

THE EFFECT ON EGO FORMATION OF THE WAY A MOTHER LOOKS AT HER  
CHILD. A LACANIAN VIEW

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INTRODUCTION

You have no doubt heard that Lacan had a rather special conception of the ego. According to him, the psychological apparatus has not one center but two: the *ego* and the *subject of the unconscious*. These are two poles which are not superimposed.

Lacan liked to say that the revolution that had made possible all modern thought was not the one brought about by Copernicus, which had replaced the earth with the sun as the center of the universe, but Kepler's discovery that the planets followed an elliptical orbit - in other words, an orbit ruled not from one center, but two.

I will not address Lacan's theory of the subject today, although it certainly is one of the most interesting parts of his work, for we can grasp it only if we first understand how Lacan's conception of the ego. If the subject of the unconscious - which he calls "I" - is profoundly articulated in the Symbolic order of language, the ego is, for Lacan, an Imaginary instance that he equates with the *specular image of one's own body*. Thus, the subject apprehends his ego for the first time outside himself. The ego is therefore a product of an alienation in the image, an alienation in the literal sense of the word.

Because of this the ego has a bad reputation among Lacanians. Every serious analyst figures the work of the classical analytical treatment as a process **of taking apart** this alienating ego for the benefit of the subject of the unconscious. But what do we do when confronted with clinical cases where the alienated ego of Lacanian theory has not even been constituted yet?

When confronted with the clinical treatment of autism I discovered just how precious and indispensable this ego was, however alienated in the specular image it may be. This clinical work, insofar as it plays out the failure of the constitution of the ego, seems to me to be capable

of shedding light on it in a very interesting way. Isn't it always the pathological that reveals the normal to us?

**The non-gaze between mother and infant as one of the princeps signs of autism.**

Louise was four-and-a-half years old when we first met. She was energetically emerging from a primary autism that had been diagnosed when she was six months old, at which time it had been possible to establish an early therapeutic work with mother and child. I listened with much interest to the mother's poignant account of how the diagnosis had been made: during a visit to the pediatrician, who happened to be very sensitive to questions of early diagnosis, the mother heard him say, "Your child doesn't look at you." Then the mother, herself a pediatrician, heard herself utter the word "autism" at the same time as her colleague. Afterwards, she made an enormous effort to reconstruct the events surrounding Louise's birth, and told me, with much subtlety, how she had not been aware of anything: at the time of the birth, she had had eyes only for her laundry, overcome by a passion for ironing which had "folded" her in upon herself, a somewhat puzzling passion in a woman with a very rich intellectual and artistic life. What had masked this non-gaze between Louise and her mother was the child's strabismus.

The fact is that even if strabismus enables a refusal of the gaze to be masked, this refusal is just as often found in autistic babies who have no squint. One might wonder if this strabismus is not the effect, rather than the cause, of the babies' not using their eyes to look at the Other. We know that the strabismus ceases when these children succeed in entering into a therapeutic relationship, and reappears only sporadically, at moments corresponding to breaks in the relationship.

This non-gaze between mother and infant, together with the mother's unawareness of the non-gaze, constitutes one of the *signes princeps* that enable us to state an hypothesis of autism during the first months of life (stereotyped movements and self-mutilation occurring only during the second year.)

If this non-gaze does not necessarily lead to a characteristic autistic syndrome later on, it indicates, in any case, a major difficulty at the level of the specular relationship to the Other. Without intervention, these are infants for whom the *mirror stage* is in great danger of not being

constituted, or at least of not being properly constituted. I suppose you know what importance Lacan accorded to that particular time of the recognition, through the Other, of the *specular image*, that moment when the infant turns toward the adult who is carrying it and asks him to ratify, with his own gaze, the image that the infant perceives in the mirror. The establishment of this relationship with the mirror-image corresponds to a moment in both the logical and chronological sense. It is established around the sixth month of life, except in the case of autistic children, where it either cannot be established at all, or can be established only belatedly, within the framework of a therapeutic relationship. It is interesting to note that this is one of the very rare references to time found in the work of Lacan, who always vigorously resisted genetic conceptions of a chronological and linear development of the psychical apparatus. The *mirror stage* is moreover one point of Lacan's theory that Winnicott took into account. This moment of jubilant relationship with one's *body-image* in the mirror is crucial because it is this image which will give the baby his sense of the unity of himself and of objects, and provide the basis for his relationship with others, his own peers. This is what Lacan called the function of the *specular image*.

### **A study of babies who do not look at their mothers**

Let us leave for a moment the too-narrow framework of autism - we know the rarity of genuine autistic syndrome - in order to concern ourselves more generally with very early troubles in the relationship with the Other, those which occur before the baby has reached the *mirror stage*.

An article by Selma Freiberg, published in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* in 1982, is extremely attentive with regard to clinical description. It deals with research based on the care of dozens of mother-infant couples. Ms. Freiberg describes infants who, although they have no organic problem and are being raised by their mothers, nevertheless manifest symptoms of maternal deprivation similar to those which occur in hospitalism. But these babies characteristically display an additional feature: they selectively avoid the face and voice of their mother. Not only do they not look at her, but they neither smile at nor vocalize to her, nor do they appeal to her when in distress; rather, they give no sign of registering any perception when

the maternal face or voice comes undeniably into their perceptual field. There is no pause in their visualization, no facial movement that would indicate a . One might say that what occurs here is a selective editing of the perceptual signs corresponding to the mother.

These babies display a second clinical characteristic. Selma Freiberg calls it "freezing." They can remain for long periods of time without moving a muscle; and if suddenly they consent to extend a hand towards a stimulus, they collapse into cataclysmic distress, as if they had gone all to pieces. It seems, then, that even at the level of the body itself as a unity, there is the impossibility of managing any excitation, except through a radical avoidance of it.

### **A metapsychology of the first foundations of the psychical apparatus**

But Selma Freiberg finds herself short on metapsychology to account for the clinical features that she so astutely points out. She was, as you know, a psychoanalyst working in the United States, and had been influenced by genetic conceptions of child development. Thus she thought, following closely upon Spitz's work, that when a baby turns toward its mother to ask or to appeal, when it smiles at the face of its mother, when it shows signs of recognizing her voice, all this ties in with stages of development that are chronologically established. Imagine Ms. Freiberg's confusion when she had to state that, in certain cases, the infant's forms of appeal or relational gestures not only could not be established, but even gave rise to an active refusal on the infant's part.

I propose to use the term "at-home hospitalism" to describe a situation where the mother, while physically inhabiting the same space as the child, and while performing the acts necessary for satisfying the infant's needs, cannot gaze at it. But first of all, what ought we to understand here by the word *gaze* ?

### **The Gaze is not Sight**

The work of Selma Freiberg allows us to draw a clear distinction between the question of the *gaze* and the question of *sight*. given that, at time of that research, she was already a specialist in the study of blind babies. She notes that the latter respond to the gaze of their mother: they

smile while touching her face and appeal to her upon hearing her voice. Whereas the babies discussed in the aforementioned article avoid both the face and the voice of their mother.

Lacan was very interested in Jean-Paul Sartre's work on the question of the gaze. The gaze, as Sartre describes it in *Being and Nothingness*, as opposed to sight, refers to the notion of presence. This presence can be signified to me by two eyeballs directed at me, in which case, the eye would be the sign of libidinal cathexis rather than the organ of sight. But this experience of presence can also manifest itself through a noise, a voice. Moreover, Sartre defines the ego and the body as effects of the gaze.

Not only is Lacan's notion of presence directly derived from that of Sartre, but Sartre always wrote the Other with a capital O, as Lacan will do later throughout his work. The concept of the Other in the work of Lacan is extremely complex. Even though the term has been borrowed from philosophic thought, it is very useful for shedding light on the clinical reality of the psychical apparatus. It will be evoked here as, above all, an agent of the gaze which provides a basis for the unity of the body. Already we can perceive the value of distinguishing a Big Other from all the little others with whom we establish dual specular relationships in our everyday life. What happens in the first months of life between a parent - usually the mother - and her baby, that particular quality of her presence, of her gazing at him, this is what will determine whether or not imaginary relationships with the little others will ever be able to exist.

In view of this, it is interesting to note the absolutely dissymmetrical character of the relationship - gazing and being gazed at - at this founding moment between the infant and the parent. I will say that the parent's personal subjectivity is not at issue here; what is at issue is a symbolic function of which the parent is merely the agent. Thus, in this role, the mother occupies the place of the Other for her child. She is not simply one of his own peers, his other. Sartre did not grasp the structural dissymmetry, and Lacan moved away from the Sartrean conception of the Other the moment he gave metapsychological status to the difference between the Other and the other.

How may we imagine the process by which maternal representations could interfere with the baby's *body-image*. To try to answer this, let me offer a model which seems to me to account for the articulation between organic reality and the gaze of the Other in the constitution of one's

*own body*. I have already emphasized that the baby perceives his own unity and that of objects only after he has recognized his *specular image* in the mirror. I will now try to show how the pre-form of that *specular image* is established.

### An optical model for the establishment of the *body-image*

For the purposes of illustration, I will resort to a trick of optical physics. It is a schema, which we have thanks to a M. Bouasse, which shows how to create the illusion that a bouquet of flowers hidden from the observer's field of vision is rising up out of a vase that is really there. Bouasse makes use of the optical qualities of the concave mirror. It links the *real object* - the vase - with something which also seems to be there, which seems to be one with that *real object*, but which, nevertheless, is merely an image. In his schema, Bouasse calls the flowers which are not there the *real image*. A subject can see the flowers above the neck of the vase and experience the illusion of seeing the two, the *real object* and the *real image*, forming a set, a unity.

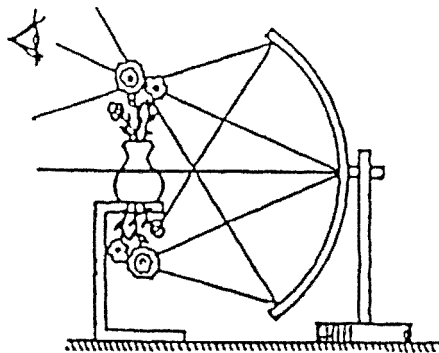


Fig. I

The beauty of this optical schema is that it provides an excellent metaphor for the first foundations of the psychical apparatus. The illusory unity formed by the vase and the flowers allows us, by analogy, to grasp the constitution of one's *own body*. This schema is really a find, since it presents a *montage* of a *real object* and a *real image*, of something which is there and something which is not there, an illusion. The *own body* would be the fruit of the articulation between the baby's *real* - let's call it his organism, to put it simply- and something which, according to my hypothesis, would come to be incorporated into it; an image which, through the

effect of what I have called the Parent's gaze, would come to be united with the baby's *real*. Let us note that here there is an image only for the psychological apparatus of the parent. I do not credit the baby's subjectivity with an active role; on the contrary, it seems to me that here we are only at the inaugural point of the rising up of the unconscious structure. In order to render more palpable the metaphoric use I wish to make of this schema, I suggest imagining for a moment that the vase is a potty while the flowers are a crowned cherub. This paradoxical image enables us to grasp the particular bond between the *real* of the infant - the organism whose filling up and emptying aspect is nicely figured by the potty - and that "something" which is still only an image, an anticipatory representation, the "His Majesty the Baby" Freud speaks of in *On Narcissism: An Introduction*. This exercise might appear dangerous, insofar as it runs the risk of an imaginary reification, something that Lacan was always trying to avoid, and the reason why he employed abstract graphs in support of his thought. Nevertheless, this figuration takes into account a kind of truth that was not unknown to the Flemish primitive painters. At the Museum of Ancient Art in Brussels, you can contemplate some nativity scenes whose iconography captures exactly what we are talking about here. You can see, lying there on the straw between the kneeling figures of the mother and father, a baby whose skinniness and ugliness recalls that of premature newborns. Nevertheless this detail is visible only to the careful observer, the fervent gazes of the parental figures envelope the little figure in such a way that they mask his pale reality. And, so that no doubt can remain as to his majesty, the body of the infant is completely encircled by a halo. Here we are faced with a truly idealized image, center of cathexis, and love object.

But let us return to the optical schema. Lacan often referred to it. However, he used it to study the complete specular relationship, that of the already established *mirror stage*. In order to be able to do this, he introduces an additional element into the schema of Bouasse. Effectively, in the device such as we have seen it up till now, the subject of the gaze, the eye, cannot be the child himself - here figured by the vase with flowers- but must be an Other. For the child to be able to see himself, Lacan proposes some modifications to the original schema, notably the introduction of a flat mirror. Thus he will be able to introduce the moment where the subject, still infant, jubilantly recognizes himself in the image which is offered to him.

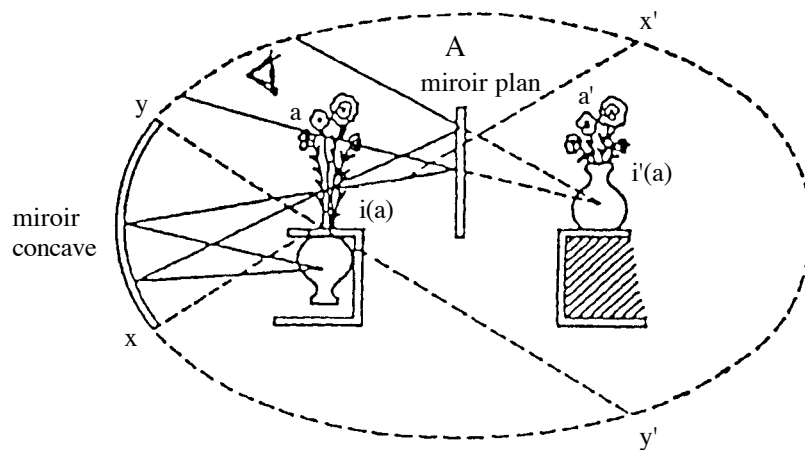


Fig. II

In the virtual space, which is located beyond the flat mirror, a *specular image* is going to be formed, which Lacan will call  $i'(o)$ , and it is there that the subject will recognize himself as ego. We are at the level of what Freud calls secondary narcissism.

Nevertheless, the clinical study of autism teaches us that it is possible for the *mirror stage* not to be established. I propose therefore to employ the optical schema in an attempt to grasp what comes into play before the establishment of the specular relationship, by trying to situate within the schema the role of the Other in the establishment of one's *own body*, the pre-form of the *specular image*, and thus of the ego, in Lacanian theory. It is Lacan himself who asserts that the role of the parental Other plays a part in the constitution of what, for Freud, belongs to the register of primary narcissism. This advance of Lacan's thought seems to me to be very important for the study of early psycho-pathologies.

To show you how, I will go back to the first schema, that of Bouasse. First of all, let us observe the set formed by the *real object* making one with the *real image* - the vase with the flowers. Here we are in the register of the *Ur Ich* (primordial ego), the pre-form of the *specular image* which, it seems to me, figures the constitution of one's "*own body*." The flowers crowning the vase represent the objects of libidinal cathexis over the body of the infant. Lacan will later call them *little o objects*, and will say that they constitute the reserves of libido in one's *own body*.



### **A First recognition allows for the possibility of the constitution of one's *own body***

I have already mentioned the importance that Lacan, from his earliest description of the *mirror stage*, accorded to that particular moment of the recognition of the *specular image* by the Other: that moment when the infant turns toward the adult who is holding him and asks him to confirm, with his own gaze, the value of what it sees in the mirror. It is at this moment that the infant becomes conscious of its *own body* as a totality, even before it has integrated its motor functions and truly mastered its body.

What I want to demonstrate is that there is not one recognition, but two, and that the recognition associated with the *mirror stage* would become possible only as a result of an original recognition.

My hypothesis consists then in positing the necessity of a first recognition, this one unsought, but without which there would not even be the possibility of constituting one's *own body*. The *real image*, - the metaphor for libidinal cathexis - can be formed only in the *gaze of the Other*. The libidinal cathexis made by the parent takes the form of what Lacan calls the *little o objects*, which will be projected over the boundaries of the *real body*, let's say the *organic*. The *unity of one's own body*, thus constituted, then makes possible the establishment of the *specular image of the mirror stage*, and the infant's access to a *body-image*.

Nevertheless, there are infants who do not exhibit jubilation, who remain indifferent before their image in the mirror, as if they didn't see it, and still others who do not turn to seek recognition in the gaze of the person who carries them. To argue the hypothesis that I have just formulated means to consider that the impossibility of the child's acceding to the *mirror stage* stems from a failing at the level of that first recognition. This failing could also account for the avoidance described by Selma Freiberg in the article cited earlier, avoidance which evokes a foreclosure, an excision (*Verwerfung*, refusal) of perceptual signs having to do with the mother's gaze, in the sense of presence, of libidinal cathexis.

### **The Function of Lack in the Parental Other**

At this point, before I can go on, I must pose another question: where does the *real image* originate, that *real image* which has been linked with the Freudian notion of libidinal cathexis ?

In order to answer this question, we must start with Lacan's reprisal of the optical schema, in his Seminar on Anxiety (1963)

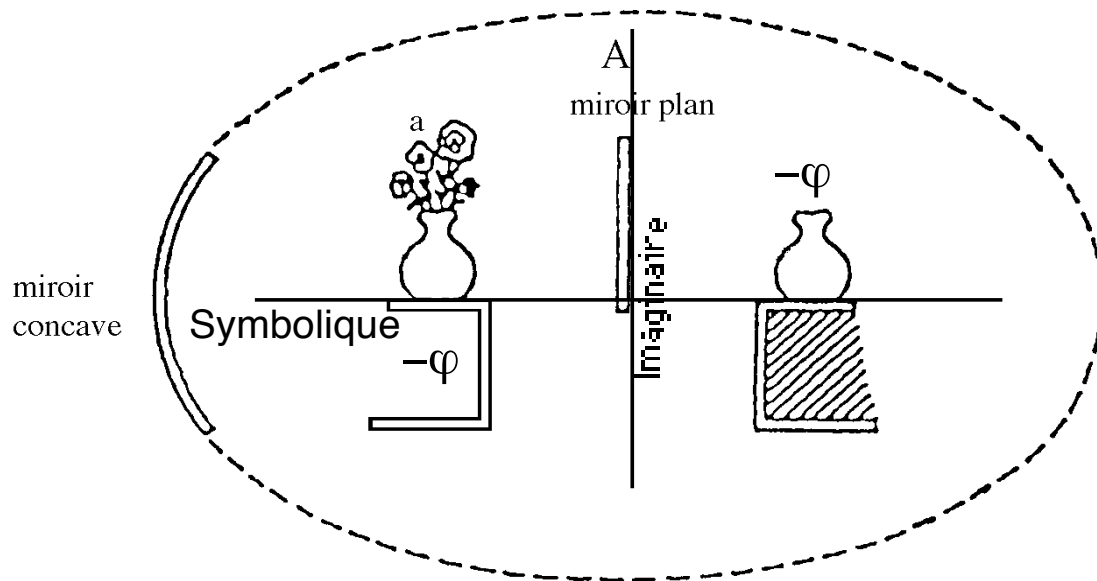


Fig III.

Right away we notice a first fundamental difference between this schema and Bouasse's: the flowers - the metaphor for the *little o objects* - which appeared above the vase, are no longer the exact duplicate of another bouquet hidden beneath the table, but rather the effect, the reflection of a lack, which Lacan writes:  $-\phi$  (minus phi).

Here is how clinical work with autism leads me to read this figure: the one who occupies the place of the primordial Other gives what he lacks, and this produces the establishment of the parental cathexis on the child, allowing for the constitution of its *own body*.

But first, who occupies the place of this Other? It seems reasonable to think that the mother would occupy it during the infant's first months., although we will see further on, in the clinical case I will briefly discuss, that a father can occupy the place of the Other's founding gaze. Then how are we to understand the term *the Other's lack*? I will approach this question obliquely, through the bestowal of a lack in the phenomenon of being in love. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud says that the lover attributes to the beloved - the one set in the place of the Ideal - all the qualities of which his ego has deprived itself. For Freud, being in love is a process of impoverishing the ego. Lacan will interpret this process as a

structural necessity: in love, he will say, what is given to the beloved is exactly what the subject does not have.

Let us return now to Figure III. : The Other - like the lover - gives what he does not have. This lack, in the Lacanian algebra, is written -  $\phi$  . This operation - the bestowal of a lack - literally produces the *little o objects*. This is a Symbolic operation which will enable us to see the *real* of the infant's body - figured by the vase-- arising, libidinally cathected. This Symbolic operation therefore brings about the coupling of the Real with the Imaginary, since it is this operation that allows for the establishment of the *body-image*.

With its halo of libidinal cathexis, the infant might be said to be *phallicized*. Indeed, the fact that the infant is desirable in the gaze of others, and of its parents in particular, is what confers a phallic value on it in the conception of Lacan. We have very rapidly touched upon two important aspects of Lacan's theory: the relationship of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic; and the concept of the Phallus.

If we look again at Figure III, we see that the virtual image, the one formed behind the flat mirror, no longer presents a bouquet of flowers, the figuration of the *little o objects*. This object no longer has a *specular image*, which causes the appearance of a lack, indicated by minus phi ( $-\phi$  ). Lacan calls this the *non-specularization of the phallus*. We notice that the phallicization of the infant takes place only in what we have called *the Other's gaze*. Here we must employ the capital O for clinical reasons, since in his relationship with his image, with the other, his neighbor or counterpart, the subject can see himself only as marked by lack.

Obviously, if in our day-to-day relationship with our *specular image* - in front of our mirror, or in our contacts with our own peers - we could recover the image of ourself encircled by a halo of its brilliance and worth, we would not need to seek in the gaze of the lover, the gaze of someone set up at that moment in the Other's place, that image of ourselves glimpsed in the blind gaze of maternal love. We would only have to remain - like Narcissus - riveted to that mirror, to our *specular image*.

How does this image, which allows for the constitution of the *Ur Ich* (primordial ego), formed in the Other? We have seen the determining place of the lack in the psychical structure, the place of the void, of the hole, in which this *little o object* can be produced.

### **What can cause the failure of the establishment of the specular relationship ?**

I will say that certain mothers are not deceived by any *real image*, and thus by no anticipatory image; they see the *real* itself in all its barrenness. These are mothers who do not easily let themselves be misled. When I pointed out to the mother of an autistic child that he had just said "give," she retorted, rightly, that it was only a babble-sound somewhere between "tive" and "pive." She was correct, and yet, the impossibility, for her, of anticipating the word, made it impossible for that word to occur. For the absence of the *real image* leaves the infant with no *own body*, thus rendering problematic the experience of the unity of the body, and consequently, of the ego. There is no longer anything but "freezing" which might, as with the babies described by Selma Freiberg, stand up to the experience of bursting, of "going to pieces" which is its lot from then on.

My hypothesis, then, is that there is a structural, necessary moment, established by the first recognition by the Other's gaze. This structural time allows for the organization of one's *own body*, the Urbild (pre-form) of the *body-image*, a condition that is preliminary to the establishment of specular relationships, and thus, to the establishment of the ego. But what could cause the failure of the establishment of this structure ?

It seems to me that there are at least two possible configurations. There could be a lack of lack in the mother. In this first situation, we must look at the question of the failure of something in the symbolic order within the mother. A failure which would render impossible the establishment of the *real image* and thus render impossible the libidinal cathexis of the child, and its feeling of having an *own body*.

### **Clinical material pertaining to the psychoanalytic treatment of a four year-old girl: Louise**

When I meet her at four years of age, Louise is no longer the hypotonic, "rag-doll" baby that she was. Thanks probably to the work that mother and child have done with a psychomotor re-educator very sensitive to questions of analysis, Louise not only walks, but also lets me hear a

certain number of utterances, among which some little nursery songs are especially recognizable. Aside from that, there are mainly broken, truncated, or incomprehensibly mumbled words.

I perceive rather quickly that these words that are broken or addressed to no one in particular come from nursery songs dealing with the relationship between fathers and daughters. I therefore get into the habit of listening very attentively to Louise's words. I wrote an article about this first period of her treatment, but unfortunately it is not translated into English. Here I will refer to a fragment of this clinical material, a fragment which seems to me to illustrate in a striking way the question of what I call the founding gaze of the primordial Other.

Seven months after the start of her treatment, a new refrain came out of her, uttered, as usual, completely out of context, and shouted out to no one in particular: "Alexandre, Alexandre ! What are you doing, Alexandre ?!" I learn from her parents that she yells this all day long, and that apparently there is an Alexandre in her class who is a troublemaker. Since the refrain literally invades the following sessions, I go get some wooden figurines and suggest using them to represent the children in the class. She lets me do it, then seems to decide that one figurine will be Alexandre. In the next session he becomes "Monsieur Alexandre !" and, next to the figurine that she has chosen to represent him, she places a tiny girl figurine, whom she calls Marceline. In the following sessions she goes to get the same figurines.

After I question them, Louise's parents inquire at the school: there is no Marceline at all. So where could this name come from?

Finally, after several days of not understanding anything when faced with this insistent refrain, the mother bursts out laughing as she suddenly remembers that there is a friend of Louise's father named Alexandre, who has a son named Marcelin ! She tells me that this Monsieur Alexandre is the only one their friends who always has a gaze of recognition for Louise, looking upon her as an extraordinary child. At this moment we hear the following utterance come forth from Louise's mouth, rattled off, as usual, as if to no one in particular: " A tremendous baby! See! see! (*Un bébé formidable ! A voir! à voir!*).

But where could this utterance come from? I am bewildered.

Well ! Her mother tells me it is from a *Gargantua for Children* tape that lately Louise has been playing all day long. So it was from Rabelais! I think you all know of the famous

French Renaissance writer and humanist who wrote the tale of the baby giant, Gargantua. But why is Louise interested in it ?

The mother says, "It's because my daughter is voracious." I communicate my bewilderment to her, and ask her to bring the text, so that in rereading it to Louise, we might locate the passages which interest her.

These are the fragments which interest her: "Once upon a time, in the castle of la Devinière, in Touraine, there was a giant .... who was not yet born. His father-to-be, Grangousier, lord of the place....." and what follows no longer holds her interest. Then, again: "This Grandgousier had taken as his wife Gargamelle, daughter of the king of the Parpaillots." That is what she retains. Then she leaves what follows in order to focus on the gaze of the assembled people at the newborn: "A tremendous baby." And here she is really in ecstasy. But she systematically modifies the baby Gargantua's first cry of appeal, which is no longer, "Drink ! Drink!" (à boire! à boire!), but "See! See!" (à voir! à voir!).

Then she skips over all the intervening text and goes right to the end, which is about the birth of Gargantua's son Pantagruel. About this birth the text of her little book says, " Gargantua had a son by Badebec, who, alas, died in bringing the baby into the world." The father, who is initially in tears, inconsolable, will exclaim at the sight of his son, "Oh, my son, my little tootsy, how pretty you are, how happy I am!" - which Louise utters jubilantly. It is then that I notice her squint has practically disappeared.

### **What lessons can we derive from this clinical fragment ?**

It seems to me that these utterances which could have remained a litany in the Real, encountered the hearing of an Other who played exactly the role that Freud, in *The Joke and Its Relationship to the Unconscious*, informs us is that of the *dritten Person*, the third person, the one who, hearing a defective neologism, something unintelligible, incomprehensible, enigmatic, far from rejecting it as being outside the code, lets himself, after a period of bewilderment, be transported by the enlightenment of a joke that he recognizes in it. *Bewilderment* and *enlightenment* are terms suggested by Heymans, whom Freud cites, and in whose work he found

his famous example of the "famillionaire." In my opinion, there is here a direct connection with what I have just explained at length regarding the founding gaze of the primordial Other.

But, you will ask me, what connection is there then between Freud's *dritten Person* and the original Big Other? Well it is precisely on this person, the one who understands that there is a joke where there seems to be only a defective word or neologism, that Lacan bases his concept of the Big Other in his Seminar of 1957-1958, *The Formations of the Unconscious*.

What does Lacan tell us ? Faced with a neologism, a deformed, or truncated word, the Other has two alternatives. In the first, he rejects, he sets himself up as an authority and states, "This means nothing, he (or she) says no-matter-what." In this situation, the Other, through his judgment of rejection, remains unbreached. What does unbreached mean here? We must take it in its literal sense, as meaning not marked by any breach, by any sign which would indicate that something is missing from him, even if this were only the knowledge about a signifier that is incomprehensible to him.

**It is only when the Other lets himself be bewildered that the joke becomes possible.**

The other alternative is the one suggested by Freud through his idea of the role of the third person, of a *dritten Person*, in the constitution of a joke. This is not necessarily the person to whom the child's utterance is addressed, but rather the one who lets himself be bewildered. If while listening to Louise I think that the utterance she makes is at least a formation of the unconscious, and is perhaps even a joke, Louise finds herself face-to-face with an Other, represented by me, who lets himself be bewildered when confronted with this incomprehensible, unintelligible word. The German word for bewilderment is *Verbluffung*, which could also mean amazement or stupefaction.

Then Freud devotes an entire chapter to the second moment, when the *dritten Person*, this third person, lets itself be overcome by the enlightenment of the word he has just heard. What Freud calls enlightenment is the driving pleasure (he uses the term *Lust*) experienced by this third person, a pleasure signified by his smile, and by his feeling that it is necessary to communicate what he has heard to others- which is, in fact, what I am doing here.

But let us return to the clinical fragment about Louise. You remember that she speaks of Monsieur Alexandre and of the little girl called Marceline. When the mother, who for a certain time had been trying with me to find out what this Alexandre-Marceline refrain could be referring to, finally understood that it was a feminine double of the real Marcelin, she experienced manifest bewilderment and amusement. Alexandre was precisely that friend of the family who had always recognized the ways in which Louise was extraordinary. It is at that moment that we heard Louise utter, to no one in particular, "A tremendous baby! See! See!" - the utterance from her Rabelais for children.

### **Louise's interpretation of the Rabelaisian myth**

If we follow step-by-step the fragments of the text by Rabelais that held Louise's attention, we must state that they are mainly about filiation, especially paternal filiation. Each time she emits the utterance "his father-to-be," it seems to me that she emphasizes it with particular accent, as if there were something important in it, that the father's name is there even before the child's birth.

When the text of her story says: "This Gargantua had taken Gargamelle as his wife," Louise hurries to add "daughter of the king of the Parpaillots." What catches her attention is the recognition of a filiation referring to a named father.

Then she skips over the following part in order to concern herself mainly with the passage where the people gather around to gaze at the newborn Gargantua. And here she is overjoyed. But she systematically modifies Baby Gargantua's first cry of appeal which is no longer "Drink! Drink", as in the text, but " See! See!" It is not that she has misunderstood the word; in fact, if while reading aloud I myself exchange *à boire* for *à voir*, she corrects me right away!

I propose to consider this change of one letter, which substitutes the demand to be gazed at for the demand for the fulfillment of a nutritional need, as a joke. For it reveals what had fallen below: a demand cannot be reduced to the satisfaction of a physical need; rather, it admits of something beyond the need, something which belongs to the order of desire, the desire of/for the Other. The appeal for the gaze seems to me to provide a fitting metaphor for this.



Louise's mother was very happy to discover in her daughter a reader, and even interpreter, of the Rabelaisian myth. Then she questioned her mother, Louise's grandmother, and found out the following story:

The grandmother is the second of three children. When the third child of that family was born, the mother, that is, Louise's grandmother, suffered a post-partum mental breakdown, and disappeared forever. Now this woman, Louise's great-grandmother, had lost her own mother, who died giving birth to her.

Louise is the second child of her parents, but in her medical record it is written that she is her mother's third pregnancy, the latter having had an abortion many years before. Now when Louise's mother was pregnant with Louise, her own mother had told her, "This child will kill its mother." - a sentence that was disconnected and incomprehensible at the time, the grandmother herself not knowing what she meant.

This second configuration occurs when a mother is capable of "dreaming her baby," capable in her unconscious fantasy life of picturing it to herself as that "His Majesty the baby" of which Freud speaks. But for her, the child's *real* does not come to be united with *real image*, the two remaining radically separate. In order to situate this eventuality within the optical schema, I will say that everything happens as though the mother's eye were not in the proper place within the cone. She sees both the *real object* and the *real image*, disunited, with no relationship between them. Let us say that the idealized baby of her dreams is not superimposed upon the *real* of the infant before her. In the case of Louise this happened for symbolic reasons - because of her place in the birth order - place marked by a prohibition of love cathexis, for she has been appointed to the place of ancestors who had to be erased or excised (*verworfen*) from the psychical apparatus of her mother.

Thus, with clinical cases such as these, our work consists in allowing for the establishment of the ego as fundamental alienation in the *specular image*, as the foundation for imaginary relationships. We therefore have to work in reverse with respect to classical analytical treatment, in which, at least for Lacanians, we must manipulate that same flat mirror to make appear the dimension of alienation of that construction of the ego.