

The basic interrelationship:

In the broad sense, the Imaginary order is the domain of the imago and relationship interaction, the Symbolic the sphere of culture and language, and the Real that which is concrete and full, that is, the domain of objects and experiences. The Real stands behind the Imaginary and the Symbolic, which exist in a sense to account for the Real that shapes them, and upon which they in turn put their stamp: the Imaginary through the logic of identification, the Symbolic by a differential logic that names, codifies, legalises. (131)

Real objects and events as well as Symbolic language and cultural codes are transformed and made personal by Imaginary mirror-stage processes, and then returned to the world in the universalising (but not objective) Symbolic system of language that named the Real in the first place. (77). Lacan describes these as interrelated in a Borromean knot, wherein if a single ring is broken, the others are loosened as well, suggesting that a shift in equilibrium between the three orders has similar effects on the psychic system. (131)

Let's look at the **Imaginary** again, the domain of the ego as "moi" (as opposed to the speaking ego, the "je")

Lacan's theory of the emergence of the ego is anti-biological in a fundamental way: not that he wants to say that genetic potential doesn't exist, but that the unfolding of that potential takes place in a space that is already filled with images (the domain of the imaginary) and language (the domain of the symbolic), and these condition each biological and developmental stage (genetic potential may be said, in this sense, to belong to the Real). Moreover, the primacy of the outside world in structuring the identity of an individual is fundamentally linked to the infant's (and individual's) dependence on the outside for survival, which leads to a necessary integration or assimilation of the world around it. Finally, any human identity is highly personalised since the particular images, effects, objects it encounters are infinitely variable and combinable.

The mirror-stage thus provides a metaphor for the dynamic process of self-constitution: it focuses on the function of the image or imago to establish a relationship between the organism and its reality through the process of introjections, the internalisation of an "ego ideal" which it assumes as its own even as its physical reality doesn't possess the kind of coherence that it attributes to the image. Thus, mirror stage identifications entail (1) the discovery of difference and (2) the concomitant experience of awareness of the existence of the self qua moi. "The first subjective human knowledge comes from a fascination with the human form which the infant perceives to be an ideal unity. The identification both symbolises the acquisition of a mental permanence but at the same time and at the cost of the subject's alienation away from the naturalness of spontaneous fusion and toward a cultural dependency. In other words, we have the "pre-mirror" experience of a fragmented body in parts, which is overcome by the identification with a unified body, the image that comes, however, from the outside (is fictional, and artificial). In this sense, the mirror stage is a vision of the harmony of a subject essentially

in discord: it is a drama that moves from a sense of insufficiency to one of an anticipated wholeness, but ultimately not one of unity.

Thus, the mirror stage never goes away but continues to repeat in adult life in the spatial lures of identification with perceived likenesses. The primordial pre-mirror moi is a scaffolding of individuality formed through a primary identification with images, objects and others as a strategy of defence. The secondary, mirror stage identification brings an intimation of unity and continuity via the human Gestalt": when the other (the image, the mother) supports one's moi identification, when it recognises one's being, it establishes for the self that moment of desired unity upon the ground of a fundamental discord. One can never get rid of the narcissistic moi since this is the source of identity, and thus the real object of love or desire is not the person or object desired but the identification with the object or person of love, that is, to be recognised, to be loved by another, to put oneself in the place of the one who is desired. It marks always therefore a sense of lack, of one's dependence upon others to be oneself, the dependence upon specular recognition for its own existence and perpetuation.

The object (desire for recognition)

Mother (mirror)

moi (alienated)

In conscious life the moi reappears as this narcissistic and aggressive intentionality, repeatedly constructing the self via such successive identifications, each like the layer of an onion. It is thus the nexus of unifying and moralising tendencies, of ethical judgements (this is good because I like it). Lacan's point is that the moi or ego is not something that is in reality integrative, holding the person together, a core that one has from the very outset. If it functions as this (if it appears in this fashion) it is because it is others in Real situation that enable the moi to reconstitute itself continually. These others hold the human subject together by their recognition and reflection. The imaginary as parole (the way in which I make meaning mine, voice my desires, going beyond the "content" of what is said to what is unsaid in the utterance as well).

[Need: purely physical and aims at immediate satisfaction and survival; Desire replaces the Freudian wish and is rooted in the unconscious as a referential content for desire as libidinal function, which is displaced into conscious life. Demand or appeal to the Other reveals the presence of unconscious Desire and narcissism in conscious life as an intentional pressure within language. Fort/Da: (1) replaying and mastering absence (2) object a, the bit of the real to which Desire gets attached as its object (3) repression of mirror stage identification (desire for mother's recognition of self) [primary unconscious] and the entrance of language, an alienation of self into words [secondary unconscious]

And now, for the **Symbolic**:

Binary Imaginary identifications and processes are from the very outset embedded in a ternary structure, that of the Symbolic whose metaphor or model is the Oedipus complex. Every person is born into a predetermined linguistic network, which forms identity and mind in conjunction with the processes of mimetic identification. The Symbolic order of language and law creates an unconscious discourse, influencing adult speech out of the remoteness of childhood.

The purely imaginary dyadic relationship (modelled on the child to the mother) turns out to be interrupted by a third term, the father, who imposes another "alienation" onto the moi, by opposing (saying no to) the infant's desire for unity with the mother, that is, to be recognised as the sole and complete object of the mother's love. The father's bar, as the one who turns out to be the 'true' object of the mother's love, forces the child to learn its own behavioural limitations and psychic boundaries: the presence of the father is an implicit no (non) to total identification with the mother. And since the mother served as a unifying focus for the infant, his "separation" from her is so traumatic that it marks the infant's "castration." In the broader Lacanian sense, then castration marks the psychic impact of loss, difference and individuation: its signifier, that is, the symbolic or representational agent or separation, is the Phallus (not the same as the male sex organ).

The verbal capacity to symbolise absence by words (Fort/da) becomes an intentional mechanism for surviving the pain of awareness and individuation. The 'I' anchors the sliding identifications of the moi (there are many moi but only one je).

Language-Sign and Sense

Lacan essentially reduces language to the signifier, and assigns to the signified the task of containing the subjective element in cognition, that which anchors linguistic meaning in repressed networks of visual and verbal associations. When Lacan says that the Ucs is structured like a language, he aims at the Saussurean notion that the Langue is a system of differences, a combinatory structure, of holes. To this structure the human being attaches "desire" and only through this structure of signifiers can his/her desire be articulated. In this sense, to say what I want always requires an alienation of the self into language; it has to take the route of the signifier in order to emerge as "intended meaning."

Thus, sounds and words proffer themselves to the infant as a way of trying to grasp the Real and explain the perceived. (but to take necessary advantage of language is also to acknowledge one's dependence upon it and to alienate one's self yet again). The function of the signifier is three fold: to fasten down or label an experience or an affect; to polarize or create meanings through oppositions; and to group meanings in bundles to create signifieds.