intensively contemplate the fact that you have a limited time to live—which is true anyway, for all of us. And you should ask yourself what you will do with the time left to you if you have cancer.

Throughout your life you have lived under the shadow of death as a catastrophe, as doom and punishment. Your life has become the fight to stay alive and to be afraid of damage and death. You forget that time is limited, that we all die in the end. Try to use this occasion to get accustomed to the finitude of life, in order to use whatever time you have.

Daphnah's eyes lit up. Almost to my surprise she embraced the idea eagerly, and went for the biopsy. She did not go to work for several days, and during these days she refrained from
calling the laboratory for the answer. We had one session during this waiting period, and I was amazed at the depth of Daphnah's inner sense of calm. It was the first time I ever saw her without a sense of doom in her eyes. It seemed as if indeed she had, for the first time in her life, gained a sense of authorship: Thinking about death not as doom but as a fact of life changed something in the very fabric of her mind.

REWITING A LIFE

Daphnah had studied literature, and, despite considerable literary talent, had chosen not even to try to pursue the career of a writer. The question whether she had acquired some permanent brain damage in the accident on the playground at the age of 5 seemed to pursue her throughout her life. She experienced the very fact that she was allowed to teach literature at a high school as a vindication of her wholeness. And yet, she felt that she was excluded from the true domain of creativity.

I have rarely met a patient who had as deep an interest in the workings of therapy and the mind as Daphnah; she was fascinated by the art of retelling lives. She told and retold her story, trying out possible perspectives on what she was going through. She began to see that her whole life had been lived under the aegis of one overwhelming feeling: She was damaged, and her life would forever consist of trying to cover up this damage. The terror of Scheherazade who had to tell stories to stay alive was also fused with an enormous pleasure.

In a sense Daphnah's almost literary interest in her own story was a necessity, her life had been lived according to a powerful myth of herself: She was a damaged girl who would never in her life get what she really wanted, and she would have to settle instead for what could be had. I experienced Daphnah's attempts at retelling her life as an attempt to find out whether the grip of this story was totally inevitable or whether she could find new ways of telling her life.

Form and content of this motif merged on all levels and colored the transference. Daphnah had never felt that she had been capable of truly capturing her father's attention. His stories and his books had always been more interesting than her. He had never been fully available. On a transferenceal level this was the guiding theme of her relationship with myself. Daphnah was very preoccupied with who I was. She fantasized a lot about me. I was cast into the role of a somewhat romanticized father figure. Would she succeed in capturing my attention fully? Would her stories be interesting enough for me?

Sometimes Daphnah would talk about her desire to create beauty, and she would start crying heartbreakingly. For her the ability to create beauty embodied the sense of wholeness, the feeling of having value. It was axiomatic for her that she would never be part of this domain of wholeness.

Daphnah's father came into closer focus. As noted before he had been a famous physicist. Most of his life and his energy had been devoted to his work. Daphnah remembered how she had envied his graduate students who sometimes came to their home. With them her father was fully alive, his eyes were beaming, his countenance was radiating. They sat in the living room, discussing topics of which Daphnah did not understand a thing.

Daphnah's family had a clearly delineated hierarchy; her father was seen as the special person, the man who embodied true value. He was essentially a committed and decent husband and father, but in a deeper sense Daphnah felt that he was not fully there. By watching his discussions with his graduate students she knew that he was capable of far more liveliness and enthusiasm than he ever showed with his family. And for some reason this enthusiasm was just never there when he was with his wife and children. Her mother had been a subdued woman, shrewd and practical, but convinced that she had no value as a person.

Daphnah's childhood world had been split into two aspects: Her father's world was one of enchantment and value; a world of special people who were deeply enthusiastic about what they were doing and who were proud of being who they were, who truly engaged her father's attention and gave him joy. The world of her mother, as Daphnah experienced it, was gray, full of little worries; a world in which there were no desires, but only necessities, and in which all that could be expected was consideration from others, but no love; mediocrity
and decency, but no pride in achievement. It was clear to Daphnah that she belonged to her mother's world. She could read it in her mother's eyes, who was highly critical toward Daphnah and worried about her. It seemed that her mother was constantly checking out Daphnah for any signs of a mental handicap, for a sign of her being in some way affected by her childhood accident.

These two worlds created what Daphnah experienced as an ontological divide between what was truly valuable, and what was just there, just to be accepted, but not enjoyed, to be taken for granted, but not cherished. For months we were working on this theme, and once this divide in Daphnah's life was elucidated, she had a crucial dream.

She was standing in an open space which was beautifully structured. It reminded her of a Greek temple. On a table there was a beautiful urn filled with coffee. She looked at it, admired its beauty, but did not touch it.

In the next picture she was running toward the home of her childhood. The street was covered with a glow of beauty which gave it an air of grandeur. She arrived at the house, ran up the stairs joyously and breathlessly, and entered the apartment. Her father sat in an armchair. She approached him and kissed him on the forehead.

Daphnah's associations came effortlessly. The space reminded her of an amphitheater at the university at which her father had taught. As a child she had witnessed her father giving a speech at a ceremony. It had been a beautiful day, and her father had seemed to her almost like a god against the background of a grand landscape.

The jug reminded her of classical Greece, a subject which had fascinated her father throughout his life. She remembered how much she wanted to study ancient Greek. Her father, who had had a classical European education, always said that there was nothing more edifying in the world than reading Plato in the original. But when she approached her father asking him whether there was a way for her to study Greek, he smiled at her asking, "Why should you want to do such a thing?" She remembered how at this moment she felt that her father told her that the world of intellectual beauty, which was his delight, was not for her, and that she should stick to the more practical side of things.

The coffee in the jug reminded her of her father's love for Turkish coffee, which he liked prepared in a particular way. She remembered how once she had made coffee for him, and how he had frowned at her because its taste and texture did not correspond precisely to his tastes.

The last scene of the dream reminded her of her joy when she would come home and see that her father was there. This joy was always tempered by his reserve, however. He hardly ever initiated physical contact. He did not mind when she kissed him, but she always felt that she had to restrain her affection. He was caring—and yet always distant. We came to have the feeling that this man had somehow left his heart in Europe with the family he had lost in the Holocaust. His way of remaining loyal to those who had died was not to experience anything in his life in Israel quite fully, except for what he felt he had salvaged from there: the world of learning and culture and the manners and cultivation of his European upbringing. He could only allow himself to be enthusiastic about the world of learning. One of the results had been that he had married a woman he respected and cared for, but did not love deeply. Daphnah's mother felt that she had no true value and transmitted to Daphnah her own belief that the world of the women in the house was less valuable than her father's.

Daphnah could of course not see the full complexity of her father's character as a child, and quite inevitably had taken her father's disfavor to be a reflection of her lack of personal value. Her father had never had the enthusiasm for his little daughter which so often forms the basis for a woman’s sense of lovability later in life.

We gained a more complex understanding of why she had chosen to work with me after having left several other therapists. Something in my European countenance, the bookshelves in my office, the art on the walls had made it possible for her to assimilate me to the world of the "truly valuable people," those who really lived their lives and did something
special. Every meeting with me for her had some of the glow associated with her father’s world from which she had felt excluded.

Daphnah had not only told and retold her story in order to find new ways to write and live her life. The telling of her story was also an act of reparation. Since she perceived me as an embodiment of her father’s world of European learning, the act of being able to hold my attention with the story of her life for years was in many ways the fulfillment of a crucial childhood wish: to command her father’s attention as his graduate students had. She succeeded in doing so quite remarkably. I generally enjoy doing therapeutic work, but I enjoyed working with Daphnah especially. There was a strange disparity between her own sense of worthlessness, grayness, and unlovability, and my experience of Daphnah. She had a peculiarly vivid ability to turn the scenes of her life into a reality. As I am writing these sentences I notice how much the drama of her life, its heroes and scenes have become part of my imagination.

Daphnah’s keen interest in the nature of the therapeutic process gave working with her a special poignancy. She was acutely aware of the intricacies of the interplay between her transferential experience of me and the partnership that evolved through years of common work. Except during the time of her great regression she always maintained an ability to experience and recount her life and the therapeutic process on various levels, and enjoyed understanding the interplay between those levels.

DISMANTLING THE PUPPETS

At some point Daphnah and I spoke about her idealization of me, about the ways in which she symbolically caught her father’s attention through talking to me. She listened respectfully, smiled sometimes, nodded. At some juncture she said: “You seem to think that I idealize you. I respect you, but I don’t think I idealize you. It is simply that what we do in therapy, the type of dialogue we have here, is one of the greatest pleasures I know of. I just don’t have that in life.”

When we looked more closely at her life, it became clearer what she meant. In her self-deprecation she rarely allowed herself to respond to overtures of people who wanted her company, if she thought that they were interesting. “I have nothing to offer to them,” she said. “You have to listen to me, but they’ll find out soon that I have nothing to say.” She also continued to lament about how unsatisfying her marriage was. She would casually indicate that she and her husband actually functioned quite well as a couple except for occasional rows which she initiated. When asked why she did so, she said: “because I can’t stand my marriage.”

We spent months and months trying to understand what was happening. The old interpretations were tried out again, but to little avail. Daphnah was intensely aware that the strongest motivating factor in her life had always been the gaze of a man whom she admired. “I know you think I should find a way to live my life without any need for a idealized man’s gaze,” Daphnah said, smiling, “but I don’t know whether I can do it.”

One of the metaphors which had accompanied our work for quite some time was that of the puppets in her mind. She had coined this metaphor during the initial stages of the therapy, and then it had primarily referred to her various anxieties. She had said: “I know you want me to find out what the puppet shows are, but I can’t.”

The school at which she taught was on a beach. Everything was empty. The surroundings of the school were full of debris, leftovers from a luna-park that had once been there. She looked at them, saw the horses from the caroussel. The paint was peeling off, and she could see that they were hollow inside. There were graffiti all over the school.
In the next scene she went toward the director's office inside the school. I was sitting there, writing the story of her treatment. She entered the office, and asked me whether I wanted some ice cream. I said yes, and she went out to get some.

In the final scene she and I were walking through the down-town area of some big city. I had put my arm around her in a friendly manner and told her, "Well, so you've had your Hans, then," and bade her good-bye. She walked into a building and stood in line in what might be a bank. A woman in her forties who was also waiting explained to her what she had to do. She noticed that the woman's face was wrinkled.

The dream needed little interpretation. The wooden horses were the dismantled puppets of her fantasy life. She emphasized that the deserted area around the school (which in reality of course was not on a beach) did not look sad, but beautiful. The next two scenes were remarkable to her because she felt that in them for the first time—in life and in her dreams—she had an effortlessly natural relationship with me. She did not feel the distance of respect, even though I was sitting in the director's office, and she felt pleasure in being able to do me a favor by bringing me an ice cream. My strange sentence, "You've had your Hans," reminded her of my European origins and of Hans Castorp, the hero of Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* who had come to a sanatorium for a brief visit, only to stay there for seven years. The woman and Daphnah's reaction to her seemed to indicate that Daphnah, who had turned 40 a while ago, could accept the passage of time and her own mortality.

The dream seemed to foreshadow the end of our work. The way she told it, the dream reminded me of the final scene of Fellini's *Otto e mezzo*, where all the figures of the protagonist's life dance around in a circus in a way which reflects the acceptance of the absurdity and strange beauty of life. It seemed that Daphnah had achieved an inner resolution.

My musings and forebearings turned out to be off the mark, though. Daphnah went into a period of bitterness, feeling that her life was not worth living. After several years of therapeutic work she was now fairly symptom-free. She had gained significant insights into the workings of her own mind and developed a richly textured understanding of her own bi-ography. There was but one problem left: As yet she felt that she had nothing to live for. She would come to the sessions and say: "I don't know how to continue." She described huge rows she was having with her husband, and added with an almost wistful smile: "I know exactly why I initiate these rows. I don't want this life! I will have to finish the therapy—which has been the source of happiness for me, and then everything will be gray again. I will be back to the days in which there was nothing worth waiting for. I cannot bear it!"

For months therapeutic work was hampered by a sense of stalemate. It was as if there was nowhere left to go: It seemed that all that could be understood had been understood. We had a fairly complex picture of the interaction between environmental influence and temperamental propensities which had led Daphnah to become who she was. We had unearthed the mythological field of force which had enveloped Daphnah's mind with a sense of doom, worthlessness, and damage. We kept going over the same ground: She continued to lament her hopelessness about ever being really alive, and I grew increasingly paralyzed and frustrated by this deadlock. All our attempts to understand were sterile. The old interpretations and narrative lines seemed to have gone stale, and nothing we could come up with seemed to make any difference.

Daphnah seemed to be caught in a deadlock of simply not being able to move away from a position of self-depreciation. She despised the prosaic life she felt locked into. She mocked herself for her own addiction to the dramatic. She compared her own life to her hopes and sank into sadness. She despised herself for not being able to give up her illusions, and she mocked the illusions themselves. She even used her own insights into the workings of her mind to depreciate herself. I started to point out to her that her habit of self-depreciation seemed to have achieved a life of its own. She despised herself for not being able to give up her illusions, and she mocked the illusions themselves. She even used her own insights into the workings of her mind to depreciate herself. I started to point out to her that her habit of self-depreciation seemed to have achieved a life of its own. I used a strategy I have found useful in many therapies: There often comes a point at which I begin to feel that there is no point in trying to understand self-depreciation and self-hatred any further, since it has acquired a kind of functional autonomy and has
turned into a habit. It is then useful to mobilize the patient in fighting this self-hatred the way you fight an addiction. He must identify the ways it permeates his mind, and persecute it whenever he can. This can help the patient to stop identifying with this hatred and instead turn it into an enemy to be fought.

Daphnah understood what I was talking about and used it cleverly to pursue the same existential strategy. She would say sarcastically: “Well, there I go, hating myself again, isn’t it pathetic?” It was of no use pointing out to her that she was using this insight for the generation of further self-hatred, since she used this in the manner of a recursive function to turn it into a further reason for self-hatred again. The sessions and Daphnah’s life seemed to be stuck in a bottomless mire of drabness, self-hatred, and stuckness, and there seemed to be no place to go.

Toward the end of one of these sessions Daphnah began to talk again about how difficult it was for her to accept the prosaic nature of her life, how all her romantic hopes had been taken away (she would often accompany her tears with the remark, “This brings tears to my eyes”). Suddenly she began to smile: “You know, a couple of days ago I thought that I am simply unwilling and incapable of giving up my desire for romantic drama. Because I cannot gain it in positive ways I generate it through my suffering. If I am not the romantic success I wanted to be, at least I will be a tragic failure!” Both of us burst out laughing; in one stroke Daphnah had illuminated the deep structure of the stalemate of the last half-year. She grinned at me and said: “I made a crucial mistake; I’ve given you the ammunition to defuse my despair, and as I know you, you’re not going to let me off the hook again.” My reply was, “While we’re at it: Have you noticed that whenever you start crying you tell me that the topic of giving up romantic hopes brings tears to your eyes? You seem to want to make sure that I see that you’re crying and that I appreciate the tragic suffering involved in it.” She laughed and said with a sigh, “Well, I told you I made a mistake.”

Daphnah began to understand that the ontological protest of subjectivity is always characterized by drama, because it is a reflection of the individual’s fight to stay alive. Living under the aegis of the ontological protest of subjectivity creates an addiction to the drama of life and death. Daphnah’s difficulty in experiencing ordinary life as significant was similar to the difficulty soldiers experienced in getting used to civilian life. War is fraught with hardship, but it is replete with drama, and there can be something anticlimactic in the return to the petty concerns and activities of ordinary life.

The end phase of the therapy came to be governed, once again, by the motif of Scheherazade. Daphnah felt that she could not end the therapy without receiving the recognition which she had failed to gain from her father. She felt cheated: It was as if she had been promised a reparation which kept eluding her. I had accepted her transferential offer of being the man whose gaze and recognition would provide her with the sense of wholeness she had never possessed, and now all I gave her was an understanding of why childhood wishes can only be renounced, and never be fulfilled. She felt that analytic therapy was essentially a bluff: It promised something it could not deliver, it created hopes that were outside its reach.

She told me of a recurrent fantasy: She stood behind a glass door, looking at a man, who could be either her father or myself, sitting in an armchair. She wanted to come into the room and engage him in play, but she was afraid that he would be the one to end the playing by telling her that he had had enough. “For once in my life I want to play with him until I feel that I have had enough, that I want to go and do something else. For once I want to be the one who says, ‘It was good, but it is enough, now.’” She finally wanted to shatter the glass door and feel some real contact with me.

This period was not easy for me to bear: Sometimes I felt unjustly accused, sometimes I labored under an obscure sense of guilt. Had I in any way created unrealistic hopes? Did Daphnah indeed expect tokens of love which were outside the domain of a therapeutic relationship? Were we stuck in one of those situations Freud had described, in which the patient demands love and will not settle for anything less? Did she really expect me to transgress the boundaries of therapeutic propriety?
The sessions acquired a tedious quality. Daphnah spoke endlessly about the fantasy conversations she had with me between sessions. And gradually I came to feel that she was not talking to me at all. It was as if she were continuing her fantasized dialogue when she physically sat in the sessions. Interpretations began to feel stale. All that could have been said about her experience seemed to have been said.

After lengthy considerations I finally decided to try a more direct and less interpretive approach. I told Daphnah:

You have been afraid all along that I would lose patience at some point, that you would again become a bothersome, clinging, unattractive girl in the therapeutic situation. You are afraid that I will become angry.

I must tell you that I am angry indeed. But not for the reasons you keep fearing. The real reason is that I feel that you are not talking to me at all. You are seemingly obsessed with me, but in reality you are obsessed with a fantasy figure. The man in your mind has the power to bestow completeness by his love and his utterances. I am just a human being who has been working with you for years, often in doubt, trying to do his best.

You keep talking about what I could give to you. You want to finally see the recognition in my eyes which would make you a wholesome, undamaged human being. But you do not recognize me in any way. You keep hammering away at me for something I cannot give, and you turn me into something I am not. I have become nothing but a source of possible recognition.

It is your choice now: You have the possibility of hearing what I say as I mean it. As a personal statement of my own anger and pain at not being recognized by you as an independent human being after all these years of work. Or you can hear it as the statement of an omnipotent father who refuses to make you whole through his love. I cannot prevent you from taking the latter line, and I know I am taking a risk. But I feel that we are caught in a labyrinth of mirrors in which images keep mirroring each other.

You say that you want to shatter the glass door and to finally touch me. By telling you what I really feel I want to shatter the mirror-labyrinth of endless stories. Please finally try to hear and see me!

At first Daphnah was in shock, but soon I felt that we were at last talking to each other. During the final months of our work the tone of the dialogue began to change. I would not call what ensued an exercise in mutual analysis, but I tried to be as open with Daphnah as I could. In trying to break through the transferential-countertransferential deadlock, it was of great importance to acknowledge the aspects of myself that had contributed to Daphnah's experience.

Daphnah felt that she had moved me in ways that I was disavowing. She kept saying: "I saw something in your eyes during the first years of treatment. Something good and caring, and you keep giving me the feeling that it was all an illusion. You try to interpret it away as some reflection of my desire to finally touch my father. Was it all an illusion, then?"

I had been aware from the very beginning of the therapy that various aspects of Daphnah's life touched deep chords in me. Her fate of having been burdened with her mother's fear of not being able to sustain life, and her father's unending grief about a family he had lost, reverberated with levels of my history that were in turn linked with previous generations of my own family history. The Holocaust's presence in her soul added additional meanings pertaining to my Jewish identity.

I thought that I had these countertransference resonances under control, and that they did not interfere with my work with her. But Daphnah was sensitive enough to pick up the ways in which she had touched deeper levels in my soul. This direct, personal contact with me was both important and confusing for her. Her capacity to engage me directly constituted a kind of corrective emotional experience, but my unwillingness to speak about this more personal level threw her back to the tantalizing doubts of her childhood and adolescence, when she had been obsessed with the question of whether she mattered to her father at all.

Once the dialogue became more direct and mutual, we could finally disentangle the various levels of our relationship. The transferential and the real, the genuine and the fantasized levels became more lucid, and it finally came to the point where Daphnah felt that we could part without leaving her in excessive pain. The more she understood my limitations and the ways in
which my own fate had resonated with hers, the less she felt that she was deprived of something unique I had withheld from her. During the last two years of the therapy, while we had been busy trying to understand the transferential entanglement, Daphnah had changed her life in significant respects. She became more open socially, and began to believe that being in her presence was enjoyable. Most importantly, perhaps, she finally dared crossing over into a territory that she had always believed to be out of bounds for her. She successfully embarked on several projects of literary translation. In a sense the glass door, which had driven Daphnah crazy, was shattered.

The retreat inside, or: authorship and fantasy

Trauma: the embodiment of fate

The therapeutic journey with Daphnah often made me think about the variety of forms of fatedness. Throughout her life she had felt so irrevocably fated that she retreated to a fantasy of her inner, true self that was locked into her apparent self. Her life had become an endless wait for the moment in which this true self would burst out like a butterfly from a cocoon. This chapter traces forms of fatedness as they are reflected in Daphnah’s life, and concludes with some reflections on how fantasy can perpetuate the fate it was supposed to fight.

Trauma has become the symbolic equivalent of fate in psychology, the modern counterpart of the Greek myth of intervention of the mairae, the fates in an individual’s life. In our psychological vocabulary, trauma epitomizes the fragility of the good life and the search for authorship.

Trauma invariably engages the patient and the therapist in thoughts about what would have happened if...? How would Daphnah’s life have evolved if she had not fallen off that ladder? Would this fall have had less dramatic consequences if Daphnah’s mother had not been traumatized by her terrible
losses during the Holocaust, in particular if her mother’s little sister had not died under such tragic circumstances?

Daphnah’s biography highlights a crucial feature of trauma in particular and fatedness in general. Daphnah’s fall from the ladder at age 5 locked her life into a struggle to gain recognition as being normal and not damaged. It is tempting to think that Daphnah’s accident in itself might not have had anything like the impact it acquired, if it had not interacted with her mother’s terror of not being capable of maintaining life. The reconstructive work we did over the years created the distinct sense that her mother’s anxious look, her hatred of Daphnah for embodying her failure to keep her sister and daughter safe, were the most important source of Daphnah’s fatedness.

The situation is further complicated by the role Daphnah’s father seems to have had in her development. Daphnah’s family of origin was structured by a mythical gap between the truly valuable and the worthless, the fascinating and the drab, the interesting and the merely tolerable embodied by her father and mother respectively. It seems to have been fueled by her father’s emotional detachment from the family he had created and his unfinished mourning for all those he had lost in the Holocaust on one hand, and her mother’s basic insecurity on the other hand.

The series of what if...? questions does not come to an end here. It might be argued that the tragic intertwining of factors in Daphnah’s life might still not have had the impact it did if she had been temperamentally more inclined toward fighting fate. Daphnah could have assigned the elements of fate a different role: She could have decided that she was going to prove everybody wrong, that she was going to show her father that she was as capable of creating beauty as he was, and that she was going to disdainfully prove to her mother that one did not have to accept fate, but that one had to fight it. This in turn leads to the further question of whether such fight would have been more likely to occur if Daphnah could have trusted her talents, which would have made it easier for her to prove that indeed she was not only not damaged but capable of creating something culturally valuable.

None of these questions can, of course, be answered with any certainty. “What might have been is an abstraction...” (Eliot, 1944, p. 13). Yet these abstractions can come to occupy the center of the individual’s life. They can be experienced as more real than the actual, external life the individual seemingly participates in. The individual can come to feel that fantasy life contains more of who she really is than her actual life.

Our minds are formed by mythological structures generated by culture and by the story of our families. By “mythological structures” I mean assumptions about our selves, our families, and our ethnic group which have the totalitarian character Claude Levi-Strauss (1979, p. 17) considers to be characteristic of the “savage mind.” They are unquestioned, and often do not reflect the consciously held, more sophisticated beliefs of individuals governed by them. They exert awesome power over the mind, and they do not allow the individual to develop a more complex and accurate picture of who she is and how she came to be who she is now.'

Daphnah’s whole life had been governed by the mythological structure of the doubt of whether her family was destined to live or doomed to die. Her thought and feeling revolved around the categories of doom versus redemption, damage versus wholeness. This mythological structure reflected her mother’s horror at first having lost her family in the Holocaust, and then her sister in Israel. Daphnah’s mother had been governed completely by the question of whether she was capable of sustaining life, and this question became the defining feature of her relationship with Daphnah.

Superimposed on this basic structure there was a second one, derived from her childhood experience of the difference

---

1 Elaborations of this topic are to be found in the work of Françoise Dolto (1984). I am grateful to Chela Bnaya who has made me more sensitive to this dimension of fatedness, and whose way of freeing children and adolescents from the mythological field of their families has had a strong influence on how I understand the issues here.
between her mother and her father. This second tier was cen-
tered around the categories of invaluable versus valuable, drab
versus fascinating, unattractive versus attractive. This second
layer of mythological thinking reflected her mother’s sense of
being worthless compared with her father’s talents. The divi-
sion of worthless versus valuable had been quite explicit in
Daphnah’s early family life. It had been reinforced by her fa-
ther’s emotional distance from the family’s daily life and his
immersion in theoretical physics and classical philosophy, from
which Daphnah and her mother were completely excluded.

The mythological web governing her family had become
the deep structure of Daphnah’s life. Her perception of herself,
the way she defined her (lack of) value, the way she experi-
enced her life, its possible goals were all a function of this
structure. Ultimately Daphnah came to feel that she was fated
because she was worthless, because she belonged to the part of
humanity which just existed without having true value.

It was to take years until Daphnah could fully understand
that her sense of fatedness had been directed toward the wrong
aspects of her life. The problem was not to be sought in her
limitations, but in the myth that had governed her life: the rigid
structure which had condemned her to experiencing herself as
someone who could not possibly lead a valuable life.

WHEN AUTHORSHIP IS IMPOSSIBLE

The sense of authorship evolves through the fulfillment of
some of the individual’s central desires. When this is impossible
there are three basic options: One is that the individual is capa-
bile of truly renouncing the unfulfillable desires. Freud assumed
that this was the solution required by civilization. Sublimation
of basic desires into higher, cultural goals was the royal road
to authorship under circumstances of adversity—and for Freud
civilized life in itself was adverse to our nature. Yet, toward the
end of his life, Freud (1937) became rather pessimistic. He
came to think that most people have very limited capacities for
sublimation. They fall ill whenever frustration exceeds what
they can bear, even if they have been successfully analyzed in
the past.

The second option is to kill desire. When there is no hope
for real satisfaction, and no alternative for the original desire
seems satisfactory, the individual can come to the point of re-
nouncing a life experienced as worth living. If she cannot bear
the pain of such loss of hope, she can try to lose touch with
the desires which once embodied the image of a full life. The
price paid is a degree of psychic death, a loss of vitality which
manifests itself in depression or schizoid withdrawal from actual
life. These are the paradigms that psychoanalysts of the British
object relations tradition described as schizoid illness.

There is a third, intermediary possibility: The person has
no realistic hope for the fulfillment of her central desires, but
does not lose touch with them. They are relegated to the realm
of fantasy, where they lead an intense existence divorced from
the individual’s actual life. This is the centripetal strategy of
the ontological protest of subjectivity, the retreat inside, which
characterizes Daphnah’s life.

The function of this strategy is to maintain hope. By pre-
serving desire in fantasy Daphnah tried to maintain a core of
aliveness. Ideally the ontological protest of subjectivity is an
existential attitude which allows the individual to survive peri-
ods of life in which circumstance does not allow for actual
authorship. It functions as a bridge between the state of fat-
edness and the state of regaining authorship by maintaining
hope for the emergence of conditions which will allow for a
life worth living. Sometimes such conditions cannot be found
but must be created, and the ontological protest of subjectivity
can be the source of such creativity.

THE RETREAT INTO FANTASY AS A MODE OF EXISTENCE

The ontological protest fulfills its function of preserving au-
thorship only if the individual at some point finds ways to re-
turn his energies to the living of a life. But the retreat into
fantasy can turn into a frozen existential attitude which forecloses the possibility of actual authorship rather than preserving it. It can become a retreat into a fantasized better world to which the individual becomes addicted. The attitude of disidentification with actual life becomes a mode of life in itself. When this happens the ontological protest loses its function, because it becomes an impediment to the actualization of authorship.

Dickens' description of Miss Havisham, one of the central character of Great Expectations, provides an almost archetypal image of the ontological protest of subjectivity as a frozen existential attitude. In her youth Miss Havisham had been traumatized by the announcement that her bridegroom had run off right before the wedding ceremony. We meet her, more than three decades later, sitting in her wedding dress, which has meanwhile turned so brittle that it is gradually disintegrating into dust. She spends most of her life in the room where she received the announcement of her bridegroom's flight. Her life is the symbolic rejection of a fact she has never come to terms with. It does not seem that she entertains any fantasies about his coming back. She just freezes in a state of protest, essentially denying that her life has continued, since the moment that she is incapable, or unwilling to overcome.

In the most transparent cases—let us call them the Miss Havisham model—protest becomes a mode of life. The individual lives in a state of bitterness, and the sense of not living is translated into a constant accusation of others who are taken to be responsible for the subject's failure to live her own life. Protest is kept alive not as a motivator for change but as a goal in its own right. The sense of authorship is maintained only through the experience of disidentification with life and hatred for reality. Sometimes, at the core of the personality, a split-off fantasy life continues to nourish the image of a life the individual could really call her own. Sometimes the individual has lost touch with any such image, and all that remains is the mute sense of detachment which characterizes the schizoid withdrawal into an inner citadel. The ontological protest has become the purely negative position of rejecting one's life without any sense of an alternative.

Authorship and Fantasy

A patient of mine, a young woman without crippling symptoms, who suffered from a deep dissatisfaction with her life, came to see me after she had spent the last seven years restlessl moving from one therapy to the next. She had an image of what her life was supposed to be like, and whenever she compared her actual life with the image of what there was supposed to be, she would go into a combination of rage and despair. Once she expressed her suffering succinctly with an expression of protest, disgust, and disbelief: "I'm sorry, this isn't my life, they simply sent me the wrong life!"

I understood her suffering more precisely from that moment on. She lived with a terrible sense of disbelief that this actually was her life. She woke up every morning not believing that she had really woken up. She was waiting for the nightmare of the life she felt locked into to fade away like a dream. She never quite felt that the life she was actually leading was fully her own, and she participated in it under protest: "The world, my life cannot be the way it seems to be, it must not be that way!" She really felt a mistake had occurred. Her fantasized worlds had become so real to her, that she experienced them as more real than her actual life. The more the split of mind engendered by fantasy became entrenched, the more the gap between her imagined self and real self deepened, the more she felt estranged from her own life.

Fantasy and Imagination

The duality of the ontological protest of subjectivity is rooted in the dual function of the human imagination: On the one hand the imagination is our tool to transcend the existing, to envisage the nonexistent, and thus to create something new (Sartre, 1943). On the other hand the imagination can be used under the aegis of the pleasure principle, and is then generally called fantasy. In fantasy we imagine a desired state of affairs. But we do not imagine it as a possibility to be realized in the future. Instead we imagine that what we desire occurs now. We want to feel that we actually have what is not ours in reality.
The function of fantasy is not to enable us to experiment with other views of the world, with possible elaborations of the future. Its goal is to relieve pain immediately by generating the feeling of what it would be like if a desire were fulfilled.

The crucial distinction between fantasy and other uses of the imagination is as follows: I desire a woman. I can imagine what it will be like to be with her. I imagine what I will do in order to gain her love. I imagine the feelings I will have, and I can enjoy this. In doing so I do not deny that she is not mine for the time being. I am capable of experiencing her absence, the pain this absence induces, the ache of my unfulfilled desire.

If I cannot stand the pain, if I feel that I need to dull it, I can choose to use my imagination differently: I can fantasize that she is mine. In doing so I split myself into two mentally. There is the dim awareness of my real situation (I may be driving my car), and the circumstance of my life (I desire a woman who does not desire me). But the center of my consciousness is filled by another situation, in which I make love to this woman, in which we walk the streets of Paris, visit the Uffizi in Florence. If I fantasize seeing her I do not only imagine what I will feel but I try to get myself to actually feel the feelings (Wolheim, 1984). The absence of the desired object has, temporarily, disappeared from the center of my experience; the pain of my unfulfilled desire is dulled. I feel better. I have used my imagination not in order to imagine what is absent, but in order to give myself the experience as if it were present.

Fantasy only works if the inner world at least temporarily abolishes the impact of the actual world. This is achieved at a twofold price. First, in fantasy the mind is split into two parts. One which is aware (even if dimly) of the actual state of affairs (the beloved is not there; I am alone), and one which lives the fantasized content (I am with the beloved). This split of the mind momentarily helps to overcome pain and frustration.

The second price paid for the habitual use of fantasy is the denigration of the real. It is an attempt to deny the consciousness of absence and to induce a state of pure presence.

The point is that the more an individual relies on fantasy as a means to reduce the pain of absence, the more fantasized realities achieve a status close to that of the actual world. The result is that the individual's actual life comes to feel unreal.²

**THE BUTTERFLY IN THE COCOON**

One of the most fateful results of the retreat into fantasy is that the actual self is experienced as not quite real. One of the fantasies frequently encountered in patients who have experienced themselves as fated is that of the butterfly locked into a cocoon. They live with the image of themselves as imprisoned in a false self which precludes their moving freely, and they settle into the existential position of the long wait.³ They wait for the moment in which they will finally break out of the cocoon and will fly like a butterfly. The fantasy they harbor is one of effortless movement. They feel that if only conditions of fatedness would disappear, they would finally move without the weight and inhibition they have experienced throughout their lives.

This illusion is made possible by an important feature of fantasy: that of creating a frictionless reality. The individual locked into fantasy sees a ballet dancer, her natural grace, her lightness and beauty of movement, and links this image to her own desire for authorship. The problem is that the image of the ballet dancer is disconnected from the facts of a professional ballet dancer's life: the arduous work eight hours a day, the renunciation and pain involved in the acquisition of control over her body. It is certainly true that the movement of a truly great ballerina acquires the quality of effortlessness, but this quality is the peak of a merging of natural talent and arduous work, not a state of grace bestowed by nature alone.

²This idea is partially inspired by Bion's notion of "hatred of reality" (1967), but does not follow his detailed reasoning.

³The metaphor is taken from Manu Khan's (1987) collection of case histories. Incidentally I would like to add a comment on this book, which has rightly been condemned for the outrageous anti-Semitism in one of its chapters, and exemplifies a form of psychotherapeutic autocratic omnipotence to be eschewed. These more spectacular features of the book have obscured the fact that it contains some ideas worth considering, such as Khan's attempt to integrate the individual's cultural background into his understanding of the notion of the true self.
The more the individual's image of a life worth living is formed by images created through fantasy, the more the distance between actual life and a life informed by authorship is increased. The fantasy image transcendentalizes the idea of a "real" life to the point where nothing in actual life could correspond to it anymore. In therapeutic work this manifests itself by the patient's contemptuous rejection of real-life options which could provide a step toward authorship, because he or she cannot see any connection between these steps and the image of real life they have gotten used to in fantasy. Fantasy can therefore, paradoxically, preserve the state of fatedness against which the individual protests (Wollheim, 1984, chapter 5, pp. 1130-1161).

The tragedy of this constellation is that the individual often feels something which is true: Often there is indeed a potential which is unrealized. Daphnah had literary abilities and a playfulness of mind which had never come to full fruition. The problem was that in her fantasies playfulness had become equated with great creative achievement. The distance between her real life and the creation of great beauty she had hoped for became so great that she did not dare even to try out what she was really capable of. The therapeutic encounter enabled her to play in ways she had never allowed herself in reality. She could take the risk of bridging the gap between the fantasized true self and reality only after years of therapeutic work, when she began to do literary translations, and to realize her as yet untapped potential.

THE INNER PRISON

One of the most salient symptoms of fatedness is that the individual seems to be locked into an inner drama. He seems to repeat the same patterns again and again, inexorably. His energies are geared toward fights with phantoms, and the wars he is involved in are often not intelligible even to those who know him well. The fated individual's sense that he is locked into life rather than actually living, often has some justification: There seems to be a veil which separates him from the concerns of others.

Daphnah's relationship with her mother had been governed by the mother's terrified and hateful gaze at her daughter whom she believed to be damaged. Daphnah had desperately needed her mother to show her that she was neither damaged nor unlovable. She drove her mother crazy with her temper-tantrums, and hoped that her mother would pick her up this time, calm her down, and restore her sense of being lovable. This hope was consistently disappointed, and her self-experience of being damaged and disgusting was reinforced. Daphnah seemed to be doomed to live with this feeling for the rest of her life—and hence she labored under the sense of fatedness which permeated everything she did. In addition she consistently failed to evoke a warm and loving response from her father who always seemed remote. She never felt that she could quite engage his attention.

Daphnah tried to gain authorship over this constellation by endlessly repeating it in fantasy. She fantasized scenes in which someone would finally give her the feeling that she was not unlovable. Her hope was that one day in reality there would be someone who would show a positive gleam in his or her eyes in Daphnah's presence. She replayed this scene constantly, but it never happened in reality.

The eternal replay of these situations in fantasy has primarily one goal: to restore a sense of authorship by reliving these scenes with an ending which does not leave the individual with the feeling of being the helpless victim he was in the original scene. This to me seems the simplest answer to Freud's question as to what is the motivation "beyond the pleasure-principle" which fixates individuals to traumatic circumstance in the past.

The intrinsic paradox of these attempts is that they turn the past into a perpetual present. This can easily be explained in reference to a very common fixation to past objects. There are individuals whose life turns into a sustained attempt to correct an early experience of rejection. They do so by falling in love with people who are in relevant respects similar to those they have been rejected by. The \textit{conditio sine qua non} for falling
in love is that the object gives the individual a sense of insecurity, that the possibility of rejection should be in the air.

If the scenario behind this choice is analyzed in detail, it generally turns out that it reflects a fantasy which has accompanied the individual for a long time, in which she finally gains the love of someone who first did not deem her worthy of love, did not see her value or her attractiveness. In this way the inner object (the fantasy structure accompanying the individual) is externalized to some actual person. The Catch-22 situation which arises is the following: If the object does not evoke the fear of rejection, the individual cannot fall in love with him, since her overriding project is the reestablishment of authorship. But once the fears are actualized, the individual tends to maneuver herself into situations of helplessness, of rage, and feelings of rejection which are very likely to engender the very rejection the individual was terrified of.

The paradox is completed by the fact that if the individual indeed manages to gain the object's love, she is likely to lose interest in him. It is as if she said to herself: “My goal was to gain the love of someone who does not love me. This man loves me, hence he is not the object whose love I need to gain in order to reestablish authorship.”

HOLDING THE PATIENT: ON SOOTHING TERRORS

The psychoanalytic emphasis on transference began with the observation that central unconscious desires can be transferred to the analyst, and that these transferred desires can become the royal road to the treatment and transformation of these desires. Since its inception psychoanalysis has added several alternative modes of understanding the dynamics of transference. One of them is Winnicott’s (1971) idea of the use of the object. This idea is often understood to mean that the analyst lends his person to the patient to enable her to develop aspects of her personality which have remained unrealized for lack of appropriate environmental facilitation.

The restoration of authorship often entails the working through of earlier trauma, and this was the use Daphnah made of me during the great regression. During that period I took Winnicott’s position that, at least with some patients, there are phases in therapy during which patients need more concrete forms of soothing and management (what Winnicott [1965] calls holding). The trauma Daphnah tried to deal with was her mother’s inability to soothe her fears during a crucial period of her life. Her mother had been so frightened by her failure to prevent Daphnah’s accident that she kept checking her child’s health instead of reassuring her. This had turned into one of the tiers of Daphnah’s experience of being irretrievably damaged.

The desire for overcoming fatedness can become an issue of life and death. The result is that the individual goes into a kind of psychic tunnel vision: There is but one thing that matters, and nothing else can reach the patient. Daphnah wanted just one thing: the experience that I could bear her when she was as unbearable as she had been made to feel during her childhood. If this were to fail, she would forever be locked into the fateful interaction with her mother which she perpetuated forever in her mind.

The therapist has only two possibilities at such a juncture. He can, of course, refuse to be used in the way the patient needs. This refusal is, I think, totally legitimate, since every clinician must determine the boundaries of what he feels capable and willing to do. If he accepts the role offered to him in the drama of the patient’s search for authorship, he takes on great responsibility, since he cannot call off the play once he feels that it becomes too much. This is the lesson I learned from patients like Daphnah and Clarissa who engaged me completely in their respective attempts to restore authorship by mobilizing me to meet their needs.

MAKING CONTACT WITH THE INNER CORE: POTENTIAL SPACE AND THE DYNAMIC OF TRANSFERENCE

Daphnah’s treatment exemplifies another aspect of use of the object which I would like to comment on. She had, as I said,
retracted into a world of fantasy which was meant to preserve a core of desire without which she would not really have felt alive. The price she paid was that her contact with the external world was of limited importance to her. She felt that her actual life reflected the ways in which she had given in to fatedness, and hence did not reflect who she really was, or, at least, wanted to be.

Daphnah rejected the first therapists she sought out because she felt that they did not provide her with the opportunity to transfer to them the fantasies which were crucial to her inner self. By saying that they were transparent, that they did not provide her with any mystery, she implied that they did not correspond to a central image of her fantasy life. That image, as we saw, was of the detached, European intellectual whose love she had always sought, an image which was traced to her father throughout the therapeutic work.

Daphnah sought to heal the rift in her personality. To seek therapeutic help was her last attempt to undo a constellation that she had come to accept as inevitable for most of her life. She had lived with the experience of an unbridgeable divide between what she truly desired and what she could get. What she really desired could only be gotten in fantasy: She thought that no man who approached her ideal of intellectuality would ever take any interest in her. Yet she felt that commanding such a man's interest was crucial to gaining authorship over her actual life, which she experienced as governed almost exclusively by fate.

This is how the motif of Scheherazade came to govern the course of her therapeutic journey. From the very beginning she felt that her days with me were limited. Every session had the subtext of whether she would be able to command my attention sufficiently to allow her to continue. The therapeutic relationship became the stage for the drama of her attempt to stay alive by continuing to tell her story.

Reality and fantasy, illusion and actuality became woven into what Winnicott (1971) called the intermediary space between the subjective and the objective. Daphnah had chosen to undergo therapy with me, because some of my actual personality characteristics were suitable for her use. She could bridge the gap between the inner core of fantasy and external reality by endowing me with the attributes needed to make her whole.

The complexity of the therapeutic work consisted in negotiating my way between Scylla and Charybdis. The Scylla was to actively play the role she had given me, to enact the transferential fantasy of being endowed with the ability to give her wholeness. This would have been very harmful, since it would have reinforced her feeling of a hopeless distance between her and myself. The Charybdis was to try prematurely to interpret the idealizing character of her transference. In moments of exasperation I made the latter mistake repeatedly. I pointed out to her that she was endowing me with properties no ordinary human could have, that she was mistaking me for the father of her childhood.

The problem was that she did not hear this interpretation as I intended it. I tried to make contact with her on the level of the working alliance, she heard it as part of the transference. I gave it from outside the stage on which the drama was going on. It was, so to speak, an attempt to call her down to the seats of the audience and discuss the play with me. Yet she heard it as part of the play itself, and there it simply meant "get off my back, I have had enough."

I came to see how I was participating in the Scheherazade drama. My interpretation of the childhood origins of her wishes was invariably experienced as an attempt to get rid of her. I began to understand that Daphnah could not renounce her desire without being condemned to a permanent, deep sense of fatedness. The one way out was to help her to transform her lifelong fantasy images of redemption rather than urging her to give them up. I could do this by granting her the opportunity to come to the end of the therapy in her own way. In this manner she could transform the image of the rejecting, impatient father to that of a therapist who honored her needs and personal rhythm.

Allowing the patient the opportunity of using the therapist as a link between her inner world and external reality creates inevitable complexities. While it may be the patient's only opportunity to bridge the gap between an inner self split off from actual life, the therapist walks the thin thread of making it
impossible for the patient ever to gain a sense of authorship by retraumatizing her. In the transference domain of potential space small mistakes can acquire tremendous importance for the patient. Once the drama of the search for authorship has been transferred onto the stage of the therapeutic relationship, the clinician cannot call the play off without doing great damage to the patient, for whom psychic and external reality have become inextricably fused.

“IT IS ESSENTIALLY A CURE THROUGH LOVE”

Thus Freud wrote to Jung on December 6th, 1906, characterizing the nature of psychoanalytic cure (Freud/Jung, 1974). This sentence is surprising, given that Freud was extremely cautious about what he called transference cures. He did not believe that a cure resulting purely from the suggestive influence derived from the patient’s transference attachment to the analyst could have any lasting impact. The symptomatic improvement would crumble the moment the patient awakened from the transference dream. Freud (1915) advised analysts to be very clear and straightforward about the nature of the analytic relationship. If the (presumably female) patient fell in love with the (presumably male) analyst, the latter had to make it very clear that the therapeutic alliance was purely work oriented. He strongly opted against any attempt to ease the patient’s pain by insinuating that the analyst would maybe return her love at some later stage.

Yet Freud, quite early in his career, came to see transference feelings as the centerpiece of analytic work. Even though they seemed to obstruct the analytic task of elucidating the patient’s unconscious conflicts, they really presented the central opportunity to uncover and resolve these conflicts. By directing her unrequited childhood wishes for her father’s love to the analyst, the patient was faced with the full force of the clash between her desires and social reality. If the analyst could stand his ground and stick to the principle of abstinence, if the patient’s wishes were not gratified by any means, she would have no choice but to renounce the desires that had survived in her unconscious and governed her life.

Ferenczi, one of Freud’s most creative pupils, came to take the sentence that all psychoanalytic cures were cures of love much more literally than Freud had ever intended. In the 1920s Ferenczi conducted several experiments in what he called active technique. He tried to give patients quite directly, the type of parental love they had not received from their parents, because he believed that only the response to the patient’s need for love would really cure the patient. Freud was highly skeptical of what he dismissively called Ferenczi’s kissing technique. The psychoanalytic mainstream accepted Freud’s view: It was of no use to gratify the patient’s wishes. This only prevented the patient from doing the real psychic work of renouncing early childhood wishes.

This was the beginning of the tension between two basic models in psychoanalysis, which I call the classic and the romantic visions (Strenger, 1989, 1997c). The classic model believed in the centrality of insight and renunciation, the romantic model assumed that only meeting the patient’s central needs could cure. In recent years various intermediary models have been presented which accept the romantic view that insight alone cannot cure, but preserve the classic insistence that concrete gratification of wishes does not really help the patient in the long run.

In what follows I want to use the model of authorship and ontological protest of subjectivity to reformulate some of the insights of the Winnicottian tradition (Winnicott, 1971; Bollas, 1987, 1989) and some other important authors (Loewald, 1980). My experience corroborates the romantic view that renunciation is not a realistic way of looking at how patients can be helped. The patient will often submit to the analyst’s insistence that her wishes are unrealistic—but the price is heavy. The patient can be left with a severe sense of emptiness, and even a feeling that there is little left to live for.

I faced this problem repeatedly with Daphnah. I often found myself investigating the origin of her transference wishes, hoping that insight would gradually lead to the waning of these wishes. This hope turned out to be quite deluded. Her
reaction was always the same: She felt that I was right, but that renunciation would leave her with nothing to live for.

I gradually gained a deeper understanding of Daphnah's hopelessness. She had felt throughout her life that her sense of authorship was impaired because she could not receive the one thing she had been hoping for: recognition of her value by a man whom she considered to be valuable. I essentially told her that this wish derived from her childhood and that she had to find ways to give up on it. But she could see no alternative way to restore her sense of authorship.

What is the therapeutic mechanism, then? What is the "cure of love" Freud was talking about? My hypothesis, put simply, is as follows. The patient who has retreated into an inner, imaginary core, lives a large part of her life in fantasy. In her fantasies she imagines the goal which would finally give her a sense of authorship. These fantasies are transferred to the therapist. This may not be the first time that the patient attaches an external object to these fantasies, but it is likely to be the first time that she can talk to the object of these fantasies about their content.

The therapist must become a transferential object in order to touch the patient's imaginary inner core. The patient must assimilate the actual therapist to the fantasy figure of the object who can restore her sense of authorship. Yet Freud was right in one respect: The concrete gratification of the patient's desire is not likely to be very helpful, because it would leave the patient in a transferential dependence on the therapist instead of setting her free to live a fulfilled life. Nevertheless Freud's insistence on the need for renunciation leaves out a third option between gratification and frustration of the patient's desire.

The interaction with the object of these fantasies opens a new possibility. The patient's fantasy image of the ideal object of love is static as long as there is no connection between the fantasies and the external world. The interaction with a real person who has empathy with the patient's struggle for authorship can transform the fantasy image of the savior whose approving eyes bestow value and whose rejection condemns the patient to endless pain.

This process can be elucidated by an analogy. Jean Piaget (1953) has shown that any organism can only relate to a physical object which can be assimilated to some preexisting schema. An infant, for example, can only relate to an object which can be assimilated to its basic, inborn schemata like grasping and sucking. A 6-year-old begins to develop notions of the preservation of mass, because he has developed representation of operations like pouring liquids from a wide into a narrow container and vice versa, but cannot grasp logical operations accessible to an adolescent. At each stage the child can extend available operations to assimilate new objects, but cannot grasp objects that are beyond any of the existing schemata and operations.

These schemata are in turn changed by interaction with the physical object. They accommodate to the object. Piaget showed in detail how the dialectic between assimilation of the object to the schema, and the accommodation of the schema by interaction with the object fuels cognitive growth on all developmental levels. The infant at some point becomes capable of moving around a screen hiding an object he has just seen. Gradually this sensory schema evolves into the inner representation of an object which exists even when out of sight.

To return to the therapeutic process: The patient's only image for the restoration of authorship is a particular fantasy of being loved, rescued, or appreciated. If the therapist is not perceived as capable of fulfilling this fantasy, the patient cannot assimilate him to the image of the potential provider of authorship. The therapeutic process consists in an interaction which gradually transforms the image of what would constitute a worthwhile life and the conditions under which it could occur. The transferentially experienced therapist provides the bridge between the original fantasy and as yet inaccessible, new forms of experience. The sustained contact between the original fantasy and the object assimilated to it, allows the gradual accommodation of the fantasy to a new reality.

The paradox of therapy pointed out by Hans Loewald (1960) is that the therapist must be experienced as an archaic object, but he must present an interpersonal experience which is essentially new for the patient. Therefore the therapist offers himself as a participant in the patient's inner drama of the
struggle for authorship. Yet he does not simply participate in the script the patient has harbored throughout her life. The type of nonjudgmental, exploratory attitude to emotionally charged contents, conflicting feelings, and intense longings and desires provides the new experience the patient is not likely ever to have had.

In this respect the therapeutic interaction is not unlike the education of the imagination through art. All of us are the dramatists of our own lives. If we are to have a sense of authorship, we must feel that we are the authors of the story we are living. This is why Freud's original model of renunciation often leaves the patient hopeless. It is as if the therapist tells the patient, "Your story isn’t good, it's too childish. You must abandon it, and take a better, more mature story." The patient's reaction may well be, "The mature story may be more realistic, but it is not my story, and therefore a life lived according to it will not be mine."

The therapist therefore accepts the patient's drama as her starting point for the search for authorship. The therapist is a sympathetic, yet critically questioning participant in the development of this drama. The therapist's interventions could be translated into this model as offering help in continuing the writing of the patient's biography. "Why don't you introduce me to your story of how I could help you to acquire authorship." Instead of simply playing along, he asks at crucial junctures, "Why does it have to continue in this particular way? Could you explain to me why this figure in the drama is constructed in precisely this way? Do you see that the story maneuvered itself into a deadlock? Could the two of us try a variation on that theme?"

The development in the patient's way of narrating her or his life is generally paralleled by changes in the experience of the therapeutic relationship. At crucial junctures of therapeutic processes, interpretive means are not sufficient in helping the patient to move out of transference deadlocks. As many authors (for an overview see Gorkin [1987]) have emphasized, there are many therapeutic situations in which disclosure of countertransference is one of the most efficient ways to open up therapeutic impasses. The patient's encounter with the therapist's subjectivity can become a crucial turning point in the search for true authorship by facilitating the move from the inner prison with its archaic objects to a new, truly interpersonal experience.

So far I have discussed the "cure of love" under the assumption that we are speaking of the patient’s love for the therapist. But Daphnah forced me to think about the other side of the "cure of love" more deeply, too. She insisted that she had seen something warm, caring, and loving in my eyes, and it was of crucial importance to her to know that she had not been deluded. She felt that if she had been wrong, the whole therapy had been a sham.

Because I felt guilty about the depth of my own feelings, for quite some time I tended to interpret both these feelings and the importance Daphnah attached to them reductively. Why is it so difficult to discuss the therapeutic love? The psychoanalytic emphasis on neutrality, and its decades of concern about countertransference impediment of analytic work has certainly contributed to this difficulty. Some of this concern has its justification, because acting out countertransference can have disastrous consequences, when it is not moderated by consideration of the patient's needs and interest (Yalom, 1980, p. 414). Another reason for this discomfort has been put succinctly by Irvin Yalom (1980) who has written quite extensively about therapeutic love:

If it is the therapist's primary task to relate deeply and fully to the patient, does then the therapist form an I-Thou relationship with each patient? Does the therapist "love" (in Maslow or Fromm's sense) the patient? Is there a difference between a therapist and a true friend?

It is hard for a therapist to read (or to write) these questions without a certain uneasiness. "Squirm" is the word that springs to mind. There is an inescapable dissonance in the world of the therapist: no amount of polishing and lubricating make concepts like "friendship," "love," and "I-Thou" fit comfortably with other concepts like "fifty-minute sessions," "sixty-five dollars an hour," "case conferences," and "third-party payments." This incongruity is built into the therapist's, and the patient's, "situation" and cannot be denied or ignored (Yalom, 1980, p. 407).
Once we accept this inevitable complexity, we can return to the question whether indeed there is a form of love that is a crucial constituent of the psychotherapeutic relationship. Daphnah had seen something in my eyes she had desperately sought in her parents’ eyes, without ever finding it: a belief and an emotional investment in the core of her individuality. Her parents had projected too much death, guilt, and fear of her being damaged onto her, and could not see her as a human being destined to flourish. It almost became a matter of life and death for Daphnah to see a certain type of love in the eyes of a human being whom she loved and respected. This is why she refused to accept reductive interpretations of both her own love for me and an emotion she had seen in my eyes.

Hans Loewald was one of the first classical psychoanalysts (as opposed to mavericks like Ferenczi) who dared to speak of love for the patient as a crucial ingredient of the therapeutic process. In his paper “The Therapeutic Action of Psychoanalysis” he characterizes the attitude of analytic love:

Through all the transference distortions the patient reveals rudiments at least of the core of himself and “objects” that has been distorted. It is this core, rudimentary and vague as it may be, to which the analyst has reference when he interprets transferences and defenses, and not some abstract concept of reality or normality, if he is to reach the patient. If the analyst keeps his central focus on this emerging core he avoids molding the patient in the analyst’s own image or imposing on the patient his own concept of what the patient should become. It requires an objectivity and neutrality the essence of which is love and respect for the individual and for individual development. This love and respect represent that counterpart in “reality,” in interaction with which the organization of ego and psychic apparatus take place [Loewald, 1960, p. 229].

There is a remarkable analogy between Loewald’s characterization of analytic love and a passage in the diary of Max Frisch, the Swiss novelist and playwright, entitled “Thou shalt not make a likeness.”

It is remarkable, that we cannot say of the human being whom we love, how she is. We just love her. Love and the miraculousness of love consist precisely in keeping us in the suspense of aliveness, and in the willingness to follow a human being in all her possible unfoldings. We know that every human being feels transformed when she is loved, and that also for the lover everything opens up, even the nearest and best known things. There is much that she sees for the first time. Love liberates from all likenesses. This is the exciting, the adventurous, the truly fascinating, that we cannot come to an end with those whom we love, precisely because, and as long as we love them [Frisch, 1950, p. 27, my translation].

Much of what we call ‘love’ in everyday life has very little to do with Frisch’s description of letting the beloved flourish. Often we really love the fantasy we have transferred to the beloved. We love the image, the likeness that we think we need rather than the actual person. This often holds true for romantic love and parental love.

Loewald and Frisch’s characterizations of love are diametrically opposed to the popular stereotypes of what psychoanalysis is about. Shrinks are supposed to diagnose people’s fixations, classify their characters, and see through their defenses. Hopefully this stereotype characterizes very little analytic work as it is actually done, because when we lock ourselves and our patients into a diagnostic understanding of who they are, their sense of their own potentiality is impaired. Psychoanalysis has become progressively aware of this danger through Lacan’s and Bion’s emphasis on the destructive impact preconceptions (Bion) and alienating identifications (Lacan) have on patients and analysts alike.

One of the reasons people need therapy is because they have ceased to love (or never have loved) themselves in the way Frisch and Loewald try to capture. They are locked into conceptions, likenesses, and images of themselves that do not allow for growth. These images can be reductive and limiting (as was Daphnah’s case), or grandiose and demanding, but no less opposed to human flourishing. Sometimes they have never experienced a relationship that is truly growth-fostering, or they have lost any inner contact with such an experience.
The result is that they cannot experience themselves fully as persons. Time and again patients describe themselves in limiting ways. "I just am such-and-such," "I just have this character trait," or "I just lack this ability." In these characterizations they turn themselves into flawed things, and therefore lose a truly personal relationship toward themselves.

Martin Buber (1927) spoke of two basic existential orientations. In the I-thou orientation not only the thou, but also the I becomes fully personal. In the I-it orientation the subject does not achieve the status of full subjectivity. Instead the subject relationship to him- or herself remains technical. Patients experience certain aspects of themselves not in I-thou, but in I-it terms. These aspects are felt to be constraints, character traits, wishes, and hopes that are imposed on them by temperament and personal history, and they feel fated to bear them. Patients therefore experience themselves in part as it-like and not as persons.

More than anything, patients need an I-thou relationship in order to revive their selves. What analytic love can do for the patient may give a new meaning to Freud's famous statement of the goal of analysis: "Wo Es war, soll Ich werden," that has been so badly translated into English as "Where id was, there ego shall be" (Freud, 1930, p. 80). A literal translation would be "Where it was, I shall become." Even though I do not want to impute Buberian intentions to Freud, it is nevertheless instructive to reread Freud's statement as referring to a transition from impersonal (I-it) to personal (I-thou) experience of the self. Where there was a sense of it-like, impersonal stasis, an experience of personal becoming, of I-thou potentiality must evolve.

In my experience one of the most important, and periodically difficult, aspects of therapeutic work is to find, and to regain time and again, an attitude of therapeutic love. Sometimes patients make it very difficult for us to maintain such an attitude. Some of them are so desperate, or full of hatred and resentment that they systematically try to destroy, both in themselves and in their therapists, the sense of an emerging core without which therapeutic work has no meaning. Others find hope too risky, and therefore test the therapist endlessly before allowing for the emergence of new possibilities.

Even if, as in Daphnah's case, it is easy to experience analytic love, there are moments in which this sense of potentiality vanishes. One of the indicators of these moments is that the therapist desperately seeks an image of what the patient could or should be. We seek such an image when we lose the basic sense of potential movement. Even if we find an image, we have not regained analytic love: Instead we run the danger of locking the patient into an alienating, externally imposed identity.

Because patients depend on our sense of their personhood, they become anxious to please us, and to adapt to our image of what they should be. At worst they feel that they fail us, and even if they succeed in being what we want them to be, they lose the chance of becoming themselves. The love patients need is the gaze that does not lock them into fixed images. The patient must see in the therapist's eyes a belief in, and a willingness to foster, the core of individuality that is the patient's ineffable essence.

A final word on the personal versus the impersonal element in therapeutic love. Loewald describes the respect and love for the individual core as arising from an attitude of objectivity and neutrality. This is prima facie paradoxical, as love seems essentially contradictory to neutrality and objectivity.

Yet it is precisely this meeting of an impersonal, ethically and professionally motivated neutrality and commitment to foster patients' growth, and the emergence of a relationship to the particular patient that characterizes therapeutic love. What allows us to wait for the sense of the patient's individual core to emerge and re-emerge, is the objectivity inherent to therapeutic eros. It is this very eros that submits the use and expression of the therapist's feelings to the discipline required by the goal of helping patients to become themselves.
The young man who entered my office looked at me defiantly. His body was powerfully built, muscular, his movements were edgy. I got the impression of an energy bundle packed too tightly. “I am thinking of dying” (What an opening bid, I thought). His eyes were fiery, his voice intense. His complexion was dark, highlighted by thick, black, curly hair. His speech was theatrical. He told me that he had to make up his mind about whether he wanted to live. He had been writing his thoughts for years now, and he had a big cardboard box full of his writings. Should he die, the box was to be burned.

Ordinarily when a patient talks about suicide I do not take this lightly. I investigate carefully how realistic the danger is; I want the patient to give a sincere and committed assessment of the seriousness of the threat, and I discuss it with him. I make clear from the very beginning that suicide is not a topic I am willing to play with: It must be dealt with in a straightforward manner, and not by way of insinuation.

With Tom my reaction was totally untypical: I was faintly amused. I was not sure whether to be worried by my own reaction. It could mean that Tom made it difficult to feel empathy with his pain, and this could be dangerous. If Tom was going to feel that his therapist was not in touch with him, it could
drive him over the edge. I also considered the possibility that my reaction might be a reflection of the fact that his talk about suicide was part of an image of himself he tried to project rather than an indication of true danger.

Gradually I got the impression that Tom’s secret wish was that his box should not be burned. Secretly he hoped that its contents would be published and that he would be discovered posthumously as a great author. Indeed, Tom’s ambition was to be a great intellectual. He had chosen to come and see me because he had heard that I had been professionally involved in philosophy, and he considered his problems to be philosophical rather than psychological in nature.

Tom was 23 years of age when he came to see me. He could not find a direction in life, moving from job to job. First, there was his dilemma about religion. He was not sure whether indeed he believed in God. If he did, he thought he should spend years in a yeshivah (a school for higher education in Talmud, the Bible, and general religious instruction), and deepen his knowledge of Judaism.

The second possibility was that he did not believe in God. If so, his plan was to get a degree in philosophy, and to go for an academic career. He had not started his studies yet, because he wanted to make up his mind about the major problems in philosophy before going to school. “They are going to try to brainwash me. It is crucial that I be well versed in the major philosophers before I go there, and I have to have a clear stance on the central metaphysical questions. The university degree is just like a driver’s license, I just need it to teach at the university myself. Forming my mind is my private matter.”

He was in despair, because he could not concentrate. He had never gotten beyond the introduction of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason (1781), because his focus faded quickly. He described with bitter self-hatred how he was incapable of staying alert, or even awake when trying to read philosophical texts. Could I do something about his concentration? For the time being he was confining the written version of his thoughts to his cardboard box. One day he would systematize them.

Meanwhile Tom’s life was, as he said, “in the pits.” He hated everything about his existence. He would explain with blazing hatred how worthless his friends were. They were not successful with women, they did not know how to dance, and none of them was intellectually brilliant. So he mostly chose to stay in his room, fuming with self-contempt. He tried to read, but could not concentrate for more than half an hour. Then, he told me haltingly, he would masturbate and feel even worse. If he was lucky he would fall asleep, only to be disturbed by dreams about women with distorted sex organs, or about some damage to his own penis.

Tom’s first decision, after some months of therapy, was to try the yeshivah. He felt that he would never make up his mind about religion without really having tasted a pure, spiritual mode of life. First, he had some positive experiences: He made friends quickly, and he did not feel himself to be a second-class student. But quite soon problems arose: His concentration did not improve. He was haunted by sexual fantasies which made him feel impure, and his religious belief was not as deep as he thought it should be. His self-hatred, which had lost some of its terrible intensity after finally having decided to do something, soon rose to its previous level. He would talk cynically about his lack of intellectual ability, his impurity of character. Thoughts about suicide crossed his mind again.

Throughout all this time I was not worried about Tom. Somehow I felt that he was a robust, energetic young man with the potential to live a good life. Yet, for some reason he forced himself to try to be something other than what he was, and in the process managed to acquire a great dose of self-hatred. We discussed various ways of understanding his lack of enthusiasm about life at the yeshivah. I challenged his conviction that it reflected his lack of character, talent, and purity, and I kept asking him whether it might not simply mean that he was not a second-class version of the “real thing” (an ethereal, spiritual intellectual), but simply another type of person altogether.

The better I came to know Tom, the more I became convinced that he was going against his own grain in his attempts to become an intellectual. He was intelligent, but he did not have the cast of mind I knew from those who were cut to spend their lives brooding on intellectual problems. He did not seem
to be really interested in philosophical problems, but desper­
ately tried to form himself in a certain image. His descriptions
of what he wanted to become reminded me of El Greco’s ren­
derings of Christ. Tom wanted to be an ethereal creature, far
above the ordinary concerns of human beings, in a dialogue
with the Great Philosophers of the past, concerned only with
the deepest metaphysical problems.

Where did this image come from? Why was Tom trying to
stretch himself on a procrustean bed which was more of a tort­
ure than an inspiration for him? The metaphor of stretching
himself on the procrustean bed had a purely physical aspect:
Tom’s physique was short, powerful, with the dense muscular
structure of a wrestler. His face was roughly hewn, attractive in
its own way. It would indeed have taken some stretching to turn
him into the El Greco figure he wanted to be.

Gradually Tom’s history began to yield some clues about
the origins of his desire to be an ethereal figure. His father
had immigrated as a boy from one of the Arab Mediterranean
countries. He had shared the fate of many Sephardic Jews who
came to Israel in the 1950s. He had not had a chance to get
an education, and after his compulsory service in the army
had become a construction worker. Soon he began to renovate
apartments on his own account. He had stayed in that business,
was never very successful, but definitely made a decent living.
Tom, it turned out, had inherited his father’s physique, even
though not his father’s temperament. He described his father
as an unassuming man, quite ambitious, yet not too bitter about
his lack of dramatic success.

His mother had met his father at the age of 18. She was a
pretty woman with a girlish charm, who gave birth to Tom
before her twentieth birthday, and went on to have three more
children at intervals of about three years each. Tom’s parents
had a good marriage, they got along well, and each partner
had a territory unencroached on by the other. Tom has been
aware though, that his mother harbored a secret fantasy
throughout her adult life. She was enthralled by intellectuals.
Whenever she saw a professor on TV her eyes would light up.
She seemed to be swooning whenever she spoke about this or
that professor whose lectures she was attending.

Tom told me quite early in the therapy that he had over­
heard a conversation between his mother and her sister in
which they agreed that once a new child was born, they felt
physically almost repelled by the older child, and that they
could only feel fully in tune with the newborn. This memory
came up in the context of one of Tom’s greatest pains: He
hated his body, his thick black hair, his height, his complexion.
He experienced himself as physically repellant. Tom himself
believed that his mother’s turning away from him in childhood
was a crucial determinant of his self-hatred. He remembered
being appalled at the way his mother turned away from her
third child when the fourth was born. He was 9 years old at
that time and spent a lot of time with his brother who, as he
described it, walked around the apartment desolate and des­
itute.

The history of his self-hatred began in childhood, but was
boosted in adolescence. When Tom went to school he soon
understood that he belonged to an ethnic group considered
to be second class in Israeli society. The establishment con­
sisted of Ashkenazi Jews of European, and sometimes American
extraction. The Sephardic Jews who had immigrated from the
Arab world felt quite distinctly disadvantaged. In the first stages
of modern Israeli history, the Zionist movement consisted
largely of European Jews. They attempted to create a society
based on Western culture, and attempted to impose this way
of life onto the large immigrations from Arab countries in the
fifties. Most leading Israeli politicians were Ashkenazi, and so
were almost all intellectuals his mother admired so deeply.

Sephardic Jews generally had darker complexions and
could mostly be identified by their physical characteristics. The
implicit class structure of Israeli society became backed by a,
mostly unspoken, racial basis. Tom was keenly aware of the
hierarchies: The Ashkenazi children from the “good” families
were more poised, self-assured, and they manifested a subtle,
but persistent disdain for the Sephardic pupils.

In Tom’s adolescence his ethnic disadvantage acquired
painful reality. Girls obviously preferred the fair-skinned Ash­
kenazi boys, and Tom gradually developed an ethnic class-con­
sciousness. Unfortunately he could not turn it into a positive
aspect of his identity. At that time Sephardic Jewry had not yet gained a sufficiently distinct political voice, and Tom could not find any role models. Hence his identity was fundamentally flawed. He experienced himself as second-class, and he began to harbor a deep, seething rage—not against society, but against himself. His looks, his mind, his style, everything about him seemed worthless and despicable.

The historical reconstruction of Tom’s development seemed to follow logically. According to family descriptions he had been the object of his mother’s undivided love and adulation until the age of 3. With the birth of his first sister he was brusquely dethroned. His mother was physically repelled by him after his sister’s birth, and this made an indelible impact on Tom’s soul. He yearned to regain her love, and when he found out that his mother admired intellectual men, he developed the *idée fixe* that this was what he had to become himself.

This first historical level of self-hatred was revived and strengthened by his adolescent experiences. He came to see the elements of Ashkenazi identity, skin color, self-assurance, and cultivation as necessary for true self-respect. His mother’s idealization of intellectuals, who were invariably Ashkenazi, certainly reinforced Tom’s belief that he was inferior. Gradually he sank into profound self-hatred, and his only moments of respite were the fantasies of becoming a celebrated intellectual.

Despite the depressive and sometimes self-destructive features of his character, my belief in Tom’s natural resilience and strength only grew. I confronted him with his evasive maneuvers quite relentlessly and kept challenging him to go out into life and to stop fantasizing his ethereal ideal self. I pushed Tom hard because I felt that his ebullient energy was throttled by his way of life, and that his excess energy turned into the relentless self-hatred which made him so unhappy.

Tom finally made up his mind to leave the yeshivah, and he did so with a sigh of relief. Now, he told me, it was time to begin his career as a philosopher. The school year had just started, and he could not enroll at the university. Hence he was faced with the question of what to do.

In one of his odd jobs Tom had been working as a journalist for a small local paper covering bits and pieces of metropolitan life. He had run into conflict with his editor who found Tom’s style of writing too sophisticated. Sometimes Tom said, with enormous self-contempt, that he might make a good journalist, but that this was just a sign of his intellectual weakness. When he got an offer to work at one of the bigger newspapers, he wanted to turn it down. I asked him why. He exploded: “You intellectual snob; you think that I’m not good enough to do what you did, that I cannot be a philosopher. You want me to dump myself in a newspaper?” (The way he pronounced the word he might as well have said brothel.)

I waited for a moment and then said, “You are totally convinced that I share your view that intellectuals are the pinnacle of God’s creation and that I consider you to be inferior. First of all I have not decided that you must be a journalist; I am just asking a question. Second, you think that journalists are inferior to philosophy professors, and you have the right to think what you want. But leave me out of it.”

During the following sessions I told Tom that I thought he was strangling himself by squeezing himself into the mold of the intellectual.

Has it ever occurred to you that your lack of concentration might not be an indication of your character weakness? I think that you are simply mismanaging yourself. I knew about his love for motorbikes, and I used them in an analogy. An intellectual is like a heavy cruiser which is made for low revs and constant, slow pounding. Imagine trying to use a supersport bike in this way. You would choke it. Of course a GSX-750 R [Suzuki’s race-replica which was wildly popular in Israel] would make a terrible low-speed cruiser. But that’s not because it is a bad bike, but because some idiot doesn’t know how to ride it! You are abusing your own engine, your temperament, by choking it. You need to rev it up freely to experience its potential!

That kind of got to him. For the first time it dawned upon him that his inability to concentrate on intellectual problems might be an indication of a strength he had never used and not a deficiency.

Tom did not reject the offer from the other newspaper. “Of course it’s nothing but an intermediary job, don’t fool yourself,” he said in a menacing tone. “Look, Tom,” I said, “I
have no vested interest in your being a journalist. As far as I am concerned you can go and get yourself a professorship in philosophy. I just don’t share your obsession that the one thing worth doing in the world is philosophy."

The following months brought some radical changes in Tom’s life. After about a month in the paper he wrote a piece he had not been assigned, and which he had researched on his own. He walked into one of the senior editors' offices and slammed the piece on the table. “Read it, at least!” he screamed and walked out. Several hours later the editor called him and said: “You son of a bitch; you were not supposed to write this. How did you research it? This is a bloody good piece!” It got published and launched Tom’s reputation as a brilliant maverick reporter, and soon he was deeply engrossed in his work. He decided to postpone the beginning of his studies (“just for one semester. I will be a philosopher,” he told me threateningly). He stopped spending endless hours in his little room, and now wrote for the newspaper and not for his cardboard box.

THE DREAM OF SHINING MASCULINITY AND THE SPLIT PENIS

Tom was finally encountering life, and not just his own fantasies about it, and he encountered new difficulties. He had plenty of company now—particularly female company. This forced him to begin to define his place in the world realistically.

One of his journalist friends was a very handsome young man, two years older than himself. Women were crazy about him, and Tom felt constantly defeated. Tom had no interest in any but the most attractive girls, but never got anywhere with them. “You see,” he would say, seething with self-contempt, “I have always been second-class, and I will always be second-class. I don’t give a shit about these second-rate girls who try to chat me up. I will die a virgin, but I’ll never accept that this is what I can get.”

This theme was condensed in an episode which became a central metaphor in our further work. Tom entered my office with his teeth clenched, and his face was whiter than usual.

I cannot take it anymore. [Pause.] This just killed me.” [I was waiting.] I stand at a traffic light with my GN 250, and I hear this high-powered whine from behind. There comes this guy with his Kawasaki 1100 Ninja, in uniform. A fighter pilot! On his back seat this beautiful, beautiful girl. Her eyes sparkle with love. She kneads his trapezius as they wait. He just gives me this brief glance. The light turns green, he nods to her, she holds on, and whoooosh, he disappears into the sunset. . . . I’m going to kill myself!

Holy shit, I say to myself. There Tom has to undergo another meeting with an alpha male. For young Israeli males, fighter pilots are second only to God. The 1100 Ninja is the fastest production bike on earth nowadays, and the guy has this beautiful girl massaging his back.

Tom looked at me accusingly: “So, don’t you think that all that’s left to do is to commit suicide?” On the spur of the moment I decided to go along with him. “Yeah; God really is trying to knock you out. The fighter pilot alone would have been bad. The Ninja in itself is a knock into the solar plexus. The girl with the massage on top of it—not much left except to die. . . .” I said this in a tone of understanding male complicity. Tom looked at me in angry despair, I met his gaze—and suddenly both of us burst out laughing.

This was one of the many instances in which Tom tried to deal with his pain about not being the beautiful, shining, smashing alpha male he so desperately wanted to be. In many ways his retreat into fantasy had spared him the pain of facing his realistic possibilities and limitations. Now that he had emerged from the world of his fantasies into real life, he often faced humiliating defeats.

Yet Tom was obviously moving forward. His retreat into sulking and grandiose fantasies became less frequent, even though his self-hatred had not yet abated. I often expressed my sincere appreciation of the tremendous psychic work Tom was
doing in a brief period of time. In less than a year he had
turned from a deeply neurotic boy locked into a world of fears
and fantasies into a young man struggling to find his place in
the world.

Tom's sexuality moved into the foreground of our work.
Tom did everything to prevent himself from sleeping with
women. During the first year of therapy he had often expressed
disdain for men who fucked around and told me that he was
saving his virginity for the one true love of his life. These an-
nouncements went hand in hand with rare, halting, and con-
flicted attempts to seduce young women. In one of the cases
he left the scene, after he and his partner were on the way to
the bed, because of a surge of disgust.

Tom often voiced fears that his sexuality was somehow
perverse and misformed. At times he was afraid of being homo-
sexual, but mostly his fear was deeper and nameless. Haltingly
Tom began to talk about an underworld of dreams, of fantasies,
which had haunted him since adolescence. His dreams were
full of women whose genitals were deformed, half-male, half-
female. His own penis appeared in distorted shapes, often split
into two parts "like a sandwich," he said. He often felt that the
split penis was also a vagina. Most of his dreams were about
voyeuristic scenes. In some of them he attempted intercourse.
But the deformation of either his own or the woman's genitals
made sex impossible, and he would wake up with waves of dis-
gust cramping his stomach.

With fear and despair Tom haltingly began to talk about
voyeuristic scenes of his childhood and adolescence. His moth-
er's younger sister had been his favorite object. She spent a lot
of time at their home, and he developed many techniques to
get glimpses of her in the toilet or taking a shower. She had
been the major subject of the masturbation fantasies of his early
adolescence.

He spoke about his unsuccessful attempts to engage in
intercourse with women. It turned out that intermittently he
had left his monastic self-image behind and tried to engage in
relationships with young women. But the women he wanted
did not want him, and he felt repelled by those who found him
attractive. He generally backed out at the last minute when he
was on the verge of having intercourse with them. His rage
against a world which did not accord him the place he wanted
found expression in a masturbatory practice: He would first
defecate and then masturbate into the feces, as if to say "sex is
shit!"

As he spoke about the world of his fantasies and masturba-
tion practices he became more desperate. He was afraid that
his sexuality was completely distorted and that he would never
be able to have intercourse. He also had continuing eruptions
of rage against his looks: "Which woman in her right mind
would want to sleep with a short, stocky Sephardic if she can get
anything else?" he would scream at me.

During this period he fell in love with a journalist at the
newspaper, whom, for reasons soon to be obvious, we will call
Lilith. She was a good-looking young woman a couple of years
older than Tom, the darling of all the men at the newspaper,
blessed with all the bearings of a femme fatale. She had remark-
able powers of seduction and exuded a Lilithian sensuality
which seemed to draw men into her magnetic field as surely as
fire draws butterflies. The senior editor of the newspaper, the
owner of the newspaper, and many other powerful men were
wooing her—and so was Tom.

She took a liking to him, and he became her confidant.
She told him how depraved she felt, that she was a bad girl and
would forever stay that way. "I really like you, but I am not for
you," she told him caressing the thick, black hair he hated so
much. One evening they finished a bottle of vodka together,
and she told him "You want to make love to me? Fine, come
on!" Tom gave a long speech: He did not want to fuck her, he
wanted to be united with her in true love. He went on and
on, until he realized that she had fallen asleep. "So I left her
apartment," he told me with raging bitterness, "mounted my
bike stone drunk, and rode back to my place at 120 kilometers
an hours, and believe me," he said threateningly "the only
reason I didn't ride faster is that this is all my bike can do."

Tom knew that I was seriously worried about his riding
style. He made up for having a small bike by riding at
breakneck speeds in town, performing acrobatic maneuvers be-
tween cars. "It's like a bullfight, and I am the muleta," he
individuality, the impossible project

explained to me. I tried to figure out with him whom he was trying to punish. "Do you think God is going to make you into what you want to be if you risk your neck? Or do you think that if you worry me sufficiently I will finally help you to gain the love of Lilith?" "Huh!" he screamed, "you try to tell me that I can never be a big dog, so I'll be a little dog, but one which bites!"

Tom was in great pain. Lilith managed to step on all his sore spots at once. She was intelligent, and she suffered from a streak of self-destruction, which fueled his fantasies of being a heroic savior. She shared her most intimate thoughts with him, but she made it clear that she was not attracted to him. He felt that she offered to sleep with him out of pity rather than attraction, and he felt humiliated by the offer. We worked on Tom's difficulty of bearing pain and rage without going either into suicidal behavior or into rageful self-pity. The result of this intense confrontation with his limitations as a male and his strategies of turning aggression against himself was that the dreams of mutilated and distorted genitals subsided.

Tom began to write short stories. Their themes were always the same: Sensitive boys in their early teens faced the harshness of life, violence and sexuality, insensitive adults, and loneliness. Tom was sometimes convinced that these stories foreshadowed twenty-first century literature. Then again he dismissed them as crap. After a while he used the theme of the clash between the adolescent naiveté and adult reality in a series of stories about the difficulty Israeli youth had in growing up, which were published by the newspaper.

Lilith had meanwhile created a totally impossible situation for herself at the newspaper. She was simultaneously involved with several senior editors and the owner of the paper, and finally she had no choice but to quit. Tom was relieved; at least he did not see her every day. He resolved to cut off contact with her, because he understood that the role of the confidant humiliated him, and he had no hope left that she would ever fall in love with him.

The rest of the story can be told quickly. Another junior journalist, Anat, had expressed interest in him for some months. "Huh, I'm supposed to take the leftovers. Never, NEVER, even if I have to die a virgin," he shouted contemptuously when he first told me about her. Suddenly he was struck by her charm and vitality, and by the grace of her dancing. They gradually grew closer, and after a few weeks they went to bed. Quite unsurprisingly Tom had some potency problems at the beginning, to which he reacted, equally unsurprisingly, with thoughts about becoming a philosopher, or about going back to yeshivah and leading an ultra-Orthodox life.

Once his potency problem had been resolved, he still did not enjoy sex. His descriptions of it sounded like hard work rather than like anything remotely connected to pleasure and intimacy. It turned out soon that the main reason he did not enjoy sex with Anat was that in his dreams her previous lovers were endowed with huge penises, whereas his own was only of average size. During sex he engaged in magic thoughts which were supposed to enlarge his penis and to fill Anat as no other man ever had. It took some more weeks for him to accept that Anat really enjoyed making love with him, even though she refused to say that he was the greatest lover she had ever had and that his penis was bigger than anyone else's she had ever seen.

Tom became more and more immersed in his life. At some point we agreed to cease regular sessions, and that he would call me when he felt the need for it. The frequency of sessions gradually moved down to once a fortnight, and later he would call me once every few months. The pattern of the sessions was that Tom would come in seething with rage and self-contempt and with doubts about whether life was worth living. It generally took no more than ten minutes to find out what setback in life had triggered Tom's retreat into the hatred of life, and another five minutes to understand the particular strategy of sulking he had adopted. In the rest of the session he would update me on developments in his life, and we would reminisce on the work we had done together.
Tom exemplifies several strategies of the ontological protest of subjectivity. When he turned to therapy he was frozen in a position of denying the importance of natural reality altogether. His haughty disdain for those who lived a natural life thinly veiled his shame and rage at not finding his way in the world of adulthood and the world of sexual relations.

He tried to transcend the order of nature in a fantasy world in which intellectuals immersed in a spiritual life were infinitely superior to those who were stuck in the mire of sex and power. Tom’s protest against nature did not result in a creative integration, though. Neither did he find a new way of organizing his sexuality, nor could he gain authorship through intellectual work, because it did not suit his temperament and talent.

Tom’s choice of the image of the intellectual as his ideal self was motivated by several factors: One seems to have been
his discovery that his mother was infatuated with intellectuals. His hypothesis that the loss of his mother’s affection and physical proximity after the birth of his sister had been unbearable, made a lot of sense. By becoming an intellectual he hoped to regain her love by forming himself in the image of her desire and to regain the status of petit prince of which he had been deprived. A second factor influential in this choice was his fate of having been born into an ethnic group perceived as second class in most of Israeli society. He could not change his skin color or his ethnic identity, but if he became an intellectual he would finally gain self-respect.

A third factor was that he could not accept that he was not an alpha male, as he called it. In his eyes the world was a market in which everybody sold himself at maximum price. He raged because his market value, as he called it, was too low to get what he wanted. He tried to assuage his pain by denying the importance of the natural order altogether. Sex, sexual competition, and relationships with women were supposed to be beneath him. He would live in a lofty world of ideas in which these petty concerns would be of no importance.

He therefore resorted to the strategy of the ontological protest typical of most religions, namely to transcend the order of nature by assigning it a secondary status. Human beings must overcome the flesh to realize their true self, which is an immaterial, spiritual soul. This retreat inside, into a world of spirituality protected him against the insecurity, the pain, envy, and rage he experienced when he faced his possibilities and limitations as a man.

Being an alpha male became the necessary condition of a life worth living. Tom experienced his masculinity as flawed and distorted, and he felt that it could only be healed by a beautiful woman. Being desired by less than perfect women only proved the flaws of his sexuality, and he reacted with disgust to women who did not correspond to his ideal of beauty. If he could not find the place in it that he wanted, he would retreat from natural life altogether.

Tom tried to destroy the natural order which gave him so much pain in fantasy. The dream images of a confused sexual universe were an attempt to reshuffle the world of men and women. His dreams made a mess of the distinctions between masculine and feminine. But Tom did not reorganize sexuality into a neosexual configuration. Sex, sexual organs, and the meeting between the sexes just became messy and disgusting.

We did relatively little detailed work on the contents of his dreams and sexual fantasies. Instead we focused on his desperate rage at not being the shining alpha male he wanted to be. His hopeless infatuation with Lilith, and his humiliation at having to listen to her stories of sleeping with better looking and more powerful men, pushed his despair to extremes. He came to understand his self-destructive behavior, self-contempt, and self-pity as reactions to the frustration of his desire for Lilith, or, to be more precise, of his desire to become the male of his own fantasies.

The consequence of this work was that the dreams of distorted genitals gradually began to wane. They were disintegration products of the rage and despair he experienced about his limitations as a male. Once he could bear to focus on Lilith and her lovers, the universe of his sexual images gradually became more organized, and this enabled him to make friends with love, sexuality, and life itself.

I would like to add some brief reflections on analytic neutrality and therapeutic attitude. In Tom’s case I took quite a strong stance on questions pertaining to his lifestyle. I had come to the conclusion that Tom’s attempt of turning himself into an ethereal intellectual was not going to be successful, that his denial of sexuality was a defensive maneuver rather than a genuine existential choice. My stance toward his way of life was quite explicit, and so was my unflagging belief in Tom’s potential to live an active existence.

I firmly believe that the therapist should safeguard the patient’s autonomy as far as possible. Nevertheless the idea of total neutrality has turned out to be conceptually and practically impossible. Every interpretive act is guided by an implicit value structure and an ideal of developed individuality (Strenger, 1997a). The only way to avoid indoctrination is to make one’s stance quite explicit toward the patient. Indeed I think that sometimes taking a firm stance is therapeutically crucial. I believe that my confidence in Tom’s robust nature was
an important therapeutic agent, and helped him to immerse himself in life. I understood my role as that of a paternal selfobject, to use Kohutian terminology (Wolf, 1988). By challenging Tom I gradually helped him to develop the belief that he could be a valuable human being and man.

There is no way in which the therapist can avoid the dilemmas involved in judging what attitude to take toward a patient. In Tamara's case I have tried to show how easy it is to impose normative conceptions on an individual and to deny her the freedom of living according to a conception of life which expresses her deepest desire. In Tom's case I think that taking a firm stance against his flight from life was fruitful, and subsequent discussions with Tom about this question tend to confirm this. There simply is no algorithmic solution of the dilemma of where to take a stance and where to respect the patient's overt will. It is easy to cut the dilemmas short and argue for one consistent position no matter what. Yet I think that adherence to a single ideology makes life easier for the practitioner, but does not serve the interest of those who seek therapeutic help.

THE RETREAT TO THE INNER CITADEL

The prototypical centripetal (i.e., inward-directed) strategy of the ontological protest of subjectivity is the retreat into an inner citadel. Its phenomenology can be explained by a simple example: Your boss scolds and humiliates you in the presence of others. You feel embarrassed, humiliated, you would give everything to be elsewhere. Suddenly something inside you says: "He cannot touch me, this is not really happening to me." You begin to experience the scene as a bystander, from a distance, possibly with a faint sense of amusement or inner superiority.

This maneuver is the basic move of retreating inside yourself. To be more precise: You redraw the boundaries of your self. While you are fully engaged by the scene, you are your body, the burning cheeks, the tears of humiliation you are fighting, the shaking of your hands you are trying to hide. The physical presence of the boss, the power he has over you, are tangible, they constitute your world for this moment. Now, suddenly, you do not feel that this situation really involves you. You are not really there. You have redefined your self in a way which makes you feel you are inside your body, not the body itself.

The phenomenological mechanics of this situation are complex: One way to understand it would be that you are retreating into a fantasy. In this fantasy you are not in this situation; your boss does not really have any power over you. You might fantasize how you tell him to bugger off, how you make fun of him, or humiliate him in turn. Or you might fantasize that you tell him calmly that he does not understand the true nature of humanity, that he lacks decency, and you put yourself into a position of moral superiority.

Another way to understand the phenomenology of this retreat would be as follows: The way you experience yourself depends on the imaginative horizon within which you place yourself. If you define yourself through the physical situation you find yourself in, you are the humiliated employee who is losing face. But your frame of reference might be different: You might have a firm belief in the brotherhood of mankind and the inalienable right of individuals to freedom and dignity. Or you might have the belief that the immortal soul constitutes the essence of each individual, and that anything else is accidental, that if you keep in mind what your true nature is, you cannot be touched by the events of this world. You may not be capable of expressing your true frame of reference overtly for practical reasons, but you really feel that what is happening to you is not of real importance.

Most developed civilizations have evolved narratives that redraw the boundaries of the self. Their goal is to help people to maintain a sense of authorship under conditions of helplessness. Some of these conditions are universal: We are all mortal, and this has been counteracted by religious belief in the immortality of the soul. The just are often helpless in the face of evil, and religions have counteracted this by promising the just compensation in the life to come while threatening the evil with eternal damnation. We all suffer losses and pain;
Buddhism tries to help its practitioner by enlightenment: The self is an illusion, and there is no use in holding on to what can be lost at any moment (Sharma, 1993).

PLATONIC PHILOSOPHY

Platonic philosophy is the cornerstone of the dualistic tradition of Western philosophy and religion. Plato’s claim that the visible world is ontologically inferior to the ideal world left an indelible impact on intellectual and religious history. Plato lived in the Athenian city state, one of the most developed political forms of life at the time. But this city state condemned his master, Socrates, to death for questioning beliefs held sacred in the polis.

Many commentators have understood Plato’s life work as an attempt to provide a justification for the life of his master, who became the protagonist of the thirty-eight platonic dialogues, which are generally regarded as the beginning of the tradition of Western philosophy (Taylor, 1926). Plato builds a metaphysics which shows that Socrates’ judges were deluded. The material world is nothing but an ephemeral appearance behind which reality, true being, is hidden: the world of eternal ideas and mathematical objects.

Ordinary human beings live in the world of the senses, and mistake for absolute reality. They are like slaves tied to a pole who believe that the shadows they see on the wall in front of them are reality. They do not know that behind them a puppet is being projected onto the wall in front of them. The philosopher is like the man who has seen the concoction which creates the shadows. He has been able to leave the cave in which all this occurs, and has seen the sun, the source of all true life and light. Naturally the philosopher is taken to be mad by the slaves. He is also dangerous because he disrupts the peace of the slaves who have acquiesced in their fate. This was Socrates’ fate: He had seen a truth hidden to normal eyes, and the slaves of physical appearances punished him for waking them from their slumber of delusion.

The world of ideas cannot be perceived by physical eyes. Plato sees the soul—the real self—as imprisoned in the body. The natural propensity of the body is to take material reality as absolute. Mathematical reasoning introduces a new form of knowledge: The mathematician does not deal with physical but with ideal objects, numbers, and geometrical forms. Philosophical reflection leads to the conclusion that what is truly real is the world of immutable, eternal ideas. True knowledge is always about ideal objects. Empirical knowledge is always insecure and time-bound, mathematical knowledge is certain and of eternal validity. These ideas are the object of true knowledge: as in mathematics, where the mind can truly grasp the object of thought, as opposed to the world of the senses, in which the fleeting phenomena cannot fully be grasped.

Platonic philosophy has had an almost immeasurable impact on the development of Western thought. A. N. Whitehead (1933) liked to say that Western philosophy is nothing but a series of footnotes to Plato. Dualistic metaphysics became central to the major monotheistic religions.

The impact of Platonic philosophy on the development of modern science is less obvious, but well documented. Historians of ideas have shown that modern mathematical physics could only evolve because of the idea that the true nature of the physical world is mathematical. Galileo’s statement that the book of nature is written in the language of mathematics is Platonic in inspiration. Mathematization, the very essence of modern physics, demanded the ability to disregard the messiness of phenomena and to construct a geometrical order which was taken to be the essence of reality (Koestler, 1959).

Plato initiated the Western tradition of otherworldliness and inwardness, the belief that we are something other than what appearance indicates. The foundation of this tradition is the experience that the world as we see it is meaningless; that it does not correspond to our ideals of order, beauty, and justice. It dealt with this experience by denying that the fate of humanity as it seemed to be was real, that circumstance of birth, the suffering from gratuitous use of power, did not touch the essence of the individual.
Plato turns the ontological protest into a full-fledged metaphysics: By disqualifying the body and material reality as not fully real, he turns what we nowadays call schizoid withdrawal into the only fully human attitude: Only he who rejects the world of the senses and penetrates behind phenomena truly salvages his soul.

THE SENSE OF THE TRANSCENDENT

The sense of the transcendent insists that the world must not be the way it seems, since otherwise life is not worth living. The yearning for transcendence has been at the center of most higher civilizations for thousands of years. The major monotheistic religions are based on it, and it was one of the main themes of Western philosophy until this century.

A good example for a culture built on the sense of the transcendent is Polish Jewry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which was powerless, persecuted, without realistic hope for bettering its lot. The synagogue, mostly a shabby little building, became the refuge from the dreariness and hopelessness of daily life. In the synagogue a transformation set in: A sense of holiness, a sense of the existence of unfathomable glory, beauty, justice, and calm was engendered (Vishniak, 1983).

The transcendent was infused into the smallest issues of everyday life. Dialogue with God was mediated through rituals ordained to the last detail. Rabbinical Judaism took care to govern every detail of life by the halacha, the practical commandments and injunctions defining Jewish Orthodox life. An Orthodox Jew could not eat without considering which food was kosher, and which wasn’t, and the eating of each type of food had to be preceded by a particular benediction. The transcendent has its influx into life in all corners; even after going to the toilet, a benediction is to be said. The everyday was transformed; the smallest acts acquired a significance far beyond visible reality.

The epitome of this connection to the transcendent is to be found in Cabalistic interpretations of reality: Every act of a pious Jew has tremendous metaphysical significance (Scholem, 1941). There are thousands and thousands of metaphysical worlds; acts of piety create the good in these worlds, acts of sin do terrible damage. The visible world is but a very small aspect of reality, which is infinitely richer. The physical act of putting on the phylacteries in the morning is not fiddling around with leather straps attached to leather boxes containing parchments. It is an act of infinitely greater importance than the commandments of the army officer who moves thousands of soldiers. The transformation of the everyday is total: The visible becomes but the pale reflection of the vast expanse of transcendence.

MYSTICISM

Mysticism is the quintessential retreat into the inner self. Imagine a room full of people, sitting quietly for many hours, breathing calmly. Outwardly nothing is happening; inwardly each of the participants is on a journey, searching for enlightenment, calm, or an intuition of the essence of the world. The mystical impulse is possibly the purest instantiation of the centripetal strategy of the ontological protest of subjectivity. It redefines the self completely: What seems most real to ordinary experience becomes irrelevant and uninteresting.

Mysticism is a universal phenomenon. No major religion is devoid of a mystical tradition. The experiences described by the mystics of all cultures have some features in common. They all described the abolition of the boundary between self and world as one of the great ecstatic experiences. They pierce the veil of appearances to arrive at the true essence of the world. The mystic sheds the inessential layers of materiality and intuits what is truly real.

The core of mystical experience is to transcend the limitations of the valley of tears, the cruel opaqueness of a world devoid of meaning. The mystic seeks to connect to a core of selfhood that is purer, more meaningful, and more valuable than the empirical self with its contradictions, conflicts and pains. The desire to overcome the unbearable limitations of
ordinary earthly experience has motivated countless generations of seekers of truth and peace of mind to undergo the arduous discipline demanded by mystical traditions.

In an earlier chapter I have described the price paid for excessive use of fantasy, namely the individual's feeling that his actual life is not quite real. Mysticism turns this sense of unreality into the most important virtue. The mystic seeks detachment from the material world. He strives for the moment of enlightenment which will finally free him from the weight of bodily existence.

Psychiatric psychopathology classifies this detachment as belonging to the spectrum of schizoid and schizophrenic disorders. The parallels between psychotic and mystical experience are quite compelling. The mystics claim to have intuited endless worlds, the Cabalist's description of reality as a communion between God and the people of Israel, the Catholic mystic's sense of communion with Jesus Christ all carry structural similarities to psychotic experiences. Nevertheless it would take some degree of cultural insensitivity and lack of understanding to simply categorize mystical experience as psychopathology.

I have no intention of entering the debates of how to understand mystical experience and how to relate it to science. My intention is to point out how individuals like Tom choose existential strategies which have been adopted by rich and important cultural traditions. I neither want to glorify these strategies, nor to pathologize the cultural phenomena which exemplify them. My brief phenomenology of the manifestations of the ontological protest of subjectivity tries to achieve but one thing: I want to point out the complexity of the human unwillingness to accept reality as it is. The ontological protest keeps hovering between flight into fantasy and inspiration for creative achievement.

**IMMANENT TRANSCENDENCE: ALBERT EINSTEIN**

The desire for an order of nature which is more intelligible than the mess that meets the eye found new fulfillment in modern science. The stipulation of an ontological realm different from the material universe was replaced by the search of hidden lawfulness in the material universe itself. The life and work of Albert Einstein is a prime example of this tendency. Einstein's work until 1916 is generally hailed as one of the greatest achievements of the human mind.

His driving intellectual motivation was to find simple and aesthetically compelling laws which would unify the known physical theories into a single encompassing theoretical structure. Popular accounts claim that the special theory of relativity was designed to explain the otherwise unintelligible result of the Michelson-Morley experiment. This is historically not true. At the time Einstein developed his theory, there were already three fairly successful theoretical approaches which explained the Michelson-Morley results (Holton, 1978).

Einstein's general theory of relativity is one of the most extreme examples of the human striving for beauty and coherence. The impulse behind the special theory was to unify the two major physical theories of the nineteenth century: Newton's theory of gravitation and Maxwell's theory of electrodynamics. The move to the general theory was a function of Einstein's desire to show the invariance of physical laws throughout all possible systems of reference. It was motivated by his belief that the phenomenon of gravitation could be integrated into his theoretical structure as well. Ultimately his goal was to show that all of physics could be reduced to a set of formulae showing that every body moves along geodesic lines in space-time. This would have been an utterly simple, integrated theory, the fulfillment of Descartes' dream of the reduction of physics to geometry (Einstein, 1920).

Einstein never renounced his desire for beauty and coherence. His search for a unified theory of physics, his refusal to accept the indeterminist implications of quantum theory, are an expression of the same desire which had led him to the general theory of relativity. Whether Einstein's search for the unified theory was the quirk of a single-minded man or the pointer toward physics of the future, history will have to judge.

Einstein is an interesting exemplification of the ontological protest of subjectivity for two reasons: The first is his well-known stubborn belief that there had to be a unified field theory, and his refusal to accept the anticausalist consequences of
quantum mechanics, a theory he had helped create. From the 1920s onwards Einstein worked toward this unified theory, a project that did not yield any results that convinced the community of physicists. Einstein was generally regarded as someone who had lost the edge of true creativity and was pursuing a private obsession which had no scientific value.

The second reason is to be found in Einstein’s political and social views. Einstein published a large number of political statements in which he tried to delineate a world order based on reason and morality. The reader of these writings is struck by Einstein’s total lack of understanding of political and historical reality and the role of interest and power in human affairs (Einstein, 1954). He had a naive belief in the possibility of the reign of reason. It was this very naiveté combined with Einstein’s disregard for social etiquette, his dislike of human company, and idiosyncratic life-style, which turned him into the image of the modern, secular saint, the man who lives beyond the pettiness of everyday concerns in a universe of ideas and values.

Lately a somewhat tabloid biography of Einstein has been published, trying to show that he was far from the saintly human being he has been portrayed as being. Roger Highfield and Paul Carter (1993) try to show that Einstein the private man was an egocentric, often manipulatively taking advantage, particularly of the women in his life. They try to show that Einstein’s love for humanity did not translate into love for the humans around him.

I am calling The Private Lives of Albert Einstein tabloid because the authors relish in the facts they uncover without trying to understand whether there is not a deep link between Einstein’s achievement and his failures as a human being. In particular they miss out on the fact that earlier biographers have noted his peculiar detachment from ordinary human intercourse, and have indeed interpreted it as a schizoid trait. The facts which they have added to what is known about Einstein do not do much to clarify the picture: Of course Einstein’s detachment was not saintly. It was a function of his difficulty in staying in close contact with others over prolonged times.

The failure of Highfield and Carter’s biography is a function of their splitting the world into saints and ordinary human beings, instead of seeing the complexity of Einstein’s character. All biographers of Einstein (except Highfield and Carter) singled out Einstein’s single-minded devotion to beauty and coherence as his most salient character trait. His detachment from other humans, his inability to deal with the complexities and limitations characteristic of ordinary human intercourse, are an expression of the same traits as those which led him to become the greatest physicist of the twentieth century and one of the great minds humankind has ever produced.

This is not meant as an apology for Einstein’s human failings—and there were many of them. It is meant to illustrate the greatness and failure of the ontological protest of subjectivity pushed to the extreme. Einstein’s political writings betray an amazing naiveté, a helpless lack of understanding of the intricacies of political reality. It is precisely this total unwillingness to think in terms of Realpolitik and his stubborn belief that pure rationality can and must win out, which gave him the moral authority, the air of saintliness generally attributed to him.

Einstein refused to accept the unintelligible. In that he is the heir of the rationalist tradition of the West which assumes that the structure of the world is reducible to simple laws which are intuitively evident. If this refusal led him to be inhumane, particularly toward his children, we must not forget that it enabled him to become who he was.

For Einstein the transcendent was the only reality that counted. The quirks and twists of the real world were nothing but the veil of appearances hiding the awesome beauty of a totally intelligible structure. Hence the sense of deep religiousness which permeates his thinking, and which, no less than his actual achievement in science, is responsible for his having been singled out to become the symbol of the grandness of the human mind.

**BETWEEN INSPIRATION AND WISH-FULFILLMENT**

Given the pivotal importance for Western culture of the idea that the essence of reality is transcendent, it would be reductionistic to simply disqualify it as a fantasy created under the
aegis of the pleasure principle. Without the sense of the transcendent and the belief that reality must be more orderly and more beautiful than the naked eye can perceive, the idea of justice, the *capella sista*, the mass in B-minor, and the general theory of relativity would not have been created.

I feel strangely indecisive about what formulation to adopt: On one hand the strategy of retreat into an internal self can very plausibly be understood as a defense mechanism, a fantasy designed to avoid unbearable pain. On the other hand this strategy and the yearning for transcendence are responsible for many of the greatest cultural achievements. It seems to me that the dual possibility of regarding the strategy of the retreat into an inner self as nothing but a fantasy-laden defense, and to see it as the power to transcend the given and to create new order reflects the Janus-faced character of the ontological protest discussed in chapter 8.

The human ability to imagine that the current world order is somehow wrong, that it misses what is truly essential, is responsible for important cultural creations: The idea of the essential equality of humans needed the ability to abstract from all empirical properties (in which we are, most obviously, not equal); the idea of the subject as the bearer of inalienable rights which is the foundation of modern political and legal thought would not have been possible without the power of abstraction which redefines the nature of the subject radically. Moreover, there is substantial evidence that our emphasis on sound reality testing, lack of flight into fantasy, and the attempt to see situations as they are, are not the qualities which enable individuals to maintain their humanity in situations of extreme horror, like concentration camps. The opposite seems to be true: Those who could somehow mentally set themselves at a distance from the reality around them and maintain a larger frame of reference, were often more likely to survive than those who fully lived a situation in which there was no real hope, and no realistic way of bettering one's lot.

The ontological protest of subjectivity is at the foundation of the most remarkable achievements of the human race: Art, science, morality are its creations. Art is the expression of the desire for unity, for something which is completely meaningful, with no aspect remaining unformed by the desire for coherence. Science is the expression of the desire to replace the brute factuality of phenomena with an intelligible structure. Morality tries to replace the power relationships of nature by systems based on the idea of justice.

Dualistic metaphysics is the claim that the *real* world behind appearances is indeed as meaningful and intelligible as we desire it to be. It is difficult not to see an element of wish-fulfillment in this vision. Throughout most of the history of human civilization the ontological protest has not managed to be conscious of its own nature: Most interpretations of the universe generated by the human race are hopeless jumbles of confusion between what there is and what there should be. Religions have construed pictures of the world in which our desire for meaning, our need to believe that the world is not indifferent to what we need and desire, got the better of the human ability to see things as they are.

Self-consciousness of the ontological protest means that we know that there is no hope, that the desire to abolish the gap between desire and reality, to find redemption from the suffering inherent in our condition, is doomed to failure. If current cosmological theories are to be believed, our species is doomed to extinction sooner or later: sooner, if the earth cools down before the sun burns it or vice versa. Later the universe will either approach a state of maximal entropy, or it will collapse back into the formless matter/energy soup from which it has emerged in the Big Bang. The cosmological implications of modern physics are that the universe is totally indifferent to our needs and desires.

Once the ontological protest of subjectivity becomes conscious of its own nature, it is faced with a cruel picture. The yearning for meaning has no counterpart in the nature of things. We have come to the point of facing the irreducible gap between what we desire and what there is. The ontological protest cannot discover the nature of things: It protests the fact that the nature of things has very little to do with what we want. The ontological protest of subjectivity hovers between being an inspiration for authorship and creativity and a fantasied wish-fulfillment which confuses between what there should be and what there is.
The case histories and theoretical reflections of this book highlight a crucial feature of the current situation of psychoanalysis. The contemporary psychoanalytic clinician cannot rely on unquestioned normative models of human development and maturity in working with his patients (Strenger, 1997a,b). The philosophical, cultural, and social developments of the last decades force him to reflect on wider issues. To what extent is individuality the realization of a preexisting nature, and to what extent is it something like an artistic creation?

The contemporary psychoanalytic clinician is faced with a complex and fascinating situation: For every patient there are several culturally accepted options of renarrating her history and continuing her life. The space of freedom provided by late-modern society is remarkable, but it also imposes great demands on the individual's mental resources. Because there are so many possibilities, the task of shaping one's life has become a more complex undertaking than it has been in the past.

I have come to see the psychoanalytic endeavor as a joint undertaking with my patients in which we look for ways in which they can renarrate and reshape their past, present, and future. What makes the project of self-creation interesting is
that individuals have historical depth. The sediments of the past reach into previous generations, and the patient’s attempt to obliterate history often turns life into a fateful chain of repetitions of the same patterns.

The therapeutic encounters told in this book show how many layers fate has. The individual psyche is inextricably intertwined with larger historical forces. Daphnah’s and Raphael’s lives reflect aspects of the historical fate of being Jewish in the twentieth century. Raphael’s suffering originates in the Diaspora experience of never being truly at home anywhere. Daphnah’s soul was filled with the terror and death of the Holocaust, even though she was born into the state of Israel. Tom’s feelings about himself reflect, among other things, the tragedy of ethnic groups deemed second rate in their society. Tamara’s life was cmciaUly formed by her father’s feeling of not being accepted by the white Protestant community in which he made his career.

Early childhood and the influence of the parents’ personalities constitutes a further layer of fate. The mental illness of Clarissa’s mother turned family life into sheer hell. The parents of the other patients made sincere efforts to provide their children with a good childhood. Nevertheless these children were destined to much suffering which led them to seek my help. Their stories show how intractable the complexity of human lives often is. Tamara, Clarissa, Raphael, Daphnah, and Tom are by no means less gifted, intelligent, creative, and endowed with character than most, if anything the opposite is true. Nevertheless their fates were so difficult that their search for authorship came to a dead end.

The therapeutic journeys with all these patients were complicated, often quirky, and, most obviously with Clarissa, my control was quite limited. I have not hidden my divergence from purist conceptions of therapeutic technique. Psychoanalysis for me stands first and foremost for the willingness to take the complexity of the project of individuality seriously and for the ethical commitment to safeguarding and enhancing the patient’s autonomy and subjectivity. It relishes in deciphering nuances of individual experience and providing assistance in the search for individuality. The very fact that hundreds of hours are spent with each individual in nothing but an attempt to understand her mind and her biography is a tribute to, and an expression of respect for human individuality.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy, the highly private, ritualized search for self is in danger of being gobbled up by the craze of brief therapies and the endless variety of “twelve steps programs towards freedom/rebirth/slimness/assertiveness/incest survivor solidarity,” etc. Much of this craze is due to economic hardship: Medical insurance is progressively less willing to cover long-term, intensive psychotherapy, and as the goals of such therapy are not consistent with the technologically oriented search for quick symptom-removal, the likelihood for a reversal of this trend is low.

Quick-fix methods and a belief in technology as the solution to our problems have entered a strange alliance with facile religiosity: Either problems are to be solved technically, or they are relegated to a domain of supposedly unassailable belief. The actual art of living, the domain which constitutes the very stuff of life, is lost between computer screens and mass prayer. I do not know whether the tradition of psychoanalysis and long-term individual therapy will survive the combined assault of belief in drugs and technology on the one hand, and the various forms of religious eschatology on the other hand.

Nevertheless psychoanalysis and psychodynamic therapy cannot, and should not, turn itself into an efficiency-driven technology of change. To the dismay of the more scientifically minded among us, psychoanalysis has notoriously failed to come up with empirical hypotheses which are amenable to scientific testing. Something in the form, not only in the content of depth psychological formulations eschews the formalization, precision, and transparency necessitated by scientific work. The analogy to poetry is compelling. The moment poetry becomes totally lucid, transparent, and accessible it ceases to be poetry. It thrives on multiplicity of meaning and lack of transparency.

Psychoanalysis is poetic in that it tries to find metaphors which describe the space between the subjective and the objective. It describes modes of experience which color the facts of life rather than the facts themselves. Subjective experience,
notoriously, defies anything other than metaphorical description, which is why psychoanalysis creates myths and metaphors. Psychoanalysis is the introvert mode of writing par excellence.

SOLIDARITY OF AN IMPOSSIBLE SPECIES

The practicing clinician must constantly find a fruitful attitude toward his patients' projects of self-creation. Doing psychotherapy means meeting people at the point where their attempt to live a life worth living has come to a dead end, and to face human frailty every single session. This position is conducive to the development of attitudes which have intrinsic problems. One is that of enlightened superiority. The patient's project of self-creation is then simply pathologized as an aberration from the state of maturity.

Another attitude which can be problematic is that of self-righteous identification with the other as a victim. There is a therapeutic subculture that turns parental psychopathology into the source of all problems. It is based on the view that we are entitled to a good childhood, and that we are condemned to be unhappy, if we have been deprived of it. This attitude can lead the patient into the deadlock of feeling the victim of a cruel fate.

The art of psychoanalytic clinical work requires striking a balance between lucidity and warmth. My experience is that warmth can emerge from lucid awareness of the impossibility of the project of individuality. As long as the therapist does not experience the messiness of life from the vantage point of superiority, he will be able to meet his patient's trouble with the solidarity of a fellow traveler on a hazardous journey.

In addition to the psychoanalytic and existential traditions, I have found one philosopher and two writers very helpful in the search to combine lucidity and warmth. Richard Rorty has formulated a perspective well defined by the title of his book *Irony, Contingency and Solidarity* (1989). Rorty shows that our conceptual frameworks and ethical principles do not reflect an ahistorical, necessary truth, but are historical creations. This helps us to maintain a basically ironic stance toward all theories and ideals. Rorty urges us to maintain such irony, because it is the only way to avoid the inhumanity inevitably generated by the certainty that one's own point of view is privileged.

Rorty's basic value is the striving toward solidarity, the attempt to increase our ability to identify with others and to see them as part of the same species. Rorty believes that solidarity cannot be forced by argument. If anything, art, particularly literature, can increase the range of the same species. Rorty also takes art as a paradigm for the organization of society, because his ideal of society is that of a community of individuals who protect and cherish each other's right to self-creation. He prefers art to science as a model, because art thrives on plurality of styles and ideals, and is more conducive to the maintenance of solidarity.

Saul Bellow is another figure congenial to the therapeutic attitude I am trying to develop. Bellow has developed a rare combination of irony and compassion in his descriptions of human affairs. A finely honed sense for the comic absurdities of life permeates the construction of his characters and situations. He depicts the manifold ways in which individuals fail in their quest for grand solutions, total happiness, and how they maneuver themselves into the weirdest dead ends. Nevertheless he succeeds in describing the quirkiest life trajectories without sliding into cold cynicism. The reader easily identifies with the characters, because they are presented as part of the impossibly complex and often funny tapestry of life to which we all belong. Putting down Bellow's novels never leaves the reader with a sense of despair, but with the experience of warmth generated by recognizing oneself in a fellow member of our funny species.

The second novelist I have experienced as important in the development of my therapeutic attitude is Milan Kundera. He is more acerbic, less forgiving than Bellow, but his lack of forgiveness is always directed at the vices responsible for inhuman behavior: fanaticism, self-importance, and pomposity. Kundera is the advocate of the individual facing the collective, the particular trying to extricate itself from the pressure to conform. His work tries to salvage the idiosyncratic from being...
drowned in ideology. Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) is one of the very few instances of the philosophical novel that really works—both as a novel and as philosophy. Kundera shows how pomposity, the unwillingness to reflect on one’s principles and beliefs can turn people into inhuman functionaries of domination. Lightness of touch for Kundera is an ethical value designed to save the individual from the crushing heaviness of totalitarianism. His insistence on the importance of the comic dimension is one of the most serious attempts to protect us from the fascist in ourselves.

I am proposing an existential and therapeutic perspective based on solidarity between members of a species who find themselves in an impossible plight. We have evolved through a process of biological evolution which had nothing to do with happiness, individuation, or living a worthwhile life, but with the propagation of genes. Nature tricks us into seeking action and excitement in order to keep us from starving, and it makes us seek safety because it wants us to survive. It goads us into attaching ourselves to members of the other sex in order to perpetuate the species. But it leaves males with the desire to impregnate as many females as possible, and females with the desire to find more powerful males than the ones they are presently bonded to. To make the mess complete, our brains have evolved to the point where we can ask questions about justice, beauty, and truth, and about what kind of life we should be living.

The development of Western civilization has opened up the vista of a society of free individuals who are more or less secure in the most vital needs, and more or less safe from the ravages of nature and other human beings. We have gained the freedom to ask loftier questions: What is the good life, and how can we live it? Then, alas, we find out that we are singularly badly equipped to live lives of fulfillment and happiness. Our phylogenetic inheritance is not suited for civilized life, as Freud argued long ago. Nevertheless we cannot help asking larger questions, and we strive for a life of goodness, beauty, and fulfillment.

Given this degree of complexity, it is not surprising that the project of living a life experienced as worthwhile often fails. If anything, it is surprising that it partially succeeds as often as it does. The solidarity we might develop is that of fellow travelers stuck in an impossible situation, with tools inadequate for the tasks at hand, with nowhere to go, and with the knowledge that the situation will never change.

Looking at this species of thinking reeds, as Pascal (1670) has called human beings, one cannot help admiring its creative achievements, both collective and individual. The fact that this species has managed to produce forms of political organization based on ideas of liberty, justice, and equality is nothing short of amazing, since nothing in nature foreshadows this idea. Yet reality remains forever recalcitrant to our need for meaning. Sartre’s (1943) depiction of subjectivity as caught in a world that is totally opaque is a precise description of the impossibility of living completely according to the reality principle. The ontological protest of subjectivity is an expression of the disbelief that we have evolved into a thinking reed, a creature capable of thought, and are yet faced with a world that is governed by the laws of a nature red in tooth and claw. Hence the need for illusion. Winnicott (1971) has argued that human beings can indeed not bear the full impact of the realization that reality is as it is. Culture is a repository of the illusions needed to stay alive.

The perspective of solidarity between members of an impossible species tries to combine lucidity with warmth. Emphasis on the sometimes intractable complexity of living need not lead to the morality of maturity. Rortyan irony prevents us from taking the overly knowledgeable attitude psychoanalysis has often been accused of. Kundera’s ideal of cherishing the individual vis-à-vis the general and ideological, protects us from sliding into the pomposity that endangers those whom society endows with the status of the healer. Bellow’s combination of warmth and irony can enable us to see the comic aspects of the ways by which fellow humans try to find their way through the maze of life without falling into cynicism.
UNITY WITHOUT PLENIITUDE

One of the central values of psychoanalysis has been to help individuals to uncover who they really are, and to base change on curing underlying causes rather than simply influencing symptoms. This value is reflected in the metaphor of the true self hidden behind layers of the false self. The true self represents the state of a life informed by authorship, the false self the state of fatedness. The individual's protest against the state of fatedness is symbolized by the image of an entity living somewhere inside which might one day be free to express itself. The narrative of the true and the false self is a manifestation of one of the strategies of self-creation: that of redefining the self.

The idea of the true self is an important regulative ideal, a notion which reminds us of the possibility of an authentic life. But this idea easily creates the illusion that the true self is a fully formed entity, buried in the personality, waiting to be liberated. The utopia of total freedom and plenitude can become an impediment to the development of true authorship. It can lock individuals into the endless wait for conditions which will allow total authenticity.

What turns us into individuals is not a fully fledged true self, but the striving for coherence of thought, desire, and action. Unity is not there to begin with, and to the extent coherence is possible, it is an achievement. It is an aesthetic creation in which the various vectors of the personality integrate into a general direction. Indeed, it might be argued that it is the sense of authorship more than anything else which constitutes the self. The sense of direction and the striving toward coherence is what makes us into individuals.

Maybe all the unity we can ever achieve is the coherence we succeed in introducing into the messiness of the motivational systems with which we are born and which we develop over time. The desire for unity and the desire for plenitude are not the same. The desire for plenitude is the desire for the abolition of the gap between desire and reality. Freud (1930) thought that this desire is based on an illusion reflecting the imprint on our nervous system of the prenatal state in which the universe and ourselves were the same.

The problem is, of course, that moments of plenitude are the most powerful experience we are capable of. Freud's belief that plenitude was nothing but an infantile illusion can be seen as a way to ease the pain engendered by the rareness of plenitude. As adults we can find plenitude in moments of sexual union, in experiences of kinesthetic harmony, in moments of easy flow of interpersonal attunement, or in powerful aesthetic experiences.

Such moments make us aware that most of our lives are lived in what Lacan called *manque à être*, a lack of plenitude. The knowledge that plenitude is a permanent possibility rarely realized has been the source of many myths. Aristophanes' tale in Plato's *Symposium* (1961) is one of them: Once humans were rounded creatures with two heads and eight extremities. The gods cut us in two because of our hubris, and ever since we search for the half which will make us complete. The Dionysian abandon of sexual bliss becomes the hallmark of a sense of wholeness that escapes us in most of our lives.

Nevertheless we try to live lives worth living. The romantic hope that we can base our lives on plenitude is probably illusory, though. The sense of authorship is an Apollonian achievement rather than the result of Dionysian abandon. And maybe it can only be achieved once we renounce the desire for plenitude, in which uncultured desire merges with experiences of satisfaction. The moments in which plenitude reigns are lucky coincidences; nothing we can base our lives on.

This would explain why many of us spend a lifetime projecting the idea of plenitude onto various fantasied states of affairs. "If I was rich, beautiful, successful, loved, admired (or whatever), plenitude would come back." The result is that lives are spent with the feeling that the limitations of the self were responsible for the elusiveness of plenitude. If plenitude is not to be had, unity must be created, not found. The romantic idea that such creation, if it is genuine, springs from the depths of the self as water flows from a spring is illusory. Individuality is a work of art: It must be created through effort and stamina, and the fantasy of plenitude and effortlessness may be one of the greatest obstacles to individuation.
REFERENCES


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


NAME INDEX

Abraham, K., 49
Amado, J., 96
Aristophanes, 235
Aristotle, 85
Aron, I., 10, 122
Atwood, G., 10
Benjamin, J., 10, 43
Bion, W., 52, 179, 193
Bollas, C., 2–3, 4, 122, 180, 187
Bos, M., 122
Brandcraft, B., 10
Brown, N., 141
Buber, M., 122, 194
Campus, A., 44
Carter, P., 222–223
Chasseguet-Smirgel, J., 53
Chodorow, N., 10, 56, 57, 94
de Beauvoir, S., 93
de Sade, M., 96–97
Deleuze, G., 50
Descartes, R., 84–85, 86–87
Dickens, C., 176

Do, F., 173n
Einstein, A., 221–223
Eliot, T. S., 175
Erikson, E. H., 76n
Fallini, F., 164
Ferenczi, S., 122, 192
Foucault, M., 8–9, 50, 59, 62, 121, 135–144
Frank, J., 120
Freud, S., 2, 3, 12, 13, 48, 62, 92, 122, 141, 174–175, 181, 186–188, 190, 194, 292, 284–285
Frisch, M., 192–193
Fussell, S. W., 90, 101–102
Gay, P., 52, 57
Genet, J., 121, 128, 131
Goodman, N., 9
Gorkin, M., 130, 190
Guattari, F., 50

Hegel, G., 92, 97
Hestegger, M., 85, 123
Highfield, R., 222–223
Hine, S., 89
Holton, G., 221

243
Jung, C., 4, 186
Kant, I., 198
Kernberg, O., 50
Khan, M., 97, 179
Kierkegaard, S., 94
Klein, M., 2
Koestler, A., 217
Kohut, H., 10, 190
Krafft-Ebing, R. von, 141
Kundera, M., 231-232, 233
Lacan, J., 2-3, 69, 92, 193, 235
Lanman, C., 141
Levi-Strauss, C., 173
Lewin, K., 121, 123
Loewald, H., 78, 187, 189-190, 192-193, 195
Lyne, A., 81
Macey, D., 138
Mann, T., 164
Marcuse, H., 141
Marx, G., 91
May, R., 57
McDougall, J., 58, 59, 89
Merleau-Ponty, M., 3
Mitchell, S., 10
Miller, J., 136-137, 143
Mozart, W. A., 94-97
Nussbaum, M., 52
Paglia, C., 96, 100-103
Pascal, B., 235
Phillips, A., 56-57, 60, 120
Piguet, J., 189
Pino, 216-218, 235
Putnam, H., 9, 85
Rorty, R., 9, 230-231
Roth, F., 121, 132-135
Sartre, J. P., 177, 235
Schauen, R., 53
Scholm, G., 218-219
Sharma, A., 215-216
Socrates, 216
Spence, D., 2
Spielberg, S., 141
Sassanopoulos Huffington, A., 97-98
Stoller, R., 89, 94, 137, 143
Stolorow, R., 10
Strugger, C., 60, 51, 154n, 187, 213, 227
Szasz, T. S., 50, 120
Taylor, A., 216
Vishniak, R., 218
White, E., 131
Whitehead, A. N., 217
Williams, B. E., 85
Winnicott, D. W., 2-3, 4, 12, 46, 155, 182-183, 184, 187, 233
Wiegnerstein, L., 85, 125
Wolf, E., 214
Wollheim, R., 55, 178, 180
Wright, R., 91
Yalom, I., 122, 191

SUBJECT INDEX

Active technique, 187
Aesthetics of existence, 144
Alpha male, 204-207, 212-213
Amorality, 120
Analytic love, 235
Antisocial behavior, 119-120
Apollonian achievement, 235
Apollonian impulse, 100, 101-102
Art in imaginative empathy, 231
Autarkia, 83
Authorship, 231
Self-creation addiction to fight for, 46-48
fascination and, 171-175
impossibility of, 174-175
over childhood pain, 11
restoration of, 182-183
sense of, 11-12
striving for, 147-170
strong need for, 75-79
Autonomous individuality, 86
Badness, sense of, 133-135
Being against, 124
Being with, 123-124
Body, unconscious as, 3
Bodybuilding, 90-91

heroism of, 101-102
Bondage, freedom and, 48-51
Bourgeois morality, 59-60
Buddhism, 216
Cabalism, 218-219
Cartesian project, 84-87
Central trauma, 42
Centrifugal strategies, 7, 11
Centripetal strategies, 6, 12
Character, psychoanalytic conception of, 13
Childhood ineradicability of, 53-54
mastering trauma of, 137-138
Chthonian principle, 101
Classification
defiance of, 136-137
historical genesis of, 141-142
wounds inflicted by, 139-140
Clinician, 231
Coga ergo sum, 84-86
Cognitive growth, 189
Coherence, striving for, 219-222, 234
Comical absurdities, 231
Community, sense of, 124, 128
Compulsion to repeat, 2
Conformity, resistance of, 231-232
Language, structure of, 9
Latin macho, 110
Lebenswelt, 121
Legitimate identity, acceptance of, 124-125
Libido, stickiness of, 2
Life as fate, 63-79
as work of art, 61-62
worth living, striving for, 227-228, 235
Limitations fight against, 44-45, 61-62, 96-103
transcendence of, 219-220
Lives, rewriting of, 158-162
Loneliness, 63-64
Love as accomplishment, 91-92
battle for, 91-93
cure through, 186-195
failure of, 193-194
as form of recognition, 92-93
as triumph of authorship, 92
as ultimate prize, 93
Love object fantasy image of, 188
fear of rejection by, 181-182
Lucidity, 230-231
Male sexuality, essence of, 100
Marginalization, 131
Masculinity, 204-209
Masochism. See Sexual masochism;
S&M, consensual
Maturity, 56-57
morality of, 10
self-knowledge and, 50-51
Meaning versus nature, 138-139
need for, 233
Meaninglessness, deep sense of, 63-64
Medical insurance, 229
Meditations on First Philosophy
(Descartes), 84, 86
Men, bodily nature and essence of, 100
Mental health, meaning of, 10
Metaphysics, 9
Michelson-Morley experiment, 221
Moral order. See also Social order
deconstruction of, 135-144
fight against, 128
individual psyche and, 122-125
inner experience of, 123-124
ontological protest against, 144
outrage against, 120
subjective experience of, 121
victims of, 131
Moral outrage, 11, 120
Mother anxiety of, 172
loss of affection of, 211-212
rejecting, 153-154
Motivations, biologically entrenched, 91-92
Les mots et les choses (Foucault), 138-139
Muscle Confessions of an Unlikely Bodybuilder (Paglia), 101
Mutabilion, mastering fear of, 137-138
Mutual analysis, 169
Mutuality, 121-122
patient-therapist, 121-130
in patient-therapist dialogue, 168-170
Mysticism, 219-220
S&M and, 143-144
Mythological structures, 173-174
La naissance de la clinique (Foucault), 138
Narratives, motifs of, 12-13
Nature defiance of, 96-97
fight against, 100
fusion with, 101
versus meaning, 138-139
structure of, 9-10
Neosexuality, 56, 94
Neutrality, 213-214
emphais on, 191
Nichomachean Ethics (Aristotle), 83-84
Nine and a Half Weeks, 81, 87-89
Normality, freedom and, 48-51
Object relations, internalized, 122
Object relations theory, 122
Objectifying gaze, fighting, 140-142
Obligations, 132, 133
Obsessive rituals, 147
Ontological protest, 95-96, 144,
211-214, 221-223, 233
drama of, 166-167
duality of, 177-179
as human achievement, 224-225
metaphysical, 217-218
self-consciousness of, 225
Order, deconstruction of, 135-144. See also Moral order; Social order
Orthodox practitioner, 49
voice of, 51-56
Otherworldliness, 217
Pain secret of, 140-141
suffering, 52
Parents personalities of, 228
shaping lives, 53-54
Past continuing patterns of, 66-67
fixation to, 54-56, 59-60
immutability of, 45
inerradicability of, 55-54
as perpetual present, 181-182
as sediment of, 228
Pathology, ascription of, 141
Patient-therapist dialogue, mutual and
direct, 108-170
Penis, damaged, 204-209
Personality, determinants of, 5-6
Phobia, of illness, 147, 152-153, 156-157
Psychoanalysis art of, 230
classic vs. romantic visions of, 187
deep self and, 2-4
poetic nature of, 229-230
questioning theories of, 50
Psychoanalytic cure, through love, 186-195
Psychodynamic psychotherapy, 229
Psychoopathia Sexualis (Krafft-Ebing), 141
Psychopathology, treatable forms of, 49-50
Quick-fix methods, 229
Rabbinical Judaism, 218
Radical doubt, 84-85
Rationality, pure, 221-223
Reality ability to distance self from, 224
denigration of, 178-179
hatred of, 179
Regression, 152-155
Relativization, 127-130
Rehumanization, 221
Religious, 83
Reliability theory, 221

Platonic philosophy, 216-218
Plenitude, 97-99
Portnoy's Complaint (Roth), 121, 133-134
Postmodern pluralism, 50-51
Postmodernism, 9-10
Power, of sexual fantasy, 89
The Private Lives of Albert Einstein (Highfield; Carter), 222-223
Project Shylock (Roth), 134
Psyche, inertia of, 3
Rationality, pure, 221-223
Reality, 186-195
Rationality, pure, 221-223
Regression, 152-155
Relativization, 127-130
Religious, 83
Reliability theory, 221

Picasso, as creator without limits, 97-99
Plato, 216-218
Plenitude, desire for, 234-235
lack of, 235
Portnoy's Complaint (Roth), 121, 133-134
Postmodern pluralism, 50-51
voice of, 56-60
Postmodernism, 9-10
Power, of sexual fantasy, 89
The Private Lives of Albert Einstein (Highfield; Carter), 222-223
Project Shylock (Roth), 134
Psyche, inertia of, 3
Psychoanalysis, 230
art of, 230
classic vs. romantic visions of, 187
deep self and, 2-4
poetic nature of, 229-230
questioning theories of, 50
Psychoanalytic cure, through love, 186-195
Psychodynamic psychotherapy, 229
Psychoopathia Sexualis (Krafft-Ebing), 141
Psychopathology, treatable forms of, 49-50
Quick-fix methods, 229
Rabbinical Judaism, 218
Radical doubt, 84-85
Rationality, pure, 221-223
Reality, ability to distance self from, 224
denigration of, 178-179
hatred of, 179
Regression, 152-155
Relativization, 127-130
Rehumanization, 221
Religious, 83
Reliability theory, 221

Platonic philosophy, 216-218
Plenitude, desire for, 234-235
lack of, 235
Portnoy's Complaint (Roth), 121, 133-134
Postmodern pluralism, 50-51
voice of, 56-60
Postmodernism, 9-10
Power, of sexual fantasy, 89
The Private Lives of Albert Einstein (Highfield; Carter), 222-223
Project Shylock (Roth), 134
Psyche, inertia of, 3
Psychoanalysis, 230
art of, 230
classic vs. romantic visions of, 187
deep self and, 2-4
poetic nature of, 229-230
questioning theories of, 50
Psychoanalytic cure, through love, 186-195
Psychodynamic psychotherapy, 229
Psychoopathia Sexualis (Krafft-Ebing), 141
Psychopathology, treatable forms of, 49-50
Quick-fix methods, 229
Rabbinical Judaism, 218
Radical doubt, 84-85
Rationality, pure, 221-223
Reality, ability to distance self from, 224
denigration of, 178-179
hatred of, 179
Regression, 152-155
Relativization, 127-130
Rehumanization, 221
Religious, 83
Reliability theory, 221
Religion
redrawing boundaries of self in, 215-216
world view of, 225

Sabbath's Theater (Roth), 121, 133, 134-135

Scheherazade motif, 151-152, 167, 184, 185

Schindler's List, 141

The Second Sex (de Beauvoir), 93 repairing damage of childhood, 54
Self. See also Deep self

Sexual masochism, 18-39. See also

S&M, consensual, 61-62, 137-138, in aesthetics of existence, 144
masochism celebrating desire for, 100-103

Shoah, 141

Sensibility, 56-57
Sensuality, sinful, 126

Serena, world of, 216
Sensitvity, imposing ideal of, 57-58
Senses, world of, 216
Seriousness of, 197-198
Sexuality
deep, 1-4, 60-62
freedom to create, 1-2
multilayered, 11
as not real, 183-186
retreat inside, 214-216
Self-creation, 1-2. See also

Authorship; Individuality
in aesthetics of existence, 144
anatomy of, 41-62
celebrating desire for, 100-103
crucial decisions in, 42
culture and, 82-87
deep self and, 60-62
effectiveness of, 7
as fiction, 53-54, 58-59
framework for narrating, 5-8
limits of, 81-82
paradigmatic strategies for, 6-7
sexual fantasy and, 87-89
stories of, 10-12
strong desire for, 81-103
through bodybuilding, 90-91
without limits, 17-39, 97-99
Self-depreciation, 165-166
Self-hatred, 201-202
Self-moral order relationship in excommunication, 125
in identity of legitimacy, 124-125
Self-respect, 82

Sexes
difference between, 58-59
versus generations, 54

Sexual fantasy
as power, 89
self-creation and, 87-89

Sexual masochism, 18-39. See also

S&M, consensual, as fixation on past, 55-56
in gaining authorship, 46-47
repairing damage of childhood, 54

Sexual Personae (Paglia), 100

Sexuality
confused, 212-213
distorted, 206-207
psychological accounts of, 56-57
Shame, fighting to overcome, 63-79

Shoah, 141

Signifiers, repressed chains of, 3

Sin, Freudian, 141

Sin as wrong, 224
as fiction, 5:1-54, 58-59

Social classification.
See Classification

Social norms, rebellion against, 7
culture and, 82-87

Social order.
See also

Moral order

Smiling, 230-231

Sodality, 230-233

Soul
concept of, 6-7
Platonic, 217

Spirituality, 83-84

Spilling
of father, 42-43
of men, 43

Stalemate, 165

Structuralism, 86

Subjectivity
of father, 42-44
ontological protest of, 6-7, 78, 81,
156-157, 177-179, 211-214,
221-223, 224, 225, 229, 233

Sublimation, limited capacity for, 174-175

Suicidal thoughts, limited capacity for, 174-175

Sufficiency, imposing ideal of, 57-58

Suicide attempts, meaning of, 75-76

Swan song motif, 109-110

Terror, trauma and, 172

Tension, abolition of, 48

Therapeutic interaction, 189-190

Therapeutic love
difficulty discussing, 191-192
importance of, 193-195

Therapeutic mechanism, 188

Therapeutic processes, inconclusive ending of, 41

Therapeutic relationship
mutual and direct, 168-170
mutuality in, 121-122, 128-130

unique chemistry of, 13

Therapist
as archaic object and participant, 189-190
idealization of, 162
as link between inner and external reality, 185-186
loss of control by, 77-78
as moral order, 128-129
neutrality of, 213-214
in restoring patient's authorship, 182-183
as social authority, 120

suffering, 122

Subjectivity of, 122

Therapy, limitations of, 78-79

Thought, as innermost core, 84-87

Tradition, rebellion against, 132

Tragic dimension, 53, 54-55

Transcendence
immanent, 220-223
yearning for, 211-225

Transcendent, sense of, 218-219

Transference
centrality of, 186-187

distortion of, 122
dynamic of, 184-186
emphasis on, 182

Transferential wishes, origins of, 187-188

Trauma
as embodiment of fate, 171-173
working through of, 182-183

Traumatic constellation
in gaining authorship over, 181
overcoming, 184
regression to, 152-155

True self, hidden, 234

The Unbearable Lightness of Being
(Kundera), 232

Unconscious
assumption of, 52-53
as body, 3
as center of personal being, 4
as metaphor for deep self, 3-5
as repository of wisdom, 4

Unfreedom, by fixation to past, 54-56, 59-60

Unified field theory, 221-222

Unity, without plenitude, 234-235

Victim, self-righteous identification with, 230

Visible world, 216-217, 219

Warmth, 230-231, 233

Woman, as embodiment of natural order, 96-97, 99

Womanizer, charming, 107-112

Work ethic, 57

World, structure of, 9-10

World order, 222

Wordsworthian dichotomy, 150-152, 159-162, 172, 173-174