

analysis. Such a simplification, moreover, reproduces the structure of under polarity under the guise of attacking it.

In this book I have tried to build on and reframe psychoanalytic theory in order to retell Freud's story of domination in a way that preserves its complexity and ambiguity. It was Freud's conclusion that we could not do without authority (internalized as guilt), and that we would not but suffer under its constraint. No doubt our historical situation readily allows us to question the masculine form of authority—as Freud did not—but this in itself does not immediately resolve the problem of destructiveness or submission. It only starts us on a new approach to grasping the tension between the desire to be free and the desire not to be. To persevere in that approach, it seems to me, requires a theory some of that quality which Keats demanded for poetry—negative capability. The theoretic equivalent of that ability to face mystery and uncertainty “without any irritability reaching after fact and reason” would be the effort to understand the contradictions of fact and reason without any irritability reaching after one side at the expense of the other.

As I have said elsewhere, a theory or a politics that cannot cope with contradiction, that denies the irrational, that tries to sanitize the erotic, that aesthetic components of human life cannot visualize an authentic end of domination but only vacate the field.

C H A P T E R O N E

The Bonds of Love

J. Benjamin 1988

Pantheon Books

The First Bond

PSYCHOANALYSIS HAS SHIFTED its focus since Freud, aiming its sights toward ever earlier phases of development in childhood and infancy. This reorientation has had many repercussions: it has given the mother-child dyad an importance in psychic development rivaling the oedipal triangle, and consequently, it has stimulated a new theoretical construction of individual development. This shift from oedipal to preoedipal—that is, from father to mother—can actually be

said to have changed the entire frame of psychoanalytic thinking. Where formerly the psyche was conceived as a force field of drives and defenses, now it became an inner drama of ego and objects (as psychoanalysis terms the mental representation of others). Inevitably, the focus on the ego and its inner object relationships led to an increased interest in the idea of the self, and more generally, in the relationship between self and other. The last twenty-five years have seen a flowering of psychoanalytic theories about the early growth of the self in the relationship with the other.¹

In this chapter I will show how domination originates in a transformation of the relationship between self and other. Briefly stated, domination and submission result from a breakdown of the necessary tension between self-assertion and mutual recognition that allows self and other to meet as sovereign equals.

Assertion and recognition constitute the poles of a delicate balance. This balance is integral to what is called "differentiation": the individual's development as a self that is aware of its distinctness from others. Yet this balance, and with it the differentiation of self and other, is difficult to sustain.² In particular, the need for recognition gives rise to a paradox. Recognition is that response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self. It allows the self to realize its agency and authorship in a tangible way. But such recognition can only come from an other whom we, in turn, recognize as a person in his or her own right. This struggle to be recognized by an other, and thus confirm our selves, was shown by Hegel to form the core of relationships of domination. But what Hegel formulated at the level of philosophical abstraction can also be discussed in terms of what we now know about the psychological development of the infant. In this chapter we will follow the course of recognition in the earliest encounters of the self with the nurturing other (or others), and see how the inability to sustain paradox in that interaction can, and often does, convert the exchange of recognition into domination and submission.

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THE BEGINNING OF RECOGNITION

As she cradles her newborn child and looks into its eyes, the first-time mother says, "I believe she knows me. You do know me, don't you? Yes, you do." As she croons to her baby in that soft, high-pitched repetitive voice (the "infantized" speech that scientists confirm is the universal baby talk), she attributes to her infant a knowledge beyond ordinary knowing. To the skeptical observer this knowledge may appear to be no more than projection. For the mother, this peaceful moment after a feeding—often after a mounting storm of cries and body convulsions, the somewhat clumsy effort to get baby's mouth connected to the nipple, the gradual relaxation as baby begins to suck and milk begins to flow, and finally baby's alert, attentive, yet enigmatic look—this moment is indeed one of recognition. She says to her baby, "Hey, stranger, are you really the one I carried around inside of me? Do you know me?" Unlike the observer, she would not be surprised to hear that rigorous experiments show that her baby can already distinguish her from other people, that newborns already prefer the sight, sound, and smell of their mothers.³

The mother who feels recognized by her baby is not simply projecting her own feelings into her child—which she assuredly does. She is also linking the newborn's past, inside her, with his future, outside of her, as a separate person.* The baby is a stranger to her, she is not yet sure who this baby is, although she is certain that he or she is already someone, a unique person with his or her own destiny.† Although the

*Although I use the word "carried" and refer to research on mother-infant pairs in which the infant was the biological offspring of this mother, I am not suggesting that the experience is radically different in adoption. Adoptive mothers, like biological ones, hold their baby inside their minds before birth, and identify with their own mothers who carried them. It is this mental holding, and the shift to a relationship with a real—outside—baby that I am referring to here.

†Since there is no graceful solution to the problem of what gender pronoun to use for the infant, I shall alternate between masculine and feminine. In those paragraphs where

baby is wholly dependent upon her—and not only on her, but perhaps equally on a father or others—never for a moment does she doubt that this baby brings his own self, his unique personality, to bear on their common life. And she is already grateful for the baby's cooperation and activity—his willingness to be soothed, his acceptance of frustration, his devotion to her milk, his focusing on her face. Later, as baby is able to demonstrate ever more clearly that he does know and prefer her to all others, she will accept this glimmer of recognition as a sign of the mutuality that persists in spite of the tremendous inequality of the parent-child relationship. But perhaps never will she feel more strongly, than in those first days of her baby's life, the intense mixture of his being part of herself, utterly familiar and yet utterly new, unknown, and other.

It may be hard for a mother to accept this paradox, the fact that this baby has come from her and yet is so unknown to her. She may feel frustrated that her child cannot yet tell her who he is, what he knows or doesn't know. Certainly, a new mother has a complex range of feelings, many of which are dismissed or utterly denied by the common sentimentality surrounding motherhood. She may feel bored, unsure of what she should be doing to quiet or please baby, exhausted, anxious about herself and her body, angry that baby demands so much from her, dismayed at the lack of visible gratitude or response, impatient for baby to reveal himself, afraid that her baby is not normal, that he is going to stay like this forever.

Despite such doubts and difficulties, however, most first-time mothers are able to sustain a powerful connection to a newborn child.

I refer to the mother as "she," I will generally avoid confusion by calling the infant "he." In those paragraphs where I refer to the infant alone and therefore the referent for the pronoun is clear, the infant will generally be "she." Although I write about the mother, I mean simply the significant adult, which could equally be a father or any other caregiver well known to the child. But since it is quite relevant to my argument that the principal caregiver in our culture is usually (or is assumed to be) "the mother," this ambiguity will have to remain.

Naturally, some of a mother's ability to mother reflects the nurturance her own parents gave her and the support she receives from other adults. But what sustains her from moment to moment is the relationship she is forming with her infant, the gratification she feels when baby, with all that raw intensity, responds to her.⁴ In this early interaction, the mother can already identify the first signs of mutual recognition: "I recognize *you* as my baby who recognizes *me*."

To experience recognition in the fullest, most joyful way, entails the paradox that "you" who are "mine" are also different, new, outside of me. It thus includes the sense of loss that you are no longer inside me, no longer simply my fantasy of you, that we are no longer physically and psychically one, and I can no longer take care of you simply by taking care of myself. I may find it preferable to put this side of reality out of my consciousness—for example, by declaring you the most wonderful baby who ever lived, far superior to all other babies, so that you are my dream child, and taking care of you is as easy as taking care of myself and fulfills my deepest wishes for glory. This is a temptation to which many new parents succumb in some measure.

Still, the process of recognition, charted here through the experience of the new mother, always includes this paradoxical mixture of otherness and togetherness: You belong to me, yet you are not (any longer) part of me. The joy I take in your existence must include *both* my connection to you *and* your independent existence—I recognize that you are real.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Recognition is so central to human existence as to often escape notice; or, rather, it appears to us in so many guises that it is seldom grasped as one overarching concept. There are any number of near-synonyms for it: to recognize is to affirm, validate, acknowledge, know, accept, understand, empathize, take in, tolerate, appreciate, see, identify with,

find familiar, . . . love. Even the sober expositions of research on infancy, which detail the exchange of infant and caregiver, are full of the language of recognition. What I call *mutual recognition* includes a number of experiences commonly described in the research on mother-infant interaction: emotional attunement, mutual influence, affective mutuality, sharing states of mind. The idea of mutual recognition seems to me an ever more crucial category of early experience. Increasingly, research reveals infants to be active participants who help shape the responses of their environment, and “create” their own objects. Through its focus on interaction, infancy research has gradually widened psychology’s angle of observation to include infant *and* parent, the simultaneous presence of two living subjects.⁵

While this may seem rather obvious, psychoanalysis has traditionally expounded theories of infancy that present a far less active exchange between mothers and infants. Until very recently, most psychoanalytic discussions of infancy, early ego development, and early mothering depicted the infant as a passive, withdrawn, even “autistic” creature. This view followed Freud, for whom the ego’s initial relation to the outside world was hostile, rejecting its impingement. In Freud’s reconstruction, the first relationship (i.e., with mother) was based on oral drive—a physiological dependency, a nonspecific need for someone to reduce tension by providing satisfaction. The caregiver merely appeared as the object of the baby’s need, rather than as a specific person with an independent existence. In other words, the baby’s relationship to the world was only shaped by the need for food and comfort, as represented by the breast; it did not include any of the curiosity and responsiveness to sight and sound, face and voice, that are incipiently social.⁶ Those elements of psychic life that demand a living, responsive other had little place in psychoanalytic thought.

Much of the impetus for change came from research based on nonpsychoanalytic models of development. Piaget’s developmental psychology, which saw the infant as active and stimulus-seeking, as constructing its environment by action and interaction, eventually led

to a wave of research and theory that challenged the psychoanalytic view of infantile passivity.⁷ Equally important was the influence of ethological research that studied animal and human infants in their natural environments, and so identified the growth of attachment, the social connection to others—especially the mother—that we have been describing.⁸ From knowing and preferring its mother, the infant proceeds to form a relationship with her that involves a wide range of activities and emotions, many of which are independent of feeding and caregiving.

Basing their work largely on infant observation, the “attachment theorists”—preeminently the British psychoanalyst John Bowlby—argued that sociability was a primary rather than a secondary phenomenon. In the late 1950s, Bowlby explicitly contested the earlier psychoanalytic view that saw the infant’s tie to the mother exclusively in terms of his oral investment in her. Bowlby drew on extensive research which showed that separation from parents and deprivation of contact with other adults catastrophically undermined infant emotional and social development.⁹ Social stimulation, warmth, and affective interchange, he concluded, are indispensable to human growth from the beginning of life. Research with infants who were securely embedded in a relationship confirmed that attachment to specific persons (not only mothers but fathers, siblings, and caregivers as well) was a crucial milestone of the second six months of life.¹⁰ Bowlby’s work coincided with an influential tendency in British psychoanalysis called object relations theory, which put new emphasis on the child’s early relationship with others. Together they offered psychoanalysis a new foundation: the assumption that we are fundamentally social beings.¹¹

The idea that the infant’s capacity and desire to relate to the world is incipiently present at birth and develops all along has important consequences. It obviously demands a revision of Freud’s original view of the human subject as a monadic energy system, in favor of a self that is active and requires other selves. But it also contests the view of early infancy in the dominant American psychoanalytic paradigm, ego psychology. Ego psychology’s most important theory of infant

development, formulated by the child analyst and observer Margaret Mahler in the late 1960s, describes the child's gradual separation and individuation from an initial symbiotic unity with the mother.¹² The problem with this formulation is the idea of separation from oneness; it contains the implicit assumption that we grow *out of* relationships rather than becoming more active and sovereign *within* them, that we start in a state of dual oneness and wind up in a state of singular oneness.

Mahler's work on separation-individuation was, nevertheless, a landmark in the theory of the self. It offered a genealogy of the anxiety and conflict associated with becoming independent, and thus profoundly changed the focus of both clinical practice and psychoanalytic theory. Separation-individuation theory influenced psychoanalytic thinking in its drift toward the object relations approach; it also formulated more concretely the actual interaction between parent and child, admitting the importance of interpersonal dynamics without denying inner unconscious reality. In separation-individuation theory, the self-other relationship almost has its day. However, its theoretical construction of early infancy reiterates the old view of the baby who never looks up from the breast. This baby, who "hatches" like a bird from the egg of symbiosis, is then brought to the world by its mother's ministrations, just as Freud thought the ego was brought into being by the pressure of the outside world.¹³

It was, therefore, a radical challenge to the contemporary American psychoanalytic paradigm of infancy as well as to the classical Freudian view, when psychoanalyst and infancy researcher Daniel Stern contended in the 1980s that the infant is never totally undifferentiated (symbiotic) from the mother, but is primed from the beginning to be interested in and to distinguish itself from the world of others.¹⁴ Once we accept the idea that infants do not begin life as part of an undifferentiated unity, the issue is not only how we separate from oneness, but also how we connect to and recognize others; the issue is not how we become free of the other, but how we actively engage and make ourselves known in relationship to the other.

This view of the self emerged not only from the observation of infants, but also in the consulting rooms where psychoanalysts began to discern the infant cry in the adult voice. The desperate anguish of those who feel dead and empty, unable to connect to themselves or to others, led to the question, What makes a person feel authentic? a question which also led back to the infant. In the words of the British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott, the question is, What kind of relationship "enables the infant to begin to exist, to build a personal ego, to ride instincts, and to meet with all the difficulties inherent in life?"¹⁵ This question motivated the "backward" shift of psychoanalytic interest: away from neurosis, oedipal conflicts, and sexual repression, toward the preoedipal conflicts of the ego, disturbances in the sense of self, and the feeling of acute loneliness and emptiness. What psychoanalysts began to look at was how a sense of self is consolidated or disrupted. Their focus was no longer on just the wish that is gratified or repressed, but on the self that is affected by the other's denial or fulfillment of that wish. Each denial or fulfillment could make a child feel either confirmed or thwarted in his sense of agency and self-esteem. The issue of the self's attitude to itself (self-love, self-cohesion, self-esteem) gave rise to the psychoanalytic preoccupation with narcissism as a clinical and a theoretical issue. In the 1970s, Heinz Kohut founded a new direction in American psychoanalysis called self psychology, which reinterpreted psychic development in terms of the self's need to find cohesion and mirroring in the other.¹⁶

From the study of the self who suffers the lack of recognition, as well as the new perception of the active, social infant who can respond to and differentiate others, emerges what I call the *intersubjective view*. * The intersubjective view maintains that the individual grows in and

*The concept of intersubjectivity has its origins in the social theory of Jürgen Habermas (1970), who used the expression "the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding" to designate an individual capacity and a social domain. I have taken the concept as a theoretical standpoint from which to criticize the exclusively intrapsychic conception

through the relationship to other subjects. Most important, this perspective observes that the other whom the self meets is also a self, a subject in his or her own right. It assumes that we are able and need to recognize that other subject as different and yet alike, as an other who is capable of sharing similar mental experience. Thus the idea of intersubjectivity reorients the conception of the psychic world from a subject's relations to its object toward a subject meeting another subject.

The intersubjective view, as distinguished from the intrapsychic, refers to what happens in the field of self and other. Whereas the intrapsychic perspective conceives of the person as a discrete unit with a complex internal structure, intersubjective theory describes capacities that emerge in the interaction between self and others. Thus intersubjective theory, even when describing the self alone, sees its aloneness as a particular point in the spectrum of relationships rather than as the original, "natural state" of the individual. The crucial area we uncover with intrapsychic theory is the unconscious; the crucial element we explore with intersubjective theory is the representation of self and other as distinct but interrelated beings.

I suggest that intrapsychic and intersubjective theory should not be seen in opposition to each other (as they usually are) but as complementary ways of understanding the psyche.¹⁸ To recognize the intersubjective self is not to deny the importance of the intrapsychic: the inner world of fantasy, wish, anxiety, and defense; of bodily symbols

of the individual in psychoanalysis. The term was first brought from Habermas's theory of infant psychology by Colin Trevarthen, who documented a "period of primary intersubjectivity, when sharing of intention with others becomes an effective psychological activity." More recently, Daniel Stern has outlined the psychological development of intersubjectivity in infancy, locating intersubjective relatedness as a crucial point in self development when the infant is able to share subjective (especially emotional) experiences. Because intersubjectivity refers both to a capacity and to a theoretical standpoint, I will generally call the capacity recognition, and the theory intersubjectivity.¹⁷

and images whose connections defy the ordinary rules of logic and language. In the inner world, the subject incorporates and expels, identifies with and repudiates the other, not as a real being, but as a mental object. Freud discovered these processes, which constitute the dynamic unconscious, largely by screening out the real relations with others and focusing on the individual mind.¹⁹ But my point here is not to reverse Freud's decision for the inner world by choosing the outside world; it is, rather, to grasp both realities.* Without the intrapsychic concept of the unconscious, intersubjective theory becomes one-dimensional, for it is only against the background of the mind's private space that the *real* other stands out in relief.

In my view, the concept that unifies intersubjective theories of self development is the need for recognition. A person comes to feel that "I am the doer who does, I am the author of my acts," by being with another person who recognizes her acts, her feelings, her intentions, her existence, her independence. Recognition is the essential response, the constant companion of assertion. The subject declares, "I am, I do," and then waits for the response, "You are, you have done." Recognition is, thus, reflexive; it includes not only the other's confirming response, but also how we find ourselves in that response. We recognize ourselves in the other, and we even recognize ourselves in inanimate things: for the baby, the ability to recognize what she has seen before is as Stern says, "self-affirming as well as world-affirming," enhancing her sense of effective agency: "My mental representation works!"²⁰

Psychologists speak of contingent responsiveness—this refers to the baby's pleasure in things that respond directly to the baby's own acts,

*Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this discussion to propose a scheme for synthesizing the two approaches. The problem is that each focuses on different aspects of psychic experience which are too interdependent to be simply severed from one another. I am emphasizing intersubjectivity over intrapsychic theory because the latter is better developed and usually overshadows the former, not because I think one ought to preclude the other.

the mobile that moves when baby jerks the cord tied to her wrist, the bells that ring when she kicks her feet. Contingent responses confirm the baby's activity and effectiveness, and therein lies the pleasure: the baby becomes more involved in making an impact (the kicking has results!) than in the particular sight or sound of the thing.²¹ And soon the pleasure derives from both the effect on the object and the reaction of the other subject who applauds. The nine-month-old already looks to the parent's face for the shared delight in a sound. The two-year-old says, "I did it!" showing the peg she has hammered and waiting for the affirmation that she has learned something new, that she has exercised her agency.

Of course not all actions are undertaken in direct relation to a recognizing other. The child runs down the hill and feels the pleasure of her body in motion. She is simply aware of herself and her own action, absorbed in herself and the moment. This experience, like the play with objects, may be based on pleasure in mastery as well as self-expression. Yet we know that such pleasure in one's own assertion requires and is associated with a supportive social context. We know that serious impairment of the sense of mastery and the capacity for pleasure results when the self-other matrix is disrupted, when the life-giving exchange with others is blocked. The ten-month-old may resitate to crawl away and explore the new toys in the corner if he senses that the mother will withdraw her attention the moment he is not absorbed in her, or if the mother's doubtful look suggests it is not all right to go.²² As life evolves, assertion and recognition become the vital moves in the dialogue between self and other.

Recognition is not a sequence of events, like the phases of maturation and development, but a constant element through all events and phases. Recognition might be compared to that essential element in photosynthesis, sunlight, which provides the energy for the plant's constant transformation of substance. It includes the diverse responses and activities of the mother that are taken for granted as the background in all discussions of development—beginning with the

mother's ability to identify and respond to her infant's physical needs, her "knowing her baby," when he wants to sleep, eat, play alone, or play together. Indeed, within a few months after birth, this so-called background becomes the foreground, the *raison d'être*, the meaning and the goal of being with others. As we trace the development of the infant, we can see how recognition becomes increasingly an end in itself—first an achievement of harmony, and then an arena of conflict between self and other.

But the need for *mutual* recognition, the necessity of recognizing as well as being recognized by the other—this is what so many theories of the self have missed. The idea of mutual recognition is crucial to the intersubjective view; it implies that we actually have a need to recognize the other as a separate person who is like us yet distinct. This means that the child has a need to see the mother, too, as an independent subject, not simply as the "external world" or an adjunct of his ego.

It must be acknowledged that we have only just begun to think about the mother as a subject in her own right, principally because of contemporary feminism, which made us aware of the disastrous results for women of being reduced to the mere extension of a two-month-old.²³ Psychology in general and psychoanalysis in particular too often partake of this distorted view of the mother, which is so deeply embedded in the culture as a whole.²⁴ No psychological theory has adequately articulated the mother's independent existence. Thus even the accounts of the mother-infant relationship which do consider parental responsiveness always revert to a view of the mother as the baby's vehicle for growth, an object of the baby's needs.²⁵ The mother is the baby's first object of attachment, and later, the object of desire. She is provider, interlocutor, caregiver, contingent reinforcer, significant other, empathic understander, mirror. She is also a secure presence to walk away from, a setter of limits, an optimal frustrator, a shockingly real outside otherness. She is external reality—but she is rarely regarded as another subject with a purpose apart from her existence

for her child. Often enough, abetted by the image of mothering in childrearing literature and by the real conditions of life with baby, mothers themselves feel they are so confined. Yet the real mother is not simply an object for her child's demands; she is, in fact, another subject whose independent center must be outside her child if she is to grant him the recognition he seeks.²⁶

This is no simple enterprise. It is too often assumed that a mother will be able to give her child faith in tackling the world even if she can no longer muster it for herself. And although mothers ordinarily aspire to more for their children than for themselves, there are limits to this trick: a mother who is too depressed by her own isolation cannot get excited about her child learning to walk or talk; a mother who is afraid of people cannot feel relaxed about her child's association with other children; a mother who stifles her own longings, ambitions, and frustrations cannot tune in empathically to her child's joys and failures. The recognition a child seeks is something the mother is able to give only by virtue of her independent identity. Thus self psychology is misleading when it understands the mother's recognition of the child's feelings and accomplishments as maternal mirroring. The mother cannot (and should not) be a mirror; she must not merely reflect back what the child asserts; she must embody something of the not-me; she must be an independent other who responds in her different way.²⁷ Indeed, as the child increasingly establishes his own independent center of existence, her recognition will be meaningful only to the extent that it reflects her own equally separate subjectivity.

In this sense, notwithstanding the inequality between parent and child, recognition must be mutual and allow for the assertion of each self. Thus I stress that mutual recognition, including the child's ability to recognize the mother as a person in her own right, is as significant a developmental goal as separation. Hence the need for a theory that understands how the capacity for mutuality evolves, a theory based on the premise that from the beginning there are always (at least) two subjects.

MUTUALITY: THE ESSENTIAL TENSION

So far I have tried to convey the idea that differentiation requires ideally, the reciprocity of self and other, the balance of assertion and recognition. While this may seem obvious, it has not been easy to conceptualize psychological development in terms of mutuality. Most theories of development have emphasized the goal of autonomy more than relatedness to others, leaving unexplored the territory in which subjects meet. Indeed, it is hard to locate the intersubjective dimension through the lens of such theories. Let us look more closely at the dominant psychoanalytic paradigm, ego psychology, and at its most important expression, Mahler's separation-individuation theory, to see the difference intersubjectivity makes.

Mahler's theory, it will be remembered, conceptualized a unilinear trajectory that leads from oneness to separateness, rather than a continual, dynamic, evolving balance of the two.²⁸ Moving along this unilinear trajectory, the subject presumably extricates himself from the original oneness, the primary narcissism, in which he began. Although Mahler acknowledges that the child grows into a fuller appreciation of the other's independence, her emphasis is on how the self separates, how the baby comes to feel not-one with the mother. Seen in this light, relationship is the ground and separation is the figure;²⁹ recognition appears as a fuzzy background and individual activity thrusts forward out of it. This has seemed plausible to so many people for many reasons, but especially because of our culture's high valuation of individualism. And, of course, it corresponds to our subjective feeling of being "the center of our own universe" and to our struggle to enhance the intensity of that feeling.

Interestingly enough, when we do succeed in reaching that enhanced state of self-awareness, it is often in a context of sharpened awareness of others—of their unique particularity and independent existence. The reciprocal relationship between self and other can be compared with the optical illusion in which the figure and ground are

constantly changing their relation even as their outlines remain clearly distinct—as in Escher's birds, which appear to fly in both directions. What makes his drawings visually difficult is a parallel to what makes the idea of self-other reciprocity conceptually difficult: the drawing asks us to look two ways simultaneously, quite in opposition to our usual sequential orientation. Since it is more difficult to think in terms of simultaneity than in terms of sequence, we begin to conceptualize the movement in terms of a directional trajectory. Then we must try to correct this inaccurate rendering of what we have seen by putting the parts back together in a conceptual whole which encompasses both directions. Although this requires a rather laborious intellectual reconstruction, intuitively, the paradoxical tension of this way and that way "feels right."

In the last fifteen years, infancy research has developed a new model for early experiences of emotional intensity and exchange which emphasizes reciprocity as opposed to instinctual gratification or separation. Already at three to four months, the infant has the capacity to interact in sophisticated facial play whose main motive is social interest. At this age, the baby can already initiate play. She can elicit parental response by laughing and smiling; she can transform a diaper change into a play session. In this play, the reciprocity that two subjects can create, or subvert, is crucial.³⁰ True, the moving ducks on the mobile respond to the kick of the infant's foot and so "recognize" her, providing her with the vital experience of contingent response that fosters a sense of mastery and agency. But the mother's response is both more attuned (it "matches" the infant) and more unpredictable than the ducks'. The child enjoys a dose of otherness. Let mother not coo in a constant rhythm, let her vary her voice and gestures, mixing novelty with repetition, and the baby will focus longer on her face and show pleasure in return. The combination of resonance and difference that the mother offers can open the way to a recognition that transcends mastery and mechanical response, to a recognition that is based on *mutuality*.

Frame-by-frame analysis of films of mothers and babies interacting

reveals the minute adaptation of each partner's facial and gestural response to the other: mutual influence.³¹ The mother addresses the baby with the coordinated action of her voice, face, and hands. The infant responds with his whole body, wriggling or alert, mouth agape or smiling broadly. Then they may begin a dance of interaction in which the partners are so attuned that they move together in unison.³² This early experience of unison is probably the first emotional basis for later feelings of oneness that characterize group activities such as music or dance. Reciprocal attunement to one another's gestures prefigures adult erotic play as well. Play interaction can be as primary a source of the feeling of oneness as nursing or being held. Thus the ultimate gratification of being in attunement with another person can be framed not—or not only—in terms of instinctual satisfaction, but of cooperation and recognition.

The study of early play interaction also reveals that the baby's principal means of regulating her own feelings, her inner state of mind, is to act on her partner outside. Being able to make herself feel better is directly dependent on being able to make the other act in attunement with her feelings. As Stern points out, "The issue at stake is momentous. The infant requires the integrative experience [that her action] successfully restructures the external world"—that what she does changes the other. Since these acts are also charged with emotion, with pleasure or pain, acting on the world also means being able to change one's own feelings "in the desired direction."³³ In the interaction situation, when stimulation becomes too intense, the infant regulates her own arousal by turning her head away. If the partner reads this correctly as a message to lay back, the baby experiences relief of tension without losing the connection and dropping out of the exchange. The baby can control her own level of excitement by directing the other. Now she is able to feel both that the world is responsive and that she is effective. If the baby is not successful, she feels a simultaneous loss of inner and outer control.

We also observe how mutual regulation breaks down and attunement fails: when baby is tired and fussy, when mother is bored and

depressed, or when baby is unresponsive and this makes mother anxious. Then we will see not just the absence of play, but a kind of anti-play in which the frustration of the search for recognition is painfully apparent. The unsuccessful interaction is sometimes almost as finely tuned as the pleasurable one. With each effort of the baby to withdraw from the mother's stimulation, to avert his gaze, turn his head, pull his body away, the mother responds by "chasing" after the baby.³⁴ It is as if the mother anticipates her baby's withdrawal with split-second accuracy and can only read his message to give space as a frustration of her own efforts to be recognized. Just as the baby's positive response can make the mother feel affirmed in her being, the baby's unresponsiveness can amount to a terrible destruction of her self-confidence as a mother. The mother who jiggles, pokes, looms, and shouts "look at me" to her unresponsive baby creates a negative cycle of recognition out of her own despair at not being recognized. Here in the earliest social interaction we see how the search for recognition can become a power struggle: how assertion becomes aggression.

If we take this unsuccessful interaction as a model, we can see how the fine balance of mutual recognition goes awry. The child loses the opportunity for feeling united and attuned, as well as the opportunity for appreciating (knowing) his mother. He is never able to fully engage in or fully disentangle himself from this kind of sticky, frustrating interaction. Neither separateness nor union is possible. Even as he is retreating he has to carefully monitor his mother's actions to get away from them: even withdrawal is not simple.³⁵ Thus the child can never lose sight of the other, yet never see her clearly; never shut her out and never let her in. In the ideal balance, a person is able to be fully self-absorbed or fully receptive to the other, he is able to be alone or together. In a negative cycle of recognition, a person feels that aloneness is only possible by obliterating the intrusive other, that attunement is only possible by surrendering to the other.

While the failure of early mutuality seems to promote a premature formation of the defensive boundary between inside and outside, the

positive experience of attunement allows the individual to maintain a more permeable boundary and enter more readily into states in which there is a momentary suspension of felt boundaries between inside and outside. The capacity to enter into states in which distinctness and union are reconciled underlies the most intense experience of adult erotic life. In erotic union we can experience that form of mutual recognition in which both partners lose themselves in each other without loss of self; they lose self-consciousness without loss of awareness. Thus early experiences of mutual recognition already prefigure the dynamics of erotic life.

This description of the intersubjective foundation of erotic life offers a different perspective than the Freudian construction of psychosexual phases, for it emphasizes the tension *between interacting individuals* rather than that *within the individual*. Yet, as I have said above, these rival perspectives seem to me not so much mutually exclusive as concerned simply with different issues. The inner psychic world of object representations—the intrapsychic life with which classical psychoanalysis is concerned—does not yet exist at four months; indeed, it awaits the development of the capacity to symbolize in the second year of life. The distinction between inner and outer is only beginning to be developed; inner and outer regulation still overlap. This does not mean that the infant is unable to differentiate self and other in actual practice or to represent them mentally. It means that the infant represents self and other concretely, not through the mediation of symbols that later characterize mental representation.³⁶

The mental organization of self and other enters a new phase, Stern theorizes, when the infant begins to be aware of the existence of "other minds." While the infant of four months can participate in a complex social interaction, she does not do so self-consciously. But at seven to nine months, she takes a great leap forward to the discovery that different minds can share the same feelings or intentions. This is where Stern introduces the term *intersubjectivity* proper, to designate the moment at which we know that others exist who feel and think as we

do. In my view, however, intersubjective development is best understood as a spectrum, and this moment marks a decisive point along that spectrum at which the infant more consciously recognizes the other as like and different.³⁷

Now, when the infant reaches excitedly for a toy, he looks up to see if mother is sharing his excitement; he gets the meaning when she says, "Wow!" The mother shows that she is feeling the same, not by imitating the infant's gesture (he shakes the rattle), but by matching his level of intensity in a different mode (she whoops). This translation into a different form of expression more clearly demonstrates the congruence of *inner* experience than simple, behavioral imitation.³⁸ Technically the mother is not feeling the exact same feeling as her child: she is not excited by the rattle itself; but she is excited by his excitement, and she wants to communicate that fact. When mother and child play "peekaboo" (a game based on the tension between shared expectancy and surprise), the mother takes similar pleasure in contacting her child's mind. This conscious pleasure in sharing a feeling introduces a new level of mutuality—a sense that inner experience can be joined, that two minds can cooperate in one intention. This conception of emerging intersubjectivity emphasizes how the awareness of the separate other enhances the felt connection with him: this *other* mind can share *my* feeling.

The development toward increasingly mutual and self-conscious recognition, Stern argues, contrasts sharply with Mahler's theory of separation-individuation.³⁹ That theory focuses on the infant's sense of separateness, but does not show how this sense of separateness simultaneously enhances the capacity for sharing with and appreciating the other. According to Mahler, the infant of ten months is primarily involved in the pleasure of expressing his separate mind by exploring the world. The infant's psychological well-being depends on whether he can use the mother to refuel for his forays into the world, whether he can maintain a certain amount of contact while venturing off on his own, and whether the mother can give her infant the push from the nest rather than responding anxiously to his new independence.⁴⁰

But, as I see it, intersubjective theory expands and complements (without negating) this picture, by focusing on the affective content of the mother-child exchange. The baby who looks back as he crawls off toward the toys in the corner is not merely refueling or checking to see that mother is still there, but is wondering whether mother is *sharing* the feeling of his adventure—the fear, the excitement, or that ambiguous "scarey-wonderful" feeling.⁴¹ The sense of shared feeling about the undertaking is not only a reassurance, but is, itself, a source of pleasurable connection. For the separation-individuation perspective, such emotional attunement may be part of the landscape, but it is absent at the level of theory; the concepts grasp only how mother protects the child's ego from anxiety so that it can separate. Intersubjective theory introduces attunement, or the lack of it, as an important concept.⁴² In so doing, it reintroduces the idea of *pleasure*, pleasure in being with the other, which had gotten lost in the transition from drive theory to ego psychology—but redefines it as pleasure in being with the other.

At the same time, the awareness of separate minds and the desire for attunement raises the possibility of a new kind of conflict. Already at one year the infant can experience the conflict between the wish to fulfill his own desire (say, to push the buttons on the stereo), and the wish to remain in accord with his parents' will.⁴³ Given such inevitable conflict, the desire to remain attuned can be converted into submission to the other's will. At each phase of development, the core conflict between assertion and recognition is recast in terms of the new level at which the child experiences his own agency and the distinctness of the other.

THE PARADOX OF RECOGNITION

The conflict between assertion of self and need for the other was articulated long before modern psychology began to explore the development of self. Hegel analyzed the core of this problem in his

discussion of the struggle between “the independence and dependence of self-consciousness” and its culmination in the master-slave relationship.⁴⁴ He showed how the self’s wish for absolute independence clashes with the self’s need for recognition. In Hegel’s discussion two hypothetical selves (self-consciousness and the other, who is another self-consciousness) meet. The movement between them is the movement of recognition; each exists only by existing for the other, that is, by being recognized. But for Hegel, it is simply a given that this mutuality, the tension between asserting the self and recognizing the other, *must* break down; it is fated to produce an insoluble conflict. The breakdown of this tension is what leads to domination.*

The need of the self for the other is paradoxical, because the self is trying to establish himself as an absolute, an independent entity, yet he must recognize the other as like himself in order to *be* recognized by him. He must be able to find himself in the other. The self can only be known by his acts—and only if his acts have meaning for the other do they have meaning for him. Yet each time he acts he negates the other, which is to say that if the other is affected then he is no longer *identical* with who he was before. To preserve his identity, the other resists instead of recognizing the self’s acts (“Nothing you do or say can affect me, I am who I am”).

Hegel creates a conceptual representation of the two-sided interplay of opposites. As each subject attempts to establish his reality, he must take account of the other, who is trying to do the same: “they recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another.”⁴⁶ But almost immediately Hegel observes that this abstract reciprocity is not really

*The reader may ask, Why does this tension have to break down? The answer is, for Hegel every tension between oppositional elements carries the seeds of its own destruction and transcendence (*Aufhebung*) into another form. That is how life is. Without this process of contradiction and dissolution, there would be no movement, change, or history. We do not need to accept this conclusion in order to draw on Hegel’s understanding of this process; but if we wish to argue that tension can be sustained, it behooves us to show how that is possible.⁴⁵

how the subject experiences things. Rather, the subject, first of all, experiences himself as an absolute, and then searches for affirmation of self through the other. The mutuality that is implied by the concept of recognition is a problem for the subject, whose goal is only to be certain of himself. This absoluteness, the sense of being one (“My identity is entirely independent and consistent”) and alone (“There is nothing outside of me that I do not control”), is the basis for domination—and the master-slave relationship.⁴⁷

Now we can see how Hegel’s notion of the conflict between independence and dependence meshes with the psychoanalytic view. Hegel posits a self that has no intrinsic need for the other, but uses the other only as a vehicle for self-certainty. This monadic, self-interested ego is essentially the one posited in classical psychoanalytic theory. For Hegel, as for classical psychoanalysis, the self begins in a state of “omnipotence” (Everything is an extension of me and my power), which it wants to affirm in its encounter with the other, who, it now sees, is like itself. But it cannot do so, for to affirm itself it must acknowledge the other, and to acknowledge the other would be to deny the absoluteness of the self. The need for recognition entails this fundamental paradox: at the very moment of realizing our own independence, we are dependent upon another to recognize it. At the very moment we come to understand the meaning of “I, myself,” we are forced to see the limitations of that self. At the moment when we understand that separate minds can share the same state, we also realize that these minds can disagree.

To see just how close this conceptual picture comes to the psychoanalytic one, let us again look at Mahler’s theory of separation-individuation. According to Mahler, the infant moves through three subphases: differentiation,* practicing, and rapprochement. From the first hatching in the differentiation phase (six to eight months), we

*This subphase, differentiation, is not to be confused with the larger process of establishing the awareness of self as distinct from the other, which is also called differentiation.

follow the infant, who is able to move around, and so maintain distance and closeness to mother, into the practicing phase (ten to thirteen months). The practicing phase is an elated, euphoric phase of discovery in which the infant is delighted with the world and himself, discovering his own agency as well as the fascinating outside. It has been called "a love affair with the world."⁴⁸ The screech of delight at moving about is the hallmark of practicing. But in this phase of new self-assertion the infant still takes himself for granted, and his mother as well. He does not realize that it is mother, not himself, who insures that he does not fall when he stands on the chair to reach for something interesting on the table. He is too excited by *what* he is doing to reflect on the relation of his will and ability to his sovereignty.

But soon this Eden of blissful ignorance comes to an end. At fourteen months or so the infant enters rapprochement, a phase of conflict in which he must begin to reconcile his grandiose aspirations and euphoria with the perceived reality of his limitations and dependency. Although he is now able to do more, the toddler will insist that mother (or father) share everything, validate his new discoveries and independence. He will insist that mother participate in all his deeds. He will tyrannically enforce these demands if he can, in order to assert—and have mother affirm—his will. The toddler is confronting the increased awareness of separateness and, consequently, of vulnerability: he can move away from mother, but mother can also move away from him.⁴⁹ To the child, it now appears that his freedom consists in absolute control over his mother. He is ready to be the master in Hegel's account, to be party to a relationship in which the mutuality breaks down into two opposing elements, the one who is recognized and the one whose identity is negated. He is ready, in his innocence, to go for complete control, to insist on his omnipotence.⁵⁰

What is life like for the mother of a toddler who manifests the constant willfulness, the clinging or the tyrannical demands typical of rapprochement? Depending, in part, on how imperious or clinging the child is, the mother may feel extremely put upon ("Her reactions are tinged with feelings of annoyance," Mahler reports).⁵¹ Suddenly the

child's demands no longer appear to be merely the logical results of needs that ought to be met with good grace, but, rather, as irrational and willful. The issue is no longer what the child needs, but what he *wants*. Here, of course, is where many a mother-child pair come to grief. A variety of feelings well up in the mother: the distance from her no-longer-perfect child, the wish to retaliate, the temptation to take the easier path of giving in, the fear or resentment of her child's will. What the mother feels during rapprochement and how she works this out will be colored by her ability to deal straightforwardly with aggression and dependence, her sense of herself as entitled to a separate existence, and her confidence in her child's wholeness and ability to survive conflict, loss, and imperfection.

As Freud reminds us, the parents' abandoned expectations of their own perfection are recalled to life in their child, "His Majesty the Baby."⁵² The rapprochement crisis is thus also a crisis of parenting. By identifying with her child's disillusionment, and by knowing that he will survive it, the parent is able to respond appropriately; in doing so she has to accept that she cannot make a perfect world for her child (where he can get everything he wants)—and this is the blow to her own narcissism. The self-obliteration of the permissive parent who cannot face this blow does not bring happiness to the child who gets everything he demands. The parent has ceased to function as an other who sets a boundary to the child's will, and the child experiences this as abandonment; the parent co-opts all the child's intentions by agreement, pushing him back into an illusory oneness where he has no agency of his own. The child will rebel against this oneness by insisting on having his way even more absolutely. The child who feels that others are extensions of himself must constantly fear the emptiness and loss of connection that result from his fearful power. Only he exists; the other is effaced, has nothing real to give him. The painful result of success in the battle for omnipotence is that to win is to win nothing: the result is negation, emptiness, isolation.

Alternatively, the parent who cannot tolerate the child's attempt to do things independently will make the child feel that the price of

freedom is aloneness, or even, that freedom is not possible. Thus if the child does not want to do without approval, she must give up her will. This usually results in the "choice" to stay close to home and remain compliant. Not only is she constantly in need of a parent's protection and confirmation in lieu of her own agency, but the parent remains omnipotent in her mind.

In both cases the sense of omnipotence survives, projected onto the other or assumed by the self; in neither case can we say that the other is recognized, or, more modestly (given the child's age), that the process of recognition has begun. The ideal "resolution" of the paradox of recognition is for it to continue as a *constant tension*, but this is not envisaged by Hegel, nor is it given much place in psychoanalysis. Mahler, for example, views the resolution of rapprochement as the moment when the child takes the mother inside himself, can separate from her or be angry at her and still know her to be there—as a "constant object."⁵³ But this does not tell us how the toddler comes to terms with the difficulty that his own freedom depends on the other's freedom, that recognition of independence must be mutual.

The decisive problem remains *recognizing the other*. Establishing *myself* (Hegel's "being for itself") means winning the recognition of the other, and this, in turn, means I must finally acknowledge the other as existing for *himself* and not just for me. The process we call differentiation proceeds through the movement of recognition, its flow from subject to subject, from self to other and back. The nature of this movement is necessarily contradictory, paradoxical. Only by deepening our understanding of this paradox can we broaden our picture of human development to include not only the separation but also the meeting of minds—a picture in which the bird's flight is always in two directions.

DISCOVERING THE OTHER

Even if we assume that life begins with an emergent awareness of self and other, we know that many things will conspire to prevent full

attainment of that consciousness. The problem of recognizing the other was addressed directly by Winnicott, and his original, innovative perceptions point the way out of the paradox of recognition. Winnicott, as we have noted, was concerned with what makes a person feel unreal to himself, with the deadness and despair that accompany the sense of unreality, with what he called "the false self."⁵⁴ He concluded that one of the most important elements in feeling authentic was the recognition of an outside reality that is not one's own projection, the experience of contacting other minds.

In his essay, "The Use of an Object,"⁵⁵ which is, in many ways, a modern echo of Hegel's reflections on recognition, Winnicott presents the idea that in order to be able to "use" the object we first have to "destroy" it. He distinguishes between two dimensions of experience *relating* to the object and *using* the object. (These terms can be troublesome, for Winnicott uses them in quite the opposite sense than we might in ordinary speech: "using" here does not mean instrumentalizing or demeaning, but being able to creatively benefit from another person; it refers to the experience of "shared reality" in which "the object's independent existence" is vital. "Relating" refers to the experience of "the subject as an isolate," in which the object is merely "phenomenon of the subject.")⁵⁶

At first, Winnicott says, an object is "related" to, it is part of the subject's mind and not necessarily experienced as real, external, or independent. But there comes a point in the subject's development when this kind of relatedness must give way to an appreciation of the object as an outside entity, not merely something in one's mind. This ability to enter into exchange with the outside object is what Winnicott calls "using" the object. And here he finds "the most irksome of all the early failures that come for mending." When the subject fails to make the transition from "relating" to "using," it means that he has not been able to place the object outside himself, to distinguish it from his mental experience of omnipotent control. He can only "use" the object when he perceives it "as an external phenomenon, not as a projective entity," when he recognizes it "*as an entity in its own right.*"⁵⁷ (italics added)

Winnicott explains that the recognition of the other involves a paradoxical process in which the object is *in fantasy* always being destroyed.⁵⁸ The idea that to place the other outside, in reality, always involves destruction has often been a source of puzzlement. Intuitively, though, one senses that it is quite simple. Winnicott is saying that the object must be destroyed *inside* in order that we know it to have survived *outside*; thus we can recognize it as not subject to our mental control. This relation of destruction and survival is a reformulation of and solution to Hegel's paradox: in the struggle for recognition each subject must stake his life, must struggle to negate the other—and woe if he succeeds. For if I completely negate the other, he does not exist; and if he does not survive, he is *not there* to recognize me. But to find this out, I must *try* to exert this control, *try* to negate his independence. To find out that he exists, I must wish myself absolute and all alone—then, as it were, upon opening my eyes, I may discover that the other is still there.

Destruction, in other words, is an effort to differentiate. In childhood, if things go well, destruction results simply in survival; in adulthood, destruction includes the intention *to discover* if the other will survive. Winnicott's conception of destruction is innocent; it is best understood as a refusal, a negation, the mental experience of "You do not exist for me," whose favorable outcome is pleasure in the other's survival.⁵⁹ When I act upon the other it is vital that he be affected, so that I know that I exist—but not completely destroyed, so that I know he also exists.

Winnicott's description of what destruction means in the analytic context is also evocative of early childhood experiences.

The subject [patient] says to the object [analyst]: "I destroyed you," and the object is there to receive the communication. From now on the subject says: "Hullo object!" "I destroyed you." "I love you." "You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you." "While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) *fantasy*."⁶⁰

Perhaps this tension between denial and affirmation is another of the many meanings of that favorite toddler game "Peekaboo" or of Freud's observations of the toddler making the spool disappear and reappear (the famous "*fort-da*," or gone-there, game). Probably destruction in fantasy also underlies the joy in the young toddler's constant repetition of "Hi!" It has something to do with constantly rediscovering that *you* are there.

The wish for absolute assertion of oneself, the demand to have one's way, the negation of the outside—all that Freud understood as aggression and omnipotence—must sometime crash against the reality of an other who reflects back the intransigent assertion that the self displays. The paradox of recognition, the need for acknowledgment that turns us back to dependence on the other, brings about a struggle for control. This struggle can result in the realization that if we fully negate the other, that is, if we assume complete control over him and destroy his identity and will, then we have negated ourselves as well. For then there is no one there to recognize us, no one there for us to desire.

The experience of rapprochement might be reframed in light of Winnicott's understanding of destruction: If I completely destroy the other, she ceases to exist for me; and if she completely destroys me, I cease to exist—that is, I cease to be an autonomous being. So if the mother sets no limits for the child, if she obliterates herself and her own interests and allows herself to be wholly controlled, then she ceases to be a viable other for him. She is destroyed, and not just in fantasy. If she retaliates, attempting to break his will, believing that any compromise will "spoil" him, she will also inculcate the idea that there is room for only one ego in any relationship—he must obliterate his for now, and hope to get it back, with a vengeance, later. Only through the other's survival can the subject move beyond the realm of submission and retaliation to a realm of mutual respect.

Elsa First, a child psychoanalyst influenced by Winnicott, has offered a picture of how the rapprochement struggle for control may yield to mutual respect. Observing toddlers, she suggests how the post-rapprochement child may begin to apprehend mutuality in rela-

tion to the mother's leaving. The toddler's initial role-playing imitation of the departing mother is characterized by the spirit of pure retaliation and reversal—"I'll do to you what you do to me." But gradually the child begins to identify with the mother's subjective experience and realizes that "I could miss you as you miss me," and, therefore, that "I know that you could wish to have your own life as I wish to have mine." First shows how, by recognizing such shared experience, the toddler actually moves from a retaliatory world of control to a world of mutual understanding and shared feeling. From the intersubjective standpoint, this movement is crucial. By accepting the other's independence, the child gains something that replaces control—a renewed sense of connection with the other.⁶¹

Mutual recognition cannot be achieved through obedience, through identification with the other's power, or through repression. It requires, finally, contact with the other. The meaning of destruction is that the subject can engage in an all-out collision with the other, can rattle himself against the barriers of otherness in order to feel the shock of the fresh, cold outside.⁶² And he can experience this collision as hurtful neither to the other nor to himself, as occasioning neither withdrawal nor retaliation. Thus Winnicott advises parents:

It is a healthy thing for a baby to get to know the full extent of his rage. . . . If he really is determined he can hold his breath and go blue in the face, and even have a fit. For a few minutes he really intends to destroy or at least to spoil everyone and everything, and he does not even mind if he destroys himself in the process. Naturally you do what you can to get the child out of this state. It can be said, however, that if a baby cries in a state of rage and feels as if he has destroyed everyone and everything, and yet the people round him remain calm and unhurt, this experience greatly strengthens his ability to see that what he feels to be true is not necessarily real. . . .⁶³

Winnicott's theory of destruction also implies a revision in the psychoanalytic idea of reality—it suggests a "reality principle" that is a

positive source of pleasure, the pleasure of connecting with the outside, and not just a brake on narcissism or aggression. Beyond the sensible ego's bowing to reality is the joy in the other's survival and the recognition of shared reality. Reality is thus *discovered*, rather than *imposed*; and authentic selfhood is not absorbed from without but discovered within. Reality neither wholly creates the self (as the pressure of the external world creates Freud's ego) nor is it wholly created by the self.

Winnicott's view of reality echoes the themes of his earlier work on "transitional objects," things like teddy bears, blankets, even special ways of humming or stroking. The child both creates and discovers these things, without ever having to decide which: "The baby creates the object, but the object was there waiting to be created. . . . We will never challenge the baby to elicit an answer to the question: Did you create that or did you find it?"⁶⁴ The object existed objectively, waiting to be found, and yet the infant has created it subjectively, as if it emerged from herself. This paradox is crucial to the evolving sense of reality.

The transitional object is literally a means of passage toward the awareness of otherness, toward establishing a boundary between inside and outside. But it is precisely an intermediate experience in which that boundary has not yet hardened. Out of this initial conception Winnicott created the broader notion of a transitional *realm* in which the child can play and create as if the outside were as malleable as his own fantasy. One could say the baby experiences something like this: "Reality recognizes me so I recognize it—wholly, with faith and trust, with no grudge or self-constraint." Thus the transitional realm allows "the enjoyment and love of reality," and not merely adaptation to it.⁶⁵

The infancy researcher Louis Sander has conceptualized a very early form of transitional experience that he calls "open space."⁶⁶ Open space occurs in the first month of life when the mother and infant have achieved sufficient equilibrium to allow for moments of relaxation from internal pressure or external stimulation. In these moments of optimal disengagement, the infant can explore himself and his sur-

roundings, can experience his own initiative and distinguish it from the other's action, for example, by putting thumb into mouth. The baby might lie on his side and move his hands slowly in front of his face, watching them intently—an activity one baby's parents aptly called "doing Tai Chi." In the balance between self and other, disengagement (open space) is as important as engagement. Indeed, as we saw in the antagonistic anti-play between mother and infant, disengagement and engagement form a crucial balance: the opportunity to disengage is the condition of freely engaging, its counterpoint.

What disengagement means here is not simple detachment, but what Winnicott called "being alone in the presence of the other,"⁶⁷ that is, in the safety that a nonintrusive other provides. Prior to self-consciousness, this experience will appear to the child as that of the self alone; but later it will be understood as a particular way of being with the other. In these moments of relaxation, Winnicott proposed, when there is no need to react to external stimuli, an impulse can arise from within and feel real. Here begins the sense of authorship, the conviction that one's act originates *inside* and reflects one's own intention. Here, too, begins the capacity for full receptivity and attention to what is outside, the freedom to be interested in the object independent of the pressure of need or anxiety. In this sense, the earliest transitional experience forms a continuum with the most developed capacities for contemplation and creativity, for discovering the outside as an object existing in its own right.⁶⁸

BEYOND INTERNALIZATION

The discovery of the object as a real, external being distinguishes the intersubjective view of differentiation from the more conventional ego psychology of separation-individuation theory. In ego psychology, development occurs through separation and identification—by taking something in from the object, by assimilating the other to the

self.* Most of psychoanalytic theory has been formulated in terms of the isolated subject and his internalization of what is outside to develop what is inside. Internalization implies that the other is consumed, incorporated, digested by the subject self. That which is not consumed, what we do not get and cannot take away from others by consumption, seems to elude the concept of internalization. The joy of discovering the other, the agency of the self, and the outsideness of the other—these are at best only fuzzily apprehended by internalization theory. When it defines differentiation as separating oneself from the other rather than as coming together with him, internalization theory describes an instrumental relationship. It implies an autonomous individual defined by his ability to do without the "need-satisfying object." The other seems more and more like a cocoon or a husk that must gradually be shed—one has got what one needs, and now, goodbye.

Let us consider how ego psychology thinks about the matter Winnicott called destruction, the matter of the infant's aggression and the mother's survival. Ego psychology conceives of the establishment of a constant internal object that survives frustration and absences, so that the mother is not internally destroyed when the infant is angry or when she goes away. In this conception, the infant can separate and yet be internally connected, be angry and yet still reclaim his love. This is both an accurate and a useful statement of what is going on from the intrapsychic point of view. What it does not capture, however—and what Winnicott's theory includes—is the intersubjective aspect of destruction, the recognition of the other,

*The theory of identification has been central to psychoanalysis since Freud's development of ego psychology in the 1920s. The Oedipus complex now resulted not only in the resolution of the conflict between wish and defense, but also in the consolidation of the tripartite structure of id, ego, and superego. The ego and superego developed through identification with the parental objects. Since those formulations, the theory has been greatly expanded to include the internalization of a whole world of objects.⁶⁹

the joy and urgency of discovering the external, independent reality of another person.

A similar difference appears when we look at how ego psychology understands the phenomenon Winnicott identified as transitional experience.⁷⁰ In ego psychology's terms, the infant uses the transitional object (the favorite bear or the beloved blanket) to soothe and comfort himself, as a substitute for the mother's function in regulating tension. He *internalizes* the soothing function of the mother, and this represents a shift "from passivity to increasing activity," doing to himself what was previously done to him by the mother. By means of such internalization, the child progresses toward autonomy; he frees himself "from exclusive dependence on the need-satisfying object." Accordingly, the ego psychologist Marie Tolpin argues that Winnicott was wrong to say that the transitional object is not internalized. In her view, it goes inside just as the mother does, as mental structure.⁷¹ And in the process of clinical work with adults, one can see how this framing of the problem occurs. One sees the way in which certain persons are unable to soothe themselves or regulate their own self-esteem. They act as if the internal "good mother," or her structural equivalent, were missing.

But Winnicott's transitional realm was primarily about creativity and play, about fantasy and reality, not about soothing. And even in regard to soothing, his concepts were getting at something beside internalization, something which is implied by his use of terms like "the holding environment" and "the facilitating environment." I think he was trying to define the area in which the child is able to develop his innate capacities because the people around him facilitate such development.* The ability to soothe oneself is not generated by internalizing the other's function; it is a capacity of the self which the other's response helps to activate. Infants are born with this capacity

⁷⁰Thus the analytic situation itself has come to be understood as a potential transitional space, creating the conditions for the growth of authentic agency through play, rather than merely a context for interpretation, in which the analyst "changes" the patient.⁷²

in more or less developed form; some are quite adept from the first day, while others need someone to comfort them in order to fall asleep or stay awake without feeling uncomfortable. Within a few months an infant can also regulate himself through interaction—for example, when he looks away to reduce stimulation.⁷³ The activation of innate capacities is a very different developmental process from internalization; it presupposes at all times the presence of *two* interacting subjects who each contribute, rather than *one* subject who incorporates the action of the object.

Internalization theory and intersubjective theory are not mutually exclusive. But they are radically different ways of looking at development. Intersubjective theory is concerned not with how we take in enough from the other to be able to go away, but how the other gives us the opportunity to do it ourselves to begin with. This theory attributes all agency neither to the subject with his innate capacities or impulses, nor to the object which stamps the blank slate of the psyche with its imprint. It argues that the other plays an active part in the struggle of the individual to creatively discover and accept reality.

Intersubjective theory also permits us to distinguish two subjects recognizing each other from one subject regulating another. Stern has argued that we should not conflate instances where our main experience is of *being with* the other person with those in which the other simply helps to regulate our physiological tension. He suggests that although psychoanalysis has traditionally seen only certain moments of need gratification as "the cardinal 'magic moments' against which most all else in early infancy is background,"⁷⁴ these only represent one kind of relationship to the other. Nursing and going blissfully to sleep, says Stern, is an instance of having one's self dramatically transformed by the other's ministrations. It is quite different from facial play where the essential experience is *with* the other.*

*I would add that the nursing experience itself has legitimately been understood quite variously: in terms of oral sexual pleasure, reduction of tension, the sense of efficacy

Of course, the experiences of need gratification and soothing are an indispensable part of gaining a sense of the reliability and responsiveness of the external world—what Erikson called basic trust, and what Stern calls core relatedness. Such experiences contribute in a major way to faith in the other and a sense of one's own agency. But the experience of *being with* the other cannot be reduced to the experience of *being regulated* by an other. Indeed, the model of drive satisfaction has left an entire dimension unaccounted for; and that model has been greatly expanded since Freud. American ego psychology added to it by focusing on the relationship in which regulation occurs, and how that relationship is internalized. Object relations theory modified it by pointing out that the ultimate need is for the whole object, not simply the satisfaction of a drive.⁷⁶ But these elaborations still did not conceptualize the elements of activity, reciprocity, and mutual exchange that we now see when we study infants and their interaction with adults. The intrapsychic model thus missed what I consider the essence of differentiation: the paradoxical balance between recognition of the other and assertion of self. It also missed the fact that we have to get beyond internalization theory if we are to break out of the solipsistic omnipotence of the single psyche.

The classic psychoanalytic viewpoint did not see differentiation as a balance, but as a process of disentanglement. Thus it cast experiences of union, merger, and self-other harmony as regressive opposites to

resulting from the caregiver's responsiveness, an intense merging or oneness, the "creative illusion" that one has made the breast appear. One might distinguish the element of soothing and relief of hunger from the element of emotional attunement and facial mirroring that follow or accompany relief. Within a few weeks of birth, the infant has sufficient control over physiological tension that hunger may be less pressing than his interest in mother's face. Thus nursing, as a primary metaphor of infancy, encompasses all three kinds of relationships to the other that, according to Stern, appear in psychoanalytic thinking: being transformed by another (as in tension relief), complementarity (as in being held), and mental sharing (as in mutual gaze).⁷⁵ The power of the breast metaphor, I believe, has always lain in the multiplicity of meanings it evoked.

differentiation and self-other distinction. Merging was a dangerous form of undifferentiation, a sinking back into the sea of oneness—the "oceanic feeling" that Freud told Romain Rolland he frankly couldn't relate to.⁷⁷ The original sense of oneness was seen as absolute, as "limitless narcissism," and, therefore, regression to it would impede development and prevent separation. In its most extreme version, this view of differentiation pathologized the sensation of love: relaxing the boundaries of the self in communion with others threatened the identity of the isolate self. Yet this oneness was also seen as the ultimate pleasure, eclipsing the pleasure of difference. Oneness was not seen as a state that could coexist with (enhance and be enhanced by) the sense of separateness.⁷⁸

One of the most important insights of intersubjective theory is that sameness and difference exist simultaneously in mutual recognition. This insight allows us to counter the argument that human beings fundamentally desire the impossible absolutes of "oneness" and perfection with the more moderate view that things don't have to be perfect, that, in fact, it is *better* if they are not. It reminds us that in every experience of similarity and subjective sharing, there must be enough difference to create the feeling of reality, that a degree of imperfection "ratifies" the existence of the world.⁷⁹

Experiences of "being with" are predicated on a continually evolving awareness of difference, on a sense of intimacy felt as occurring between "the *two* of us." The fact that self and other are not merged is precisely what makes experiences of merging have such high emotional impact. The externality of the other makes one feel one is truly being "fed," getting nourishment from the outside, rather than supplying everything for oneself.

As infancy research informs us, the intense high feeling of union occurs as much in the active exchange *with* the other as in experiences of being regulated or transformed *by* the other. But psychoanalysis has seen only those interactions in which the infant's state of tension is regulated—feeding and holding—as the prototypical merging experiences. Above all, psychoanalysis has stressed complementarity in in-

teraction over mutuality. The other is represented as the answer, and the self as the need; the other is the breast, and the self is the hunger; or the other is actively holding, and the self is passively being held.⁸⁰ This complementarity of activity and passivity forms a dual unity which can be internalized and reversed (“Now I’m the Mommy and you’re the baby”). The dual unity form has within it this tendency to remain constant even in reversal, never to equalize but simply invert itself within relationships of dependency. As we will see in chapter 2, the complementary dual unity is the basic structure of domination. And while it is certainly one of the structures of the psyche, it is not the only one. To see it as such is to leave no space for equality.

To transcend the experience of duality, so that both partners are equal, requires a notion of mutuality and sharing. In the intersubjective interaction both partners are active; it is not a reversible union of opposites (a doer and a done-to). The identification with the other person occurs through the sharing of similar states, rather than through reversal. “Being with” breaks down the oppositions between powerful and helpless, active and passive; it counteracts the tendency to objectify and deny recognition to those weaker or different—to the other. It forms the basis of compassion, what Milan Kundera calls “co-feeling,”⁸¹ the ability to share feelings and intentions without demanding control, to experience sameness without obliterating difference.

The intersubjective view certainly doesn’t negate all that we have learned from Freud, nor does it erase the many grounds he saw for pessimism. Often enough we see evidence of the striving for omnipotent control, and the hostility to otherness. The intersubjective view, however, suggests that there are aspects of the self, missing from the Freudian account, that can oppose (and help to explain) these tendencies. Perhaps Freud had them in mind when he referred to the instinctual force of Eros, the life force that aims at creating unities, but he never gave Eros a place in psychic structure.⁸² It is this missing dimension of the psyche that finally enables us to confront the painful aspect of external reality—its uncontrollable, tenacious otherness—as a condition of freedom rather than of domination.

. . .

In the effort to explore the genesis of domination, we have had to undertake a broad theoretical revision. We have had to recast the psychoanalytic framework to include a largely neglected dimension of experience, the intersubjective dimension in which recognition is so crucial. I have tried to show that the erotic component of infant life is bound up with recognition, and that the struggle for recognition requires the self to relinquish its claim to absoluteness. Yet in the course of differentiation, the recognition process may go awry and the self may resort to asserting omnipotence (either its own or the other’s). The breakdown in the fundamental tension between assertion of self and recognition of other that then occurs is, I believe, the best point of entry to understanding the psychology of domination.

The traditional psychoanalytic view of differentiation cannot account for this breakdown, because it only dimly recognizes the existence of that tension. Its model of the mind is based on a well-established dualism of oneness and separateness, difference and sameness. Although in their clinical practice most psychoanalysts would reject these oppositions in favor of a balance between autonomy and connection, the overvaluing of separation is a strong bias in the theory. This is the result of a conception of the individual as a closed system. Within this closed system, the ego invests objects with his desire and takes in these objects to further his autonomy from them. This conception of the individual cannot explain the confrontation with an independent other as a real condition of development and change. It does not comprehend the simultaneous process of transforming and being transformed by the other.

By contrast, intersubjective theory sees the relationship between self and other, with its tension between sameness and difference, as a continual exchange of influence. It focuses, not on a linear movement from oneness to separateness, but on the paradoxical balance between them. What we see in early infancy is not symbiosis, or complete undifferentiation, but, rather, an interest in externality alternating with absorp-

tion in internal rhythms; later, there is alternation between the oneness of harmonious attunement and the "two-ness" of disengagement.

But why has the dualistic view of the individual enjoyed plausibility for so long? Why does the idea of the linear movement toward separation, of the construction of the psyche in terms of the internalization of objects ring so true? Perhaps it is because this conception of the individual reflects a powerful experience—whose origins we have discovered in the rapprochement conflict—the experience of paradox as painful, or even intolerable. Perhaps, also, because of a continuing fear that dependency on the other is a threat to independence, that recognition of the other compromises the self. When the conflict between dependence and independence becomes too intense, the psyche gives up the paradox in favor of an opposition. Polarity, the conflict of opposites, replaces the balance within the self. This polarity sets the stage for defining the self in terms of a movement away from dependency.

It also sets the stage for domination. Opposites can no longer be integrated; one side is devalued, the other idealized (splitting). In this chapter we have concentrated on infancy, on the shifts in the balance of assertion and recognition at the earliest moments in the self-other relationship. We have seen how a crisis arises as differentiation proceeds and recognition of otherness confronts the self with a momentous paradox. In the following chapters we shall analyze how this inability to sustain the tension of paradox manifests itself in all forms of domination, and why this occurs.

We shall begin by following the breakdown of tension into its adult form, erotic domination and submission.

C H A P T E R T W O

Master and Slave

IN THE POST-FREUDIAN world it is commonplace to assume that the foundations of erotic life lie in infancy. This means that adult sexual love is not only shaped by the events dating from that period of intense intimacy and dependency, it is also an opportunity to reenact and work out the conflicts that began there. Where the site of control and abandon is the body, the demands of the infant self are most visible—and so is the shift from differentiation to domination. In sadomaso-