

**Legacies of the Golden Age: A Memoir of a Collaboration<sup>1</sup>**George E.

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**Abstract**

This paper tells the story of an intellectual and personal relationship, spanning more than four decades. The account begins with a “golden age” period in the 1970s at Rutgers University, where an effort was made to resurrect the personological tradition in psychology under the leadership of Silvan Tomkins. In spite of the eventual failure of this effort, the foundation of our collaboration had been lastingly formed. The focus of the discussion is on a series of epiphanies that occurred, moments of shared inspiration that in each instance gave rise to significant writings over the ensuing years. We also describe the deepening personal connection that was the context of these developments.

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In the fall of 1972, at Livingston College of Rutgers University, a miracle began to occur: the resurrection of the personological tradition in psychology originally established at the Harvard Psychological Clinic in the 1930s by Henry A. Murray. The essence of this tradition is found in its central methodology – the intensive, in-depth case study. Personology rests on the assumption that meaningful questions about human personality must be framed and answered in terms of individual lives and personal worlds, understood in all their idiosyncrasy and complexity. This is in contrast to the long-standing practice of the academic psychology of personality, which has concerned itself with the quantifying investigation of so-called personality “variables” that are studied across populations of different individuals. It was the good fortune of Livingston College, after being founded in 1969 as part of the Rutgers University system, that it attracted to its faculty one of the great theorists of 20<sup>th</sup> Century psychology: Silvan Tomkins. Tomkins, who had studied with Murray at Harvard during the 1950s, dreamed of a renewed personology program to be situated at Livingston, and he was joined in pursuing this goal by five colleagues who shared his vision: George Atwood, Rae Carlson, Daniel Ogilvie, Seymour Rosenberg, and Robert Stolorow. The years from 1972 to 1978 were golden ones, in which we all experienced a sense of ever-deepening comradeship as we joined in

intellectual exchanges and assisted one another in graduate and undergraduate teaching. Tomkins, as the leader of this new personology group, suggested a metaphor representing the potential inhering in this gathering of scholars: he said we were on the threshold of achieving “critical mass.” It was his idea that when a number of people, diverse in their backgrounds but sharing common values and goals, have a sustained period of interacting with and stimulating each other, the ideas that are expressed begin to combine and an explosion of creativity can result. The golden age of personology at Livingston College came to a sudden and premature end in the late 1970s because of two emerging situations. First, there was an attitude of unrelenting hostility toward our efforts on the part of the larger Rutgers psychology community, which was highly traditional in its emphasis on objective observation and quantitative data. And second, the personology group fell apart because of tensions coming from within, chief among them being Silvan Tomkins’ dismay as ideas he often had importantly inspired began to give rise to interesting articles and books written by others. It was a repeating theme in his professional life brilliantly to mentor young scholars for long periods, but then to feel stolen from and turn on them with great hostility when they took what they had learned and went on their own separate pathways. In spite of our sad awakening from

the dream of renewing personology at Rutgers, the foundation of the intellectual collaboration and personal friendship between the two of us had been lastingly formed. Our purpose in this paper is to explore the legacies of the close relationship that arose between us in those golden days. The focus of the discussion will be on a series of epiphanies that occurred, moments of shared inspiration that in each instance gave rise to significant writings. We also describe the deepening personal connection that was the context of these developments.

**1. Messianic projects: light and dark** In the fall of 1972, one of us (G.A.) had become interested in studying the life-historical sources of “messianic salvation fantasies,” i.e., emotionally powerful images of being destined to save the world. An initial idea had formed that such fantasies are rooted in experiences of early traumatic loss, wherein the passive situation of helplessly longing for the lost other is replaced by an active role of rescuing and saving (Atwood, 1974, 1978). The idea was that an identification with the lost idealized other occurs and then becomes enacted through adopting the role of the world’s messiah. One day over lunch as we discussed this notion, a suggestion was made (by R.S.) that there is a dark side of the messianic project, in which there will always be a tendency to enact the abandoning, disappointing aspect of the lost other. We envisioned a splitting process wherein the longing for reunion with the

figure that has been lost is divided off from the pain and vengeful anger at that figure that also inevitably arise. A full understanding of saviors of the world, we thought, must therefore include both the positive and the negative aspects of the identification that occurs. Our first coauthored publication (Stolorow & Atwood, 1973) put these ideas into writing and established a pattern followed by our many collaborations in later years. The pattern, we have realized, is dialectical in form. One of us has an idea or develops a perspective on some problem and communicates it to the other. The other enthusiastically embraces what has been offered, but then gives some contrasting or complementary viewpoint, and in the ensuing discussion an integration occurs. The result of the dialogue is thus one of combining and deepening each of our partial understandings in a more complex and inclusive structure.

**2. The problem of subjectivity** Under the inspiring influence of Silvan Tomkins in the year 1974, a second problem began to attract our attention: that of the subjectivity of personality theory. Tomkins often spoke about the way a theorist's effort to make sense of the human condition reflects the themes of his or her personal existence, deriving significantly from individual life history. One of us (G.A.) found Tomkins' observations in this connection profound and began to imagine the possibility of a whole

research program devoted to this problem. In reviewing historical sources that might support such an enterprise, he made a discovery that had a fateful influence on all our subsequent thinking: a dramatic instance of personal subjectivity embedded in one of the very first discussions to appear dealing with the problem of the subjectivity of personality theory. This was in Jung's *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (1943, 1945/1965), in a chapter presenting reflections on the psychological differences between Freud and Adler that might be associated with the sharp contrast between their differing understandings of psychopathology and psychotherapy. Jung proposed that in Freud's personal vision of the world, and therefore also in his theorizing, it is the external world of the object that has the greatest significance and determining power. For Adler, according to his argument and in sharp contrast, it is the internal subject that has primary importance, a subject that seeks its own supremacy and security independently of objects. Jung went on then to suggest a solution to the Freud-Adler conflict for the field of psychoanalysis: their respectively extraverted and introverted viewpoints should be united in an embracing synthesis. The amazing thing about Jung's discussion was that it mirrored precisely the division in his own personal selfhood and the ever-renewed quest for integrated wholeness that was the theme of his own life and work. As a boy Jung (1961) split apart

into an outer No. 1 personality and a secret inner No. 2, attempting to hold on to connections with others in the surrounding world while protecting himself from engulfment and annihilation by retreating into a secret interiority (Atwood & Stolorow, 1993, chapter 3). So, it became apparent, he had assimilated the division between Freud and Adler to his own divided selfhood, providing a stunning instance of the subjectivity of personality theory in the context of one of the first discussions of this problem in our field. Reflections on this example of the subjectivity of personality theory suggested an approach to studying parallel instances in the lives and theoretical systems of other thinkers. All that would be needed, it seemed, was a juxtaposing of central theoretical ideas on the one side and critical formative experiences on the other, and then a working out of a psychological interpretation of the link between the two. An effort to pursue these thoughts and apply them to a number of other theorists (Carl Rogers, Wilhelm Reich, Gordon Allport) led to a paper, “On the Subjectivity of Personality Theory,” at first unpublished. Tomkins, although enthusiastic about the content of the work, began to be upset with how deeply his thinking had been drawn upon. Sensitive to this issue but not anticipating the emotional and intellectual disaster that was soon to come, G.A. invited Tomkins to be second author and the paper was eventually published as such

(Atwood & Tomkins, 1976). All was still golden, but dark clouds were forming. The subjectivity of personality theory was also becoming a focus of ongoing discussions between the two of us. R.S. at that time was involved in studies of the phenomenology of narcissism and narcissistic disturbances, importantly influenced by a reading of Heinz Kohut's *The Analysis of the Self* (1971). Included in these studies was an exploring of the many ways then-contemporary advances in the understanding of narcissism had been anticipated in the writings of Otto Rank. As the two of us talked about this theorist's precocious insights, it occurred to R.S. that it would significantly deepen the study if the discussion of his ideas were to be accompanied by a psychobiographical journey into the severe narcissistic disturbance that haunted Rank's personal life and childhood. G.A., concurrently, had begun to immerse himself in the writings of Wilhelm Reich, tracing how a tragic loss in Reich's childhood contributed to the genesis over the course of his lifetime of a delusion that his destiny was messianic: to save the world of life from a deadly, anti-sexual evil. Each of us worked on his project, drawing extensively on ongoing discussions with the other, and finally two coauthored papers emerged (Stolorow & Atwood, 1976; Atwood & Stolorow, 1977a). We had completed two detailed case studies of the subjectivity of personality theory. Several strands of thought combined in



the next steps of our shared journey. First, we read Sandler & Rosenblatt's (1962) "The Concept of the Representational World," which seemed to us to offer a language for a phenomenological rethinking of essential psychoanalytic ideas. Second, we encountered Kohut's (1959) "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," a groundbreaking work proposing that the empirical field of psychoanalysis consists exclusively in that which is open to empathy and introspection – in other words, emotional phenomenology. And third, we found G. Klein's (1976) *Psychoanalytic Theory: An Exploration of Essentials*, a work sharply distinguishing between the experience-near "clinical" and the objectifying "metapsychological" theories on which psychoanalysis is based. Inspired by these writings, an idea began to crystallize about the future of personality theory. One of us (R.S.) suggested that studies of the subjectivity of personality theory might contain within themselves the possibility of *a theory of subjectivity itself*, a grand framework of understanding that could integrate the varied clinical contributions of earlier theorists and also be open to new discoveries. Discussions of this proposal led us to additional ideas regarding the form such an integrating theory might take and the process by which it could be brought into being. We pictured a disentangling of the clinical knowledge embedded in the various theories from objectifying metapsychological

superstructures that define and delimit the universal content of human experience. We imagined a sweeping project of translation and reinterpretation, one in which conceptions of absolute human nature and of the essential defining dimensions of the human condition would turn into particularized descriptions of diverse regions of personal subjectivity. In our many conversations, we also saw a significant linkage between theorists' metapsychological formulations and their personal worlds: the principal metapsychological construct of each theorist, we realized, reflects and symbolizes each theorist's personal solution to the nuclear crises and dilemmas of his or her personal development. It therefore seemed natural to join the critique of metapsychology with a careful psychobiographical analysis of the life historical context of each theory's development. Our project of phenomenological translation and psychobiography turned at this point to a comprehensive exploration of the thought and life of Carl Gustav Jung. The study was divided into two parts. The first, written by R.S., undertook the task of reinterpreting the Jungian metapsychology as a reification and universalization of a variety of subjective states involving experiences of self-dissolution and self-fragmentation. The second, authored by G.A., traced the theme of vulnerability to self-loss through Jung's childhood. We then, working together, integrated the psychobiographical analysis with the

phenomenological translation of the metapsychology, recasting Jung's theory as a profound contribution to the description of extreme subjective states and their typical symbolizations. The study was published in our paper, "Metapsychology, Reification, and the Representational World of C. G. Jung" (Atwood & Stolorow, 1977b), which served in our minds as a model of what could be accomplished through such analysis. Years later, one evening over glasses of vodka on ice, we were recalling the process of completing the Jung paper. Two interlocking themes appeared centrally in the study, one concerning Jung's vulnerability to engulfment and annihilation in interpersonal relationships, and the other a killing loneliness which arose from his self-insulating withdrawal into a secret world. G.A. remembered that he had contributed most importantly to the collaboration by emphasizing the theme of loneliness, whereas R.S. had focused on the danger of self-loss. R.S. recalled our respective emphases as precisely the reverse. Our thoughts had evidently become very deeply intertwined. The last step in this early set of studies involved an inquiry into the life-historical context of essential metapsychological concepts of Sigmund Freud. We chose as our focus the theory of instinctual drives and aspects of the associated account of so-called psychosexual development. Drawing on Tomkins' (1963) brilliant analysis of how Freud displaced his own

conflictual feelings about his mother on to a depiction of the psychology of the girl, we sought to illuminate the personal origins of the drive theory in the context of trauma and loss in Freud's early childhood. It was our view that the formulation of drive theory embodied a kind of interiorization of the factors responsible for the development of an individual's personality, and a defensive turning away from experiences of traumatic disappointment by Freud's mother and other people. Since we had relied heavily on Tomkins' thinking, we suggested that he become a coauthor of the emerging paper. He declined the opportunity, citing aspects of the study with which he did not completely agree. He seemed nevertheless distressed by how we had used his ideas and began increasingly to withdraw from the rich dialogues we had formerly had with him. The golden age had itself begun to end, even as our paper, "A Defensive-Restitutive Function of Freud's Theory of Psychosexual Development" (Stolorow & Atwood, 1978) was published. The two of us continued our collaboration nevertheless, and worked to integrate our four psychobiographical studies (Freud, Jung, Reich, and Rank) into a book. G.A. composed an introductory chapter for this work, to some extent again relying on Tomkins' thinking, while R.S. wrote a last chapter that proposed the possibility of a "psychoanalytic phenomenology" that would dispense with limiting metapsychological reifications. We were

here envisioning an inclusive viewpoint that would address personal subjective worlds in all their idiosyncrasy and diversity. Finishing our book, we searched for a colorful title that would do justice to its content and to the extreme effort that had been poured into its completion. Dry, abstract characterizations seemed incompatible with the passionate faith we had in our work, so we looked for a dramatic metaphor. At this point R.S. suggested that we draw on Plato's allegory of the cave, calling our book *Shadows in a Cave*. G.A. resisted this idea because the underlying assumptions of our studies were very far from Platonic idealism. The quest for a title reached its goal when R.S. stumbled on a wonderful passage in Henry Murray's (1938/1962) *Explorations in Personality*. "...man – the object of concern – is like an ever-varying cloud and psychologists are like people seeing faces in it. One psychologist perceives along the upper margin the contour of a nose and lip, and then miraculously other portions of the cloud become so oriented in respect to these that the outline of a forward-looking superman appears. Another psychologist is attracted to a lower segment, sees an ear, a nose, a chin, and simultaneously the cloud takes on the aspect of a backward-looking Epimethian. Thus, for each perceiver every sector of the cloud

has a different function, name and value – fixed by his initial bias of perception. To be the founder of a school indeed it is only necessary to see a face along another margin.”The title of our book, completed in 1976, became *Faces in a Cloud: Subjectivity in Personality Theory* (Stolorow & Atwood, 1979). The order of authorship was decided by the toss of a coin and was reversed in the second edition (Atwood & Stolorow, 1993), in which *subjectivity* was replaced by *intersubjectivity* in the subtitle. The publication of *Faces in a Cloud* was a death-blow to Tomkins’ commitment to a personology research group at Rutgers. He felt abandoned and robbed, and withdrew into a bitter depression. Lashing out in particular at G.A., with whom there had been an especially close bond, Tomkins inflicted significant emotional trauma, and the dream of resurrecting personology lay in ruins. Although R.S. then left Rutgers to take up a faculty position at Yeshiva University in New York City, our deepening friendship and collaboration proceeded without skipping a beat. The collapse of the golden age, nevertheless, became a source of lasting pain and sadness for everyone involved.

**3. Intersubjectivity and contextualism** In reuniting Freud's decontextualizing metapsychological reifications with their formative relational contexts, our study of Freud pointed to what would become a hallmark of our psychoanalytic phenomenology: It would soon evolve into a

phenomenological *contextualism* emphasizing the constitutive role of the intersubjective systems in which emotional experiencing is always embedded. Although the concept of intersubjectivity was not introduced in the first edition of *Faces*, it was clearly implicit in the demonstrations of how the personal, subjective world of a personality theorist influences his or her understanding of other persons' experiences. The first explicit use of the term *intersubjective* in our work came about as a result of a meeting we had in 1976 over beer and French fries at the Homestead Bar in Highland Park, NJ, a favorite hangout for Rutgers students and faculty. Putting the finishing touches on a paper rethinking the psychoanalytic situation and process from the perspective of our psychoanalytic phenomenology, we needed to come up with a subtitle for the section dealing with the impact on the analytic process of unrecognized correspondences and discrepancies between the patient's and analyst's respective worlds of emotional experience. "An interactional perspective" seemed too generic and "an interpersonal perspective" too behavioral to capture our phenomenological emphasis. We needed a phrase that would capture the mutual interplay of two differently organized subjective worlds, two worlds of subjective meaning. Suddenly one of us came up with "an intersubjective perspective," a phrase that has stood the test of time. The fact that we cannot recall which of us came up

with that phrase points to the deepening of both our friendship and our collaborative process at that time. Lewis Aron (1996) credited the article that was completed at that meeting (Stolorow, Atwood, & Ross, 1978) with having introduced the concept of intersubjectivity into American psychoanalytic discourse. In addition to being the year in which we completed *Faces* and came up with the idea of an intersubjective perspective, 1976 was also the year in which R.S. was inspired to write an article applying George Klein's distinction between psychoanalytic clinical theory and metapsychology to the concept of psychic structure (Stolorow, 1978). Specifically, R.S. proposed that reified metapsychological structures like id, ego, and superego be expunged from psychoanalytic discourse and be replaced by a conception of psychological structure as consisting in the invariant principles, meanings, or schemas through which emotional experience comes to be organized according to characteristic themes and patterns. Such organizing principles derive from recurring forms of interaction within the developmental system, and they constitute the basic building blocks of personality development. They are unconscious, not in the sense of being repressed, but in being prereflective; they ordinarily do not enter the domain of reflective self-awareness. G.A. remembers that we toyed with the idea of a *prereflective unconscious* (Atwood & Stolorow,



1980), which became a cornerstone of our psychoanalytic phenomenology (Atwood & Stolorow, 1984), as early as that fateful conversation at the Homestead Bar. These intersubjectively derived, prereflective organizing principles show up in the psychoanalytic situation in the form of transference, which, following an article by R.S. and Frank Lachmann (Stolorow & Lachmann, 1984/85), we conceptualize as unconscious organizing activity. The system formed by the interplay of the patient's and analyst's unconscious organizing activities is a prime example of what we mean by an *intersubjective system*. Psychoanalysis, in our vision, became a dialogical method for bringing this prereflective organizing activity into awareness. Our contextualist perspective significantly deepened and expanded in consequence of an epiphany that emerged from R.S.'s and Bernard Brandchaft's investigation, in 1980, of so-called borderline phenomena. They found that when a very vulnerable, archaically organized patient is treated according to the theoretical ideas and technical recommendations offered by Otto Kernberg (1975), that patient will quickly display all the characteristics Kernberg ascribed to borderline personality organization, and the pages of Kernberg's books will come alive right before the clinician's eyes. On the other hand, when such a patient is treated according to the theory and technical stance proposed by Heinz Kohut

(1971), that patient will soon show the features Kohut attributed to narcissistic personality disorder, and Kohut's books will come alive. In the chapter that resulted from their investigation (Brandchaft & Stolorow, 1984), they contended that borderline states take form in an intersubjective field, co-constituted by the patient's psychological structures and the way these are understood and responded to by the therapist. Thus began a series of collaborative studies (see Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987) in which we and Brandchaft, who became a dear friend, extended our intersubjective perspective to a wide array of clinical phenomena, including development and pathogenesis, transference and resistance, emotional conflict formation, dreams, enactments, neurotic symptoms, and psychotic states. (See also Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002, chapter 8, for an explication of the phenomenology of psychotic states.) In each instance, phenomena that had traditionally been the focus of psychoanalytic investigation were understood not as products of isolated intrapsychic mechanisms, but as forming at the interface of interacting experiential worlds. The intersubjective context, we contended, plays a constitutive role in all forms of psychopathology, and clinical phenomena cannot be comprehended psychoanalytically apart from the intersubjective field in which they crystallize. In psychoanalytic treatment, the impact of the observer was grasped as intrinsic to the

observed. Our psychoanalytic phenomenology had led us inexorably to a thorough-going contextualism. **4. The primacy of affect** Our psychoanalytic contextualism was even further radicalized in consequence of an article that R.S. wrote with his late wife Daphne Socarides (Socarides & Stolorow, 1984/85) attempting to integrate our evolving intersubjective perspective with the framework of Kohutian self psychology. In their proposed expansion and refinement of Kohut's (1971) selfobject concept, they suggested that selfobject functions pertain fundamentally to the integration of affect into the organization of self-experience, and that the need for selfobject ties pertains most centrally to the need for attuned responsiveness to affect states in all stages of the life cycle. In so suggesting, they grasped emotional experience as being inseparable from the intersubjective contexts of attunement and malattunement in which it was felt. They also grasped, and this proved crucial, the motivational primacy of affectivity. It became a central tenet of our perspective that a shift in psychoanalytic thinking from the motivational primacy of drive to the motivational primacy of affectivity moves psychoanalysis toward a phenomenological contextualism and a central focus on dynamic intersubjective systems. Unlike drives, which originate deep within the interior of a Cartesian isolated mind, affectivity—that is, subjective

emotional experience—is something that from birth onward is constituted within ongoing relational systems. Therefore, locating affect at its motivational center automatically entails a radical contextualization of virtually all aspects of human psychological life. Comprehending the motivational primacy of affectivity enables us to contextualize a wide range of psychological phenomena that have traditionally been central in psychoanalytic theory, including psychological conflict, trauma, defense and resistance, and the dynamic unconscious itself. Seen from an intersubjective perspective, psychological conflict develops when central affect states of the child cannot be integrated because they evoke massive or consistent malattunement from caregivers (Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987, chapter 6). Such unintegrated affect states become the source of lifelong emotional conflict and vulnerability to traumatic states, because they are experienced as threats both to the person's established psychological organization and to the maintenance of vitally needed ties. Defenses against affect thus become necessary. Developmental trauma is viewed here, not as an instinctual flooding of an ill-equipped Cartesian container, as Freud (1926/1959) would have it, but as an experience of unbearable affect. Furthermore, the intolerability of an affect state cannot be explained solely, or even primarily, on the basis of the quantity or intensity

of the painful feelings evoked by an injurious event. Traumatic affect states can be grasped only in terms of the relational systems in which they are felt (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992, chapter 4). Developmental trauma originates within a formative intersubjective context whose central feature is malattunement to painful affect, leading to the child's loss of affect-integrating capacity and, thereby, to an unbearable, overwhelmed, disorganized state. Painful or frightening affect becomes traumatic when the attunement that the child needs to assist in its tolerance and integration is profoundly absent. One consequence of developmental trauma, relationally conceived, is that affect states take on enduring, crushing meanings. From recurring experiences of malattunement, the child acquires the unconscious conviction that unmet developmental yearnings and reactive painful feeling states are manifestations of a loathsome defect or of an inherent inner badness. A defensive self-ideal is often established, representing a self-image purified of the offending affect states that were perceived to be unwelcome or damaging to caregivers. Living up to this affectively purified ideal becomes a central requirement for maintaining harmonious ties to others and for upholding self-esteem. Thereafter, the emergence of prohibited affect is experienced as a failure to embody the required ideal, an exposure of the underlying essential defectiveness or

badness, and is accompanied by feelings of isolation, shame, and self-loathing. In the psychoanalytic situation, qualities or activities of the analyst that lend themselves to being interpreted according to such unconscious meanings of affect confirm the patient's expectations in the transference that emerging feeling states will be met with disgust, disdain, disinterest, alarm, hostility, withdrawal, exploitation, and the like, or will damage the analyst and destroy the therapeutic bond. Such expectations of retraumatization, unwittingly confirmed by the analyst, are a powerful source of resistance to the experience and articulation of affect. A second consequence of developmental trauma is a severe constriction and narrowing of the *horizons of emotional experiencing* (a phrase we owe to another dear friend and collaborator, Donna Orange; see Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002, chapter 3), so as to exclude whatever feels unacceptable, intolerable, or too dangerous in particular intersubjective contexts. Our ideas about the horizons of experiencing have developed over the course of more than two decades from our attempts to delineate the intersubjective origins of differing forms of unconsciousness (see, for example, Stolorow & Atwood, 1992, chapter 2). Our evolving theory rested on the assumption that the child's emotional experience becomes progressively articulated through the validating attunement of the early surround. Two closely interrelated but

conceptually distinguishable forms of unconsciousness were pictured as developing from situations of massive malattunement. When a child's emotional experiences are consistently not responded to or are actively rejected, the child perceives that aspects of his or her affective life are intolerable to the caregiver. These regions of the child's emotional world must then be sacrificed in order to safeguard the needed tie. Repression was grasped here as a kind of negative organizing principle, always embedded in ongoing intersubjective contexts, determining which configurations of affective experience were not to be allowed to come into full being. In addition, we argued, other features of the child's emotional experience may remain unconscious, not because they have been repressed, but because, in the absence of a validating intersubjective context, they simply were never able to become articulated. With both forms of unconsciousness, the horizons of experiencing were pictured as taking form in the medium of the differing responsiveness of the surround to different regions of the child's affectivity. During the preverbal period of infancy, the articulation of the child's affective experience is achieved through attunements communicated in the sensorimotor dialogue with caregivers. With the maturation of the child's symbolic capacities, symbols (words, for example) gradually assume a place of importance alongside sensorimotor attunements as vehicles

through which the child's emotional experience is validated within the developmental system. Therefore, we argued, in that realm of experience in which consciousness increasingly becomes articulated in symbols, unconscious becomes coextensive with unsymbolized. When the act of symbolically (linguistically, for example) articulating an affective experience is perceived to threaten an indispensable tie, repression can now be achieved by preventing the continuation of the process of encoding that experience in symbols. Repression keeps affect nameless. The focus on affectivity contextualizes the very boundary between conscious and unconscious. Unlike the Freudian repression barrier, viewed as a fixed intrapsychic structure within an isolated Cartesian container, the limiting horizons of emotional experiencing were conceptualized as emergent properties of ongoing dynamic intersubjective systems. Forming and evolving within a nexus of living systems, the horizons of experiencing were grasped as fluid and ever-shifting, products both of the person's unique intersubjective history and of what is or is not allowed to be felt within the intersubjective fields that constitute his or her current living.

**5. Psychotic states: a generative dialogue** In the fall of 1984, the two of us joined Bernard Brandchaft at his ranch in the mountains outside Santa Barbara, California. With a beautiful view of the Pacific Ocean in the distance, we



spent two days and three nights talking about all things psychoanalytic. There was no pre-arranged agenda that had been set for these conversations, but as they proceeded an unexpected theme began to emerge: the understanding and treatment of so-called psychotic states. We began with Brandchaft and G.A. regaling each other with detailed clinical stories about their most challenging psychotherapy cases, and at first R.S. just listened as the accounts unfolded. Soon, however, the discussions became a triologue in which each of us offered ideas and perspectives to the others that illuminated the clinical material being presented as never before. As the interaction continued, we saw that a new understanding of our patients' delusions and hallucinations was emerging, and that we had found the nucleus of a phenomenological reconceptualization of psychosis itself. A key feature of the shift was the suspension of diagnostic assessments of the adequacy of the patient's contact with objective reality. Released from conducting evaluations by reference to an external standard of the real, we were free to study our patients' worlds in their own terms, in whatever state they presented themselves. R.S., drawing on the phraseology of Kierkegaard, suggested that traditional concerns with the objective factuality of what our patients feel and believe could be supplanted by a focus on *subjective truth*. Delusions and hallucinations, from such a viewpoint,

become symbols concretizing core aspects of the experiential world the felt validity of which has come under assault or is disintegrating. Psychosis, instead of being seen as a flight from the external world (Freud, 1924/1961), is understood then as an effort to preserve or restore a personal reality threatened by the danger of obliteration. In subsequent weeks we worked hard to fill out the clinical implications of this revised perspective and completed a long paper, “Symbols of Subjective Truth in Psychotic States” (Stolorow, Atwood, & Brandchaft, 1988). R.S. wrote the theoretical section, and G.A. and Brandchaft provided the detailed clinical illustrations. This paper became the basis of a chapter on psychotic states appearing later in *Psychoanalytic Treatment: An Intersubjective Approach* (Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987). The shared epiphany at Brandchaft’s ranch had two further consequences in the years immediately following. The first of these appeared in Brandchaft’s (1993) magnificent essay, “To Free the Spirit From Its Cell,” which became a chapter in his book, *Toward an Emancipatory Psychoanalysis* (Brandchaft, Doctors, & Sorter, 2010). It was argued there that the manic phase in bipolar disorder represents a transient liberation from an annihilating tie to caregivers embedded in a pattern of pathological accommodation. The depression ensuing as a manic episode recedes, in turn, may be understood as a reinstatement of that tie. We

consider Brandchaft's idea to be the single most important insight into manic-depressive conditions that has appeared since the writings of Winnicott (1935/1958) and Fromm-Reichmann (1954).

The second consequence emerged out of G.A.'s longstanding interest in psychotic states and the challenges of psychotherapy with psychotic patients. G.A. realized that the dissolution of the experienced validity of an individual's subjective world, in the extreme, results in a sense of personal annihilation. Working closely with R.S. and our other principal collaborator at the time, Donna Orange, G.A. explicated various dimensions of this catastrophe in an essay, "Contexts of Nonbeing: Varieties of the Experience of Personal Annihilation," which appeared as a chapter in another co-authored book, *Working Intersubjectively* (Orange, Atwood, & Stolorow, 1997). This work was then followed up by a longer and more comprehensive paper, again written in close consultation with R.S. and Donna Orange, "Shattered Worlds/Psychotic States" (Atwood, Orange, & Stolorow, 2002). G.A. has often said about this paper that it cost him "a gallon and a half of blood." The essay, which included elaborations and illustrations of Brandchaft's ideas on bipolarity, was incorporated as a chapter in our book *Worlds of Experience: Interweaving Philosophical and Clinical Dimensions in Psychoanalysis* (Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002). The final

development of the generative dialogue at Brandchaft's ranch appeared in G.A.'s sole-authored book, *The Abyss of Madness* (Atwood, 2011), a work devoted to the farthest reaches of psychological disorder.

**6. Trauma and human existence** On the morning of February 23, 1991, R.S. awakened to find his young wife, Daphne (Dede), lying dead across their bed, four weeks after her metastatic cancer had been diagnosed. He felt that only G.A., whose own world had been shattered by the death of his beloved mother when he was eight years old, could really grasp his emotional devastation. Now, in addition to being close collaborators and dear friends, we became brothers in darkness. In August of 1991, R.S. and two of his children spent a couple of weeks at the Atwood vacation home in Maine. In the wake of devastating loss, sipping vodka on a porch overlooking beautiful Rangeley Lake, we outlined our next book, *Contexts of Being: The Intersubjective Foundations of Psychological Life* (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). As we said in the preface, "We drew closer and decided to try to create something lasting from the ashes of loss and sorrow" (p. xi). In the book we extended our intersubjective perspective to a phenomenological rethinking and contextualization of the foundational pillars of psychoanalytic theory, including the concept of the unconscious, the relation between mind and body, the concept of trauma, and the

understanding of fantasy. At least two inspirational ideas emerged from our conversations in Rangeley, ideas that related to the context of trauma in which the conversations were taking place. G.A. proposed, as the introductory chapter of the book, a deconstructive critique of Descartes' doctrine of the isolated mind, a doctrine that he thought had become a Western cultural myth serving to evade the vulnerabilities inherent in finite human existing. R.S. suggested that isolated-mind thinking was in particular a flight from what he called *the unbearable embeddedness of being*, which he was then wrenchingly experiencing himself. The second idea had to do with the context-embeddedness of emotional trauma, already discussed, and the resulting chapter on trauma expanded on sentences that Dede had written in the article with R.S. on affects and selfobject functions (Socarides & Stolorow, 1984/85). Some twenty months after Dede died, an initial batch of copies of our newly published *Contexts of Being* was sent "hot off the press" to a display table at a conference in 1992 at which R.S. was a panelist. He picked up a copy and looked around excitedly for Dede, who would be so pleased and happy to see it. She was, of course, nowhere to be found. Spinning around to show her our book and finding her gone instantly transported him back to that devastating moment in which he found her dead and his world was shattered (an experience he would later call, borrowing a

term from Harry Potter, a *portkey to trauma*; Stolorow, 2007). In an article he wrote six years later (Stolorow, 1999) with his wife Julia Schwartz's encouragement, he described his retraumatized state at the conference as one in which the meaningfulness of his professional world had collapsed and in which he felt like an alien being among his friends and colleagues. Further, he conceptualized his dreadful sense of alienation and estrangement as having resulted from the shattering of what he called the *absolutisms of everyday life*—the illusory beliefs that allow one to experience the world as stable, predictable, and safe. The essence of trauma was grasped as a catastrophic loss of innocence. Once we had rethought psychoanalysis as a form of phenomenological inquiry, a focus on the mutually enriching interface of psychoanalysis and Continental phenomenology became inescapable, and over the decades we have studied phenomenological philosophy voraciously. In 2000, two years after writing the article described in the foregoing paragraph, R.S. formed a leaderless philosophical study group that devoted a year to a close reading of Heidegger's (1927/1962) *Being and Time*. R.S. recalls that when he read the passages in *Being and Time* devoted to Heidegger's existential analysis of *Angst*, he nearly fell off his chair. Both Heidegger's phenomenological description and ontological account of *Angst* bore a remarkable resemblance to what he had

written two years before about the phenomenology and meaning of emotional trauma. Thus Heidegger's existential philosophy—in particular, his existential analysis of *Angst*—enabled R.S. to grasp trauma's existential significance. Trauma shatters the illusions of everyday life that evade and cover up the finitude, contingency, and embeddedness of our existence and the indefiniteness of its certain extinction. Such shattering exposes what had been heretofore concealed, thereby plunging the traumatized person into a form of what Heidegger calls *authentic Being-toward-death* and into the anxiety—the loss of significance (the meaninglessness), the uncanniness (the not-at-homeness and estrangement)—through which authentic Being-toward-death, according to Heidegger, is disclosed. Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of *Angst*, world-collapse, uncanniness, and thrownness into Being-toward-death provided R.S. with extraordinary philosophical tools for grasping the existential significance of emotional trauma. It was this latter discovery that motivated him to begin doctoral studies in philosophy in 2003 and to write a dissertation and two books (Stolorow 2007, 2011) on Heidegger and what we have come to call *post-Cartesian psychoanalysis*.**7. Intersubjectivity turns back upon itself**

One afternoon in the spring of 1992, G.A. had a reverie in which he imagined a scholar in the future giving a presentation at a psychoanalytic

conference devoted to the development of the intersubjective approach.

Living perhaps fifty years hence, he was looking back on our thinking and offering an interpretation of what had become our most central idea. G.A. found himself listening in on the imaginary gentleman's concluding remarks, which had an almost hallucinatory clarity. *“And so you can see, ladies and gentlemen, Robert Stolorow's and*

*George Atwood's central concept – that of the intersubjective field, understood as a system of differently organized, interacting worlds of experience – may be viewed as a symbol perfectly crystallizing and mirroring the collaborative process out of which their theory was brought into being.”* G.A. was so excited by this idea that he

immediately left a message on R.S.'s voicemail describing it. Strangely, R.S. did not answer the message for several weeks, and G.A. in consequence began to think the interpretation had no real value and made little sense.

Two months later, the two of us were walking along a street in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where we were presenting at a conference on creativity and madness. G.A. described again his vision of the future and asked why there had been no response. R.S. then said, “You know, intersubjectivity theory could never have been the brainchild of a single individual – by virtue of its content, it had to arise out of a collaboration.” We were seeing for the first



time a significant aspect of the subjectivity of the intersubjective viewpoint itself. We also wondered if the age of the lonely hero in psychoanalytic personality theory was coming to an end, and if all the important future developments in our field would also be collaborative in nature. Although we addressed the embeddedness of the intersubjective viewpoint in our ever-ongoing dialogues in the second edition of *Faces in a Cloud* (Atwood & Stolorow, 1993) and also in *Worlds of Experience* (Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002), a more detailed account of the interaction between our respective personal worlds had to await a further epiphany. The background of this development involved a study of the lives and ideas of four great philosophers on whom we have relied in fashioning a vision of a post-Cartesian psychoanalysis: Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Searching for a pathway toward a deeper understanding of our own philosophical commitments and their relationship to our personal life themes, and working closely again with Donna Orange, we thought that an exploration of the personal subjectivity of these thinkers might be of value. If we could understand essential truths in the lives of those who were driven to break away from the legacy of Descartes, perhaps we could bring our own truths more clearly into view. For almost ten years we tossed around the possibility of such a project, and

finally it all came together in our paper, “The Madness and Genius of Post-Cartesian Philosophy: A Distant Mirror” (Atwood, Stolorow, & Orange, 2011). Here is the result of our studies of the philosophers: Each of them suffered extreme trauma in his personal world, eventuating in lifelong struggles with profound inner conflict. Their thinking, in addition to being brilliant and innovative, also in each instance embodied an effort to master or otherwise come to terms with persistent emotional tensions presenting the danger of fragmentation. We found madness in the genius of their works, arising from the often tragic, disintegrating, and even annihilating conditions dominating their life histories. There were personal demons with which they fought, always ambivalently and with uneven success, and the intellectual journeys for which they are famous dramatically reflect and symbolize their efforts to bring themselves together and emotionally survive. Gazing into the mirror presented by an understanding of the post-Cartesian philosophers, we were led to questions then about our own demons, about the personal contexts and origins of our phenomenological contextualism. Perhaps not surprisingly we saw more clearly the power of trauma in each of our lives, including experiences of shattering loss, tyrannical invalidation, and personal fragmentation. We also began to recognize all the ways that intersubjectivity theory constituted a kind of answer to the events and

circumstances that had been most difficult. The theory that is our Holy Grail, toward which we have journeyed since the early days of the golden age at Livingston College, seeks victory over demonic forces that tear us away from ourselves and each other, that confront us with crushing, authoritarian definitions of who we are and should be, and that threaten the survival of our very subjectivity as experiencing persons. The most important details of our respective histories of trauma are reviewed and discussed in our paper, “The Demons of Phenomenological Contextualism: A Conversation” (Atwood & Stolorow, 2012).**Afterword**

The story of our collaboration is both one of intellectual cooperation and of close emotional connection. We have not only sustained each other in the development of a rich variety of theoretical and clinical ideas over the years, we have also seen each other through personal crises that at times challenged our capacities even to continue with our lives and careers. We have been so close that R.S. once made the claim that we are in actuality one person. G.A.’s wife, Elizabeth Atwood, on hearing this absurd statement, laughed and said, “Well, it is true that if you take George Atwood and Bob Stolorow, and add them together, you just might get one whole person!” Although the golden years of our early period at Livingston College ended in traumatic disappointment, the creative symbiosis between us that came

into being now so long ago has survived and flourished over the ensuing decades. One evening in 1973, at a party given by one of the graduate students in psychology, R.S. turned to G.A, and made the following promise: “We will always work together.” G.A. recalls having thought that this was a very nice thing to say, but who can know what will happen? That promise continues to be fulfilled.

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