

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS OF JACQUES LACAN'S "OPTICAL SCHEMA"

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Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem...

Cardinal Newman

Introduction

The debate carried on through his *Ecrits* is, Lacan wrote in 1966, "*le debat des lumires*" - the age-old intellectual struggle pursued by men and women to break out of the shadows and the images in which reality, and in particular the reality of those whom they love best, is shrouded, in order to come to live in the truth: the search for more light, "*Mehr licht*", in Goethe's dying words.

For Lacan, Freud's discovery of the unconscious subject of speech brought a major new contribution to this debate and from his early writings in the 1930's - especially in *Beyond the reality principle* - he castigated the second generation of psychoanalysts for having overlooked the epistemological implications of unconscious "thinking" and with having regressed to pre-Freudian simplifications in trying to understand the genesis of neurosis and its cure.

To summarise his critique we could say briefly that the pivotal role accorded to the functions of the ego from the 1920's on resulted from uncritical assumptions about the unity of the human *percipiens* as necessary to deal appropriately with the information received from the inside and outside world. To the extent that this unity is disturbed, it is said, the individual's relationship with reality is disturbed and neurosis or psychosis result.

The obvious fact that ego-functions like perception, understanding and judgement are required to put you in touch with external reality in order to do the shopping or to prepare and eat a meal overlooks what such routine activities may mean to a phobic, obsessional or deluded patient, and the whole of psychoanalysis is there to demonstrate that it is the unconscious structuring of the subject that allows the ego its apparently natural relationship to an already-out-there-now real world.

This central role of the unconscious is obscured by the sort of models that analysts use in order to depict the relationships between the different agencies of the psyche. Beginning with Freud's diagram of the ego with its Pcpt.-Cs eye in Chapter II of *The ego and the id* these geometrical schemas tend to be ego-centred and to bias one's thinking and practice away from the revolutionary Freudian notion of an unconscious that speaks.

The Optical Schema is presented by Lacan as a way of countering the bias produced in analysis by ego-centred diagrams and of establishing links which refer in a metaphorical way to intra-subjective structures and make it possible to represent and distinguish the imaginary and symbolic incidence of the relationships to the other in the unconscious structuring of the subject.

Since this thinking-aid is not as familiar to us as it might be I have chosen to approach it in a rather pedantic way by spelling out the different articulations given to the schema in the course of its development. However I hope that Dr. Darby's clinical addendum will go some way towards showing the concrete uses to which these apparently abstract formulations can be put.

Optics and the mental apparatus

When he first introduced the optical schema in 1954 Lacan presented it as a successor to his own mirror phase but more particularly as an attempt to take up Freud's suggestion in *The Interpretation of*

Dreams that in order to grasp Fechner's idea that "the scene of action of dreams is different from that of waking ideational life we should picture the instrument that carries out our mental functions as resembling a compound microscope or a photographic apparatus or something of the kind". The claim that optics can serve as a basis for understanding the phenomena that we have to deal with is thus solidly established in analytic tradition but it has failed to be fully exploited mainly because analysts did not heed Freud's express warning and with their psychological entification of analytic categories have mistaken the scaffolding for the building. Let's hope that we will not do the same with the optical schema.

There are two main chronological moments in Lacan's discussion of the schema:

- the first is this Seminar on Freud's Technical Writings in 1954¹ where it is introduced with reference to the topography of the imaginary and distinction between the ideal ego and the ego-ideal;
- the second is the *Observation on the paper by Daniel Lagache* written in 1960² and the final seminars on Transference in 1961³ where its principle purpose is to clarify for the analyst the position he should take up in order to respond to the transference - and especially the position he should avoid of trying to incarnate the ego-ideal for the analysand.

An optical metaphor for the first forms of the ego

¹ J. Lacan. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan BK I. Freud's Papers on Techniques 1953-1954*. Ed. J.-A. Miller. Trans. J. Forrester. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1988.

² J. Lacan. in *Ecrits*. p. 647-684. *Remarque sur le rapport de Daniel Lagache: "Psychanalyse et structure de la personnalité"*. Paris, Seuil, 1966.

³ J. Lacan. *Le Séminaire Livre VIII. 1960-1961. Le Transfert*. Ed J.-A. Miller, Paris, Seuil, 1991. *Transference*, trans. C. Gallagher (unpublished) Dublin, St. Vincent's School of Psychotherapy.

The first element in what will become the optical scheme is an actual experiment in which Lacan finds a brilliant illustration of the interdependence of the categories of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic, which he had introduced barely a year before as being essential for the understanding of the realities opened up to us by psychoanalysis. Optics too deals with the interaction of the real and the imaginary in a context which must be rigorously structured by mathematical symbolization. Lacan's major preoccupation at that time was the articulation of the notion introduced in the Rome report of symbol and language as the structure and limit of the psychoanalytic field.

Hence the attraction of an experiment which demonstrated that a particular subjective organization of the imaginary was possible only if the eye of the observer was placed in a mathematically, and therefore symbolically, defined optical cone (Figure 1).

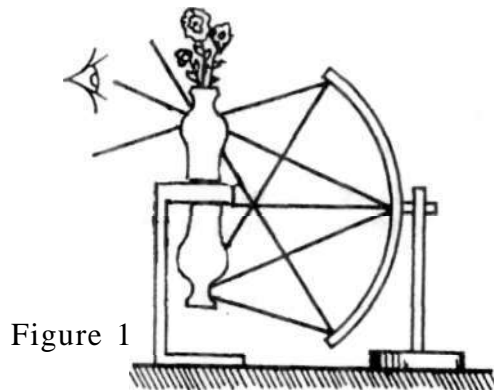


Figure 1

At the outer limits of that cone distortions occurred in the subject's perceptions and outside the cone he was confronted with naked, unsublimated reality, represented by the flowers. The primary analogy then is between the conditions necessary for the stability and coherence of optical images and those necessary for a similar stability and coherence of mental images.

Let us try to see how a consideration of the elements and relationships in this first form of the optical schema can help us to think in a more adequate way about some basic analytic notions and to make distinctions in areas which often remain confused in our handling of clinical material.

The first commonsense idea that is dispelled by the model is the notion that we have some sort of direct awareness and conceptualization of our own "biological" organism. Not so, says the schema. The real vase, which here and in all subsequent elaborations of the schema is excluded from the field of any direct perception by the support which conceals it, stands for this biological body. We have access only to its containing envelope, to its folds and orifices, and analysis has nothing to do with techniques like Yoga which try to give a heightened consciousness of the obscure processes which take place within.

We form a first pre-specular image of our bodies by way of what Lacan calls "paths of auto-conduction" by which I understand him to mean, primarily, proprioceptive sensations. This is represented in the schema by the reflection of the hidden vase in the concave mirror and by the formation of its real image at the focus of that mirror. Thus the concave mirror is to be understood here as standing for some sort of global function of the cortex.

If the bouquet of flowers is also placed at the focus of the mirror there will be a certain coincidence between the image of the vase and the flowers. The first image of the body is then like the imaginary vase which contains the bouquet of real flowers. This is the primitive ego, the *Ur-Ich*, the *Lust-Ich*, and one of the most fruitful aspects of the schema is that it forces us to wrestle with the question of what these flowers represent. If the vase helps us to visualize the container which defines what is included within and what is expelled outside the primitive ego, what do the flowers help us to say about the contents of the ego?

At this stage Lacan sees them as representing what is there at the beginning - "all the Id, objects, instincts, desires, tendencies, etc", pure and

simple chaotic reality which is neither good nor bad, but simply is or is not. But the open-necked vase which surrounds rather than enclosing the flowers provides an additional metaphor by suggesting that we should see the body-image more as a parabola than a sphere and by forcing us to question many of the received notions of inside and outside which we commonly use for example when we are trying to differentiate between an obsessional thought and a verbal hallucination.

Finally, let us consider once again the observing eye. It was the requirement that it should be situated in a mathematically defined space which first attracted Lacan to the possibility of its use as a metaphor for the analogous requirement for the human subject if he is to acquire the sense of reality that comes from an appropriate intermeshing of the real and the imaginary. If the child does not have the right to call himself Pedro then everything else is at risk. This is the first generalized introduction of the symbolic order into the schema and just as in the graph it is within this order that there will be isolated out the position of O as specifying the particular other who is for the subject the one to whom he turns as the locus of the signifier, here also O, will be further specified as the schema is elaborated.

Apart from its position, the eye at this stage also serves as a metaphor for the subject. But in this first form of the schema its position suggests rather an outside observer and it is in order to remedy this defect that in the early months of 1954 Lacan makes it more obviously subjective by bringing it into a closer relationship with the concave mirror which, despite his disclaimers about the non-organic references of his schema, he regularly says can be seen as the cortex. It is this shift that will force him to introduce a device, an *astuce* as he will describe it later, which in optical terms would allow the subject to still be able to see the image of the vase surrounding the flowers and in psychoanalytic terms will eventually allow us distinguish and to interrelate a vast range of notions which are essential to keep in mind if we are to respond appropriately to the transference.

Representations and reality

The plane mirror placed on the other side of the bouquet of flowers to the concave mirror allows us to visualize how an eye placed close by the concave mirror can see a virtual image of the flowers in the vase.

Before going on to consider the implications of this, let us pause for a moment at an intermediary stage which Lacan does not isolate but which I believe may help to provide a metaphor for the position of Melanie Klein who is Lacan's main interlocutor in his attempt to construct his version of the topography of the imaginary.

If the eye of the subject is close by the concave mirror behind the apparatus supporting the flowers and the vase (Figure 2), and does not have a plane mirror in which to see the virtual image, all it can see are these lonely flowers - an illustration of the paranoid position in which the subject is being torn apart by internal drives and in particular has to contend with its own all-consuming oral aggression. The absence of the mirror also suggests the absence of the symbolic dimension in the Kleinian approach which leaves no recourse for the subject except to construct the external world and the beings who inhabit it by way of projection of his own destructive drives and by the trial and error that his real encounters with the realities of that external world will bring.

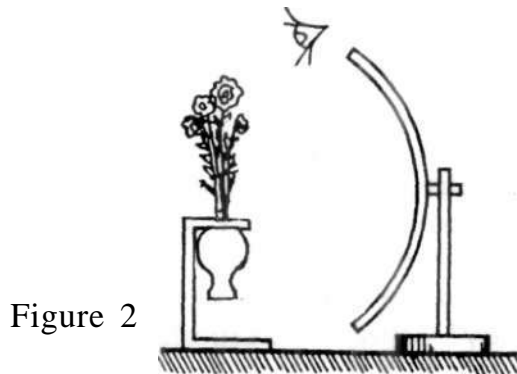


Figure 2

The plane mirror in Figure 3 is a metaphor for the real Other who addresses the inchoate subject and with whom the subject has to interact: $D \rightarrow 0$. It provides a certain reflection which is constructed with the help of words in the first learnings of language and allows the subject to form a new type of image of his body at a second remove.

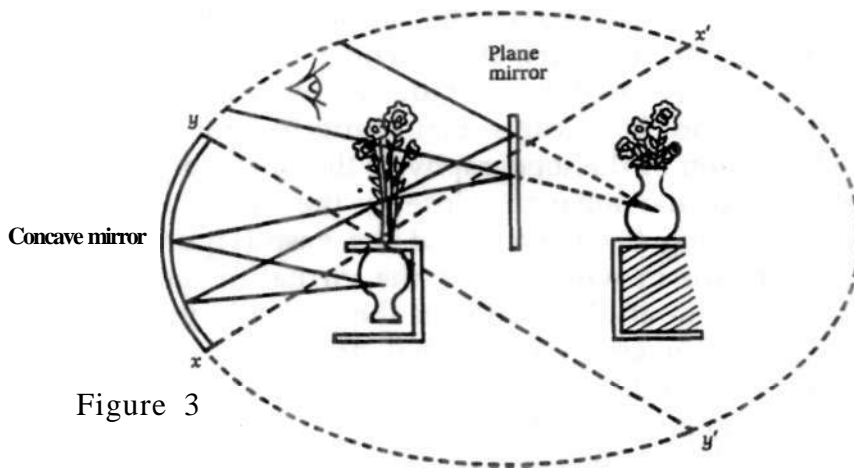


Figure 3

Figure 3 highlights a structural phenomenon which at first sight is extraordinary and is in fact impossible from the point of view of optical experimentation. The real image of the vase which is supposedly what is reflected in the plane mirror is missing from the illustration and in fact will be missing from all future versions of the schema until we come to the final one which is designed to illustrate what occurs at the end of a successful analysis.

This schematization highlights as never before the familiar notion of the primacy of the mirror image in the formation of the ego and forces us to re-think in a completely new way a question that has been present from the early stages of the mirror phase. What is the reality in front of the mirror and in what sense can the image in the mirror be said to be a reflection of that reality? Why, for example, does the anorectic not see in

the mirror the image that we see of her? Could it be because the mirror does not simply reflect an image of what already exists but rather gives an image, a representation, to what previously did not have one? Is the link between the body and its image all that natural or is it an artificial link which presupposes a very specific symbolic mediation in order to be satisfactorily completed? These are the sorts of questions which show that what we are dealing with here has the closest possible ties with clinical work and shows the need for complex formalizations in order to be able to deal with apparently simple problems.

The fuller implications of the introduction of the plane mirror are illustrated in Figure 4.

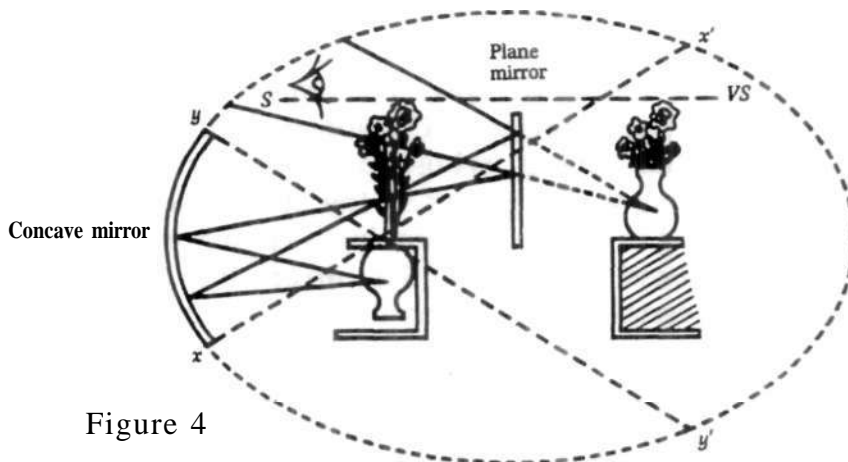


Figure 4

It is here that we begin to sense that we have now finally gone beyond the domain of optical experimentation in order to construct a schema that takes into account the structures and functions that are involved in forming an adequate picture of such familiar notions as narcissism and identification, the ideal ego and the ego-ideal.

In the first instance the mirror divides the field we are considering into the space in front of the mirror and that behind it. As a first approximation we might say that what we have in front of the mirror is a

real space within which "things" take their place and behind the mirror we have a virtual space in which their representations are formed. But what Figure 4 also shows is that there is, in addition, a real space behind the mirror - in other words that not alone can one see reflections in the mirror but one could also walk around it and see what is really behind it. It is for this reason that Lacan stresses that the mirror should not be simply seen as a conventional plane mirror but is more like a shop window in which one can see not only the reflected images of the street but also the real goods that are displayed behind the window. At other times he talks about the mirror as missing some of the silvering that makes it a reflector so that it is possible to see what exists in the real space behind. We will see later what this real space will be called on to represent - not the real of the external world but, - the real of dream-desire.

The result of this is to allow there to be represented behind the mirror not only the virtual image of the flowers in the vase but also a new entity VS, the virtual subject, whose position is defined by the same symbolic requirements which governed the eye of the observer in Figure 1. It too is presented in Figure 4 as having a certain primacy with respect to the newly introduced S in front of the mirror. It is the requirement that VS should be in a certain optical cone that defines the locus of S and not the reverse. The exact nature of this VS is left rather unclear in 1954 - it is associated with a notion of transcendence and with the *Wo Es war soil Ich werden* of human becoming - but the position it occupies remains a pivotal one and will come in 1960 to be occupied by the I of the ego-ideal. Its position behind the mirror here suggests that it is related to O but also preserves a certain autonomy with respect to it, - an indication that a reference to O is a necessary but not sufficient condition for taking one's bearings with respect to the position occupied by VS.

In Figure 4 the introduction of S (not yet provided with the bar that will later mark the division implied by its relationship to the symbolic order) accentuates the fact that the subject is not simply a seeing eye but a speaking subject. What begins to be suggested here is something that

Lacan will later formulate as the transition from $D \rightarrow 0$ to $D \rightarrow O0d$. In the $D \rightarrow 0$ formulation the Other is seen as the all-powerful locus of the code which blocks off any sense of a beyond and leaves the subject in a state of utter dependency with regard to its word. What you are must already be contained in the pre-established code of the Other. This is what the purely reflecting mirror represents, something which presents the subject with images and allows no way of relativizing or situating these images.

The fact that S is not reflected in the mirror but nevertheless has a representative of some sort behind the mirror suggests the possibility of access to a different sort of reality beyond the mirror. This is a way of representing something about the desire of the Other and therefore its incompleteness - the incompleteness of the symbolic order being a way of allowing the subject to establish an identification which goes some way towards taking into account the reality of his own want-to-be, something that will be much more central to Lacan's preoccupations when after a long detour through the graph he returns to the optical schema in 1960.

The disparate nature of the Lacanian subject

The first presentation of the optical schema to the public as opposed to those who attended the Seminar came in a version of the spoken observations made by Lacan on a paper delivered by Daniel Lagache at Royaumont in July 1958. It was written in Easter 1960 and published in June 1961 just as he was completing his seminar on *Transference*.

The illustration of the optical schema that appears in it is essentially a reproduction of the schema already produced in March 1954 - although this was not published until 1975 and there must remain some doubt as regards the fidelity with which figures drawn on a blackboard were reconstructed for publication some twenty years later. The most striking difference between 1954 and 1960 is that the elements of the schema are labelled in a way which reflect the developments in Lacan's thought over

the intervening years and in particular the increasing subtlety of his notion of the subject.

In the early versions of the Mirror Stage there was a presumption that a certain unity existed in front of the mirror - a presumption which kept us unwittingly in an ego-centric position - which was variously called the infant, the child, the subject, the fragmented body, etc. All the tensions illustrated by the mirror stage were supposed to be between this unity and its mirror image, so that the recognition, the jubilation, the narcissistic identification, the jealousy, the murderous aggressivity and the suicidal self-mutilation were all referred back to a pre-existing subject in front of the mirror. A certain reduction and normalization of the subject's tensions was then supposed to take place as a result of the introduction of the paternal imago or the name of the father, which took place with the dissolution of the Oedipus complex and established the agencies of super-ego and ego-ideal in a way that allowed an appropriate "personal equation" to be set up and access to a sublimated, rather than a raw, sense of reality to be attained.

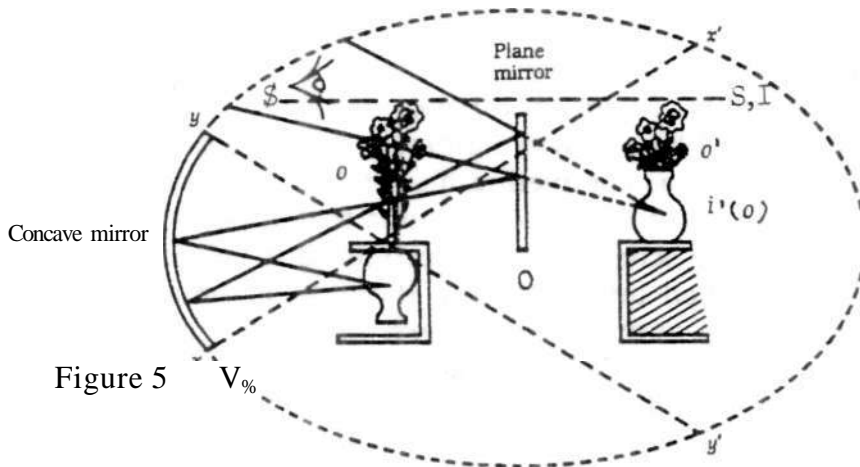


Figure 5

Here (Figure 5), the disparate and problematic nature of the Lacanian subject can be better kept in mind by considering the various elements which are in front of the mirror:

1. The eye here is no longer the disinterested and objective eye of the scientist but rather the venomous eye of the jealous infant or the lustful eye of the voyeur - the eye which eroticizes the world it contemplates and whose concupiscence is stigmatized by St. John as a source of all evil, an eye which symbolizes unbridled desire. This lustful quality is what makes so problematic the efforts to contain it within the symbolic cone from which it can perceive its body image as unified and our clinical experience shows us how often these efforts come to grief.

2. The *g* is a metaphor for the subject who is marked by the signifier before any development of his own narcissistic or imaginary world and who by that fact comes to be a speaking /demanding subject. The $D \rightarrow 0$ tension of the subject who addresses his imperious demands to the Other is represented here.

3. The most important modification of the elements in front of the mirror is the specification of the flowers as a metaphor for the *object o* which, it must be remembered, was still not fully articulated in 1960 and retained many of the imaginary dimensions of its parent, the small other, which Lacan was at this time in the process of separating out into *i(o)* and *object o*. In fact the internal logic of the schema will be one of the stimuli towards producing a purer, non-specular notion of the *object o*. Here we are left with many puzzles not the least of which is that what would later be defined by its non-specularity is pictured as having an image *o'* in the plane mirror. What we can say is that the flowers in this version of the schema take on the role of representing what is variously called the object of desire, the partial object, the pre-genital objects breast and excrement, the phallus, the *agalмата*, and even the voice of psychotic delusion...

We have here three elements in front of the mirror which appear to represent in order the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real dimension of the unconscious subject as Lacan is striving to formulate it.

Virtual and real representations of the subject

Let us now look at what is represented as being behind the mirror, keeping in mind that this behind is made up of a virtual and a real space:

1. The virtual image of the flowers in the vase has the initial value of stressing the composite nature of the source of the virtual body image, $i(o)$ and o , something which it was not possible to represent in the original Mirror Phase.

(a): $i'(o)$ represents the ideal ego, the fascinating image endowed with all the perfections which captivate the gaze of the subject and give rise not only to the jubilation of recognizing in it a salutary image but also the aggressive tension which comes from the fact that this image steals his own existence from him, highlights his own want-to-be, and puts him before the choice of submitting to its prestige and denying his own desire, like Narcissus languishing to death before the perfection of his own image, or, of maintaining with it, like Cain, a murderous, fratricidal tension. This $i'(o)$ notation throws into even starker relief something which we have already noted - the absence in front of the mirror of an $i(o)$, a real image of which it would be the reflection.

(b): We have already noted the difficulties of giving an image o' to the o in front of the mirror. However the notation has the value of circumscribing more accurately for us the place where the question of the partial object is to be situated and in particular the Abraham-type clinical experiences in which the subject sees in dreams or in delusions his own body or that of his partner entire, except for the genitals. This o' also appears to be the locus of the minus phi, -ft, which begins to be a regular reference-point around this time. Indeed in some of the later versions of the optical schema -ft will come to take the place of the flowers contained by $i'(o)$ in the mirror.

2. In the real space behind the mirror there is the further new notation of S,I - the unbarred subject and the ego-ideal. This position of

the ego-ideal behind the mirror but not in the field of reflection seems to be intended to indicate a necessary relationship with the locus of the signifier as represented by the plane mirror but also a certain ex-centricity with respect to it. This highlights for analysts the risk of indicating to their interlocutors that there is a pre-existing representation for them within the field of the analyst's knowledge, and even more the absurdity of putting themselves forward as already constituted ideals that analysands should take as a model. Like the science of Socrates, analysis must be a *docta ignorantia* which shepherds subjects towards an articulation of their own desire while avoiding the trap of imagining that this desire can ever be fully articulated as a demand. The schema thus gives a visualization to the notion that the subject can only find his or her place in the gaps of the symbolic order.

The key function that allows the subject to gain access to that place is repeatedly said to be the ego-ideal. This is a traditional psychoanalytic notion and one that was present in Lacan's theorizations from the beginning of his work and notably in *The Family*.⁴ The main difficulty for analysts has been how to explain the way in which the ideal ego of primary narcissism is articulated with this more acceptable ego-ideal and the main thrust of the observations on Daniel Lagache's paper on the structure of the personality appears to be the rejection of the notion that the ideal ego is what the subject aspires to while the ego-ideal is what he must in fact take as a model if he is to achieve normality: the subject who takes his identification from the side of the ideal ego runs the risk of displeasing authority and can only triumph if authority smiles on him despite his disobedience while the subject whose ego-ideal has been satisfactorily established follows the law of pleasing authority at the risk of not satisfying himself.

⁴ J. Lacan. *Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu (1938)* Paris, Navarin. 1984. *The Family*, trans. C. Gallagher (unpublished) Dublin, St. Vincent's School of Psychotherapy.

Lagache's formulation seems to follow the traditional line of seeing the ego-ideal as being of the same order as the ideal ego. An ego-ideal is interiorized by modifying the aspirations of the subject to omnipotence and getting him to accept a more socially acceptable role. This is a formulation which might seem to have a close relationship to Lacan's own way of insisting on the role of the name of the father as a tempering influence in the child's relationship to an omnipotent mother.

What the optical schema is designed to represent is Lacan's *new* conception of the radical otherness of the ideal-ego as opposed to the ego ideal, by clearly situating the former in the narcissistic field of the reflection of the mirror while the latter is situated in a real locus which corresponds in some way to the subject in front of the mirror but is not a reflection of it.

It has been argued that this is the point at which Lacan definitively abandons intersubjectivity and introduces a notion of the ego-ideal centred not so much on family structures and dynamics as on the radical relationship of the subject to the signifier. This may be a too-sweeping generalization but it does appear that it is by coming to "coincide" with a new sort of unity which is not a personalist, existentialist one but which is strictly defined in terms of the transmission of an *einzigster Zug* to the subject by the Other that the subject introjects an identification which allows him radically to resituate his narcissistic image and supersede the suicidal and murderous tensions which are at the core of the psychopathology with which we have to deal. The consequences of such a view-point for the technique of the analyst are obviously far-reaching since it justifies in a more radical way than ever before the reasons for using a speech-technique in order to produce fundamental changes in the structuring of the real and the imaginary.

The transmission of this *einzigster Zug* allows the collapse of narcissistic illusions without precipitating the subject into a neurotic illness - Little Hans's is a constant reference in the final seminars on transference - and also allows the final emergence of the *echte Ich* this

authentic ego which is so impoverished compared to the idealized ego of primary narcissism but which is not in a continual state of tense rivalry with that ego because, despite its poverty, it is assented to by the Other and can allow itself to be and to become.

Assent and the emergence of the *echte Ich*

Let us finally say a few words about the nature of this assent. Lacan's discrete but systematic use of the term "*assentiment*" was brought to our notice by Guy le Gaufey and it was the theme of the *Littoral* colloquium, *U assentiment a la psychoanalyse*, held in Paris in 1989.⁵ The main focus of the discussion on that occasion was the nature of the act of assenting to, as opposed to dissenting from, Freud's discovery of the unconscious and the notion of assent as a mode of transmitting the "single trait" that sets up an identification received relatively little attention.

Lacan's only published use of the term appears to be in the untranslated "*La science et la verite*" in 1966⁶ where he mentions Cardinal Newman's *Grammar of Assent* and concedes that it has a certain force "even though the purpose for which it was forged were execrable". I am not aware that any of Lacan's followers apart from le Gaufey and his colleagues at the *Ecole Lacanienne* have given any great importance to it but it does seem to be a notion that has great clinical appeal and it is from this point of view that we will look briefly at two aspects of the way it operates.

The first presentation of the notion is based on a phenomenological observation that we might well have expected to have seen introduced from the first descriptions of the mirror phase in 1936 rather than in the observations on Lagache's paper in 1960. Its omission was in fact a serious

⁵ Littoral No 29 Novembre 1989. *L'assentiment a la psychanalyse*, Toulouse, Eres.

⁶ J. Lacan. *Ecrits*, pp. 855-877.

lack and one which lead to Lacan's mirror phase being criticized as an abstract exercise which ignored the circumstance in which a baby was most likely to see its image in a mirror - when it was being carried in its mother's arms.

What Lacan now notes is the gesture of the child who after being confronted with his image in the mirror turns back towards the adult who is carrying him and catches her eye in order to obtain what? Lacan is hard put to say - an accord, a testimony, a look which by verifying the image in the mirror separates it out from the subjective jubilation with which it is assumed and thus acknowledges, assents to, the subject as a desiring want-to-be and allows him to assume as his own not only the image in the mirror but also the *echte Ich*, the authentic ego which has yet to become.

What is brought into operation by this sign of assent is the ego-ideal, transmitted, Lacan insists, not by a whole organisation of signifiers promoting a massive introjection, but by a single trait. Thus there is already a certain pacification of the tensions of narcissistic jealousy from this early stage of the infant's existence, derived from a sense of presence which Lacan says enigmatically owes nothing to the anecdotal circumstances of the one who incarnates it. Thus after having seemed to introduce a more maternal dimension into his mirror phase Lacan immediately puts up a barrier to a too-intuitive understanding of what this function of assent might be.

This first presentation is an attempt to describe an observable set of phenomena as they might take place before a simple plane mirror. These phenomena cannot simply be transposed onto the optical schema where the way in which the ego-ideal comes into play is said to be by the subject coming to "coincide" with it. How can this coincidence take place and what place does the assent of the Other have in it? How can man be helped to emerge from the field of narcissistic illusions into some sort of reality? Here we are unexpectedly led back to the bed-rock of psychoanalytic tradition:

"The first step towards reality is made at the level of and in the dream...it is by moving about in the field of the dream in so far as it is the field of the wanderings of the signifier that I can glimpse, that I can dissipate, the effects of the shadow... I gain my first access to the idea that there is something more real than this shadow... the real of desire from which this shadow separates me".

(21.6.61)

So it would be misleading to transfer the experience of the infant in front of the mirror, who turns back to catch the eye of the adult who is carrying him, to the analytic situation and to imply that the analyst must be capable of a Svengali-like look that would work its magic on the analysand. This would be to regress to a pre-Freudian hypnotic *rapport*, or to the sort of existentialist relationship to the Other that Lacan condemns as confirming the subject in an imaginary alienation. The look or any other aspect of the analyst's behaviour must be situated in the context of a certain refusal, a *Versagung*, that evokes in the subject the notion of a beyond of the Other and sustains the beginnings of a desire which will eventually allow him to come to the place that is marked in the schema by the S,I - the unbarred subject and the ego-ideal.

This seems to be what is indicated in the final configuration of the optical schema given in the paper on Daniel Lagache (Figure 6).

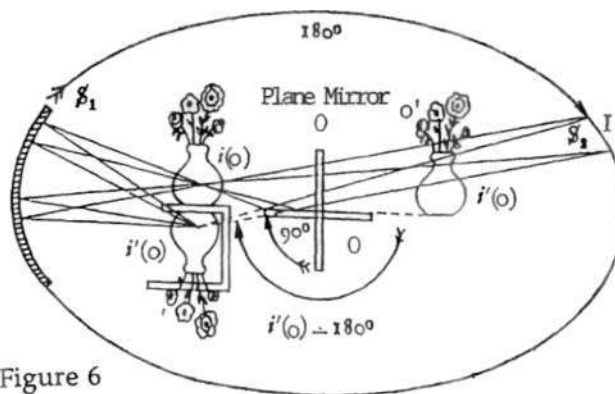


Figure 6

Outside analysis the neurotic subject manipulates the Other, turns the mirror as one turns a steering wheel in order to receive in the response of the Other, or the reflection of the mirror, a confirmation of the distorted reality required to sustain his unsatisfied or impossible desire. Within analysis it is the analyst who determines the angle of the mirror by the style of his response, or non-response, to the seductive or aggressive demands of the analysand and his final goal is to efface himself completely and in this way to allow the subject take the long and painful non-specular path indicated by the circumference of the ellipse going from $\$$ to S,I in order to take up a position at I from which he is finally able to see reality in a new way and from which, in particular, he is finally able to reconstruct the real image of his body, $i(o)$, a newly discovered ideal ego, which had for so long been obscured by the illusions of the virtual ideal ego, $i'(o)$. Illusions still exist of course, but they are now more clearly recognized as shadows when compared to the reality of $i(o)$.

This once again is a traditional datum of analysis - the subject comes to read his or her history in a way that brings a certain liberation from the fixations of the past - but the value of the optical schema is that it allows us to distinguish in our own minds psychoanalytic notions about the ideals of the person which are often so hopelessly confused or reductionist that they are virtually unusable in clinical work.

So at the end of this long and arid account of the historical development of the schema let us turn to some clinical examples in order to see whether the formalizations that we have been discussing can help us to articulate them in a more fruitful way than is usually the case.

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Clinical Material

A number of clinical cases present with a specific specular dimension. These include a wide variety of eating disorders in which disturbance of body image perception is a central theme. Patients may present with body image preoccupation post-operatively or following trauma where bodily mutilation has occurred. Distortion of body image is seen in dysmorphophobia and in certain psychoses.

Two cases highlight this specular dimension and will be examined in the light of Jacques Lacan's Optical Schema.

Miriam is a thirty years old single woman who has suffered from chronic anorexia nervosa for fifteen years. Throughout this time she has restricted her diet and has maintained an abnormally low weight in her effort to maintain the "little golden girl" image of her childhood. Her constant fear is that she could lose control of her diet and be overwhelmed by her "fat body".

She lives in a dependent relationship with her domineering mother and passive father. She turns to her mother for guidance about all aspects of her life but especially about the clothes that she wears. Her mother directs her purchases and instructs her on how to wear them.

Miriam received a telephone call at her home from a man who had dialled the wrong number, subsequent to this call she received regular erotic calls from this man who spoke of his phantasies about her. Miriam was fascinated by his words and eventually agreed to meet him.

On their first encounter, Miriam experienced a moment of awareness that this man found her physically attractive. At the same time she experienced a complete change in her perception of her own body, recognising herself as attractive, physically desirable and as desiring. Her own desire was not for this man but for an old boyfriend who had courted her many years previously but to whom she had never responded.

Jane is a fifty years old single woman whose appearance is that of a much younger woman. She has attended a number of male therapists over a period of twenty years. She has presented with symptoms of depression and has been treated with antidepressants and strong paternalistic direction.

Jane has always lived a painful dependent bond with her demanding, widowed mother. Her father died suddenly when she was aged two. She has never felt independent of her mother and has worked in a clerical job in the city, lived in uncomfortable bed-sitters and returned home to her mother's house in the country each weekend.

At the age of forty five, Jane became involved with a man whom she had admired as a friend and counsellor. They had one sexual encounter and immediately afterwards he looked at Jane's youthful body and commented on her poor breast development. Her immediate response was to reject her body as grotesque and undesirable and to seek plastic surgery as her lover had recommended. Within weeks of this event she was in surgery undergoing breast augmentation. She gave the decision hardly any thought. She phantasised that this man would visit her in hospital and she enjoyed the thought of his pleasure in her new image.

The relationship ended shortly after her surgery and with the pain of the loss came the feelings of anger towards the man and specifically towards the implanted breasts. Jane phantasised that they had been inserted just below the skin and the skin could be zipped open so she could easily remove them. When this was done "I will have my old body back".

Jane returned to the surgeon to request that the implants be removed. He could not understand her distress and looking at her breasts said "that is a beautiful job...if I had a camera, I would photograph them... they have changed your life." Jane could not communicate with him. "How can he know about my life by looking at these lumps?"

Jane felt anger that her lover had requested that she alter her image for him. She was angry that the surgeon, in agreeing to the operation, had colluded with him. She was even more angry that both had assumed that by altering her image in this false fashion, her life would be changed.

In psychotherapy with these two women, the specular image has been their central theme. In the classical anorectic fashion, Miriam is constantly preoccupied with her image; is it too fat, is it ugly, is it well dressed. In this situation, the therapist is constantly called to take up the place of the reflecting mirror. The anorectic patient attempts to turn the therapist to this position like a steering wheel as Lacan has described.

Medical therapy has recognised the captivation with the specular image which underpins these cases. Where therapy has failed this has been due to the level at which the therapist has taken up his position. Traditionally, the therapist takes up a place equivalent to that of the Big O in the optical schema, - the place of the plane mirror, totally silvered, reflecting back the specular image. Faced with this, the patient can find no way to progress beyond her knot of imaginary servitude to this image.

In medical therapy, there is a preoccupation with measurements of this body image as seen in the mirror, without acknowledgement that this image is not the Subject who stands in front of the mirror. Examples of this therapeutic blindness are seen in situations of mutilating surgery where therapeutic efforts to discuss prostheses have preceded the offer of grief counselling for the loss of the breast. In the case of Jane the surgeon is so captivated by the image of the augmented Jane that he believes that he is able to see into the subject Jane, -"they have changed your life".

In the case of both Miriam and Jane there a significant encounter with a lover each one bringing a quite different result. For Miriam who has lived most of her life captivated by her own image, lost in a mirage of narcissism, the lover comes initially as a voice over the telephone, it is his words which seduce her and allow her to turn her head in a new direction away from her image. Here the lover is met as desirer who later

with his regard can offer Miriam an assent. With this assent comes, as Lacan has described, the necessary symbolic movement in the structuring of the subject. Miriam is now in touch with something else.

For Jane, the regard she meets is not that of a desirer. When she turns her head towards her lover, her gaze is redirected back to the specular image. The Other towards whom she turns is a silvered mirror, an Other with no desire. This is an Other who gives no access to the beyond of the mirror, leaving Jane trapped in the position she has always held.

The impact of these moments highlights the significance of the Image and the Assent in the structuring of the subject and also their importance in therapy. Lacan comments on the futility of therapy which centres on the ego. He warns us that therapy is not "to put straight some sort of curvature of the ego" which is the mistake of many psychiatric approaches.

The hall of mirrors which is Lacan's Optical Schema is one in which both therapist and patient must find their way. Miriam and Jane know what it is to be trapped in front of the distorting mirror of the Big Other, here it is the mother, the surgeon, the repository of everything to be known; the solid silvered mirror. For the therapist, the place must be elsewhere, that of the mirror which cannot be tilted by the Subject to preserve her narcissistic illusions. This mirror must not be totally silvered and must be able to allow the subject to move beyond to another place, that of the authentic ego.

To be able to take up this position as big Mirror/Other where the patient can seek out the path of her desire, it is necessary that the therapist is there as desirer, always "having in reach a little well-polished desire" so that both therapist and patient can "move out of narcissistic shadows to the real of desire".

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