Chapter 4
Steely Dan's Donald Fagen: A Case of Mistaken Self-Identity, Corrected by Self-Reformulation

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Abstract Throughout Donald Fagen's life, he used the concept of bohemianism to position himself vis-à-vis his family, peers, and the mainstream culture as a whole. A psychobiographical examination of the subject with an object relations emphasis found that Fagen used his role as a successful musician to confer on himself a sense of legitimacy and to distance himself from the strictures of conventional, "bourgeois" existence. However, by the end of the first phase of his band Steely Dan's recording career, Fagen found himself in a musical, romantic, and social dead end, his bohemianism's promise of self-contained aesthetic completion being revealed as a mistaking of the ideal for the real. This chapter shows that Fagen recovered meaning in life, and thus a multilayered positivity, through psychotherapy, which led to the singer's reentry into the worlds of music, family, and friendship by tempering the perfectionism and isolationism concealed within his bohemian self-image. Ironically, Fagen's reality principle gained in strength as he loosened his grip on his mistaken self-identification as a bohemian; Fagen's self-reformulation late in life allowed him to turn a category error about the artist's role in modernity into a positive adaptation to a society that requires an adult to play multiple, often contradictory, roles.

Keywords Mistakes · Errors · Failures · Bohemianism · Donald Fagen · Object relations · Positive psychology · Psychobiography

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4.1 Introduction

Positive psychology is concerned with how human beings achieve vitality and generativity through internal and interpersonal development (Gable and Haidt 2005). However, one limitation of much positive psychology research has been its overemphasis on traits and on affect polarity, with a concomitant de-emphasis on subjective evidence such as life narratives and therapeutic disclosures (Moneta 2013). Psychobiography centers on the strategies and therapies creative individuals utilize to correct mistaken self- and other-directed judgments, errors that often lead to internal and interpersonal conflicts (Mayer 2017: 26–27); thus, the psychological study of life histories can serve as an idiographic corrective to the more common, nomothetic version of positive psychology (Jørgensen and Nafstad 2005). The present study seeks to apply insights from positive psychology to the life of Donald Fagen (1948–), lead singer of the innovative musical group Steely Dan.

From his youth until middle age, Donald Fagen's fundamental error was his utilization of a version of bohemianism that was too self-directed to position himself vis-à-vis the culture at large as a means to personal and artistic authenticity. Fagen carried on a tradition—which many trace back to 1830s France (Gluck 2000; Seigel 1986)—that viewed the artist as a special being whose unique capacity to embody the social bond depended, paradoxically, on her existential distance from the more materialistic and egoistic societal mainstream (Graña 1964; Kelley 2018, October). Beginning in late adulthood and continuing into old age, Fagen has undertaken a self-reformulation by broadening his concept of bohemianism, thus correcting his mistaken self-identity. Specifically, Fagen became more other-directed in his vocational and familial projects, cogenerating and co-directing a rarified intersubjective space within which family, friends, and collaborators could abide without being infected with the perceived crassness and materialism of non-bohemian society.

During his childhood years, Fagen sought escape from the TV culture of Cold War suburbia (McNulty 2013, 18 October) by embracing the existential sensibility that pervades jazz and Beat literature (Dinerstein 2013). By the time he entered Bard College at the age of 18, Fagen was already an accomplished keyboardist, but the alienation he felt, especially toward the opposite sex, was assuaged only once he found his place among like-minded college students (Fagen 2013a: 72–85). In 1967, Fagen met Walter Becker, and together they formed the musical group Steely Dan (Sweet 2015: 12, 52–66). Fagen and Becker were totally dedicated to writing and recording music for the band from 1972 to 1980; Fagen in these years became a "workaholic" (Pollock 2012/2018: 257) who had little investment in any life outside of recording studios. It seems the self-ascribed beatnik had to go through a personal life-crisis to psychically appropriate the consequences of his fundamental error, that of identifying artistic authenticity with social isolation.

Once Steely Dan stopped recording in 1980, Fagen fell into a writer's block that brought on bouts of depression and panic attacks (Choban 2017, 7 December). At this crossroads, Fagen turned to a psychotherapist and took responsibility for his situation by involving himself in a series of committed romantic relationships and

also by writing a series of magazine articles about his early life (Hoskyns 2018: xvi). Both occupations indicated that Fagen was seeking meaning in life beyond the narrow confines of a purist hipster ideal that needed to be updated for the "me decade." In the latest phase of Fagen's life, he has pursued generativity through a return to recording and touring with Steely Dan. Indeed, Fagen's affirmation of the value of art and life has survived the September 3, 2017, death of Walter Becker, his writing partner and archetypal Beat muse (Rolling Stone 2017, November 15).

4.2 Theoretical Background

This study links bohemianism's core binary "bohemian-bourgeois" to various analogues in post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory in order to demonstrate their relevance to both generative and destructive acts in the life of Donald Fagen. The appropriateness of using the aesthetic theory of bohemianism in concert with the psychological theory of psychoanalysis is indicated by Donald Fagen's self-applying bohemian terms like "Beat" (Sweet 2015: 168) and "hipster" (Fagen 2013a) and by his undergoing psychotherapy in the 1980s (Gill 1995) to avoid what we might call the ego's primal mistake: an "attempted flight" from the self-world interchange that amounts to a "turning away from the way things are" (Freud 1926/1950: 48–49).

4.2.1 Bohemianism

It has been said that modernity emerged when the self was first recognized as a distinct problem with its own contours and nuances (Baumeister 1987). If this is the case, then Paris in the 1830s and 1840s may be where the modern subject emerged (or at least it is a paradigmatic example of its emergence). In the years that followed, 1789, the French Revolutionaries did away with many intermediate groupings such as estates and guilds, membership in which had afforded the individual a ready-made position in the society. Once the restored Bourbon monarch Charles X was ousted in 1830, many Frenchmen wondered exactly what kinds of social limits could and should be legitimated in the new France (Seigel 1986: 9–10). The question was twofold: First, what are the characteristics that define this new subject, radically free from the chains of the Old Regime? Second, what will bind these newly liberated subjects together as a society?

One group held that the new subject par excellence was the artist, the person whose very life embodied each and every walk of life, since ideally the artist can create every possible character and can express every possible thought (De Botton 2004: 270; Kierkegaard 1843/2009: 15, 23). Indeed, the artist's relatively authentic self-relation was the key to understanding how society should be patterned (Berlin 1991: 228). But the French government established in 1830 has been called, not the

"Aesthetic" Monarchy, but rather the "bourgeois," since public life was dominated by the economic concerns of middle-class businessmen and professionals. To use two terms that came to the fore during this period, the new bourgeois subject was seen by many as bereft of any "association" (Strube 2017, November: 199) or "sentiment" (Banfield 2007) not tainted by her own desires for power and mammon.

The bohemian theory of the subject was a reformist, rather than a revolutionary, critique of the July Monarchy mainstream. According to the bohemian view, the artist's power of recapitulating the societal whole through her exquisite life is the sole means of reversing the bourgeois descent into an egoism whose only value is economic productivity. Indeed, from the standpoint of bohemianism, every particular bourgeois desire could be both derived from and related to the artist's all-encompassing and untarnished (because self-produced and self-authored) desire (Schmitt 1925/1986: 14–17). From one point of view, the bohemian notion of subjectivity avoids the error of solipsistic aestheticism, with its lack of both social responsibility and internal coherence, by insisting on the democratic identification of the quantitative (the will of the bohemian minority) with the qualitative (the will of the people as a whole) (Schmitt 1921/2014).

Though the term *bohémien* had been used from the fifteenth century to refer to the gypsies who were encountered in France, it was not until the 1830s that "bohemian" began to be appropriated by Romantic artists to designate their uniquely aesthetic mode of living (Brown 1985: 21, 27). By mid-century, this notion of the bohemian artist was common parlance, and *bohémien* became a buzzword somewhat akin to today's "hippy" or "beatnik" (Rorabaugh 2015: 8). For our purposes, we will simplify the complex history of bohemianism by reducing it to an aesthetic that hinges on the opposition "bohemian versus bourgeois." In order to illustrate this dichotomy in a manner that underscores its relevance to positive psychology, we will offer a few words about the bohemian's self-image as illuminator of the supposedly benighted bourgeois.

The bohemian sees herself as relating *symmetrically* to other bohemians, with whom she shares a similar life-orientation, but *asymmetrically* to the bourgeois—the ordinary nonartist—whose lack of sociocultural sensitivity evinces her need of the bohemian's guidance. On the one hand, the bohemian has a mission to improve society by making it more bohemian; on the other hand, the bohemian's only responsibility is to live out her aesthetic to the full and so to be a perfect beacon for the bourgeois. Thus, bohemian revolutionary activism can be seen to conceal a gradualist-quietist duality. That is, the bohemian must work on the material provided by bourgeois society to bring out supposedly deeper bonds of sympathy and authenticity latent therein. However, this reformist aim hidden within bohemianism's utopian trappings often morphs into solipsistic reverie and fey cynicism. After all, life is already transmuted into art in the artist's mind through the latter's power of imaginative production; if the wider world refuses to follow suit, then one can merely fall back on one's infinitely productive inner life. The present study seeks to show this reformist-quietist tension at work in the life of Donald Fagen, who often struggled *through* his art to find connection to the world *outside* his art.

The question may now arise: Is there a historically continuous connection between bohemianism and the outsider stance of Donald Fagen, or are we dealing with a superficial analogue or likeness? Intellectual historians have noted that the bohemianism of 1830s France survived in the dandyism of the fin-de-siecle, the refined primitivism of early twentieth-century literary Modernism, the existentialism of the 1940s, and the Beat Generation of the 1950s (Wilson 2003). Sartre's novel *La nausée* (1938), a favorite of Fagen's, ends with the central character finding in the outsider culture associated with jazz the inspiration to continue living (McBride 2012). And, of course, Steely Dan was named after a fearsome sexual aid from beat writer William S. Burroughs' novel *Naked Lunch* (1959). Says Fagen's collaborator, Walter Becker, of Burroughs: "He wasn't *just* a bohemian joker; he had points to make" (Martin 2003, June 6/2018: 237, emphasis added).

The final word on the aptness of our aestheticist frame comes from Donald Fagen himself, who has not only discussed his life and art as being thoroughly "Beat," "existential," and "hipster," but who describes his creative process in words that reflect our proposed bohemian-bourgeois structure: "…I think [our songwriting is] a way of viewing the actual world through our eyes. (…) I think…we're synthesising what we see" (Watts 1976/2018: 86). Fagen has even named Igor Stravinsky, that most bohemian of the twentieth-century composers, as one of his strongest influences (Regen 2013, January: 16, 18). In fact, Stravinsky and his collaborator Sergei Diaghilev are indirectly conjured forth in the Steely Dan song *Here at the Western World* (Steely Dan 1978: track 10), set at the Venice Lido, where the *Le Sacre du printemps* creators are known to have sallied forth in the company of Coco Chanel (Ross 2008), who helped create the *faux-luxe* postwar fashion culture which also presaged Fagen's ambivalently slick aesthetic (Sweet 2015: 168–169; Fagen 2013a: 15–151). Chanel made her fateful plunge from the cloistered milieu of culture and history into the bohemian world of art-as-life by walking out of her hotel and onto the celebrity-peopled Lido beach (Saikia 2011: 91). In any case, *Here at the Western World's* line "knock twice, rap with your cane" certainly brings to mind Diaghilev, who rarely appeared in public without a top hat and walking stick (Russian Ballet History 2010) and whose vision for a new kind of primitivist ballet seems to be inextricably linked to the notorious beach that Fagen sang about in the line: "Down at the Lido they welcome you with sausage and beer."

4.2.2 Post-Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory

Melanie Klein's famous dichotomy "paranoid-schizoid position versus depressive position" can be understood in terms of the creative individual's lifelong struggle to achieve reciprocity with significant others without losing a sense of her core self, the latter being the source of agential authenticity and personal continuity/integrity (Klein 1935). The depressive position sees a tempering of the errant absolutism of the paranoid-schizoid layer in that the latter's splitting of the Other (and the self) into perfect nourisher, on the one hand, and perfect inhibitor, on the other, is dis-

placed by a sense that the Other is a creative agent that mirrors the freedom and integrity of the self but also that both self and Other are fallible nurturers who inevitably frustrate and injure (Klein 1940, 1946). The injuries, however, can be repaired through ongoing positive ministrations in the here and now. Many perhaps miss the truly positive content of Klien's therapy; for her, theory must be completed by reparative acts that paradoxically affirm the inviolability of the creative self through acknowledging that reciprocity can only be maintained by crossing the line and making the self vulnerable to the Other's aggression (Klein 1937). For Klein, it could be said mistakes are necessary materials upon which we build closer approximations to truth through reparation.

For D.W. Winnicott, the depressive position is achieved once the individual is able to experience inner reality as necessarily "parallel to the objective" world outside (Winnicott 1941: 153). However, there is a core part of the self, comprising its decisionist depth, that is, incommunicable; this core self is the only survival of the absolute thinking of the paranoid-schizoid layer: there must be a self to decide, to process information about the environment, and to relate to other agents whose selves are equally inviolable (Tuber 2008: 33).

This is the central Kleinian-Winnicottian precept about the self: The individual is, at each life stage, in danger of losing the personal quality of her experience by being unable to bridge the gulf between inner processes and interpersonal or environmental reality (Mitchell and Black 1995: 124). An expanded notion of creativity sees at the self's core an artist who must create reparative analogues between, on the inside, the creative processes that spring from inner life, and, on the outside, the Other-generated realities that the creative self tends to mistakenly interpret as threats to the self but which must be transmuted into positivity through an ongoing "negotiat[ion of] intersubjective experience" (Bollas 1987: 13; cf. Klein 1937; Winnicott 1991: 69). Our choice of Kleinian object relations as a lens through which to view Donald Fagen's life is based upon the singer's development from an original Other-object repression (an id-centered infantilism) to his eventual turn to reparation of his primal ego error through therapy and social openness (a reality-mediated maturity) (Freud 1920, 1923).

4.3 Methodology

The present work is a single case study that uses object relations theory and psychobiography to uncover the motivational complexities that have accompanied the subject's interpersonal relations over the course of his life. Positive psychology will be utilized to gain insight into the subject's attempts to retain a sense of vitality toward work, colleagues, family, and society as a whole. It is becoming more apparent that individuals make narrative sense of their lives by dovetailing complex self-orientations, such as irony or nostalgia, with thought domains and semantic fields of concern to their personal development (Sedikides, et al. 2015; Zhou et al. 2009). This being the case, positive psychology is useful in exploring how subjects orient

themselves to apparent failures, errors, and humiliations from their past that continue to loom in their present self-image (cf. the other chapters in this volume). The subject of this study, Donald Fagen, took a stance toward the world based upon what we have termed primal ego error. He spent his later adulthood re-evaluating his use of this mistaken idea that the self can become authentic through art alone. For data, this study uses Donald Fagen's recordings, published writings, and interviews, along with both interviews and writings of important persons in Fagen's life as well as secondary sources relevant to Fagen's motivations and life choices. This selection of material was evaluated using the author's idiosyncratic dovetailing of object relations psychobiographical theory contextualized through a history of ideas focus.

4.4 Findings

4.4.1 Childhood and Adolescence (1948–1967)

Donald Jay Fagen was born on January 10, 1948, in Passaic, New Jersey. His father, Joseph "Jerry" Fagen, was an accountant; his mother, Elinor Fagen, née Rosenberg, took care of Donald and his younger sister Susan, who was born in 1954 (Sweet 2015: 7). Two influences seem to have been formative of Fagen's child psyche: The first, which we may associate more with Fagen's father Jerry, was the family's move to Kendall Park, a planned community in New Jersey, in 1958; the second was Fagen's relationship with mother Elinor, an interaction that was fraught with tension but which also held within it Fagen's aesthetic path of escape from the "identity confusion" (Erikson 1968: 197) that accompanied life under his parents' roof.

The Fagen family's move to Kendall Park was traumatic for 10-year-old Donald, who would thereafter consider himself a "prisoner," deprived as he had become of Passaic's racial diversity and comparative cultural richness, not to mention the relatives who were left behind in the city (Goodman 2006, April 13). What scene greeted the young boy as the family car pulled up to their new home? It was a caricature of a neighborhood, or so Fagen recalls: The "housing development…was very isolated, it was built on farmland. It had just been built so there were these big mounds of dirt still on every corner…" (Fagen 2013b, November 29). Kendall Park's yards of overturned sod and "little twigs instead of trees" (Sweet 2015: 8) that had to be held up by metal wires (Fagen 2013b, November 29) suggested more a Gothic graveyard than a welcoming community to the young Fagen, who "expected coffins to come out of the ground, just like in…that movie Poltergeist" (Fagen 2013a, November 29).

Though he blamed both of his parents for the move, Donald may have put more of the onus on his accountant father, who "actually worked for the guy who built [the houses]" at the Kendall Park development (Sweet 2015: 8). The real presence in the Fagen household, though, was its matriarch, Elinor Fagen. Though Jerry seemed to have no sensitivity to music or art (Fagen 2013a: 73), Elinor was, in Donald's words:

> a fine swing singer who from the age of five through her teen years worked with a trio in a hotel in the Catskills…. Her career as 'Ellen Ross' came to an end at sixteen when stage fright prevented her from walking up to the microphone on Major Bowes Amateur Hour…. After that, she performed only…while she was at her housewifely chores, waking the kids up, vacuuming, cooking and cleaning (Fagen 2013a: 1).

Donald's vocal style was thus a development of his mother's peculiar manner of phrasing, which he heard constantly from his earliest days: "I can't ever remember when there was silence around the house," Donald recalls (Sweet 2015: 7). However, with Elinor's gift of music came a liability: she passed her nervousness, which could take the form of panic attacks and stage fright, to Donald, whose later obsession with doing scores or even hundreds of takes helped to extend already interminable recording schedules and whose predisposition to performance anxiety contributed to an absence from the stage between 1974 and 1995. This "double-bind" (Bateson et al. 1956) aspect of Donald's relationship with his mother reflects what Edith Jacobson describes as a mother's contribution to her infant's "development of functional ego activity" by, among other nurturing activities, "sing[ing] to him" (Jacobson 1965: 37; as cited in Bollas 1987: 13). Such motherly serenading provides a sense of the outside world's reality both by stimulating the child to act and by shaping the contour of any of the child's possible acts by calling them forth according to the parent's idiosyncratic, personal style.

By the time Donald reached his early teens, he used the musical sensibility derived from his mother to distance himself somewhat from his stultifying domestic milieu. He gave up on the rock and roll and R&B records he had been listening to and turned into a "jazz snob" (Sweet 2015: 8). Being one of the only Jews in his high school class (Rzepka 2001, 28 February) surely contributed further to his growing sense of alienation, as did his feeling of inadequacy vis-à-vis the opposite sex. Later on, though, when Fagen entered Bard College, he realized that a return to soul, blues, and folk rock would be necessary, in the interests of "relevance and authenticity," along with a concern for where "the most desirable girls were gathering" (Fagen 2013a: 19). In both of these moves, we see Fagen's bohemianism, his dual concern to remain, in Winnicott's words, "isolated" without being "insulated" (Winnicott 1965: 187) from mainstream culture. In other words, Fagen sought out a nuanced position in relation to various musical genres so as to preserve, on the one hand, his connection to the "beatster" or "hipster" alternative culture, but, on the other hand, a more diffused association with humanity at large.

4.4.2 Early Strivings to Early Dan (1967–1977)

At Bard College in 1967, Fagen met Walter Becker (1950–2017), and the duo immediately began writing songs together (Kim 2017, 3 September). Becker was, for the more reticent and detached Fagen, something of a beatnik muse. Becker had lived through a traumatic childhood, having been told his absent mother was dead

when, as he later found out, she was alive and well and living in the United Kingdom (Sweet 2015: 110). As if one parental trauma was not enough, before Becker reached adulthood, his father had a heart attack and later died (Raidió Teilifís Éireann 2017, 23 September). Becker's disordered beginnings give us insight into Donald's attraction to him: Fagen wished to gain distance from his conventional upbringing and Becker's very mode of being seemed an exile from normality. Against Fagen-the studied cultivator of the bohemian-one could certainly contrast the more authentic Becker, the latter having his beatness forced upon him by adverse circumstances. Together, Fagen and Becker straddled all the classic bohemian binaries: Whereas Donald was especially attuned to notes on a musical staff, Becker was more logocentric, a bender of words and phrases (Watts 1976/2018: 68). Fagen was jazz; Becker was blues. Fagen viewed the comfort of his *faux-luxe* suburban upbringing with a wistful irony; Becker's alienation from the mainstream was more profound, his sardonicism more layered, filmic, and surrealistic, the better to conceal his inner orphan (Palmer 1982, 20 October; Himes 2017, 5 September).

The songs that the pair began to compose reflected their bohemian concern to both dramatize and work through their ambivalence toward their early experience of straight culture and the various escape routes that hip culture seemed to present. An early trio of Becker-Fagen compositions uses the metaphors of a foxhole, a well, and a cave to represent the protagonists' object relations, their inner representations of significant others who stand in for society's values. The narrator of *Fire in the Hole* (Steely Dan 1973: side B, track 2) is undergoing a mental breakdown, and he uses the trope of a pot of liquid "boiling over," leaving "nothing left to burn" to express his overwhelming mental arrest. His crisis has been caused by the straight world's insistence, which the narrator hears as a superego-installed "woman's voice" that he "serve and not…speak." Pressure from the conflicting motives of compliance and resentment dries up the narrator's vital moisture, leaving the foxhole-interred speaker "wish[ing] someone would open up the door." *Gullywater*'s (Steely Dan 2017) narrator likens the mind of a jealous lover to a desiccated well that yields only mud. The second verse speaks of a dog enclosed in a room who seems to be smiling as he is given a new leash, which the lyric sardonically dubs a "lifeline." The room is the human mind and the dog represents the ease with which humans ensnare themselves, ironically, through the only means they have of finding freedom: their mental apparatus. In *Stone Piano* (Steely Dan 1969–1971/2002: track 4), the narrator is torn between the reality of his life as a clerk in a "ten-cent store" and his fantasies of being outside of society as an "outlaw" or "samurai." He finds a bohemian third option by listening to the song of his internal objects, which, like the automated sounds of a player piano, both are and are not subject to his conscious control. Contact with the unconscious ground of thought is maintained through this mineral instrument, but the metaphor is given a darker turn by the lyrics about being "Calvary bound." Is this strange keyboard also a tomb? Once again, we find in Fagen the bohemian who stands on the fence between two degrees of alienation from the mainstream, one mild and optimistic, another extreme and antisocial.

4.4.3 Apex to Nadir (1977–1993)

The apex of Steely Dan's recording career may have been their 1977 release *Aja*, the first of their 1970s albums to sell over a million units (Breithaupt 2011: 68). By this time, Fagen and Becker had perfected their approach to writing and recording, and though their use of expensive hired musicians and studio equipment made the price tag for *Aja* higher than any of their previous albums, the end seemed to justify the means, both artistically and fiscally (Sweet 2015: 161).

However, once Fagen and Becker reconvened to begin recording *Aja*'s follow-up, which was to be titled *Gaucho* (Steely Dan 2000), cracks in the facade began to show. First, there were technical issues. The elaborate and detailed process of recording now had to be measured not in months, but in years, involving scores of musicians and teams of engineers and assistants. They "worked on one song for so long and listened back to it so many times that they actually wore the oxide off the [analog reel-to-reel] tape" (Sweet 2015: 137). To further complicate matters, Fagen and Becker gave their engineer Roger Nichols a large sum of money to build an 8-bit computer that became a forerunner of the drum machine (InfoWorld 1984, April 30). Those involved in the tortuous sessions recall Nichols typing digital code into his computer for hours on end, all in order to create subtle deviations in the timing of the drum beats that would give the mechanized sounds a quasi-human feel (liner notes to Steely Dan 2000). Then came a true recording disaster: in December 1979 an inexperienced recording engineer accidentally erased three-fourths of a nearly completed track called *The Second Arrangement*, which upset Fagen and Becker so much that they decided against rerecording it, even though it was one of the best songs they had written for the album (Aaron 2012, 29 April). One month later, Becker's girlfriend Karen Stanley died of a drug overdose in the New York apartment she shared with the goatee-sporting guitarist (Smith 1994, 27 January). Lastly, Becker, whose addiction to various drugs was causing him to become uncharacteristically undependable (Sweet 2015: 189), was hit by a taxicab while crossing a New York City street, breaking both of his legs and causing him to miss much of the album's mixing (Pareles 2017, 3 September).

At the beginning of summer 1981, Fagen announced that Steely Dan had officially disbanded (Palmer 1981, 17 June). Walter Becker moved to Maui, replaced drugs with health food, and got into a relationship with his yoga instructor, who quickly became his first wife (Gill 1995). Fagen released his first solo album, *The Nightfly* (1982), but soon found himself unable to finish any songs, though he composed on the piano for hours each day (Smith 1993, 20 May). Long after his recovery, Fagen revealed that his writer's block was a result of depression and paranoia over the failure of his life to live up to idealizations he first formed in childhood. "I think I was a very childlike person," Fagen admitted. "I was very idealistic as a child about certain things, about the kind of life I'd have and the kind of relationship I'd have, and when these things didn't work out…it was very disappointing to me"

(Cromelin 1991, 3 November). This mistaken perfectionism, in Fagen's later appraisal, not only caused his post-*Nightfly* malaise but also precipitated two breakups: that between Fagen and Becker and that between Fagen and his most important 1980s love interest, novelist Marcelle Clements. It seems that Fagen's bohemian ideal of a quasi-utopian life could not be easily detached from the prefabricated Kendall Park homestead where it began nor could it be divorced from the voice of his mother, whose songs offered an unstable mixture of security and exoticism. In an unguarded moment, Fagen likened his tendency to hole up in recording studios to the womb-like qualities of his childhood home: "[Recording studios] remind me of my parents' house; wall-to-wall carpets, bland colours, Swedish furniture. I find them very comforting" (Sweet 2015: 232). Here we see the bohemian ambivalence toward the *faux-luxe*, the affordable domestic "luxury": The desire is for an authenticity that retreats teasingly from the plush surfaces of walls and furniture whose velvet sheen speaks the language of European sophistication but with a Woolworth accent.

In any case, Fagen began seeing a New York City psychotherapist who helped him to recognize that the same perfectionism that led him to withdraw into music was impairing his relationships with friends, family, and romantic partners. It appears that Fagen turned to therapy in desperation over his breakup with writer Marcelle Clements, a situation that was doubtless exacerbated by his lack of musical direction. Around 1983, Fagen composed *On the Dunes* (Fagen 1993, track 7), a song that summed up his hitting rock bottom in the wake of *The Nightfly*. The song's narrator becomes despondent, even suicidal when his romantic partner breaks off their relationship: "When you spoke, you must have known it was a kind of homicide." Like the rooted-to-the-spot figure in C.D. Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (c. 1818), or like the hapless protagonist of Kobo Abē's *Woman of the Dunes* (1964), Fagen's narrator finds himself trapped in a landscape whose dynamism contrasts with his own relative immobility. To be on the dunes is to be betwixt and between, neither on the more level beach face nor on the firmer ground further inland. The man of the dunes sees the inexorable pulse of nature, of time, in the swells that flow in from the immense sea, but they only mirror his own inner sterility as they break against the shore, their force dissipated. He sees couples living a picturesque life of "pretty boats, sweeping along the shore," an ideal that in his case has proven to be a mistake, since it is unattainable in the real world. Indeed, he cannot rid himself of the vision of "pretty women, with their lovers by their side," living out the happy life from which he is exiled. Hence, the song's lyrics offer a vivid picture of a "defense against internal bad objects" (Pataki 2014: 423), wherein omnipotence and a sense of tying off all loose ends are purchased at the price of self-objectification and a "sense of lifelessness" (Ogden 2002: 773). Also, Fagen's repeating of the adjective "pretty" brings to mind the last cynical line of Hemingway's fictionalized chronicle of Parisian Bohemia, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), wherein an emasculated Jake Barnes, in response to his lover's suggestion that the past could have been different, answers "Isn't it pretty to think so?"

4.4.4 Dan Mark II (1993–)

With the release of his second solo album, *Kamakiriad* (1993), the former Steely Dan frontman began to conceptualize his primal ego error in his art, and thus he began the slow process of object reparation. The album's appearance marked the healing of the two most important relationship areas in Fagen's life: Walker Becker produced the album and thus restored to Fagen the aesthetic relationship that the *Gaucho* debacle had severed; on the romantic front, Fagen had found the love of his life in singer-songwriter Libby Titus (née Jurist, b. 1947), who, like Becker, co-wrote a song on the new album. By 1989, Fagen was living with Titus and her two teenage children, and he was soon coaxed onstage by his new partner at an informal club show she produced (Sweet 2015: 251–252). This led to Fagen reuniting with Becker onstage at further Titus-organized shows, the end result being, in the wake of *Kamakiriad*'s release, a reformed Steely Dan touring again for the first time in close to two decades.

Before Walter Becker fell ill and died in the fall of 2017, the reformed Dan had recorded two albums and completed numerous sold-out world tours. Not all was sweetness and light during these years, however. Becker admitted his stamina for endless recording sessions was diminished, leading him to focus more on his family and other nonmusic interests, a fact that led Fagen to record a pair of solo albums without Becker's presence. On the Fagen home front, an ominous blip occurred on January 4, 2016, when Donald spent a night in a NYC jail after "shoving" his spouse Libby (Blistein 2016, 5 January). In the face of all difficulties, though, Fagen has remained passionately devoted to his wife, and despite the loss of his lifelong writing partner, he continues, even to the time of this writing, to keep his music alive through steady touring. Overall, our examination of Donald Fagen has offered glimpses of how transformation of errors into emotional growth and fulfillment can be achieved in the life of a creative individual caught in the pressure-filled arena of the modern capitalist marketplace.

4.5 Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research

Throughout his life, Donald Fagen utilized the concept of bohemianism to shield his core self from the conventional lifestyle and culture that surrounded him in postwar America. Beat poets and jazz musicians lived within the bourgeois world but were not of it, and the budding muso embraced their stance as both a self-definition and a criterion for communion with other outsiders. However, planted within Fagen's bohemianism was a seed of potential discord: If it is true that community is pur-

chased through aesthetic authenticity, there is a danger of replacing real-life interaction with an all-encompassing focus on the creative act. Obsession with creating the perfect Steely Dan track was the salient manifestation of Fagen's primal ego error; this Other-object repression led to the implosion of Fagen's primary creative relationship when Walter Becker left for Hawaii in the early 1980s. His failures to sustain both his creative verve and his romantic life led to Fagen's near breakdown by 1983. This situation forced Fagen to reach out beyond his comfort zone; he underwent psychotherapy and entered a relationship with an extrovert in Libby Titus, who pushed him back onto the stage and back into a less restrictive social space.

Overall, this study suggests that positive psychology as it is usually conceived is unable, on its own, to render a full-bodied understanding of the self. Object relations theory, coupled with a history of ideas approach, has yielded unexpected insights into the motivations and life strategies that allowed Fagen to survive and even thrive in a society that often seemed to him devoid of value, aesthetic, or otherwise. The psychology of error and failure has been contextualized through our analytical narration of a popular musician's life, and we have made tangible how cultural and ideological beliefs interact with traumatic and generative life events. Donald Fagen initially viewed his achievement of a bohemian self-image as an idealistic overcoming of the childhood alienation from family, peers, and society; however, through various psychological, interpersonal, and professional setbacks, the singer came to see his Beat self-object (Kohut 1971) as a dead end that had to be completed by more open-ended, interactive relationships that provided a more sure grounding for his reality principle (Freud 1926/1950) and which, at the same time, punctured the isolation booth that, so we have contended in this chapter, Fagen had constructed out of his own Cold War version of bohemianism.

On the psychobiography front, more research could result in a fuller picture of the other half of Steely Dan, Walter Becker, whose psyche formation and later life experiences differed from Donald Fagen's in that, as we have been suggesting, Becker embodied avant-garde bohemianism to a much greater degree than did Fagen. Analysis of Becker's ambivalent embrace of quasi-New Age healthy living in Maui and his efforts to become a father and husband could give us more insights into positive psychology as it intersects with addiction and family dynamics. In terms of the psychology of mistakes and errors, this chapter could serve as a springboard for further forays into the interface between creativity and social/familial expectations. A promising theme in this line of research would be the developing artist's overriding perception that she is betraying or failing expectations even as she is carving out her own psychosocial space. We expect that a concept of errors/mistakes, if it is to be serviceable in studies of creative lives, will need further elaboration in the context either of Klein's notion of reparation (Klein 1937/1975) or of any number of similar corrective theories that attend to the aesthetic personality, such as those of Winnicott and Milner (Glover 2009).

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