

Dr Joanna Kellond

PhD in Critical Theory, University of Sussex, 2015

Lecturer in Humanities, School of Humanities, University of Brighton

Member of Centre of Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics, University of Brighton

Email. J.Kellond@brighton.ac.uk

Abstract: Modernity, Alienation and the Mirror in the Work of Lacan and Winnicott

Lacan and Winnicott are both profoundly psychosocial thinkers who shared an interest in the modern psyche and the alienation often considered endemic to it. From Freud, Lacan took the theory of narcissism (Borch-Jacobsen, 1991), which he developed into a wide-ranging critique of the psychosocial constitution of the modern subject. Winnicott, on the other hand, trained his eye on the environmental conditions necessary for feeling authentic, or 'real,' and the experiences that might produce alienation from this 'true' self, and encourage the formation of a narcissistic 'false' self (Donald W. Winnicott, 1990). In this context, Lacan and Winnicott's shared interest in the metaphor and function of the mirror, which has long provided an entry point for clinical and academic comparisons of their work, is a key point of orientation. This article seeks to explore and unpack the relationship between Lacan and Winnicott's interest in narcissism, alienation and the mirror, locating their thinking in relation to dominant philosophical conceptions of subjectivity and sociological understandings of modernity, dating from the seventeenth to the late nineteenth century. Situating Lacan and Winnicott on this terrain throws their theories of the mirror into relief in important ways. Not only is the 'modern' character of psychoanalysis foregrounded, the contribution it can make to social transformation is also affirmed.

Key words: Lacan, Winnicott, alienation, mirror, modernity.

Modernity, Alienation and the Mirror in the Work of Lacan and Winnicott

“After having opposed the names of Lacan and Winnicott,” writes Andre Green (2011), “today it is frequent to bring them together” (p. 29). As Green suggests, Winnicott and Lacan are thinkers whose ideas can seem antithetical. Whilst Winnicott is concerned with the development of the self in the context of a ‘good enough’ experience of care giving, Lacan’s theory of the subject challenges the very idea of the self. What we have here, writes Lewis Kirshner (2011), introducing a collection of essays on the two theorists, are “two seemingly incompatible theories of the origins and structure of the human psyche” (p. xi). Yet Lacan and Winnicott are both profoundly psychosocial thinkers who shared an interest in the modern psyche and the alienation often considered endemic to it. From Freud, Lacan took the theory of narcissism (Borch-Jacobsen, 1991), which he developed into a wide-ranging critique of the psychosocial constitution of the modern subject. Winnicott, on the other hand, trained his eye on the environmental conditions necessary for feeling authentic, or ‘real,’ and the experiences that might produce alienation from this ‘true’ self, and encourage the formation of a narcissistic ‘false’ self (Donald W. Winnicott, 1990). In this context, Lacan and Winnicott’s shared interest in the metaphor and function of the mirror, which has long provided an entry point for clinical and academic comparisons of their work (Coulson, 2013; Eigen, 2004; Hirsch, 1997; Lebeau, 2009; Rudnytsky, 1991; Rustin, 1991; Wright, 1991), is a key point of orientation. The mirror is present in Lacan’s thinking from early on. He first presented the concept of the ‘Mirror Stage’ at the 14th International Congress of Psychoanalysis at Marienbad, which took place in 1936. Winnicott, however, turned to the mirror at the end of his career, in 1967, prompted by Lacan’s intervention, and what Winnicott believed Lacan’s theory of the ‘Mirror Stage’ did not address (1991).

This article seeks to explore and unpack the relationship between Lacan and Winnicott’s interest in narcissism, alienation and the mirror, locating their thinking in relation

to dominant philosophical conceptions of subjectivity and sociological understandings of modernity, dating from the seventeenth to the late nineteenth century. The preoccupation of these psychoanalytic thinkers with these themes points up a link between the assumptions of psychoanalysis and the philosophical and sociological discourses of, and on, modernity. Stanley Cavell (1987) notes that psychoanalysis inherits the preoccupations and assumptions of classical German philosophy (p. 391), whilst Rita Felski (1995) points out that “the discourse of sociology has affected the ways in which all of us envision the modern,” psychoanalysis in particular (p. 36). Situating Lacan and Winnicott on this terrain throws their theories of the mirror into relief in important ways.

The mirror, as both object and metaphor, has played a central role in shaping how Europe, the triumphal ‘West,’ has come to understand itself and its relation to the world over the course of modernity. Writing on the history of the mirror and its impact on European culture, Sabine Melchior-Bonnet (2001) notes that mirror production expanded greatly around the time of the early Renaissance, in the fifteenth century. Mirrors were rare until around 1630, and thus highly prized (p. 28). During the Renaissance, the mirror offered an unprecedented tool for the elaboration of ideas of self and identity that were beginning to take shape. From then on, the mirror “lends itself to self-examination and interior dialogue,” offering “a new way of looking at the world” (p. 126). The mirror allows ‘Man’ to become an object for his own contemplation, but it also facilitates his sense of dominance over the world, because it offers to place him at the centre and origin of meaning and creation. According to Melchior-Bonnet: “the specular encounter multiples [Man’s] strength by inviting him to both cast himself upon the world and study himself within it” (p. 162).

The seventeenth century French philosopher, Rene Descartes, did much to formalize this way of thinking. Cartesian philosophy is premised on the idea that the mind is like a mirror, containing representations of the world that can be made more accurate through

inspection, repair and polishing (Rorty, 1980, p. 12). Instigating a practice of radical critique, Descartes sought the true foundations for knowledge by stripping away all that could be doubted, including the material world made available via the senses. Negating the external world, and even his own body, Descartes famously arrived at the indubitable: the fact of his own thinking, captured in the famous dictum, ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist,’ or *cogito ergo sum* (Descartes, 2006, p. 29). The capacity to think here offers certainty, giving birth to a new conception of both knowledge and subjectivity. The mind – self-present and transparent, rational and certain – comes to be seen as the subject and source of knowledge; and the material world becomes an object that the singular, separate mind contemplates and comes to know. To put this another way: The idea that the mind is like a mirror assumed a gap between ‘Man’ and ‘Nature,’ an insurmountable and alienating distance.

Bernard Murchland (1971) writes that the alienation wrought by modern philosophy finds its origins in the work of the early Christian theologian, St. Augustine, who posited a dualism between Godly spirit and base matter (pp. 49-53), one that foregrounds the supremacy of the non-material in an economy of value. This way of thinking was developed by the medieval philosopher, Ockham, who elaborated a theory of nominalism, according to which the world is made up of separate and discreet objects (pp. 53-62). These thinkers foregrounded the basic idea that the mind is separate from world, and this way of thinking was elaborated by Descartes and later in the work of Locke, Rousseau and Hegel, and then on into twentieth century Existentialism. In terms that recall Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002), first published in 1944, Murchland suggests that “many of our present dilemmas originate in the uses to which reason has been put in the course of history” (p. ix), and he sets out a narrative of the advancing estrangement of humans from the natural world. In short, it is the reification of the world, rooted in Christianity’s attitude to the material and to human mortality, which underwrites and perpetuates an alienated existence.

This discourse of advancing estrangement between Man and Nature is central to the sociological conceptions of modernity that arose towards the end of the nineteenth century. Sociology took shape as a discipline during that tumultuous period in an effort to understand the character and structure of 'modern' society. Indeed, sociology is an inherently 'modern' discipline, offering "a reflection on modernity" (Delanty, 2000, p. 21) born out of a strong sense of rupture from the past and tradition (p. 29). Informed by a Hegelian philosophy of history, the discipline characterized 'modernization' as a process of individualization, rationalization and the alienation of Man from pre-modern Nature. For Georg Simmel, one of the most prolific sociologists of the fin-de-siècle, modernity constituted a process of culturalization and alienating de-personalization, as it brought about the separation of modern Man from the immediacy, and wholly subjective experience, of the world around him (Delanty, 2000, p. 37; Felski, 1995, p. 42). Culture, on Simmel's analysis, mediates the relation between Man and world, bringing about alienation.

For Simmel, this process was inherently understood in gendered terms. The separation of mind from nature represented the triumph of 'masculine' idealism and identity thinking over feminized nature (Felski, 1995, p. 41). Woman, considered 'closer to nature' due to her role in reproduction, provided a signifier for the pre-modern, for a lost and irretrievable past. Felski (1995) notes that within the sociological tradition, "changing experiences of and attitudes towards time resulting from the industrialization of much of nineteenth-century Europe engendered a growing nostalgia for a continuity and tradition perceived to be under threat by the accelerated nature of social change. Woman [...] came to stand for a more natural past and to be identified with the lost cyclical rhythms of a pre-industrial organic society" (p. 39). Thus despite his overt resistance to Romanticism, Simmel adopted many of its assumptions. As Kenneth Calhoun (1992) and Barbara Schapiro (1983) both demonstrate, the mother, symbol of the feminine, is a prominent figure of nostalgia in both German and

English Romanticism. In the novel fragment by Novalis (2015), *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, for instance, the figure of the mother signifies a form of merger that stands in contrast to the alienation brought about by the discourse of mastery that dominates in the masculine public sphere (Calhoun, 1992, p. 13). Alternatively, we might recall Wordsworth's famous rendering of the mother and "infant Babe" in Book Two of *The Prelude* (1959).

Wordsworth's infant "drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye," an image of incorporation that foregrounds the interrelation of subject and object prior to an alienating ascension into masculine public space and culture.

Such ways of thinking have had a profound effect on the discourse of psychoanalysis itself. As Freud famously averred, whatever he may have discovered, the poets said it first. "In what was at first my utter perplexity," he writes in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), "I took as my starting point a saying of the poet-philosopher, Schiller, that 'hunger and love are what moves the world'" (p. 117). Freud's famous 'oceanic feeling' refers to a putatively primordial experience or merger with the mother, one that must be overcome through a paternal identification that brings both individualization and the possibility of cultural greatness. This was a way of thinking foregrounded in the work of Johann Jacob Bachofen, which influenced Freud (see Sprengnether, 1990). Bachofen suggested – somewhat eurocentrically – that the identity thinking characteristic of modernity was established by the Greeks, who favoured a patriarchal social organization in opposition to the matriarchal culture of the Minoan civilization of Crete. This move from the maternal to the paternal signified and enshrined the ascendancy of the 'masculine' principle of separation and autopoiesis over material dependence (see Goux, 1993). In his own early work, Lacan himself avers that the Oedipus myth so beloved by Freud symbolizes "the emancipation from matriarchal tyranny" represented by the Sphinx (*'l'épisode du Sphinx, représentation non moins ambiguë de l'émancipation des tyrannies matriarcales'*) (2001, p. 58).

Though dating from Antiquity, the process of ‘modernization,’ understood as separation, gained pace from the fifteenth century, as changes in the mode of production brought new forms of social organization into being. In his early work, Lacan foregrounds the importance of sociological considerations in theorising psychic life. Rather than representing the universal structure of mental life, the Oedipus complex is historically specific and contingent. Lacan states that “considering both mental structures and social facts will lead to a revision of the complex that will allow us to situate the paternalistic family in history and to further clarify the neurosis of our time” (*L'ordre méthodique ici proposé, tant dans la considération des structures mentales que des faits sociaux, conduira à une révision du complexe qui permettra de situer dans l'histoire la famille paternaliste et d'éclairer plus avant la névrose contemporaine*) (Lacan, 2001, pp. 45–46). In this text, Lacan links the ‘family complexes’ to the development of the conjugal family in the fifteenth century, a form that combined aristocratic norms concerning marriage with the Christian emphasis on individual responsibility and choice. This change in the structure of social relations “realized itself in the fifteenth century with the economic revolution that produced the bourgeois society and the psychology of modern man” (Lacan, 1995, p. 198, 2001, p. 69). The prerequisite for the development of modern subjectivity is the family form, which makes possible the modern, oedipal struggle against tradition and authority. On this analysis, the idea of a subject separate and detached from nature is premised on a specific mode of paternal identification. In modernity, symbolic authority shifts from religion and feudal patriarchy to the father, the symbol of patriarchy within the home, and the modern Oedipus complex is born. The father is required to provide the son with a model for social identification and to enforce sexual repression. Yet the father in modernity is always at risk of failing in this function, of failing to adequately symbolize the paternal law he is supposed to instil. The father is “always in some way deficient – absent, humiliated, divided or false” (Lacan, 1995, p. 200). This

potential for failure means that the male child does not identify the father as the agent of repression, and thus does not develop a strong paternal super-ego. Instead, the male child only takes up half of the paternal law, the relation of identification. He comes to identify with the father and give up the mother not because the father tells him to, but rather in order to gain the social advantage and prestige his father, as a man, represents (Brennan, 1993, p. 58). When the paternal imago is weak, as Lacan believes it to be in his own time, the energy of sublimation created by the dual paternal function is diverted from creation (Lacan cites the Enlightenment as a high point for sublimation) into an “ideal of narcissistic integrity” (*quelque idéal d'intégrité narcissique*) (Lacan, 2001, p. 56). In short, the modern ego fails to surmount the Mirror Stage.

As the preceding discussion suggests, Lacan's understanding of subjectivity is profoundly grounded in the context of modernity (see Brennan, 1993; Campbell, 2004; MacCannell, 1991). As Jacques-Alain Miller (2006) affirms, “there is [...] but one ideology Lacan theorizes: that of the “modern ego,” that is, the paranoiac subject of scientific civilization” (p. 852). In Mladen Dolar's words (1998) “Lacan largely defined his project with the slogan announcing a “return to Freud,” but subsequently it turned out that this slogan had to be complemented with a corollary: the return to Freud had to pass by way of a return to Descartes” (p. 14). For Lacan, the ego commonly understood to constitute the modern philosophical subject, and so beloved of the ego psychologists, requires considerable critique. At the beginning of *Seminar II* (1988), dating from 1953, Lacan asserts that the ego has been “acquired over the course of history” (p. 4). It emerges with modernity and is articulated in the philosophy of Descartes (p. 6). Lacan sees the ego as the “fundamental illusion of man's experience, or at least of modern man” (p. 4), and his work constitutes a historically grounded critique of the modern ego/ *cogito*, which considers itself to be the centre and ground of meaning, creation and knowledge.

Lacan uses the idea of the mirror to frame his critique of the *cogito*. In the opening paragraph of one of the most famous texts included in his *Ecrits*, the 1949 paper on ‘The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the ‘I’ (presented at the 16th International Congress of Psychoanalysis at Zurich) (2006b) Lacan writes that:

The conception of the mirror stage I introduced at our last congress thirteen years ago [at the 14th International Congress in 1936], having since been more or less adopted by the French group, seems worth bringing to your attention once again—especially today, given the light it sheds on the function in the experience psychoanalysis provides us of it. It should be noted that this experience sets us at odds with any philosophy directly stemming from the *cogito*. (p. 75)

As Lacan makes clear, psychoanalysis represents a challenge to the *cogito*, and to the three centuries of philosophy that have largely issued from it, even when in a critical mode (Dolar, 1998, p. 11).

In the worlds of Ellie Ragland (2008), the ‘Mirror Stage’ has the effect “of dividing the infant away from its mother” (p. 100), a comment that takes on additional significance when viewed through the lens of the sociological understanding of modernity previously discussed. For Shuli Barzilai (1999), Lacan’s invocation of the Mirror Stage is more motivated, as it enables “an exorcism of the powerful maternal presence” (p. 83). Whatever interpretative stance one takes on this question, Lacan describes the ‘erection’ of the alienated subject of modernity using the metaphor of the mirror. This is a subject that, in line with Cartesian philosophy, finds itself through an act of representation, and is reflected everywhere it looks (see Borch-Jacobsen, 1991; Brennan, 1993; Whitebook, 1996). There is no other in the relation with the mirror – Lacan makes clear that this moment takes place “before [the infant] is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other” (2006b, p.

76). Nor is the mirror the face of the mother or caregiver. Though the child's carer may be in the background, the infant is supported by the prosthesis of the *trotte-bebe*: a technical means of support, thus minimising the presence of others (Barzilai, 1999, p. 85). Lacan is well aware of the baby's interest in the mother's face: the new-born is "fascinated by the human face," and "in the clearest possible way [...] from all the people around him he singles out his mother" (Lacan, 1953, p. 15). However, the modern ego is not formed through an exchange of looks between two, but rather through an identification with a falsely coherent image of self.

Barzilai (1999) writes that the mirror theory grounds identity in "identification with the semblable, or self-same" (p. 88), and Elisabeth Roudinesco (2003) insists that "the specular world, in which the primordial identity of the ego is expressed, contains no alterity or otherness" (p. 30). The modern ego, the Cartesian *cogito*, comes into being by erroneously assuming that it is the centre and source of itself and the world. The absence of alterity, however, does not result in a harmonious relation. Rather the sameness of the other poses a threat. The other in the mirror is a rival who threatens to usurp one's identity, which produces anxiety and aggression (Lacan, 2006a, p. 89). The identification with the mirror image is "shadowed," Vicky Lebeau (2001) writes, "by a drive to violate that image" (p. 52). The ego is affected by an ambivalent mix of love and hate that will pass over into all secondary identifications, and into modern Man's relationship with the natural world.

Lacan develops his critique of the narcissistic modern subject in "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis" (2006a), dating from 1948. Such a being cannot reach or acknowledge the other because the way is blocked by their own narcissism. Instead of finding the other in the world, the *cogito*/ ego imposes its own frame of reference on what it encounters – women, nature, other cultures and peoples – enacting their blotting out. Lacan writes that "that which constitutes the ego and its objects with attributes of permanence, identity, and substantiality,

in short, with entities or ‘things’ [...] extends indefinitely [man’s] world and his power...by giving his objects their instrumental polyvalence” (pp. 90–91). The modern ego constitutes the objects it finds in its own image, in line with its modes of understanding, and this is an alienating process which “imposes the ego’s rigidity on the object, making it into an object of technical control and manipulation” (Whitebook, 1996, p. 126).

Man comes to control the world by turning it into an object, subjecting it to his categories, “stamping his image on reality” (Lacan, 2006a, p. 95), but this leads the ego to become paranoid, fearful that its power to control and define may be precarious. Violence offers a means to maintain control over objects that threaten to slip out of the ego’s grasp. The aggressiveness that has come to define modernity is, Lacan suggests, a result of the *cogito*’s narcissism, a way of relating esteemed in ‘Western civilization’ as the virtue of “strength,” which underwrites domination of the natural world and of others, driving capitalization and colonialism (Lacan, 2006a, p. 98). The objectivizing knowledge of modern scientific civilization, Lacan asserts, both dominates and reifies the world, enacting what Brennan (1993) names an “objectifying assault on reason” (p. 32). Lacan’s view here resembles Adorno’s understanding of the relationship between subject and object in modernity: “today it is the reified consciousness that has been retranslated into reality and there augments domination” (2004, p. 310).

Given that it constitutes the dominant mode of subjectivity in modernity, the psychoanalyst encounters this narcissistic subject on the couch, and is tasked with treating it as a form of pathology. Describing the social function of the French psychoanalyst in 1948, after France’s involvement in Two World Wars, and collaboration with Nazi Germany, Lacan writes that “it is this being of nothingness [the *cogito/ego*] for whom, in our daily task, we clear anew the path to his meaning in a discreet *fraternity*” (2006a, p. 101 emphasis added).ⁱ Offering ‘Some Reflections on the Ego’ (1953) to the British Psycho-Analytic Society in

1951, Lacan calls the *ego/cogito* “the human symptom par excellence” (p. 17), and seeks to place “our role as analyst in a definite context in the history of mankind” (p. 12).

Psychoanalytic dialogue, he claims, aims to dissolve the reification of the ego, bypassing, through free association, its rigidity in order to “re-establish a more human relationship” (1953, p. 17).

During this period, immediately after the Second World War, Lacan is most certainly “resolutely on the side of the symbolic,” as Jacqueline Rose puts it (1986, p. 46). The solution to the rampant narcissism of modernity lies in the “human relationship” made possible by “fraternity.” In short, the solution lies in a form of masculine identification that might foster creativity and rekindle the conscience of Modern Man. The alienation wrought by modernity made the horrors of colonialism and war possible, but alienation also represents the solution to those horrors. “It is the gap separating man from nature that determines his lack of relationship to nature, and begets his narcissistic shield, with its nacreous covering on which is painted the world from which he is for ever cut off,” Lacan writes, “but the same structure is also the sight where his own milieu is grafted on to him, i.e. the society of his fellow men” (1953, p. 16). Modern Man is alienated from the natural world, cut off from his own materiality and dependence, but alienation from Nature is also a necessary prerequisite for modern, masculine ‘Culture.’ For the oedipal social relations, or contract, between men in modernity. Here in his early work, as Frederick Dews (1995) describes, Lacan’s position is close to that of the Frankfurt School theorists, Adorno and Horkheimer, whose reliance on Freudian theory left no alternative but to advocate more castration in response to the ‘culture of narcissism.’

The task of analysis becomes then, according to Lacan, the taming of the *cogito* through its further alienation. In releasing the narcissistic modern individual into a “discreet fraternity,” the analyst makes it possible for a third term to intervene in the dyad between the

ego and the world made over as mirror. The analysand will come to realize, over the course of their analysis, that they are spoken by the other; that their desire for coherence and insight is part of the narrative of the *cogito*; that really there is no one who knows or who masters. Rather, there is a subject whose centre lies elsewhere, a fact that brings with it a taming of narcissism, and a renewed awareness of conscience and responsibility. Describing this situation, Norman Bryson (1988) writes that “psychoanalysis is that experience of speaking on the field of the other. The analysand does not stand at the center of control over these motions of the Signifier; he or she is more like their bewildered observer” (p. 94). Undergoing analysis becomes, then, a means of overcoming the grandiose and narcissistic idea that we are the unmediated centre of knowledge and the world, a change achieved when perspective is reversed and we realize we are subjects, not masters.

Whilst Lacan is critical of the *cogito*, erected through a paternal identification made possible by the social relations of modernity, the extent to which he offers a satisfactory reformulation is a moot point. In her study of Lacanian theory and feminist epistemology, Kristen Campbell (2004) reconstructs Lacan’s later social theory in order to demonstrate the link between the *cogito*, the Discourse of the Master, and the paternal family structure (pp. 65-77). On her analysis, it is the masculine subject’s capacity to identify with the “unary trait” (Lacan, 2008, p. 154) of the phallus, symbolized by the father’s penis, which underwrites that subject’s sense of its own Oneness, completion and mastery. This identification permits the denial of ontological lack, and its projection onto the feminine other. However, whilst Campbell finds the interrelation of patriarchy and the discourse of mastery in Lacan’s work of critical value, she is less convinced by his approach to its solution. As she puts it, “ultimately, Lacan calls for the Father” (p. 165). As indicated in his early work on the ‘Family Complexes’ (2001), for Lacan the narcissism of modernity results from the failure of the father to adequately perform the function of repression. Whilst the

male child will, in general, come to identify with the father, he will only take up the ideal dimension of this relation, not its prohibition. In his later work (2016), Lacan calls for the production of a new, synthetic Name-of-the-Father – a kind of ‘synth-homme’ – capable of mitigating the narcissism of modernity. Following the example of James Joyce, transformation will come through the production of a new discourse, one that challenges the norms of rationality and mastery.

For Paul Verhaeghe and Frédéric Declercq (2016), however, Lacan’s seminar on *The Sinthome* (2016) locates the cure for the modern *cogito* “entirely in the line of femininity” (p. 21). The solution to illusory mastery will come through an appeal to what is excluded from masculine modern discourse, what exists beyond or in excess of the phallic law: woman. For Ellie Ragland, “this places man within a logic of the finite, the *faute*, as opposed to women who dwell within the logic of the particular and the infinite, *not all* (*pas-toute*) under the sway of phallic law” (2013). Thus the solution to masculine narcissism lies in the direction of femininity and the impossible world of the Real, taken up by the French feminists who proceeded Lacan. The extent to which such thinking breaks out of a masculine understanding of the feminine – as that which is outside of and opposed to the social and the symbolic – is, however, another moot point, and beyond the scope of this article.

Turning to Lacan’s seminar on the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1977), however, it may be possible to unpack this dichotomy. In this seminar, the situation of “spectacular absorption” which forms the ego in the mirror paper takes on another resonance, as etymological association slides from *speculum* (mirror) towards *spectaculum* (view, aspect). As Barzilai (1999) remarks, by invoking the mirror in his early discussion of ego formation, “Lacan had the good fortune [...] to select an exemplum in 1936 that was eminently reusable for his evolving purposes” (p. 188). In the famous seminar of 1964, Lacan draws attention to the “signifying dependence” (p. 77) of the ego, which takes itself to be the

centre of the world. The philosophical tradition has given primacy to the eye and its experience, forgetting “the dependence of the visible on that which places us under the eye of the seer [...] something prior to his eye [...] the pre-existence of a gaze – I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides” (p. 72). The philosophical project of phenomenology, contemporaneous with Lacan’s thinking, is thus undermined for failing to account for the gaze, which determines what one sees, and what can be seen. “In our relation to things,” Lacan writes, “in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it – that is what we call the gaze” (p. 73). In this way, the gaze challenges that “fundamental mode to which we referred in the Cartesian *cogito*, by which the subject apprehends himself as thought” (p. 80). No matter where I look at the world from, I cannot master the gaze, which shapes, at the most basic level, what I can see.

Though Lacan takes the idea of the gaze from Sartre (1992), their understandings are not identical. For Sartre, in line with the confrontational character of the Hegelian dialectic, the gaze stands for the objectivising look of the other, the unseen look that falls on me, challenging my status as centre of meaning and creation. As is well known, Sartre’s understanding of the gaze traces the contours of a specific form of intersubjectivity, one grounded in a paranoid view of self and other, caught in a fight for dominance. On Bryson’s analysis (1988), the gaze is not about the look of a specific other, though Lacan states that “the gaze in question is certainly the presence of others as such” (1977, p. 84). Rather the gaze speaks of the role of impersonal forces in shaping what can be seen. In this way, Lacan’s formulation foregrounds the role of the Other in structuring experience and perception. It thus “intentionally unsettle[s] the ontological assumption that anything concerned with human subjectivity might be as self-contained and self-enclosed as Descartes’

cogito” (Barzilai, 1999, p. 195). “What determines me,” he writes, “at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside” (Lacan, 1977, p. 106).

By drawing attention to “the gaze that is outside,” Lacan seeks to reiterate the decentred nature of subjectivity, the illusory quality of the modern subject’s sense of detachment from the world. The fact of “external focalization,” writes Barzilai, “of being looked at and re-presented to one’s self is crucial for the skein of reflexive consciousness that delimits subjectivity” (1999, p. 190). The ‘I’ is the product of such externalized representation. But who is the other that provides this external focalization through which the ‘I’ of the modern subject comes into being? Does the concept of the gaze refer to that which the modern subject renounces in separating itself from Nature, namely the relation with the Real, and thus the mother, or is this a reference to paternal castration? Ultimately, it must be remembered that the paternal function of castration is part of a chain of signifiers which originate with the mother.

Lacan claims that the subject is “*photo-graphed*” (p. 106), made and made over by a look from elsewhere, and this look shapes the subject by shaping their desire. Lacan speaks of a subject “sustaining himself in a function of desire” (p. 85) that presupposes the gaze of the other (Barzilai, 1999, p. 190). That first other whose desire shapes the subject, as Lacan repeatedly avers, is the mOther. This desire is linked to the gaze by Lacan: “I would say it is question of a sort of desire *on the part of* the Other, at the end of which is the showing” (p. 115). As Barzilai puts it, “the signifying functions of the eye and the male organ come into conjunction with several coordinated concepts” (p. 190). There is a chain from the child’s desire for the mother’s look, to lack, to the *objet a*, the gaze, and other people. However, though the mother and her care give the lie to the idea of an autonomous subject, this care has been disavowed in modernity, as the Cartesian subject establishes itself as independent of the world around it. If the gaze is “others as such,” i.e. the social world, this moment of

(masculine) heteronomy masks an early moment of (feminine) heteronomy, the disavowal of which is made possible by modern social relations and the gendered assumptions of the philosophical and sociological traditions.

As Herbert Marcuse (1989) notes, the idea of the bourgeois individual – informed by the philosophy of the Cartesian subject – necessitates the denial of dependence: “self-sufficiency and independence of all that is other and alien is the sole guarantee of the subject’s freedom. What is not dependent on any other person or thing, what possesses itself, is free” (p. 60-61). Identification with the “unary trait” of the phallus, and with (br)others who have also internalized this ideal, creates an illusion of autonomy and mastery, one premised on the projection of dependence elsewhere: onto the feminine/private sphere (Benjamin, 1990, p. 187). As Jessica Benjamin insists, prefiguring Campbell’s reconstruction of Lacan, “the structure of gender domination is [...] materialized in the rationality that pervades our economic and social relations” (p. 187). As Lacan had long argued, the *cogito* that dominates modern understandings of the subject is based on an illusory and singular identification with wholeness, with The One. The modern subject repudiates its dependence on a feminine (m)Other in order to secure its illusory freedom. Benjamin and Campbell both convincingly argue that the modern masculine subject comes into being by repudiating ontological dependence, or “lack” (Benjamin, 1990, pp. 133–182; Campbell, 2004, pp. 59–77).

In light of these perspectives, and Lacan’s appeal to the feminine in his late work, Winnicott’s (1991) theory of the ‘Mirror-role of Mother and Family’ takes on considerable resonance. Unlike Lacan, Winnicott rarely engaged overtly with philosophical concepts and debates. He (1958b) was reluctant even to read Freud, and acknowledged that he may have stolen his ideas from others, though he didn’t much care to find out from whom! Yet Winnicott’s paper, written in 1967, offers an overt engagement with Lacan, and an acknowledgement of his influence. Winnicott notes that he was inspired to write by Lacan’s

view, prompted by something absent from Lacan's paper, namely the early relational exchange between the child and their caregiver, most often the mother. In fact, he is resolute about this: "Lacan does not think of the mirror in terms of the mother's face in the way that I wish to do here," he writes at the start of the paper (1991, p. 111). Winnicott does not mention that elsewhere Lacan *had* demonstrated an awareness of the importance of the other's face for the infant child (1953). As previously mentioned, when he spoke in London in 1951 Lacan remarked on the fascination the face, especially the face of the mother, held for the child. That this exchange is not part of the formation of the *cogito* may reveal a considerable amount about the *cogito*'s presuppositions.

If Lacan provides a critique of those narcissistic presuppositions, Winnicott offers a Romantic response, one that focuses attention on the work of care that is undervalued in modernity, and excluded from its philosophy. Winnicott's Romantic sensibility has been widely noted and explored in the literature. Gail Newman (1997) compares him with the German Romantic poet, Novalis, because of their shared concern with the important relationship between creativity and subjectivity. He emblemizes the 'Romantic' tendency in psychoanalysis for Carlo Strenger (1989, 1997), who draws out the Rousseauian nature of his work, in contrast to the 'Classical,' Hobbesian affinities of Freud, Lacan and Klein. John Turner (1993) has highlighted Winnicott and Wordsworth's shared interest in play and paradox. He has also foregrounded Winnicott's importance as a thinker who sees the value of illusion, in contrast to the demystifying imperatives of Freud (Turner, 2002). For Emily Sun (2007), Winnicott and the poet Keats offer resources for theorising a "therapeutic poetics," capable of facilitating the working through of traumatic experience. However, the most important affinity between Winnicott and the Romantics for our present purposes is of course their shared interest in, and valorization of, the mother as a figure of critical nostalgia. For the Romantic writers of both Germany and Britain, active around the turn of the nineteenth

century – and thus witnesses to revolutions both political and industrial – the maternal figure offered a powerful symbol of Nature, and a means to critique the rationalizing, universalizing and alienating discourses generated by the fraternal Enlightenment.

Winnicott's attention to, and esteem of, the mother's role owes an obvious debt to this Romantic tradition, which often turned to the exchange of looks between mother and child, considering them as a source of connection, love and understanding, "a perfect, and wordless, exchange," in the words of David Wellbery (1996, p. 25). One cannot forget Winnicott's exclamation, "there is no such thing as a baby!" (1958a, p. 99): a powerful statement of the importance of care for child development. However, for Winnicott, as Jessica Benjamin (1990) has argued, the mother does not represent a lost form of merger and plenitude without difference: "the recognition the child seeks is something the mother is able to give only by virtue of her independent identity. [...] The mother cannot (and should not) be a mirror; she must not merely reflect back what the child asserts; she must embody something of the not-me; she must be an independent other who responds in her different way" (Benjamin, 1990, p. 24).

When the child looks, they do not find their own image in a mirror. Rather, they find themselves in the face of an other. "What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother's face?" Winnicott writes, "I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words, the mother is looking at the baby and what she looks like is related to what she sees there. All this is too easily taken for granted" (1991, p. 112). Winnicott does not suggest that there is no difference between the look of the child and the mother: she is not a surface on which the child finds only sameness. Though the mother's actions are described in terms of reflection, Winnicott's use of the term "related" insists on difference; what returns to the child is not exactly the same as what is offered through their expression; what takes place between mother and child is articulated relationally. The

mother's face is not, then, a Lacanian mirror that offers an illusion of wholeness and perfection, an image of sameness that prompts aggressivity and competition. Nor is it a passive source of oneness to be juxtaposed with the alienation of the modern public sphere. The exchange of looks between mother and child involves a form of sociality and relation – not perfection – that is disavowed by the gendered discourse of modernity, which dichotomizes perfect merger and absolute alienation.

Peter Rudnytsky (1991) notes the clear alternative that both Wordsworth and Winnicott offer to a Lacanian understanding of ego development and sociality. Unlike the infant at the Mirror Stage, convinced of his own perfection and autopoiesis, Wordsworth's baby (1959) is not an "outcast" cut off from the world around him, and he is not "bewildered" or "depressed," adjectives which might be used with reference to the alienated *cogito* Wordsworth and Coleridge riled against. As M. H. Abrams puts it, drawing on Coleridge's own words, "the persistent objective [...] was to 'substitute life and intelligence...for the philosophy of mechanism, which, in everything that is most worthy of human intellect, strikes *Death*'" (1971, p. 65). In Wordsworth's description of the exchange of looks between mother and child in *The Prelude* (1959), the mother offers a "dear presence" in relation to whom the child finds themselves. This scene, of course, can be critiqued for offering a sentimental and stereotypical view of motherhood and maternal care. However, read in light of the foregoing discussion of the sexuated character of modern knowledge and subjectivation coming from Benjamin and Campbell, Wordsworth arguably draws attention to what must be repudiated for the individualized, masculine subject to appear. In this respect, his critical nostalgia finds affinity with Benjamin's articulation of the active, relational role of maternal care, which is retroactively concealed by the gendered demands of the modern Oedipus complex (1990, pp. 133–187).

Wordsworth's (admittedly masculine) "filial bond" represents a "dear Presence," offering a vision of interrelation very different to what Rudnytsky terms "the currently fashionable doctrine that the human condition is a perpetual aporia or Absence" (1991, p. 80). Rudnytsky readily avows his affiliation to Winnicott over Lacan. However, to hold that Winnicott might add something to the critique of modernity does not necessitate that we forego the insights available through Lacan's articulation. In other words, what Rudnytsky doesn't discuss in his analysis is the *historical specificity* of both theories. These are not two disinterested visions we might choose between. Rather, Lacan is offering a view of the dominant modes of subjectivity, knowledge and vision in modernity, namely an objectivising look coupled with a narcissistic subject (and his perspective takes shape specifically in the wake of the horrors of the First and Second World Wars, and France's culpability for collaboration). Winnicott is offering an alternative premised on the importance of relationality, dependence and infant care (a view with its own ties to the war and its effects). Winnicott's thinking was foundational to the welfare state in the UK, which was itself designed to meet the demands associated with the feminized private sphere, the demands of social reproduction, on which masculine, fraternal modernity depends, yet which it excludes.

For Winnicott, following the Romantic tradition, alienation is not inherent to the human condition, rather it is a sign that something has gone missing or been disavowed, namely a dyadic form of exchange, a form of care. A "significant exchange with the world," he writes, depends on an act of creative apperception, "a two-way process in which self-enrichment alternates with the discovery of meaning in the world of seen things" (1991, p. 112). The child who gets no reflection from the environment will find their "creative capacity begins to atrophy" (pp. 112–113). When the mother fails to reflect the child, when she unwittingly projects her own mood onto the child instead of reaching out in response to theirs, the child's connection to the world may fail to develop. In its place, the child may well develop a false

self, an alienated self that responds to the demands of the world, rather than finding itself in the world.

Critics, such as Kenneth Wright and Peter Rudnytsky (Rudnytsky, 1991; Wright, 1991), have argued that the Lacanian mirror describes this negative version of Winnicott's mirroring relation, suggesting that Lacan sets out what happens when reflection goes missing: namely the development of narcissism and detachment. There are two ways to interpret this, I think. Firstly, following Wright, we can liken the Lacanian mirror to an unreflecting mother, who is then held culpable for the development of an alienated false self. Rather than seeking to demonize the mother, however, we might suggest that detachment and preoccupation might be part of the social lot of many mothers, particularly in (late) modernity under the pressures of patriarchal capitalism. However, the narcissism and detachment of the false self are not necessarily identical to the mastery of the *cogito*. The *cogito* is formed in the act of *repudiating* dependence. The false self is a consequence of dependence and absent care, and thus foregrounds their centrality. Though alienated in its own way, the false self is not necessarily identical to the *cogito* – the dominant subject of modernity – but rather the subject produced through environmental failure. It testifies to the experience of oppression, rather than describing the aetiology of domination.

Alternatively, we might focus on the idea that Lacan describes what happens when *reflection goes missing*, and understand this to mean what happens when the 'Mirror Role' of mother and family falls out of view. The Cartesian subject Lacan describes and critiques pays no attention to the work of care and relation essential for the formation of a non-alienated mode of being. For that subject, being is existing, but how do we come to be? What must be denied for the subject of mastery to emerge? Lacan never ceases to remind his audience that we are subject to the signifier, giving the lie to the myth of the autonomous subject, yet in his

own thinking, the active maternal role is supplanted by the paternal role, and separation is enshrined over relation. Once again, reflection has gone missing.

In conclusion, this paper has sought to locate both Lacan and Winnicott's thinking in the context of philosophical and sociological debates about subjectivity and alienation, debates suffused with what Susannah Radstone (2007) terms "the sexual politics of time." It has argued that Lacan offers a profoundly psychosocial critique of the dominant structure of subjectivity in modernity, which esteems detachment, objectivization and a false universalism of the perspective of The One. The modern subject is an alienated subject. The paper has also sought to raise the question of how this narcissism, a form of profound cultural sickness, might be dissipated. In this regard, it has highlighted Lacan's call for both a new Name of the Father, and a focus on the Real, as resources for change. The paper has also raised the question of whether an appeal to the Real, as that which is outside of the social, and understood to represent its feminine Other, does not reproduce a masculinist dichotomy between rational/ irrational, the singular/ plural, the universal/ particular. With this question in mind, and drawing on the work of Benjamin, the paper has sought to suggest that Winnicott's attention to the active role of maternal care may go some way to displacing this binary. For Winnicott, the maternal relation is not an impossible Real about which we can say nothing, but a site of relational exchange which is retroactively repudiated in modernity, as the Mirror Stage suggests.

Perhaps the purchase of such a perspective is strengthened by recalling, finally, a favoured anecdote of Lacan's. Across his career, Lacan returned to a scene from St. Augustine's *Confessions*, where Augustine recalls the envy of a young child towards his infant brother. Lacan describes the scene in his seminar on the gaze: "the little child seeing his brother at his mother's breast, looking at him *amare conspectu*, with a bitter look, which seems to tear him to pieces and has on him the effect of a poison" (1977, p. 116). This is a

scene Lacan cites many times, from ‘The Family Complexes’ of 1938 (2001), through ‘Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis’ dating from 1948 (2006a), to the seminar on the gaze in 1964. For Lacan, the scene speaks of the relationship between the gaze and the objet a. The child Augustine, looking on, desires what his brother has, namely the loving look (*amare conspectu*) of the mother. But Augustine, who we recall has played his part in the aetiology of the philosophy of alienation, is cut off from this look. A philosophy of separation depends on this renunciation, and that may be where the trouble starts.

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