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# Alone with the other : paradoxes of shame and recognition in psychoanalytic theory, case material and Home alone

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Shame and recognition co-occur in the human psyche. Phenomenologically, shame is relational: experienced in the world with the Other. Psychoanalytically, the shame affect is treated as one of the ego's defenses, for example, as a protection from exposure. Shame seems to either *promote* or *prevent* the subject's capacity to recognize otherness and difference. In this paper, I attempt to re-read these respective theories on shame and recognition, eventually placing shame in, among other places, Lacan's (1988) mirror stage and relational perspectives of human development. I turn to two cases, one clinical, one from popular culture, to elaborate on the paradoxical experience of shame and recognition.

Alone with the Other:
Paradoxes of Shame and Recognition
in Psychoanalytic Theory, Case Material, and *Home Alone*

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

*"It seems that each generation undertakes two opposing tasks: those who put the curtains back up and those who tear them down again!"*

*"Recall how the poet Dylan Thomas understood Freud's legacy as a human journey – from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision."*

<div style="text-align: right;">

*- Letters to a Young Therapist,*
Vincenzo DiNicola (2011; p.20, p.74)

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

*"'What does it feel like?' He asked – and his mothers, seeing his bewilderment, essayed explanations. 'Your face gets hot,' said Bunny-the-youngest, 'but your heart starts shivering.'"*

*"Wherever I turn, there is something of which to be ashamed. But shame is like everything else; live with it for long enough and it becomes part of the furniture….But nobody notices it any more. And everyone is civilized."*

- *Salman Rushdie (1983), p.21-33*

In the second quote, Salman Rushdie (1983) conceptualizes shame paradoxically: at once ubiquitous, on second thought, mundane. Shame has a way of evading language so that, even as Rushdie notices it, elevates it, he drops it or leaves it as it were, like the furniture, seemingly where it belongs.

If shame "belongs" anywhere it is because of its ethical-existential component (i.e. "everyone is civilized"). But that does not mean that shame is a welcomed guest – Andrew Morrison's (1996) "culture of shame" is a *diagnosis*, so as we seem to adapt to shame like Rushdie's narrator, we also simultaneously renounce it: "no shame!" The trajectory from "civilization" to "discontent" is largely thanks to shame (Freud 1961). Why is this so? Because the horror of shame is usually accompanied by the validation of *recognition* – upon which "human worth and reality depend" (Fanon 1967; p.217).

The shame affect occurs in response to recognition (or misrecognition) after the subject exposes themselves to the Other. Developmentally, shame seems to be the first affect that *disorients* the freely exploring infant – lowering her head after a "strange" or disapproving look, deadening creativity, curbing further exposures. Shame's origins are a phenomenological encounter with the Other, which is implicated in the relational process of separation-individuation, as I will read it. Each effort toward separation, paradoxically, has more to do with

recognition by an Other than anything we might find in our mirrors. But, that doesn't mean we don't need our mirrors too.

The *mirror relation* of early infancy, in which the infant begins to locate itself in its mother, is a metaphor for maternal attunement (Lacan 1988; Winnicott 1967). On the other side of attunement is, of course, mis-attunement, moments of disorientation in which both the infant and the mother face one another's differences. Much of the difficulty at this age has to do with the infants *dependence* on the mother: being small, weak and helpless is, unfortunately, the essence of the infant's situation – from the moment of birth, the psyche plays developmental catch-up with the body, and does so only asymptotically.

Surviving the terror of infancy requires that we develop some protection from shame, vulnerability and dependence. The ego and its ideal help the infant tolerate its separation, and it is through this ego that we become alienated from the very shit that makes us human subjects: vulnerability, otherness, dependence, and shame.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy asks that we go back into this disorientation, which, I have noticed in my own de-centered search for recognition, evokes shame. In fact, this disorientation is precisely what shame is: a new way of seeing oneself. Any counter-transferential question, any question of 'the self', for example, force us to confront shame to some extent. My sense is that if you feel shame, then you are headed in the right direction: exposure/recognition of vulnerability are the crux of the analytic process. And finally, the more shame you work through, the less self you actually discover.

Phenomenologists Sartre (1956) and Levinas (1961) read shame as existential, part of being-in-the-world-with-the-other. In contrast, psychoanalysts treat shame as a defense

(Wurmser 1981). Now, I am not saying that defenses aren't existential, or that defenses don't serve our overall existence. I'm trying to ask how we can get *from existential shame to the debilitating mask* that Wurmser (1981) describes. How could this shame-trajectory affect clinical work, where shame is inevitable? Though some say that shame is a private experience, remember that there must be an exposure, an offering for/of recognition for there to be shame. Even self-recognition has to go through the Other. Working through shame cannot simply be a private experience, though we might need therapeutic attunement to resemble the shameless privacy of the mirror relation. Nonetheless, shame is abundant in psychotherapy, and ubiquitous in psychoanalysis, when two subjectivities, slowly, make such an exposure. So, the request is paradoxical: take off the mask of shame and the therapist, as Other, can offer recognition, even though it's that recognition that is defended against.

Some therapeutic models, especially relational psychoanalysis (Benjamin 1988), emphasize that both subjectivities be unmasked in the therapeutic process. Counter-transference is not, therefore, something to hide, but at least a significant source of knowledge and affect – this will be especially clear in my case with Javi. What I hope to show is that the so-called self, something which we tend to identify as internal, is actually external, in the Other, and that's the only way to recognize it. Tolerating otherness is often too disorienting to recognize. Indeed, not 'noticing' shame is the essence of shame – it operates in the blind spots, which is where it gets all its power.

Shame is at once concerned with privacy, with the individual, and with the Other, the social. Situated in *difference*, shame always seems to have a foot in both camps. My understanding of the social component of shame concerns ways that shame interferes with one's

*capacity for recognition*, at the basis of which are repressive/oppressive reactions to difference. In our "culture of shame", the essence of Otherness seems to be vulnerability, lack, and shame.

Philosopher Judith Butler (2005) takes up our ethical relation to the other in *Giving An Account of Oneself*. Early in the book, she says that *recognition* is the "process by which I become other than what I was and so cease to be able to return to what I was." Here, she alludes to the fact that in recognizing (and recognition is always recognition *of difference*) we acknowledge our desire for recognition, i.e. vulnerability, and therefore recognize ourselves as vulnerable subjects in the process of recognizing the other. She elaborates:

"one finds that the only way to know oneself is through a mediation that takes place outside of oneself, exterior to oneself, by virtue of a convention or a norm that one did not make, in which one cannot discern oneself as an author or agent of one's own making" (28)

Here, Butler shows that self-reflection is not the equivalent of looking into a *mirror*, but looking somewhere incredibly foreign, a place loaded with doubt, helplessness, vulnerability, and misunderstanding. To begin the process of self-recognition, I argue, we start with shame – who am I? *Through whose eyes do I see myself?* In every case, it is the Other – who is, albeit a person(s), much more than that: "a set of unwritten rules that effectively regulate our speech and acts, the ultimate guarantee of Truth to which we have to refer…" (Zizek, p.57). Thus, the Lacanian Other is any signifier that structures socio-emotional behavior, and determines the conditions for recognition.

Lacan's (1988) weaving of phenomenology and psychoanalysis will be important for my synthesis of the literature. But, not only that – he also has ushered in a theory of shame aligned with my experiences of psychoanalysis, theoretically and therapeutically, as well as my own biases, that is to say, my personal experiences with shame.

In *Seminar 11*, Lacan (1978) summarizes about the subject: "But, certainly, it is in the space of the Other that he sees himself and the point from which he looks at himself is also in that space. Now, this is also the point from which he speaks…" (144). Much of my literature review will be a re-reading of psychoanalytic theories that are either explicitly or implicitly about shame, including Freud (1914, 1922) on narcissism and the ego-ideal; Erikson (1950) on shame and autonomy; Winnicott (1949, 1958) on aloneness; Mahler (1975) on separation-individuation; and Lacan's (1977) mirror stage. I will use the phenomenologist's to give shame the *ontological* status Lacan (2007) only mentions, from what I gather, in *Seminar 17*. But he is close here, where he is discussing Merleau-Ponty: "It is no doubt this seeing, to which I am subjected in an original way, that must lead us to the aims  of this work, to that ontological turning back, the bases of which are no doubt to be found in a more primitive institution of form"  (72). The shame I talk about here always involves our vulnerable visibility, the fact that we can be seen by the Other *from all angles*, that we need to be seen by them (*recognition*), and ultimately, perhaps, that in order to locate ourselves we need to use them (i.e. the mirror stage); in short, a battle between dependence, desire and destruction.

**Methods**

My methodology will be exclusively philosophical and psychoanalytic. I use only Sartre (1956) and Levinas (1961) to give a phenomenological framework for shame. I stated earlier that I will discuss shame paradoxically – so while the phenomenologists *existentialize* shame, the psychoanalysts *pathologize* it. Shame is actually what gives psychoanalytic psychotherapy its "paradoxical" structure*: the defense that has allowed us to survive in the relational world so far now has to come down, slowly, in the presence of the Other* (Winnicott 1971; Ghent 1992).

If shame operates maladaptively, psychoanalyst Leon Wurmser (1981), for example, would argue that it works as a narcissistic *mask*, protecting the subject from the eyes of the world. If, on the other hand, shame is adaptive, then the subject has a greater capacity to relate to themselves and others in a reasonably ethical way – i.e. he/she can demand and offer recognition mutually. What I take from this juxtaposition is that psychoanalytic therapy revolves around shame – if there is a "terminable analysis", it is because the subject has come to a place where she can recognize herself (Freud 1937). *Through the eyes of the therapist,* the subject gives up the mask of shame, and eventually, begins to see her – *true* – self. I will two case studies to problematize the capacity for recognition at the "mirror stage" (Lacan 1988).

I hypothesize, building on Seidler (2006), that shame is the response to perceived differences between the mother and infant. Remember the first quote from Salman Rushdie, "your face gets hot…but your heart starts shivering." Here, Rushdie describes a *difference*, a friction, between the body and the heart, the external and internal. But do we need to mindlessly adapt to rules that are not of our own choosing, to an Other that we do not know? Actually, perhaps given the helpless situation of infancy, we do – the Other *is* an intrusion. The question then, is: *how can we begin to "notice" the furniture*, the shame that civilizes us, and, *what should we do about it*?

I turn to Sartre (1956) and Levinas (1961), first, for a foundation of being in the world with the other. I find there that if the Other is present, then so is shame. Sartrean shame boils down to visibility; Levinasian shame is a reference to difference, and our violent urge (ego defense) to categorize otherness into sameness. I find an intersection there between Levinas (1961), Melanie Klein (1935) and Winnicott (1971), as well as one between Sartre (1956) and

Wurmser (1981). The former group, plus Lacan (1988), brings me to the mirror metaphor for shame; the latter is where I see the mask metaphor for shame.

I will then switch gears to psychoanalytic theory, which I synthesize in favor of a relational-Lacanian approach to shame and recognition which treats the ego, born from the mirror stage, as the culprit of misrecognition, and the fantasy of an autonomous self. I read Lacan's seminar on *The Ego in Freud's Theory*, where he describes the mirror stage, as, also, about shame and recognition, the moment when the subject is de-centered, in relation to its body, its ego, as it (mis)recognizes itself as an independent entity through the eyes of the mother (Winnicott 1967; Lacan 1988). The *difference* of course is between how the world sees you and determines you in language (the Other) and a respective, perceived self-identity (the ego). I turn to two case studies, one from my internship, and one from the movie *Home Alone*, to clarify my thinking, specifically in regards to the ego.

### Shame is Personal/ Shame is Social – Thesis as Transitional Object

*"Who am I to myself, when I allow myself to see me? I am not the person that I want to be."*
*- Melanie Suchet (2007)*

What brings *me* (my ego) to an analysis of *shame*? I'd never really studied the emotional side of clinical work specifically, but I started reading psychoanalytic theory as an undergraduate student at Marlboro College, a small, private, liberal arts college. For my undergraduate thesis, I wrote about my experiences reading Freud and those who responded to him: ego psychologists, object relations theorists, self psychologists, attachment theorists, and Lacanian psychoanalysts. I was fascinated by, and I only recognize this in retrospect, how analysts "separate" from Freud.[1] I organized one paper around whether post-Freudians *extended* Freud's theory, or *modified* it. I could rewrite this as those who separated from Freud (the latter), and those who did not (the

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[1] I brought my adolescent questions and conflicts to Freud.

former). As I entered the clinical social work field the following year, as a first-year intern, I was confronted with some major unresolved theoretical and counter-transferential questions: namely, what is the ego? Is it what I am? These questions were obviously relevant to my own separation-individuation stages, questions first asked in infancy, and then rearticulated in adolescence (Mahler 1975; Blos 1974). French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and the continental philosophers in his wake, brought these questions to analytic theory; questions that I needed to answer.

I had not only studied psychoanalysis as an undergrad, I also had some exposure to continental philosophy. I found that philosophers – Sartre, Heidegger, Fanon, Levinas – were better at answering some of Freud's questions than psychoanalysts themselves. And, their "phenomenologies of the other", so to speak, always seemed relevant to psychotherapy. Not to mention, when I started to read Lacan, I saw that he had wanted to tie up Freud's loose ends. I would say now that Lacan, like an analyst should, read Freud from Freud's blind spots – *I wanted to be there too*. A "blind spot" is an additional metaphor for shame I make use of – it is a reference to the limitations of vision and the accompanying shame that results. My motivation to understand psychoanalysis was always a desire to know myself – but only as a means of protection, a means of keeping the other from knowing me first.

My desire to confine myself to psychoanalysis bumped up against my blind spots. I found Smith's *psychodynamic* social work program, which seemed to be a good "fit". The truth is, I did not look into it too deeply; higher education was a mystery to me, but I felt that there was enough mutual interest for it to work. The non-directive philosophy at Marlboro College seemed to be a mirror for me; Smith's program was much more disorienting. It took me a while to understand, but I felt as if moving *from the individual to the social* was something I had dreaded. It was a

world of difference that I had anticipated only unconsciously, or that I had kept myself from exploring as an undergraduate. For example, my older brother, a social studies teacher, someone I am separating from, had a stake in social justice, and so my own differences were magnified: "why wasn't I more *like him*? Why do I feel so disengaged in the political? Why did my interest in psychoanalysis feel so narcissistic?" In short, being different is terrifying, especially when you feel desperate for recognition but doomed for misrecognition.

I had avoided confrontation with all of my social signifiers: white, male, heterosexual, etc. I had no idea about the way others saw me, but since it was the first time I experienced the question "who are you" as for-me, I felt I needed answers. I was asking Sartre's question, which come up as he discusses shame, "am I that ego?" as well as: how can I accept responsibility for my body, my privileges, without feeling "separated," without feeling myself an individual? How can I make sense of this paradox? Certainly I could not *deny* my body, my identity, but my own *shame kept me silent*, unable to offer an account of myself. Through a few intimate relationships (especially my own psychotherapy), I recognized a connection between my *silence,* my *shame,* and my *identity* (recognition).

I have learned through my own personal psychotherapy, my work as a clinician, and this paper, that shame has been the thing at once connecting me to the social world, but simultaneously protecting me from it. I have tended to silently attune myself to theory, without criticism, idealizing Lacan, for example, without much separation. As soon as I started reading about shame, I was shocked to see such limited work within psychoanalysis on it (Wurmser 1981; Erikson 1950; Ikonen 1993; Frolund 1997; Morrison 1996). I already had an appreciation for Leon Wurmser's (1981) work, but I was sick of reading about psychopathology – I only really read with my observing ego, so I always end-up pathologizing myself. And as if I didn't

idealize Lacan enough, I validated in him everything I knew up to then: psychoanalysis is all about shame – that's where I found myself (Lacan 2007).[2]

Continental philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1961) had also stuck with me from an undergraduate philosophy course. I resonated with his "ethics of the other," finding similarities in what Wurmser (1981) called "the omnipotence of responsibility." *Being close to shame may cause us to be so attuned to the other that we lose sight of ourselves.* But even that omnipotent attunement leads to ruptures, as my case material will show. At Smith College, I have had a necessary experience of being de-centered – necessary because it is only from that position that a subject sees itself and others as *different*. Levinas's theory anticipated my experience at Smith, where I learned quite succinctly that I was an other to myself.

*Recognition is always a recognition of difference*. Prior to internalizing the Smith gaze, my social signifiers had not been put into question by the dominant ideology. My privileges as a straight, white man were not easy to swallow, because, again, this didn't feel like an account I was giving, but rather, a set of conditions foreign to my mis-recognizing ego. Insight *always* comes from the Other, but that's not what a shamed-person wants to hear.

But my privileges came to the surface more and more. In my limited understanding, "privilege" means never having to confront or respect difference (psychically equivalent to narcissism) – this is Freud's "overclothed blindness" (DiNicola 2011). Race was big for me, as my white identity operated "as an omnipotent fantasy of wholeness that attempt[ed] to avoid any feelings of lack, vulnerability, or humiliation" (Suchet 2007). Psychoanalysis as an institution has been problematically built around a similar fantasy, of real systemic oppression (white supremacy, neutrality, gender/sex norms, hetero-normativity) but has done little to actually listen to the voices of its clientele. In many ways, psychodynamic theorists have, like Freud, struggled

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[2] I suppose idealization might in itself be protection from vulnerability, dependence, and severe narcissistic injury.

to integrate the social side of human behavior into a clinical framework, which is why I turn to Lacan and relational psychoanalysis. *Nonetheless*, it was easy to recognize myself in psychoanalytic theory before I had any serious exposure to theories of oppression/prejudice. My social work education, a necessary response to my psychoanalytic orientation, I define as a re-confrontation with *difference*, the most "fundamental of all encounters" with the world (Levinas 1961; Benjamin 1988). This may seem simple; it is simple. But when this simply-profound encounter with difference goes wrong, the ethical relation to the other becomes, essentially, narcissistic, one-dimensional. Only this confrontation, plus my own analysis, has helped to move me *from the priviliged privatism of psychoanalysis to the social work world of difference*. In short, we need a theory of mind that gives precedence to the Other, not the self, or the ego.

For example, the more I attempt to give an account of myself in this paper, the more exposure, and the greater potential for shame. My thesis as an undergraduate was a great example of Lacan's theory of the ego – an imaginary presentation for the other. I wrote almost completely based on the theories of others; I had no hypotheses of my own, nowhere to stand. In fact, I titled the collection of essays "The Shoulders of A Giant." Significantly, I was not "on" the shoulders of a giant (Freud), as the quote goes, but it was more or less a description of others that I identified myself with but could not separate myself from. I sought Freud's grandiosity, but it was not mine. In this paper, I continue to draw from my psychoanalytic niche. My only hope is that *I have something different to say*. Lucky for me, giants also have giant blind spots.

The unique relationship between shame and language came up in the process of thesis-writing, during my second-year internship. Between being quiet in large groups, writing a thesis, and engaging in psychoanalytic psychotherapy, I noticed a dualism in my own psyche between the voice in my head/my desire to speak and my actual inability to speak. For example, during

my first-year internship, which I will provide case material from, I was asked to give a short "talk" about my college experiences to the third, fourth and fifth grade at the elementary school I was placed at. Feeling it a good opportunity for recognition, I accepted. Only to find out, however, that I could not get the recognition I needed – the speech was a bust, recognition is so unfamiliar sometimes that you will see whatever you need to not get it (Levine 2008).

What seemed to occur while I was up there was that, scanning the faces of the audience, I anticipated misrecognition. Filled with shame, and by no means my first experience with the paralyzing moral emotion, I lost access to language. Thus, shame, takes us to the pre-inter-subjective – I felt disconnected from the others in the crowd. In contrast to my wordlessness, vis-à-vis half an elementary school, my own experience in psychotherapy (specifically as a patient) has been defined by a (re)discovery of my own voice. But, certainly I was not ready for, nor familiar with, the recognition I was after. There was a parallel process with a cilient from that year, who I considered "unrecognized," and therefore, like me. This totalization on my end led to ruptures and counter-transferential acting out I could not *understand*. But these moments of mis-attunement (and shame) turned out to be essential to my learning.

A similar phenomenon goes on in the paradigmatic tale from the Western Imaginary, *Home Alone*. Kevin McCallister, who is my second character study, experiences the shame of being dominated by the way his family members *see* him. Unable to locate himself amidst his too-busy family, he fantasizes their absence (destruction, as I will read it) and has his own search for recognition. Through the intermediary of the Other, Old Man Marley who "buries the bodies in salt", and the "bad guys" (Harry and Marve), Kevin rediscovers himself. Then, when his family returns, *as if strangers,* they are finally able to recognize Kevin. But he is no longer recognized as the idiotic, helpless fool of the family, the symptom-bearer as it were, but as self-

sufficient Kevin: an idealized protégé, the golden child who successfully survives the trauma of premature autonomy. Given the popularity of *Home Alone*, I consider ways it offers a normalized account of a child's confrontation with difference, shame and recognition. I use it to continue to question the status of the Other, the ego and the family in contemporary psychoanalyic discourse.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Methodology

As I've already belabored, the shame and recognition literature is paradoxical. On the one hand, shame is a necessary outcome of being in the world with the other. On the other hand, shame can be destructive; when difference or separation is too much, co-navigating shame becomes unfathomable. In other words, we all need *some* protection from shame and vulnerability. Much of my work will attempt to make sense of the shame we need, and the shame we would like to get rid of.

My approach to shame and recognition will be both phenomenological and psychoanalytic. I am claiming that shame is an essential part of our *first* experience of/with the Other. Levinas (1961) and Sartre (1956) each account for shame in this specifically ontological way. As I draw from psychoanalytic theory, the study of shame brings with it recognition, separation and difference. I conceptualize shame as existential, as a supplement to the psychodynamic-defense-definition. Ultimately, the discussion of shame and recognition raises the issue that there are *always* 'blind spots', that is what shame is: the spot only the other can see you from (hence, reflexivity). Speaking from my experiences, and, as a case in point, this thesis is an attempt to fill in a lot of (my) blind spots, and seek my own recognition.

For this paper, because I would say I am "working through" my shame, much of my work is synthesis. First, I read the phenomeologists on shame – Sartre, Levinas. They provide me with the ontological description of shame I need, as it is relevant to the clinician, describing, in detail, the profound experience of being in the world with the Other. Additionally, both Sartre and Levinas write shame as a moment of reflexivity, which comes from a look or a face, presented to the subject as vulnerability itself. Next, I read the psychoanalysts on shame – Freud (1914, 1922); Mahler (1975); Kohut (1968); Winnicott (1971); Wurmser (1981); Ikonen (1993); Lacan (1988). Their shame is protective; it's actually the *response* to shame: a mask or a mirror (protection from difference; desire for likeness). I take both perspectives to be compatible; in fact, Lacan does some of the synthesis for me. Lacan's mirror stage is a moment of vulnerability and disorientation – in a sense, it is the moment of recognition between a caregiver and child, but it takes me to the "limit of recognition." Via my case material, I place myself in the mirror stage with a young client from my first-year, Javi, reflexively as a clinician, and attempt to use his insights (transference) to see from my blind spots (countertransference). Finally, I take the story of Kevin McCallister, from the movie *Home Alone*, as a dominant narrative in the West for preoedipal development, separation, shame and recognition.

My tendency is to generalize about 'universal' affect (shame) rather than discuss particular populations experiences of shame. I choose the theories I did more or less unconsciously. In other words, this is what I've *chosen* to read in the last four years of my life. I now recognize how deliberate these choices were, how often they protected me from difference, how I turned to philosophy as a way out of psychoanalysis, how I first turned to psychoanalysis to learn about who "I really am." I feel like a lot of it chose me, in a way, this thesis is simply the

voices of the Other that have resonated with me, and the voices of the Other that I need to push up against.

When I seem to be too theoretical, I lean on others – I'd prefer to use someone else's words than my own. I try to be my own observing ego, but, ultimately, there are always blind spots. Perhaps they will provide some insight.

## CHAPTER THREE

## Phenomenologies of Shame

### Jean-Paul Sartre: The Look, Being Alone

Sartre (1951) has made one of the more relevant contributions to the shame literature to date, according to Schneider (1977). For him, shame crops up as we notice the Other looking at us. The look is, quite literally, a perceptual relation to the Other, which for Sartre, is a fundamental relation: "the very type of my being-for-others" (p. 341). Perception is the earliest ego function and structures the first interaction with the Other (Spitz 1950). And unlike other objects in the environment, the Other is a being that looks, and in looking, disturbs – and shames – the complacent subject.

The look, Sartre states, is "a pure reference to myself" (p. 347). Shame can only come from the other, but it affects the subject. I take this to mean that the Other is always the deliverer of shame, even, perhaps, when alone. Winnicott (1974) describes the "capacity to be alone" as paradoxical, because ultimately, the subject is *never alone*. The infant only hones her capacity to be alone in the company of the other. Sartre is saying something similar – "the Other is the indispensable mediator between myself and me" (p. 302). It is through the other's look that I can come to see myself – Winnicott (1974), later, calls this the mirror function of the mother. It must

be that we see ourselves through her eyes before our own. And this, significantly, is where all the shame arises in the first place – shame is *the* response to otherness.

"Through shame," Sartre carries on, "I have discovered an aspect of myself" (p. 350). This is shame at its most existential. Sartre treats 'the look' as the origin of shame, but even more profoundly, he treats the look as the origin of self-discovery. But, *this self-discovery only occurs through the eyes of the other*, thus associating insight with shame.

Shame is that "my nature is – over there, outside my lived freedom" which is to say that inersubjective existence is "over there", in the Other (Ibid.). Shame is a reminder that the Other exists. It is in shame that the subject discovers the ego, which, Sartre adds, exists for the Other. "Nevertheless I am that Ego; I do not reject it as a strange image, but it is present to me as a self which I am without knowing it; for I discover it in shame and, in other instances, in pride" (350). Being an object for the other is, in the last analysis, the cause of shame. Sartre, though, welcomes shame. "I need the Other in order to realize fully all the structures of my being" (303). Shame is inevitable in the intersubjective relation, as well as in the capacity for (self)-recognition. Sartre is way ahead of Benjamin (1981) in coining recognition, and positing a connection between it and shame (Levine 2008).

"*Shame is by nature recognition*. I recognize that I am as the Other sees me" (302; italics mine). This is the closest anyone has come to the connection I am making. There are more important passages that mention separation and freedom, but they won't make enough sense, as I have not moved through my *developmental* reading of shame (Freud 1914; Mahler 1975; Klein 1935; Lacan 1988). In short, shame has, first and foremost, to do with separation, which Sartre calls "distance", between the subject and the Other. Shame boils down to the fact that we will internalize the Other's look (though it will still remain foreign to the ego).

Sartre asks "What sort of relations can I enter into with this being *which I am* and which shame reveals to me?" These questions are of the utmost concern to the clinician – is this an intersubjective relation? How can I be *authentic* toward the Other? What do I do with (my) shame and otherness? Well, Sartre emphasizes that we must own our vulnerability under the Other's look: "I am this being. I do not for an instant think of denying it; my shame is a confession" (p. 350). The authentically Sartrean clinician, therefore, welcomes shame as a potential moment of de-centered reflexivity. When things go awry in clinical work, the therapist's shame reproduces Sartre's question: how should we engage with the Other? How do we *see* each other? As different? As similar?

**Emmanuel Levinas: From Destruction to Ethics**

*"…if I could have freely chosen my own existence everything would be justified."*

*- Levinas (1961; p.83)*

Levinas' (1961) Other differs in important ways from Sartre's. For starters, Levinas' Other represents "Infinity": everything different, not understood. *Infinity* is Levinas' way of organizing the stuff that doesn't have a category. In contrast to infinity, the subject is much more accustomed to "Totality" – the automatic and egocentric structuring of experiences without regard for otherness and difference. Levinas says that the presentation of the Other "suspends" totality. For example, an infant spills food, gets a look from her caregiver, and realizes that she should be more careful, or that it is okay to be messy, etc. Faced with the Other, the infant learns that her actions *effect* the Other. Thus, the relationship to the Other, to infinite difference, is ethical – that's where Levinas makes his contribution.

Remember that Sartre conceptualized shame, basically, as a rule that we are always already seen by, and determined by, the Other. For Levinas, it is not, as it was for Sartre, that we

get self-information from the Other. Actually, it is that the relation to the Other is ethical. "The first consciousness of my immorality is not my subordination to facts, but to the Other, to the Infinite" (Levinas 1961 p.83). Thinking about this developmentally, the first adjustment the infant makes is from existence to *co*-existence; shame being the response to this adaptation.

The most primary, and most common, experience according to Levinas is the experience of the Other. Yet, no one escapes totality. It is much easier (and less shameful) to think of what we understand, to plan what can be planned, to follow one's instincts (etc.) than to think of what we missed. Of course, this is not what Levinas means, because infinity is only present in *the face* of the Other. Still, the idea is the same – infinity constantly surrounds us. For Levinas, it is a matter of recognizing when our own cognitive schemas are destructive to this otherness. In fact, asserting one's self risks stepping on the toes of the Other – that's Levinasian shame.

Shame, when Levinas considers it in his 'ethics of the other', comes up in regard to freedom.

> Thus this way of measuring oneself against the perfection of infinity is not a theoretical consideration; it is accomplished as shame, where freedom discovers itself murderous in its very exercise. It is accomplished in shame where freedom at the same time is discovered in the consciousness of shame and is concealed in the shame itself.

Here, it is the freedom to destroy the Other (in fantasy) that makes one ashamed.[3] Shame, then, marks the discovery of the totalizing impulse. Levinas continues

> Shame does not have the structure of consciousness and clarity. It is oriented in the inverse direction; its subject is exterior to me. Discourse and Desire, where the Other presents himself as interlocutor, as him over whom I cannot have power, whom I cannot kill, condition this shame, where, qua I, I am not innocent spontaneity but usurper and murderer. Contrawise, a theoretical idea of another myself is not adequate to the infinite, to the other as other, already for the simple

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[3] A good example from psychoanalytic theory is Klein's (1935) theory of the paranoid-schizoid position and Winnicott's (1949) description of "Hate in the Counter-transference."

reason that he provokes my shame and presents himself as dominating me. His justified existence is the primary fact, the synonym of his very perfection. (84)

That passage builds on my previous explanation, but goes one step further to elucidate the nature of the Other. The disparity between I and Other is qualitatively different than Sartre's. Levinas' Other is not another me, a doppelganger. The relation to his Other is not a mirror relation: each moment with the Other is an opportunity to recognize them, not totalize them in a narcissistic way. Experiencing Infinity gives us the idea of the perfect, from which we realize that we are imperfect. Our self-esteem is lost in the Other, we experience shame as they call that pride, that freedom, into disbelief.

Welcoming the perfect is "the commencement of moral consciousness, which calls in question my freedom" (84). Shame is, then, giving the ideal back to the Other. It is the realization that you are nothing but a supplement to this separate Other, who is better-equipped for autonomy than our infant subject. If the Other "dominates me" it is because they are in a position of height, privilege and independence, while the subject is fundamentally dependent on them. For Levinas then, we are only fulfilling our ethical obligations to the Other when we recognize their difference and our inability to grasp those differences. That, in short, is a lot of shame to retain.

### From Phenomenology to Psychoanalysis

In sum, we get shame from the Other's look, which founds self-reflexivity. Sartrean shame had to do with the fact that self-recognition depends on the Other. Taking this a step further, Levinas placed shame in the ethical. Here, shame operates as a retroactive question of freedom. It is not enough to access the self via the Other, we have to bear witness to the Other too. Always under the Other's gaze - it is now a matter of *how* they see us, and that is why the

unconscious interferes with recognition, and why I need to turn to psychoanalysis. It is not that they simply see you, but, that *they see you from their point of reference*. The implication is that, perhaps after all this ontological shame, we are in a better position to recognize difference. Given our status as a "culture of shame", I am not sure this implication holds out (Morrison 1996).

My purpose for drawing from these 'ontological' accounts of shame is that they bear on our first experiences with the other – which is the direction I hope to take shame through psychoanalytic theory. I agree with both Sartre and Levinas that shame is, in fact, ontological in this way – meaning that it is felt in every experience of being in the world with the Other. If we give shame this primacy, then it also bears on me to connect, inextricably, shame *with* separation *from* the Other, and recognition *by* the Other. With Sartre and Levinas as a backdrop, I will review the psychodynamics of shame and recognition via the 'mask' and 'mirror' metaphors respectively.

Psychoanalysts have dealt with shame at, mostly, an intra-psychic level. I organize what I perceive to be the two major theories of shame and recognition around two paradigmatic psychoanalytic metaphors: the mask and the mirror. Implicit in both is a faulty, or missing, definition of otherness, problematic, of course, when juxtaposed with Sartre (1956) and Levinas (1961). According to Wurmser's (1981) "mask of shame", the subject's mask is a protection – from misrecognition, humiliation, exposure, etc. It's an excellent metaphor for shame because the seriously-shamed client does not recognize difference – they hide and defend against the Other's look. The mask is appropriate here because it defends against the overwhelming experience of the Other. On the other hand, it describes a patient with a mask, but not much

more. How can we have shame without the Other?[4] My case material will bear on both sides of the shame conflict relevant to the mask metaphor, bringing up the question – whose shame is it?

According to the *mirror* metaphor for shame, appropriated from Kohut (1968), Winnicott (1971), Frolund et. Al (1993) and Benjamin (1988), the other does not come into play. Instead, this Other is only is an *anticipated reflection* of the infant's emerging sense of self. One way of thinking about Kohutian narcissism is as a refusal of shame and vulnerability – shame cannot be a reality because the narcissist must appear perfect in the eyes of the other.

I will argue that the ego *is* the mask that protects us from the Other. The mirror theory relies on the assumption that the Other is perfectly attuned, leading to the conclusion that shame is a result of deficiencies in the mirroring function (Frolund 1993). Jacques Lacan (1988), in his description of the "mirror stage" argues that the mirror-relation is fundamentally narcissistic. I will use this theory to deconstruct the mirror metaphor for shame and recognition.

What stands out about both metaphors is that neither theory recognizes the role of the Other in shame. While it is common to oppose narcissism with difference, the analytic metaphors reenact subjective, private shame by never getting to the root of it – "the shame affect develops in interpersonal acts involving reciprocal perception of differences" (Seidler 2000, p. 305). *Shame has to do with how the Other responds to our differences.* Building on Seidler, I hope to tie this shame to separation and recognition, as these developmental processes occur simultaneously and indiscernibly. Developing infants may need affirming mirrors, but they also need an other that helps them tolerate difference, separation and shame in the early years. By never mentioning the Other, the foremost representative of difference, psychoanalysts continue missing the inevitability of shame, demonstrating in typical fashion how impossible, how destructive, recognition actually is (Benjamin 1981).

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[4] Of course, the Other is both internal and external.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Psychodynamics of Shame

### Definition: Origins

How have psychoanalysts thought about the phenomenology of the Other? Asked differently, what goes on in the first few years of life? After briefly defining shame, I will sketch out my developmental paradigm, which informs Lacan's mirror stage and my hypotheses of shame and recognition (Freud 1914; Klein 1935; Mahler 1975; Winnicott 1971; Stern 1985).

Shame's existence in psychoanalytic theory begins with Freud (1914/1922). In his *Three Essays*, Freud (1904) puts forward the scopophilic drive – the pleasure of seeing and being seen. Scopophilia gets lumped in the anal stage, since that is the stage the toddler masters her body, and the 'behind' is a place only the other can see you from – the first blind spot. During toilet training usually the parents (the Others) watch to make sure the toddler was successful 'going on their own.' Hence, Erikson (1950), in his psychosocial crises of childhood, opposes shame with autonomy. I find it fascinating that this crisis of autonomy depends on the other, perhaps even the other's *permissiveness* (Winnicott 1968). In other words, the Other must bear witness to the infant's exhibitionism and attempts at autonomy. Here, shame can interfere with the other's permissiveness. The Other must eventually be willing to say "he/she came from me, but he/she is not me." I speculate that shame interferes with our capacity to recognize difference, perhaps protecting us from exposing something too vulnerable to recognize.

In a straightforward definition, Moore and Fine (1990) state that shame

> refers to a broad spectrum of painful affects—embarrassment, humiliation, mortification, and disgrace—that accompany the feeling of being rejected, ridiculed, exposed, or of losing the respect of others. Early experiences of being seen, looked at, exposed, and scorned are significant in producing shame.

Even in this definition, Moore and Fine (1990) account for both the profoundly simple experience of being looked at (Freud 1904; Sartre 1956) and severer experiences of shame, i.e. rejection, ridicule. The *origins* of shame are not necessarily "pathological" but perhaps as essential as Sartre and Levinas claim. Rather, shame is structured paradoxically – defending against the Other or helping us see her (Sartre 1956; Levinas 1961).

### Structures of Shame: The Ego-Ideal

One of Freud's more-underexplored theories is the "ego-ideal". (Freud 1914; Chasseguet-Smirgel 1975). In the structural model, shame is "located" in the conflict between ego and ego-ideal (Blos 1974). Typically, and especially for Lacan (1988) and Chasseguet-Smirgel (1975), the ego-ideal is a fantasy space for the mother, the Other we separate from/against.

Freud first defined the ego-ideal in his essay *On Narcissism* (1914), where he describes the infants' anaclitic relation to the mother. Freud theorized that as we separate, we carve out mental space for the pre-separate world we leave behind, the time he called "primary narcissism." Mahler (1975) also saw social life developing out of a "normal autistic phase." To an extent, *physiological* birth is premature; the infant is never "ready" to be born (or the mother isn't ready to let them go). In contrast, Stern's observations (1985) denied any existence of a primary narcissism: "There is no confusion between self and other in the beginning or at any point during infancy. They…never experience an autistic-like phase" (p. 10). So much of the shame-debate hangs on the false dichotomy that Stern describes between autonomy and dependence. Naturally, we are in paradoxical space (Winnicott 1974), this is the juncture between fantasy (autonomy) and reality (dependence, helplessness).

In these initial moments of intersubjectivity, the infant is at once interested and simultaneously overwhelmed by its interpersonal world. When infants cannot handle all the difference, they avert their gaze or shut their eyes. *The Other must allow the infant these freedoms.* So even if Stern wants to give the infant a bit too much self-determination, I think we are actually treading the most delicate balance of self-other co-construction. In this way, the infant does experience loss, if anywhere at the level of fantasy, *which turns into the ego-ideal.* No longer is the relationship symbiotic, one-inside-the-Other, but now two distinct creatures that have to co-navigate each other, this is especially true for the newborn. Via the ego-ideal, the infant subject grasps itself (all the while maintaing lost narcissism), eventually, in the form of the ego. That is one way of making sense of Freud (1914), Mahler (1975) and Stern (1985). In my analysis, it comes back to this ego – what is its structure and what is its role in shame and recognition?

"The ego is, first and foremost, a body ego" (Freud 1923). The question about the ego is simultaneously a question about shame, as shame is always a reference to the body. I am saying that because of physical separation – that is, birth – we have to *psychologically* separate, though the latter never ends. In other words, separation is itself a paradox; for me, separation is more of a perpetual rapprochement between Other and I. This lag in body/mind development creates a great deal of dependence, in conflict with the "omnipotent freedom" the infant was used to. As we begin separating, taking notice of our difference from the one we are separating from, the seeds of shame are planted.

Later in Freud's thinking, he noticed that in melancholia, the ego is also divided into two pieces, the second of which contains the lost object – "we have called it the 'ego-ideal'…" In fact, this intra-psychic separation pre-empts object-relatedness: "the ego now enters into the

relation of an object to the ego-ideal which has been developed out of it." The ego-ideal is, according to Freud, the first object. Separation from the first love-object drives the subject to relate: for example, in group-formation, identification, with ideology, and even love (Freud 1922). In love, we seek out the ego-ideal, the lost object, which is why the ego-ideal works in the "service of Eros" (Chasseguet-Smirgel 1985). No wonder Webster (2008) makes a connection between love and shame, and Benjamin (1988) places recognition between the "bonds of love" and destruction.[5] When shame is overwhelming, we may have a case of object abuse (Winnicott 1969).

The disparity between an ego and ego-ideal does not always result in shame. The shame response occurs when the two entities conflict with each other. When the other, a stand-in for the ego-ideal, mis-recognizes (e.g. judges, scorns, etc.) the subject, the latter may feel shame. When the other *confirms* something in the subject (recognition), and the two entities are temporarily in sync, there is a feeling of pride (Sartre 1956, opposes shame and pride). And finally, in love, the subject seeks out the object of primary narcissism, who we hope will undo the trauma of separation, shame and premature autonomy. Indeed, social historian Christopher Lasch states: "separation from the mother shatters self-esteem because it forces the child to confront his own weakness and dependency – the gap between ego and ego-ideal, which we spend the rest of our lives trying to close" (Chasseguet-Smirgel 1985, p. x). This last point is why, in the last analysis, we have a mirror metaphor for shame, because so many people imagine that love is a relation between two individuals who *complement* one another. We don't actually want to close this gap (though Lasch is certainly right) – that would mean disavowing weakness and vulnerability. First the subject must develop the capacity to be alone – in the context of the other – (Winnicott

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[5] However, Lacan has written about this love, which is an essentially narcissistic love., perhaps suggesting that the ego-ideal is not just serving Eros, but Thanatos as well.

1958). In love, we must accept difference, not see ourselves the way we do in the mirror relation. Only from the position of "paradise *lost*" can the subject begin to engage with the world.

So, when Freud (1914) asks "why" the infant leaves the paradise of narcissism and attaches to objects, he provides the answer that too much ego-libido may lead to illness:

> The answer which would follow from our line of thought would once more be that this necessity arises when the cathexis of the ego with libido exceeds a certain amount. A strong egoism is a protection against falling ill, but in the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love.

But of course, leaving narcissism has to do with the affect Freud could not quite grasp: shame. It has to be that the infant leaves narcissism because of disharmony – the mother is not a perfectly-attuned omnipotent object, she is a subject of her own. The infant *needs* shame to disorient her, to remove her from her narcissistic orbit and bring her attention to the Real Other.

### From the Ego-Ideal to the Other: Recognition and Destruction

*"All his subsequent dealings with women were acts of revenge against the memory of his mothers"*
  - *Rushdie (1983) p. 35*

Separation might not be the best term to describe the processes at work here. It's not as simple as one person leaving another. Rather, separation is ideally about the comings and goings of two distinct subjects, and each managing each other's differences. However, in Winnicott (1971; 1958), Benjamin (1988) and my case material, the autonomy of one subject is sometimes experienced as aggression towards the Other.

How does one come to accept that the first object is an Other? How do we learn to respect the Other as an external reality? Winnicott (1971) puts this in terms of aggression, which we've seen from Levinas (1961), is part of the shame experience. The infant first relates to the

object. Then, prior to recognizing the object as such (as Other), the subject destroys the object. In fantasy, Winnicott argues, the subject's omnipotent control of the object is destructive to the object. The only way the parent can "survive" its own destruction is, not retaliation Winnicott emphasizes, but rather, permission – they must tolerate the destruction.

I have to underline Winnicott's (1969) claim that fantasies of destruction provide the basis of reality – we will see this in *Home Alone* later. The infant subject only determines what is real versus what is fantasy via the object's survival. Winnicott (1969) maintains, "my thesis is that the destruction plays its part in making the reality" (122). In surviving, the subject can *use* the object, not exploitatively but cooperatively, with recognition going both ways. Winnicott warns that the object has a "liability not to survive" (124), which has to do with tolerating change and difference. Why does the object fail to survive? When does the object become recognized so-called objectively, as survivor, as Other? Relational psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin (1988) takes up this thread.

Benjamin (1988) rearticulates Winnicottian destruction in terms of separation. "Separation – whether really leaving or simply asserting one's own will – is often interpreted as a hostile act, by both parties" (213). She says of the mother-infant dyad: "Consciously, her child is perfect (as her own mother was) and no sacrifice is too great; unconsciously, he is powerful and destructive (as she was, when she wanted to separate or when she denied her mother's independence)." Benjamin recognizes that the preoedipal object-relation must be one of mutual recognition, but the intergenerational unconscious interferes with separation, *if either party has unfulfilled needs for recognition*. Most importantly, her Other is gendered: "The symbolic structure of gender polarity produces the fantastic ideal of motherhood even as it stimulates the fear of destroying all maternal goodness. On the social level, male rationality sabotages maternal

recognition" (214). Only the *mother's* survival of destruction allows her to claim her subjectivity

and stake her own demands for recognition. This survival is especially difficult given the

oppression of women and motherhood that Benjamin (1988) notes.

Benjamin goes on to mention

"idealization marks the entry into a gendered reality. To be sure, idealization of
the early figures who raise us is to some extent inevitable. It is one pathway of the
desire for recognition, a welcome escape at just the moment when the child's
awareness of opposition between self and other brings the fall from grace: the
confrontation with difference." (222).

Now things are starting to come together. If we are doomed to idealize, but the other side

of it is destruction, how can we emerge with a capacity for recognition? At this very early stage

in infant development, the question is, what do we do with all the shame? What should we do to

deal with idealization and destruction, before recognition is possible? We take up our masks, i.e.

the ego.

### Function: Shame is a Mask

*"Every profound spirit needs a mask"*
  - *Nietzsche (1973)*

Leon Wurmser (1981) is a psychoanalyst who, perhaps better than any other, has taken

on the ethical side of psychoanalysis, typically through an analysis of the archaic superego

(Wurmser 2004). His approach is classical, though he draws from many disciplines. Shame, for

him, is the "veiled companion of narcissism," by which he means that shame

Is an affect concerned with self-respect and integrity, not with caring about the
other. It is self-related, a narcissistically oriented, not an object-related, feeling,
but one of great power and importance. No one else has to see this stain – the
shame remains. (p.19)

As I've already introduced Sartre (1956) and Levinas (1961), we know that Wurmser must be mistaken about the role of the Other in shame. From where does shame get its "great power and importance" if not the other, the one we depend on? Later in the book, Wurmser adds that shame is both subject and object-related. Still, he operates from a one-body theory of psychoanalysis, and accordingly, this is a one-body theory of shame.

Each reference Wurmser makes to shame comes back to the name of his book, *The Mask of Shame*. The mask, a visual metaphor, connotes Wurmser's hesitance to give the other a role in shame. That is, the mask, worn by the subject, is a protection from the outside world; shame is a defense. The nature of the other is, for Wurmser, less important than what the shamed-subject communicates *without the other*. In other words, shame, in this defensive way, leads one to *replace* the other. Wurmser observes that his clients withdraw, self-reject, hide, etc. *preemptively*, before the possibility of being seen or exposed. This is the part of shame that Wurmser is most concerned with – the clinical side, where, in almost each clinical encounter, his patients fear over-exposure, intrusion or recognition.

Nonetheless, Wurmser does ponder more ontological hypotheses of shame. For example, in his interpretation of "The Fall" he asks: "Does this say – ontogenetically – that shame as a central and organized affect arises at the time of the discovery of language?" (p.55).

Indeed, Wurmser takes shame very seriously – shame adapts us to the public/private dichotomy. In fact, here, he nails the phenomenological side of shame: "Would one not expect that we would need a constantly vigilant guardian to protect the inner life from being overwhelmed by the spellbinding force of others?" (65-66). Intolerable experiences of shame will protect from, rather than bring one closer to, recognition; even though it was this same look

from the other, Sartre says, that invites us to the ethical world.[6] Now, in Wurmser, it is the look

that the subject *hides* from. While the mask appears superficial, it also communicates something

to the psychotherapist – "you will *not* see me." In other words, it lets a therapist know how much

"you", as looker/difference, they can tolerate. Needless to say, *shame is a mask we all wear.*

### Shame and Mirroring

*"Narcissus did not recognize his own reflection and was immediately enamoured. Narcissus bent down his head to kiss the vision. As he did so the reflection mimicked his actions. Taking this as a sign of reciprocation Narcissus reached into the pool to draw the water spirit to him. The water displaced and the vision was gone. He panicked, where had his love gone? When the water became calm the water spirit returned. "Why, beautiful being, do you shun me? Surely my face is not one to repel you. The nymphs love me, and you yourself look not indifferent upon me. When I stretch forth my arms you do the same; and you smile upon me and answer my beckonings with the like." Again he reached out and again his love disappeared. Frightened to touch the water Narcissus lay still by the pool gazing in to the eyes of his vision…*
He was transfixed; he wanted to stay there forever. Narcissus like Echo died with grief. *His body disappeared and where his body once lay a flower grew in its place. The nymphs mourned his death and as they mourned Echo also mourned."*
  - *Narcissus and Echo*

The *mirror* is the second metaphor through which I will consider shame, though it is

more a metaphor for recognition.[7] The mirror differs from the mask insofar as it describes a

relation rather than a subject. Moreover, we have moved from a one-body to a two-body

psychology, though, from the quote above, it seems the two are not mutually exclusive (Freud

1927; Kohut 1968; Winnicott 1954; Frolund 1998; Lacan 1939).

A few authors have recently connected shame with mirroring. In terms of treatment,

Heinz Kohut, working with narcissistic-disturbances, defines the mirror transference as a relation

to a "separate person who, *however*, has significance to the patient *only* within the framework of

the needs generated by his therapeutically reactivated grandiose self" (Kohut 1968; p.96 italics

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[6] It's scary how close shame and pride are sometimes.
[7] In the above quote: Narcissus does not recognize his reflection as him, but sees it as an ideal-ego, an ideal other. But the ideal-ego cannot always reciprocate, I wonder if shame also contributed to his death.

mine). For Kohut, the "mirror transference" is the reactivation of an earlier state, in which "the gleam in the mother's eye, which mirrors the child's exhibitionistic display, and other forms of maternal participation in the child's narcissistic enjoyment confirm the child's self-esteem" (Ibid.). The gleam in the mother's eye is a good indicator that we are talking about shame and recognition.

The purpose of the mirror transference is that the therapist recognize the client's grandiose self, which helps the patient transform grandiosity into realistic self-esteem. The mirror transference is to an ego-ideal, thus alluding to the narcissistc relation Freud (1914) first described. Kohut seemed to be on the same page as Wurmser – *the shamed client does not recognize the other,* in this case, the therapist. The therapist in a mirror transference is experienced as an extension of the client's self, a selfobject. *Unrecognized as a subject, the patient does not have the capacity to recognize the therapists' independence either.* Stretching this theory, shame results from poor mirroring, also known as, empathic failures (Kohut 1968)[8]. Clearly, Kohut's narcissists had high expectations from the other, which makes me wonder: what should we expect from our parents? Is the mirror an appropriate metaphor to describe a *relationship*?

Iknonen (1993) says that shame has been, historically, described as stranger anxiety (Spitz). "When the infant notices that he does not meet the mother's gaze which he had taken for granted, he is ashamed of his false expectation." The undeniable cause of shame, according to Ikonen (1993), is anticipated *reciprocity*. Thus, the mirror relation *soothes* the shame of difference because it communicates, "you are like me", and can protect from mis-attunement. And the infant should expect perfection, since they were used to it. Still, this does not mean that the other *is* a mirror. The mirror-relation, when played out in psychotherapy, is closer to

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[8] Self psychology rests on a connection between shame and subjectivity (Sedgewick 1995).

Winnicott's (1969) description of object-usage, in which the mother gets treated as an object *temporarily*, her subjectivity consumed by her attunement to her infant. In fact, that level of object-abuse is destructive to the Other. Shame, in these descriptions, *disrupts* the capacity to recognize others – that is why the mirror relation is the farthest we have gotten in shame dynamics. The Other has shifted from being seen, perhaps, through Wurmser's mask, and now, as if an extension of the self, in the mirror. From these theories, we can begin to reconstruct the earliest interaction with the other, despite all the shame.

### Jacques Lacan: The Mirror Stage

The Lacanian approach to clinical psychoanalysis is radical: historically, Lacan argues that ego psychology, and even object relations theory, depart too far from the Freudian discovery that "man is not master in his own house" (Freud, 1917). The common clinical mistake is confusing the Lacanian subject, a subject of language, with the ego, which Lacan sees as a perceptual illusion. I can sum up the paradigm shift Lacan (1988) makes here: "the subject is decentered in relation to the individual. That is what 'I is an other' means" (9). The subject is decentered in relation to its ego because of the discord between perception (ego) and language (unconscious), the disorientation takes us into the peculiar stage of development Lacan calls the mirror stage.

*The mirror stage is the site at which the subject is de-centered*. Remember, the subject is basically a being in language: "Founding speech, which envelopes the subject, is everything that has constituted him, his parents, his neighbors, the whole structure of the community, and not only constituted him as symbol, but constituted him in his being" (20). Later in his work, he says that the "unconscious is the discourse of the Other". By this he means that the unconscious, of which psychoanalysis takes as its starting point, is symbolic, a chain of signifiers – so that when

we free associate, the unconscious speaks (and speaks the truth). In contrast to this symbolic unconscious, the ego is the source of resistance and defense, and is organized by perception and fantasy (not language).

In short, the ego is what we see, when we see ourselves in the mirror, always fantasied. The origins of the ego date back to the mirror relation I described earlier: "The ego is constituted in relation to the other" (p. 50). I might say that when we look, we tend to see ourselves, mirrors everywhere, but when we speak to the Other, we speak a radically different language. Prior to the mirror stage, the subject is nothing but fragments of language, until it is able to locate/identify itself, in its mothers eyes or wherever else. Now at this early stage the human infant only perceives forms, the mother's face is not 'recognized' but perceived as a "Gestalt", a unity, and the ego is constructed similarly (Spitz 1950). The infant cannot help but mistake self and other, still separating, it uses the object to organize itself. In short, the ego is nothing but our collection of these types of perceptual identifications.

What makes the ego narcissistic is that the infant is just learning the rules of the game, by which I basically mean the social rules: co-existence with the Other. The reign of absolute narcissism is over. Our infant subject now has to navigate the world of language, difference, the Other, whom we hope can tolerate the shame and vulnerability of a newly evolving subjectivity, which, most importantly, speaks, that is to say *it begins to give an account of itself, and seek its own recognition*. But it first needs an ego, the borrowed self-image from the other, so it also has some protection from exposure and intrusion.

Judith Butler (2005) writes that "exposure, like the operation of the norm, constitutes the conditions of my own emergence as a reflective being…This exposure…is a feature of my very

corporeality, and in this sense, of my life" (p.33; p.39).[9] The fundamental exposure so crucial to human existence is, going back to Sartre, the ego itself, corporeality, being vulnerable to the face of the Other, whom we depend on, and who sees us from every angle, though we only see from one (Lacan 1988). In order to emerge as subjects (reflective beings), there must be both an Other there to recognize us and an Other that demands its own recognition, an Other that we have to answer to. The latter is Levinas' theory of shame as retroactive, because this Other is destroyed, not-recognized, before it can be recognized.

Am I getting carried away? Wurmser (1988) warns about the fear of over-generalizing shame – once you begin noticing it, it comes up everywhere. Using Lacan (2007) to respond, I too feel that if you're doing analysis or are in analysis then "you've got enough [shame] to open a shop" (182). Because if psychoanalysis is concerned with a decentered subject then it is a subject that shame protects – that's what the ego is "and there is no way of getting out of it." What psychoanalytic psychotherapy does via mirroring, ideally, is allow someone to give a *different* account of themselves (Butler 2000) – mirroring helps two subjects work through shame and recognize one another (eventually, of course). Lacan finally shows that the mirror is *a stage*, and albeit a necessary one, one we cannot afford to remain in if we are to become truly ethical beings.

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[9] The norm operates in the same way insofar as it shames a characteristic, group, etc. It applies to Benjamin's discussion of gender, as well as Yoshino's discussion of covering behavior.

**The Mirror as the Limit of Recognition**

*"We always understand too much, especially in analysis. Most of the time, we're fooling ourselves."*
*– Lacan (1988), p. 103*

*"I interpret mainly to let the patient know the limits of my understanding"*
*- Winnicott, (1971) p.116*

Lacan deconstructs the mirror metaphor for shame, criticizing our cherished ego-ideals – autonomy and mastery. I think he is right to shame the American psychoanalytic traditions: ego psychology and self psychology for their mis-appreciation of the ego. In other words, if autonomy exists *as opposed to shame*, which is how Erikson (1950) frames it, then I would rewrite this dialectic as that between fantasy (autonomy) and reality (shame). And, if mastery and autonomy exist as (ego) ideals then it is only because we *refuse* to acknowledge our vulnerabilities, a Real shame more ontological than a fantasied self.

I will investigate Levine (2012), and see how relational psychoanalysts make the connection between shame, recognition and mirroring.

To recognize is to acknowledge the existence of something different. The infant's recognition of difference depends, first, on the acknowledgement of difference on their end (otherwise they may be trapped in attunement). The mirror relation is much more of an interference here than anything. The mirror relation is what we need to transcend in order to really talk about "authentic" recognition. *Shame can keep us at the mirror stage; but with good company, shame can also provide insight.*

Levine (2012) shows, by way of mirroring, how the therapist always "fails" as a mirror. The article Levine calls "Into thin air" to describe how quickly the "emotionally alive" psychoanalytic space could become dead and inarticulate with one of her clients, Julia. Said

differently, recognition so easily vanishes with the shamed client. Levine describes this in greater detail:

"We went through periods in the treatment in which there was a shared sense of vivacity, a creative sense of 'flow' in sessions, in which she imagined and described art projects she wanted to create. We would both feel hopeful and optimistic about her capacity to make art. But inevitably, the aliveness would disappear, as if into thin air, and she would shift into a more discouraged state, in which her art felt far away and inaccessible. At such times, she would periodically consider stopping treatment." (p. 457)

Her discussion of shame and recognition brings up for her, creativity, mirroring, and intersubjectivity. Julia's initial moments of recognition, recognition of her true self, were too unfamiliar for her to tolerate. Her distance served to shame, that is to de-center, the therapist. From that position, Levine quotes Phillip Bromberg (2006): "dissociated 'not-me' self-states continue to get enacted in the treatment until they are experienced in the countertransference and gradually understood by analyst and patient" (465). What is interesting is how Levine frames her counter-transference, as she comes to be in a position, similar to Julia, of shame and misrecognition.

In the context of mirroring, how can we think of what happened? Recognition gets complicated; mirroring is not an end in itself. Levine is obviously attuned to Julia, but Julia is more familiar with mis-attunement. Levine's mirroring is therapeutic, no doubt, especially as it is experienced by Julia. Mirroring, though, works to a point, then disintegrates (it may even feel superficial, as Julia describes). The therapist gradually becomes an Other, by being someone different, by offering recognition, and having a *different* experience of Julia – that's the separation piece. We need both attunement and mis-attunement – both are within the realm of

inter-subjectivity. Still, whatever happens has to happen *through the eyes of the Other*. In other words, only when Levine experiences the counter-transference (the loss, the despair) and recognizes it as Julia-the-subject, can she start to help Julia unpack the shame. Levine's recognition of Julia occurs when Levine is shamed, a new experience of de-centering, albeit one that she recognizes as Julia's, as the Other's. As something begins to get clearer, another blind spot crops up – the nature of perception in the mirror stage makes recognition nearly impossible. That is why I emphasize complicating recognition, because once you think you're there, you're not – more shame.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Relevance to Clinical Social Work

No doubt a study of shame is relevant to clinical social work. I've claimed already that any encounter with the Other evokes shame – clinical social work is no exception. But, because the Other is in a position of power, the therapist, also an Other, must side with shame. No matter where social workers intervene, macro or micro-level, their interventions aim to deconstruct ideologies of power. On the social side, invisibility and marginalization – on the clinical, affective side, shame.

Oppressed populations experiences of shame and invisibility are well-documented by social work literature (Gray 2010; Gump 2000; Dimen 2005). This literature tends to be *particular*, in regards to shame associated with racism, sexuality, class, people diagnosed with HIV and AIDS, etc. My contribution to the social work literature on shame is *general* rather than particular. I suppose my interest in shame is narcissistic, insofar as I claim it "moves us from the individual to the social", I mean to say that I am in the midst of that trajectory.

My own identity has protected me from shame to an extent because the center (of power) determines the blind spots, and, therefore, *delimits the possibilities for recognition*. Only the ego can protect an individual from recognizing these blind spots. The narcissist will not leave the mirror stage *except with shame*. And social work *values* place us *on the side of this shame* (which means we hold vulnerability). In the blind spots of the social, I frame this as a capacity for recognition – specifically (a) in terms of ideology and below, (b) in my first case study with Javi.

Recently, social worker Brene Brown (2011), like Lacan, has noticed the power that shame has over the human species, since it keeps us from talking. Sartre (1956) first noticed that the look produces shame. But, since shame is fundamentally about difference, this look determines *who* "covers" and covers what (Yoshino 2008). However, this is not a neutral observer, but an Other that defines and organizes difference, creating the blind spots as it were.

So, how does the therapist offer recognition? What does it mean to offer recognition? The therapist's specialized vision is not helpful early in treatment, since, we saw from Levine (2012), there is very little to see just yet. The clinical social worker may find themselves in a swarm of ideologies of pride, autonomy, certainty. They may feel compelled to turn to evidence-based practices, anything that claims closer access to truth and knowledge. Unfortunately, my point here is that the clinician, the analyst, whomever, cannot access truth – it is not a solo enterprise, it is not researchable, it is not objective. There might be something there, behind the curtains, and there might not be; either way, you cannot see it.

In the next section, I start reflecting on a case through my shameful counter-transference. During the work, I see now that I had turned away from my supervisor, claiming independence and, actually, refusing shame (I also feel I was trying to protect my supervisor from shame). I was dominated by the essential Lacanian ego function 'mecoinnasaince', which translates

'misrecognition.' I had fantasies of my own competence, even through moments of severe mis-attunement, desperate to show Javi that I was with him, that I understood him, protecting me from shame, and identifying myself in his vulnerability, which interfered with my ability to recognize him as an equal subject. The clinical social worker may be particularly susceptible to identifying with vulnerability and dependence, as I was; on the other hand, the seasoned psychoanalyst (the one inside me) may be quick to think that they, better than anyone, understands unconscious motivation. Trapped in these projections, I was a confused clinician wondering how to make my interventions, somewhere, perhaps, between knowledge and shame.

Keeping with Lacan, and trying to bring him to the psychodynamic social work literature: perhaps the only way for a subject to have agency is in language, a subject offering its own account. I provide case material below, which shows how Javi was able to break through his totalizations, which had come from my supervisor, and the rest of a confused, mis-recognizing elementary school staff as well as my own counter-transference. That is why I say we social workers are in the blind spots – no one knew what was going on with Javi, but everyone imagined they did: "autism? Psychosis? Trauma?" In contrast, I was probably over-identified with Javi and all of his shame-laden glory, but at least quiet enough to let his words affect me. For me, his academic struggles were emotional, and they needed time to be worked through. But much of the staff was looking for a diagnosis, some way to push him out of a mainstream classroom and into special education.

When we are quick to identify something, e.g. "autism", the label forecloses any mystery, any otherness from being explored, leaving no room for "infinity" (Levinas 1961). When you accept first that you do not understand, that you could not possibly make sense of this otherness, you may be quiet enough to hear a speaking subject. A clinician makes a difference because they

offer a (private) recognition that has been forbidden from the public sphere. The starting point of counter-transference, I hope to show, is the shameful fact that we are doomed not to see what is in front of us.

It is never the case that oppressed populations are not speaking – it is that their voices are not heard. I have found it essential to get in touch with my shame to listen for these quieted narratives, since, of course, it is that narrative *in me* that I struggle to recognize. To this day, Javi occupies a niche in my psyche that I continue to work through, as, narcissistically, the memory of him is probably a reference to myself.

## CHAPTER SIX

## Case Material

*"We first have to have a practice, a method, which reaches certain limits, which posits problems, which ends up at certain impasses, in order for a critical attitude to emerge."*
-   *Michel Foucault, 2007 (p.68)*

### Case Study #1: Case of Javi

*"Psychotherapy is about two people playing together."*

*- Winnicott (1971)*

*"The shame that I experience after sessions pivots between 'what have I done?' and 'why, in God's name, did that work?'"*

*- Webster (2008, p.2404)*

Javi was a 7-year-old, Latino male child who was in the first grade while we worked together. He and his immediate family lived in a low-income neighborhood near his school. His family included his mother, step-father, older sister and his baby sister, and he had family living in Central America. Javi presented with ADHD symptoms, the same symptoms of a complex trauma, including hyperactivity, inattention, impulsivity. The unresolved, unknown and

preverbal nature of the trauma made it so that I was constantly off – without language, I was unable to get the sense that I was understanding Javi. I saw many themes emerge relevant to a discussion of shame and recognition, including Javi's use of masks in the play metaphor, our playing hide and seek, and his ambivalence about being seen. Transference and counter-transference structures tended to repeat themselves: Javi's exposure, my interpretations, his shame, my shame, and eventually, moments of recognition.

Before even a first session, Javi was presented to me as being unfit for his mainstream classroom. A struggling school in a northeast city, special education was the only realistic alternative to 'mainstream education' – a second-grade class of 22 children per just one teacher. So, when students "misbehaved" or "acted out," they were referred for special education services, regardless of if their struggles were academic, behavioral, socio-emotional, etc. Though I heard a mental health worker call Javi "autistic", and despite his only actual diagnosis being Adjustment Disorder NOS, I was the only one working, therapeutically, with Javi. Here, my desires for recognition came to the fore, as I began noticing that I had access to a different Javi – by which I mean that I thought that many of his behaviors *made sense*, while the rest of the school totalized Javi's "acting out" as non-sensical, as meaningless. I started off trying to recognize something that the rest of the school could not see, and so, my (narcissistic) desires became locked-up in my work with Javi.

From September to November, Javi rarely made it through a full week of school. He was repetitively in crisis – when things weren't going well, he ended up on the floor in his classroom, laying out, kicking and throwing furniture, pencils, etc; or, running down the hallway, back and fourth, pouring sweat – both of which seemed to be attempts at self-regulation or reactions to re-traumatization. No one in the school could make sense of preverbal trauma, or, they were too

busy to try. Eventually, during his excursions, he would find his way to my office, where our work began to take shape.

When I wrote my first major case study, I chose to present Javi through Leon Wurmser's (2004) theory of the archaic superego. Thus, I saw myself as a stand-in, benign superego – helping Javi internalize a forgiving other, rather than the harsh judge he always presented to me or played out in the transference. This time, I am using shame and recognition to describe our relationship, as I think our closeness to shame helped us, respectively, navigate the transference-countertransference. This shame has given me a new way of seeing, reflectively, Javi and my interaction.

### *Exposures*

Javi's exposures took on many forms: in our first session, for example, he shared a dream with me. Later that month, as Javi was dealing with a new pair of pants that were too long and too tight, he used the play metaphor to be a tailor. Fancying myself a non-directive, child-centered therapist (though I was actually much too intrusive), I appreciated his transparency. His exposures were comforting to me, counter-transferentially, because it allowed me to stand back; I eventually used it as an excuse to "let the other be" – let him play, basically, without much constraint. I refused to acknowledge that there was any "hate in the counter-transference" – or even that there was counter-transference in the first place (Winnicott 1949).

In retrospect, I think I saw Javi as a perfect complement to me, as therapist. Our fit made it difficult to actually recognize Javi as a separate person. In other words, I perceived us as having complementary relational schemas, which, of course, neither of us wanted to abandon – sometimes our attunement was therapeutic, other times, it was not.

47

By my supervisor, I was informed at the outset that Javi had a trauma history – I later learned directly from him that he had both witnessed and was victimized by physical and verbal abuse. His play began to reveal those unconscious themes: not only was it highly aggressive, it was also sexual, which caught my supervisor's attention. She told me, against my own instincts, to "interpret the play" – that those themes were inappropriate and need to be "talked about." Thus, I abandoned my "let beings be" mantra, all the while having no idea how to interpret or "work through" metaphorical play with a seven year-old. Not to mention, I was dominated by my own unconscious needs for recognition from a supervisor that I realized I could not recognize myself in, theoretically. In one way, it took me to a more-familiar position of "I will do it on my own" – a turning away from the other that was about the shame that, again, I found someone who could not understand me. Javi had a parallel process with me sometimes, in which he fled my office, feeling rejected, yelling "Fine! I don't need you!" In another way, I felt more determined to figure out, from Javi himself, what exactly therapy was and how I could make the best use of myself. Said differently, I attempted to let Javi "use me" as an object (Winnicott 1969). What happened was countless examples of mis-recognition, retraumatization, rupture, etc. that we continued to navigate through, repair, and eventually led to moments of recognition.

Our play followed one of two themes (while it lasted): (a) wrestling, (b) families. When we set up the wrestling arena, Javi took to the play deciding that we could make *masks* for our characters. He would sometimes make eyeholes in the clay masks, but this particular time he wanted me to be unable to see. I became vulnerable Javi, and he got to play the destroyer:

J: He has to wear a mask
N: My guy?
J: Yeah, so he can't see me.
N: Okay. Here are the pencils to make eyeholes.
J: No, they can't see out of these masks.

N: Oh. (I walk around the ring, without being able to see, humming, feeling vulnerable)
(J attacks my guy, hitting him very aggressively at times)
J: He's dead
N: You beat him up
J: *Now the others need masks*
N: *They all get masks?*
J: *Yeah*. (He then attacks the next guy of mine that I put a mask on)
J: Okay, now this is a doctor
N (still unable to see): Hello? I don't hear anything…
J: I'm a doctor. Do you want me to try to take your mask off?
N: That would be very nice.
J: I can't
N: That's okay, thanks for trying
(At that point, the play degenerated into attacks on my people. He invited my characters to dance with him, and then tried to invite them to "kiss his boobies" and fart on the other characters. Needless to say, I felt I was doing therapy with a character from South Park.)
J: "Doodoododo" wanna dance?
N: Dooodododo, sure!
J: No! you can't sing! (attacks my guy)

In the last exchange, I remember realizing how hard it was to be a mirror for Javi, he so often rejected my attempts to mirror him. I had associations to the way Javi would sometimes arrive at my office, without a pass, without permission (except my unconditional permissiveness), and ever so slightly poke his head into the crack in my door. He would hang around to that extent until I caught his gaze, *shaming him but simultaneously recognizing him*, as ("needy") Javi. However, I couldn't always see him, and when he saw other students in my office, he sometimes experienced it as rejection, and would either flee the scene, disappearing temporarily, or, he would ask to wait outside. As I started to see him use family members in his play, and felt the pressures to make interpretations, I think I ruined the play metaphor by showing Javi that I was learning about him through the play, though he always rejected my interpretations. In the end, Javi seemed to learn that *I could not play*: my interpretations were obviously hostile, unnecessary intrusions into a safe space. Not only were they unhelpful, they were anti-therapeutic. Via my interpretations, I pushed Javi away from more typical play

therapy, and he shamed me by refusing to play with me in that way. In a roundabout way, we

arrived back at the only thing working between us: our mirror relationship – as we got some

distance from the play, we found that we had managed to make something work.

### *Intrusions*

One day after a session, Javi asked if we could stop by the water fountain before

returning to class. As he was drinking, Javi said, "now your turn." I said, "I'm not thirsty." He

replied, "yes...come on!" Here, the conflict for me was between being "child-centered", letting

Javi "be the boss", even being a mirror for him, versus not letting myself be ab-used. The whole

time, we were close to domination, since we both struggled with each other's differences.

Because we were both so consumed with shame, and our respective needs for

recognition, it was near impossible for either of us to offer each other the recognition we actually

needed – recognition of difference, as opposed to over-identification. In this sense, we met each

other at the mirror stage; we could each see each other in our tunneled vision sort-of way.

Nonetheless, there were *differences* to be navigated. As I felt more attuned to Javi, I started using

myself – *losing* myself might be more accurate – in the play. Here are two sessions where I

began to see progress being made:

N: Which guy should I pick first?
J: Not him
N: Him?
J: Nope
N: Okay..
J: This one (he chooses a female character)
N: Okay
J: Come get me (He hides his character behind the box)
N: I begin chasing his character.. (He would play hide and seek constantly, and it would often get overwhelming. *Anytime he was hiding or pretending to be invisible he would get shaky from the anticipation of being seen, of deciding when to be visible.* He would always laugh when we

played like this with toys, it seemed he could hide and watch me stumble around looking for him forever.)

J: Hahaha! I'm on the train.

N: (My character got on the train with him. Then, the session was interrupted by a teacher. I stepped outside for a minute and return to Javi who had rearranged a few things.)

N: What did I miss? (both characters sitting next to each other, Javi smiling)

N: Are they friends now?

J: Yeah, they can't fight because he's a boy and she's a girl.

N: Oh, I see

J: Wanna hang out with me?

N: Yes, that would be very nice.

J: Just kidding! (he hits her)

N: Ow! That hurt!

J: Fine! You don't want to be my friend! (He buries his character in the pile of action figures).

…….

J: He's dead. His face ripped off. (association to Oedipus poking his eyes out…)

N: Oh no! Should I check to see if he's okay?

(J nods)

N: Are you okay? Hello!?

J: I'm okay! I'm just tired…

N:  Oh, okay. Well, get some rest and you will feel better.

J: Um…you could sleep with me?

N: Umm, I don't think so. I will sleep over here and you sleep over there.

J: Okay, close your eyes.

N: Okay…

J: No peeking! (He starts laughing loudly)

N: I'm opening my eyes… What happened?

J: Oh sorry, that was my alarm. It's loud.

N: What happened here?

J: Um, we slept together.

N: Oh, I thought I said I didn't want to do that.

J: Fine! You see that window? Leave!

N: Okay, I will let myself out through the window…

(J whispers to me that the girl is dead)

J: Tell him.

N: She is dead…

J: NO! She is dead.. (he throws his guy in the air)

N: but it wasn't his fault.

J: Hello!

N: Oh, she's not dead, thank heavens..

J: Can I have a hug?

N: Sure

J: No, tomorrow.

N: Oh, okay, tomorrow.

J: I wanna go to Friendly's

N: Tomorrow buddy, it's time to go.

………..
(next time we meet, we picked up at Friendly's, where Javi insisted the couple bring their dog. I played the waiter, and Javi placed his order…)
J: Wait, what about the dog? He pooped on the floor. (Javi knew how to make things fun)
N: Oh goodness, he did? Well, we better bring him outside.
J: The waiter says you can't come back.
N: Okay, let's go home then.
J: Okay, we're home!
N: Let's take the dog out to do his business.
J: Close your eyes.
N: Here we go!
J (laughing hysterically): He pooped on your head.
N: He did! Bad dog! Don't poop on me! (Turning to Javi's character) Help me train him?
(J grabs the guy and moves them to another table.)
N: Is something wrong?
J: He's not answering you.
N: He's mad about something. Hmm, what should I do?
J: Write him a letter?
N: Okay
J: And bring him a pizza.
N: Oh, okay... "Dear husband…"
J: No! You need a paper and a pen.
N: Okay… "Dear husband…" (I begin writing)
J: No! It needs to say "Dear husband, why you're under the car? I love you with my heart. Signed and loved, your wife."
……
(We did this multiple times that session, Javi seemed to find the reparative process very therapeutic.)

After sessions like this, where I saw sexuality, aggression and Javi's desire to control me, I felt the pressure to "talk it out" with him after the session. I told him that I was worried about the stuff that happened while we played together, and would ask questions about his feelings about what I saw. He would shake his head, reject all of it, or tell me that he learned that stuff from "wrestling…on tv." Nonetheless, he did eventually disclose that his parents hit him "when he was bad" (not that this detail was important, but the trauma had me curious). Around this time he also told me that he heard "a voice in my head…telling me to do bad things." He was very upset one day when I interrupted the play to ask him about it, then, announced the five-minute

warning, to which he responded, angrily, "See! You always do that! You talk too much!" Given all the shame, it was difficult to control my intrusions.

I took this to be a "play disruption", described by Erikson (1950) as "the sudden and complete or diffused and slowly spreading inability to play" (223-224). We had moments of very therapeutic play, but I think I stole the fun from Javi's fantasy life when I made him talk about it – the latter step was superfluous and unnecessary. In fact, just by playing, which is therapeutic in itself (Winnicott 1971), Javi was working through what he needed to. However, by making him talk about it, by just *reflecting it back*, I shamed Javi for what he had exposed to me in the safety of the play metaphor.

### *Transference-Countertransference*

One day in March, I was walking Javi back to class after a play session (this was while we were still playing) and Javi proposed a question to me. "What if we were superheroes?" I replied, "What if we WERE superheroes?" He responded that he would be able to breathe fire. I said, "Wow, breathe fire!" And he continued, "And *you could read people's minds*."

I took this to be a pretty accurate translation of Javi's experience of transference with me. Here, he took on an aggressive power, and attributed to me the ability to read minds. Of course, we were not talking about telepathy, we were talking about the unconscious. I think he was ambivalent about this super-power of mine, as I so often over-stepped my boundaries with him. In other words, I don't think he meant to simply say that I've read his mind, that I've understood something about him. I assume he was also simultaneously complaining about the fact that I dug deeper than I needed to – telepathy and psychotherapy are not synonymous, though I can see that my own shame made me want to be a mind-reader rather than the therapist he needed.

Nonetheless, I took this message as a moment of reflexivity – the Other, as Javi, had recognized something in me too.

I like to think that I learned from this shame, as Javi eventually stopped "playing" in the ways I thought necessary. He happened to see me one morning during breakfast playing basketball with another client. Giddy with excitement, Javi asked if *we* could play basketball during *our* sessions. I could not say no, that's the counter-transferential truth, but I was reluctant to give up my position doing more-typical play therapy, where I felt I knew what was going on. So we safely enjoyed each others company, our symbiotic relationship, outside playing basketball through the spring season, and we remained rupture-free, that is, until we began talking concretely about termination in April.

Termination was a magnifying glass that put our relationship into sharper perspective – through it we each saw our intimate details, our weird rapprochement, the effects we had had on each other. I decided to 'celebrate termination' (don't ask me where I got this crazy idea) by baking cookies each day of my last week, and inviting my clients to talk about the year reflectively with me. I saw Javi the first day of my last week, Monday, and, after basketball, walked up to my office where I told him we could have a cookie. When he got there, he saw an empty plate, where the cookies should have been. He *knew* that that was where the cookies were supposed to be. He picked up the plate, held it closely. I approached him cautiously (it was a ceramic plate). He warned, "I'm not gonna drop it!" (in a way that sounded like "get away from me so I can smash it") Moments later it was on the floor in pieces. "It was an accident," Javi said. I interpreted, "Sometimes we make mistakes, and sometimes things make us angry." "Yeah," he said.

So there I was, in the counter-transference, being the first gratifying, then disappointing, and finally forgiving, Other. I often felt that, at my best, I was only a witness to Javi – the underside of Javi that is, that I saw him as other people had not been able to. So even when he smashed my mother's ceramic plate, and watched me clean it up, I had to survive this destruction, acknowledge his potential for destruction and communicate that his aggression was not too much for me. We were in the mirror stage, not just because we saw one another as extensions of the self, but because I witnessed Javi's exposures with shame – I had no way of recognizing them, so I basically let them be, or tried to, by the end of the year. Something felt like it was working, in a way I assured myself that I had something to do with it – that recognition also helped me tolerate the shame that I had no clue what it was that was working. *Shame is a roadmap for the transference-countertrasnference, you cannot get to recognition without it.*

In retrospect, before I was able to notice Javi in the blind spots, I was in a mirror-relation with him. In other words, I over-identified with vulnerable Javi, I saw me in him, as an unrecognized subject. His destitution took me to a primitive place of misrecognition as well, though unconscious, and I acted out from that position, finding it hard to establish boundaries. In his otherness was the basis of my vulnerable subjectivity, my true self, though one I recognize only in hindsight.

**Case Study #2: The Case of Kevin McCallister**

*Home Alone*, the title itself gives us proof that Kevin's separation from his family is a paradox. Every moment that Kevin is potentially alone is interrupted, so that his "capacity to be alone" is, as Winnicott (1951) sees it, paradoxical – to be alone is to be alone *with the Other*.

Through Kevin, we see the rapprochement crisis come to life – he declares, "I'm living alone" though he is helpless, dependent, and under constant surveillance.

If there is a *need to be alone*, it is only insofar as it is Kevin's need for recognition, manifested as Kevin's wish to make his "family disappear."[10] His fantasy is sustained by his ego, which has been co-opted by the narratives he has from his others: "Kevin, you're such a disease; look what you did you little jerk; you're what the French call *les incompetent*." Against the shame of these misrecognitions, Kevin must prove his self-sufficiency and find his own recognition – though he finds it in the most unusual person.

Before the family disappears, Kevin is in Buzz's room and their neighbor, Old Man Marley, is shoveling outside. Here, the brothers *totalize* Old Man Marley – their fantasies of destruction turn this different Other into an evil known entity – that is what "stranger anxiety" does: "Who is this Other? Oh, I know him, that's my enemy, that's the one that wants to annihilate me." Of course, when Marley returns the gaze and the children see his face, they too are shamed, as if in returning the look he sends back their projections. At this point in the movie, he does not exactly represent the Other (maybe Levinas'), but instead, the abyss of the Lacanian Real – the terror of absolute destruction.

Kevin, still the unrecognized subject, declares after dinner, "I'm living alone," again, a wish containing the annihilation of his family. No one will leave him alone, no one heeds his requests – translation, "if no one will recognize me then forget them", the retreat from object-relations. As he walks upstairs, we see that he, his mother and, later, his father, share the desire for destruction – they unconsciously mirror Kevin's wish, revealing that this is, as I mentioned earlier, a relational destructiveness (i.e. a fantasy on both ends). Kevin's parents need to leave

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[10] The wish contains everything: the family has to disappear so that Kevin can "appear" to an extent, can come into Being. But with his family gone, who will be there to recognize him?

him alone, but it seems that they cannot handle his demands. In other words, it is his idea, but he needs his parents to play along.

The initial moments alone are the first moments of freedom for young Kevin. However, he soon realizes that he is not alone and that he is not free – the Other always interrupts his complacency, his naïve narcissism (Sartre 1956; Levinas 1961). For example, he ventures into the basement and is again, disturbed by what he does not know, the Real, in the form of the furnace, which, naturally, resembles a human face. He is getting the idea that things do not always fit his pre-operational schemas, and that he is vulnerable to the unknown outside world. Later, he encounters Old Man Marley in a convenience store, again, disoriented to the point that language fails him – the image we are presented is a bandage stained with blood – the stain obviously from Kevin's own realization that *he has done damage to the Real Other*; this is not guilt, but shame.

Kevin is noticing that the world is not such a blissful place – despite his wishes, he is very much not alone. Besides Old Man Marley, two criminals appear, as fundamental proof that Kevin is not alone, and is not free. The criminals represent Kevin's superego, though they seem to double as his observing, ego-ideal in the following scenario. The scene of the criminals looking into the McCallister windows, seeing the silhouettes of people at an imaginary party represents Kevin's ego, idealized in a mirage of togetherness and self-sufficiency, which conceals the all-too-real reality of dependence, here in the form of the Other's gaze, which Kevin can only protect himself from imaginarily. All Kevin realizes here is that this fantasy is not sustainable, the Other, the source of knowledge, sees through his defenses.[11] Kevin has to turn

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[11] On the other hand, there is a benign way in which they let him have his defenses, they accept his false pride and leave – perhaps we could call it a (narcissistic) transference.

from the mask to the mirror, recognizing himself in Old Man Marley, the Other he comes to depend on, an ego-ideal, the one containing and surviving his destructive wish.

Later on in the movie, Kevin and Old Man Marley find themselves in a church, and they have a very therapeutic mirror-like encounter. Of course, Old Man Marley is an Other before there is any identification. Finally, they break through their imaginary relation and Kevin is forced to confront his otherness. We learn that Old Man Marley is the future of Kevin's fantasied life-alone. And despite his otherness (actually the otherness is crucial), they come to a place of mutuality – both alone with serious needs to make reparations. But, first, they offer one another recognition: from this, Kevin gains some *insight*. His own reflection, which I paraphrase, "aren't you a little old to be fighting with your family?" is also a question to the adult in all of us. That is, the story is Kevin's as well as Old Man Marley's – "with all these others around, isn't life-alone a ridiculous proposition?"[12] But, the criminals remain to reinforce Kevin's guilty wish (the fun part of the movie is that Kevin gets to torture his superego). But, the criminals are also possibly projections of Kevin's inability to do it alone; he needs to destroy them to prove his "autonomy". The conflict turns into Kevin's need to defend his family (his home, his body), who in fantasy he destroyed. Now full of *pride*, the opposite of shame, thanks to his recognition by Old Man Marley, Kevin must defend himself (ego defenses).

When Kevin gets captured by Harry and Marve, and is about to be castrated for his misbehavior, sadism, etc., Old Man Marley has Kevin's back. What does this mean? It's not only the Other returning the favor, *it's Kevin accepting that the Other exists*, that he doesn't actually have to do it all alone. Kevin learns from Old Man Marley that the future of absolute aloneness is not all it's chalked up to be, and real aloneness, real separation, is paradoxical – autonomy is a myth.

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[12] I hope there is a critique of privacy built in here.

Then, Kevin's family returns, *as if strangers*, without the knowledge of Kevin's trauma – that's essential: some of Kevin is *different*. His father asks, I paraphrase: "what else did you do while we were away?" Kevin replies, "Just…hung around." This pause in speech is an indicator that repression has occurred, that he skipped some important detail. Kevin cannot communicate his change – that's the real mark of difference, he is able to accept recognition for doing the shopping, laundry, etc., but decides, ultimately, that he can let them be too – the trauma of Kevin's time-alone remains untranslatable. The unfathomable Real threat of annihilation sustains "civilized" life (shopping, laundry, etc.). He seems content to be different, to the extent that his self-recognition is sufficient, he can relinquish some of his hateful dependence.

The only thing that reminds us of the trauma is in the last line: "Kevin! What did you do to my room?" Buzz's room, from where Kevin first saw the Other, and which he destroyed in the process of survival, is the stain of Kevin's rapprochement crisis – that is to say that Kevin also continues to be (incompetent) Kevin. Buzz's message communicates "Kevin! Your autonomy fucked everything up": a small price to pay for some essential recognition. Ultimately, I would even say that leaving us hanging on this stain of destruction, in a parallel way, leaves Kevin hanging in a state of perpetual reparation toward the (here, Levinasian) Other  - the ethics of the Real – Buzz's room: a reminder of the freedoms of totality, the shame of Otherness, and how difficult recognition is.

The only difference is that, perhaps now, Kevin can hear the call of the Other and answer in an ethical way. Now that there has been recognition by the Other, Kevin is truly a de-centered subject – he cannot drown out the Other's call, but is always already in a position of responsibility.

In the following section, I continue to discuss both case studies, with continued emphasis on *Home Alone*, and synthesizing it with my phenomenological and psychoanalytic analyses.

**CHAPTER SEVEN**

**Discussion**

So far, I've shown that shame develops, typically, as the mother and infant separate, which is both a physiological and psychological process, of course. As differences between the dyad emerge, so does shame – *the affect with which we distinguish difference*: self and other, private and public, recognition and misrecognition. In the mirror stage, the infant subject gets to suspend his/her subjection in favor of a mirage of mastery. At this level, the dread of dependence and vulnerability, i.e. the Real, threaten to annihilate the infant, so he/she turns to fantasy. This is basically where *Home Alone* comes in. In an act of identification with Old Man Marley, Kevin wishes that his family could also disappear, that perhaps even he could make them disappear – these are the things we are forced to fantasize when we have others that will not get off our backs (perhaps that is what the Other is).

When they do disappear, Kevin discovers his shame, "where freedom discovers itself murderous in its very exercise" (Levinas 1961). By wishing to be alone, he has hurt his family. For example, Kevin retiring to his room, alone after the pizza incident, is very much a protection against his own aggression, which his family could not tolerate. *No doubt the aggression was first expressed as Kevin's need for recognition:* "did *anyone* order *me* a plain cheese pizza?" Kevin's forbidden aggression comes back as a wish to destroy his family.

Now, and this is why I bring in the mirror stage, Kevin is just bombarded with Others, he's overwhelmed – in short, he needs his ego (defenses; shame/pride being one of them) desperately. An example of the mirror stage occurs in the scene when Harry and Marve are

outside the McCallister windows, watching his pretend party. They can only see a façade, an imagined complacency, and so they confirm "there *is* someone in there", namely, *a subject*. Kevin fools them with his identifications, his mask. It is not coincidental that Harry and Marve receive the message later, *on an answering machine*, that the McCallister's, in fact, are gone – Kevin is alone – *language* interrupts the fantasy of Kevin's *perceived* self-sufficiency. There is some recognition here, recognition that Kevin is visible – this is Sartrean shame![13]

But, being a subject means being *subjected* to the language of the Other. So that the ego, the site of supposed "mastery" and "autonomy", works defensively against that subjection. In the movie, Kevin does not want to accept his dependence. Mostly because this is an Other already lost – there is a depressive component I haven't exactly tackled, but it is important here. Kevin needs his family's recognition, but he knows they are already gone, or that his recognition is lost in their fantasies of him. Let me briefly return to the Klein/Kohut/self-psychological mirroring-component to shame, because I am aiming at an analysis of Kevin's mother:

"The narcissistic personality…flees the depressive position principally because his excessive aggression threatens to overwhelm the good object" (Gorkin, 415). Kevin does not mourn, he's too angry, and too busy, at this point, celebrating his "freedom." But, there is a mourning component here that I should also mention, since it bears on the entire analytic (separation-individuation) experience (from Alice Walker): "What needs to be mourned is the loss of the 'true self', which originally occurred when the narcissistic individual as a child adapted to a narcissistic" other… a mourning "which was avoided from the time that he was a child when it was too much for him (and those around him)" (Gorkin 1984). If I were using Melanie Klein's (1935) theory, we could say that Kevin travels the necessary ethical trajectory: from love/*hate*, to guilt/*shame*, to *reparation*. When his family returns he is proud to have been

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[13] Sometimes he is seen, sometimes heard, but rarely both simultaneously.

able to do it alone, he now has separated self-object representations so to speak. Kevin is an individual and his family recognizes him as such. But he does not use his autonomy as a mask against the other. He is able to hear the ethical call and hopefully he can respond, but we really don't know. It's just a call, and the blood is now, at the very end, on Kevin's hands. Can he offer the same recognition that was his?

I want to spin this back now to ask a Benjaminian question: does Kevin's mother "survive" his destruction of her, his "omnipotent use" of her (Winnicott 1949; Benjamin 1988)? Remember, all the abandonment guilt falls on Mrs. McAllister; no doubt she had her own hate for Kevin (but, seriously, where is Mr. McCallister?). Here is an excellent quote from a lecture by Avital Ronell (Schirmacher 2001) that captures *both* sides of rapprochement:

> "with children it's a mutual slavery, a mutual wounding. Babies can be the most powerful force in the universe. Their voice alone can kill everybody. It's a slavery for both sides, you see how the mother has to give up in the first year in order to follow the call of baby, both are put into a prison. So the real question actually is, is not emancipation as such the wrong question?"

Kevin's search for recognition meant that he had to "suspend the norm", put the Other's rules on hold, his wish, his "voice", *did* kill everyone. Ultimately, he was fed up with misrecognition, with the space of *totality* his family put him in. He had to forget the bonds of co-existence, temporarily, and step on some toes, for his recognition, to discover "his own human worth" (Fanon 1967). From the Real of terror/dependence, to the fantasy of autonomy/mastery, to actual (inter)subjectivity – that's the psychoanalytical-ethical course of development, synthesized through Kevin McCallister. Shame and recognition every step of the way.

Kevin and his mother are certainly both "put into a prison", but at a real level, his mother is a slave and Kevin is her master. The point of emphasis is that the roles are reversed, eventually. Kevin must recognize himself as a slave as well, his dependence on his mother, her

"very perfection" (Levinas 1961). His mother has to let him play out his mastery fantasies, his "exhibitionism" all the while *"staking her own demands for recognition"* (Kohut 1968; Benjamin 1988), so that she is not just subjected to Kevin, but her own person as well, with, maybe, her own needs, for a vacation, for example. Neither should hope to just leave the situation, that's not ethically reasonable; "emancipation" from the Other is not the road to freedom. Kevin has to go into it, his lack of freedom that is, and figure it out with the Other, whom he notices, he needs. He has to confront his dangerous "wish to be alone" and find his subjectivity there, with the Other, where he wasn't looking.

The shame I think we need is not just the protective mask of the false self. Shame has to have a foot in both camps so to speak: self AND other, public AND private, true AND false. My reading of shame necessitates that paradox, meaning ultimately that the ego is not any more superficial than the unconscious, true self. That is why the mirror turns out to be a limited metaphor for recognition – a superficial image because a mirror only gives us one angle, though the Other has multiple vantage points (Lacan 1988). The true self is in the blind spots, in the Other – like the sun, you do not see "the self" by looking directly at it, *in the mirror* as it were. I hope that shame can be just as de-centering, that's what I'm saying anyways – keeping you interested, but protecting you from what you can actually recognize. Shame reveals us, confesses our vulnerabilities, and if we can tolerate that shame, then we arrive at the only agency we have – our words.

And then, finally, Kevin's mother returns. I'm still asking the question does *she* have agency*?* Is she a subject in the way that Benjamin (1988) asks?

The beginning of the movie is defined by Kevin's misrecognition, his life in the fantasies of the others who dominate him. His mother cannot see him as a separate individual. Now, in the

last minutes, she returns. Kevin had just been looking for her, he woke up expecting her, then, anticipating reciprocity, notices she is not there, and lowers his head, ashamed. Then she comes in. We are presented with a beautiful image of Kevin's mother *in his blind spot*, over his shoulder. That's how you know she has returned as an Other, a stranger – she has survived. Kevin wonders: *is that her?* In the silences before they hug, there is a stand-still, where Kevin is trapped in his rapprochement, not knowing how to move forward in this new (different) relationship with a new Other. As the adult, she takes responsibility and breaks the silence: "Oh, Kevin, I'm so sorry." Her heart-wrenching need for forgiveness is obviously simultaneously a moment of recognition. That is, they both recognize the need for reparation. Reparation is crucial in moments of recognition because it acknowledges the alterity of the other; difference is not collapsed into sameness, but understood as paradoxically both me and not-me. This *reparation* is also the basis of Kleinian (1935) love, and Levinasian (1961) justice.

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In many ways, shame was Kevin McCallister's guiding light. The ways in which his voice *was not heard* were rediscovered in his unconscious aggressive wish to destroy his family, which was projected onto Old Man Marley. In Lacan, the unconscious is language itself – the words Buzz uses on Old Man Marley are none other than Kevin's desire to make his family disappear, or that's where he gets the idea. When he encounters Old Man Marley later, his *speechlessness is also the source of his future agency*; it leaves Kevin open to *Infinity*: "the very possibility of linguistic agency is derived from the situation in which one finds oneself addressed by a language one never chose" (Butler 2005, p. 53). What happens? Kevin shuts his mouth and

listens – he is taken to the limits of recognition. In short, Kevin is speechless; finally, Marley can give an account of himself (which, of course, is Kevin's account).

The sight of Marley's Real vulnerable body forces Kevin to be quiet. When you maintain your silence and listen, you give yourself over to the other in an ethical way – that is where shame can lead. This shameful silence should do nothing but *humble us to the voice of the Other*.

Psychoanalytic theory, I hope to have shown, gives us a perspective we cannot get anywhere else. It is a theory that leaves paradoxes hanging; it does not solve problems, but just gives a new perspective on them, which is the only solution we can hope for. And speech being the "way to recognition" does not mean that there is ever a complete picture. We are subjects who cannot give complete, or even the same, accounts of ourselves (Butler 2005). *There is always a Real, or a blind spot, a difference, that we bump up against.* The transition from shame to pride will always be inscribed paradoxically, as others continue to recognize or misrecognize us, never able to wish away our dependence on the Other. Of course, we forever receive new messages from the Other, integrating difference a little at a time, shame the remainder.

The inevitability of difference means that *we*, social workers, humans, *cannot be neutral about difference* – we should welcome the Other, as continued encounters with difference are one of life's few guarantees, infinity always overflowing the limitations of cognition – we should "not for an instant think of denying it", our "shame is a confession" (Sartre 1956). What, then, does shame confess about the dominant culture?

One of the modern ways we confess our shame seems to be through its own negation. "No shame" is a popular phrase that captures the contradictory feelings associated with shame. In other words, by rejecting personal shame we simultaneously elevate it; declaring "no shame" is a revelation that, yes, we would prefer to reject, or not experience, this *real affect* at the core of

our being (recognition). Of course, "no shame" is a private confession, but one that reaches the Other without recognizing them – "no you cannot shame me!" Really what would help is we could get rid of our pride. Pride leaves us hanging on coat-hooks; shame brings us to the Other.

Now that I am wrapping this up, I feel myself in the forgotten-but-familiar confessional, with nothing but my shame. There is just no way out of original sin, out of totality, without our words, the Echo inside of us that takes us beyond fantasy and narcissism. The only one who can absolve us is the Other, who in shame "does not exist" but we must discover as an Echo, a forgotten language, which is our own (Tutt 2013; Fromm). Like Suchet (2007), "I want to offer you a solution, yet I also know that there is none, only a continual process of opening up."

**CHAPTER EIGHT**

**Conclusion**

*"The ego is not a master in his own house"*
   - *Freud (1917)*

*"The masters tools will never dismantle the masters house."*
   - *Lorde*

What should we do with the "culture of shame"? What should we do with this affect which is at once a sign of weakness, incompleteness, and vulnerability, but, which also accompanies our being in the world with others, which "civilizes" us, partly responsible, that is, for "civilization" *and*, "its discontents" (Freud 1961). And what of all of its intersections: narcissism, otherness, freedom, difference? What are the ways shame can help us navigate, and learn from, difference, and offer recognition? When it seems that we need both a true and false self, how can we be authentic to both? Because if we are made up of systems of difference,

namely the symbolic unconscious, and filled with contradictions, then miscues and misrecognitions are *inevitable*.

The point that I cannot help but return to is otherness, the Other – in contrast to the ego, our mask against difference. Remember that the criminals from *Home Alone*, representative of Kevin's forbidden aggression, look into Kevin's home while he imagines himself at a party – he presents a conflict-free image of himself, that silhouette, that's his ego (ideal).

Lacan feels very strongly that the ego is a mirror stage derivative, an image of ourselves we get from the other. Even though it is that ego that is supposedly autonomous, it is all from the other. The ego is structured narcissistically and marked by identifications that took place at a time when perceptual fantasies dominated still-developing toddlerhood schemas. That's what rapprochement is all about: it's a communication to the adult that the child *thinks* she is on her own, narcissistic as it were, tries, struggles, to make her own way, to confirm her separateness in the other (Mahler 1975; Winnicott 1951). But how does the adult perceive this separating child?

Returning to *Home Alone*, young Kevin has to do like any angry child does: communicate to his parents that he is better-off on his own. Kevin idealizes autonomy because of all the mis-attunements, he is shamed for his needs. Autonomy remains an ideal in the Western value system, but look at how much of a fantasy it is for Kevin. This is the place, if we are a "culture of narcissism", or a "culture of shame", then this is where the dominant culture of the West is stuck: the anal stage, the stage of ethics, the rapprochement sub-phase (Mahler 1975). The point where we begin to "master" the body, recognize the body of the Other, the Other's desire, and begin to really experience shame, as the Other watches us struggle with our own need for independence *and* dependence (Lasch 1979; Morrison; 1996). These are conflicts for young Kevin McCallister, and they will resurface in adolescence.

The relationship between Kevin, Harry and Marve in the mirror-stage-scene is only delicately intersubjective – without a linguistic exchange, a lot is left to fantasy. It is *this mirror-relation that structures all future relationships*. Kevin puts on his charade – that is all the ego is. Most of the time, we are putting on our own charade, presenting ourselves as other than we really are – mis-attuned to ourselves because someone else was mis-attuned to us (Gorkin 2004). Kevin's false self, seen only as a silhouette, exists insofar as he needed it to appease others who misrecognized him (namely his family, and in this case, people who imagine "no one is home"). Kevin cannot imagine himself in any other way *except* the way his others see him – see how strong the other is! Kevin convinces the criminals that people are home, but he is actually alone (it recaptures his communication about the pizza: "doesn't anyone see that there's someone in here?"). The nice thing is that this house metaphor is so common, that I can just apply other quotes to make my point more sensible.

The two quotes above: "the *master's* tools will never dismantle the *master's house*" and "the *ego* is not the *master* in its own *house*" seem relevant here (Lorde, Freud 1961).[14] At this point in the movie, Kevin's ego is as authentic as anything else. That ego is all he can offer: an independent, conflict-free agency, okay on his own. When we imagine ourselves like this, we cannot recognize anything Other. But, we, the audience, see the real Kevin, who is working behind the scenes (unconsciously) to keep up appearances. His shame obviously has a foot in both camps – the Other who looks, and Kevin who is under their gaze. He is dominated by his shame at this stage – this is the shame he needs to get rid of, because it keeps him at a narcissistic level, unable to engage with the social world.

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[14] The house always seems to be a metaphor for the body. It brings to mind the phrase "the eyes are the windows to the soul."

Shame moves us *from the individual world of narcissism to the social world with the Other* – that's why we need shame. There can be no justice, you cannot recognize the Other, without the resolution that they are not you, that they see things differently. To some, this sounds simple. For me, a person filled to the brim with shame, this is the most profound realization. We need shame to disturb our complacency (which conceals mastery and autonomy), because our complacency is, like Kevin McCallister's, imaginary. Note how hard he has to work to keep up his charade. We *cannot* say "I do not need the Other – their recognition, their help, their existence" or more extremely – "the Other is not-me, and therefore, evil." These ideas only come from so-called strong ego's – hence why ego *strength* should never be a measure of mental health! The true sign of strength might be the ability to acknowledge blind spots, but the ego has a hard time giving up its mastery fantasies.

A strong ego could only be a sign of mental health in a "culture of narcissism" (Lasch 1979). If a strong ego did signify mental "health" then Harry and Marve would have left after seeing Kevin's party. But no, the message gets delivered from an anonymous source (Kevin's father!) that they have left, no one is home – that's paradoxically true – Kevin is not there, not yet a subject, he has not recognized his true self yet. [15]

A strong ego is a sign that one's *fantasies* have been confirmed, by one's parents and by the dominant ideology. It is not something to be strengthened in therapy, though that may happen, it is not the desired result. Strengthening the ego does not lead to agency. A strong ego, a *master*, says "I don't have blind spots" – think of the damage these ego's have done on the highway!

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[15] Kevin's father might as well be the superego – here he is their informant. Joe Pesci's character wears a police uniform in the beginning – even a disguise isn't just a disguise. It is a dead giveaway that this criminal actually represents *the law* – a substitute for the father, in Lacan, the paternal metaphor operates as law. It is no wonder Mr. McCallister has no role in the film. When the McCallister's leave, the criminals fill in for Dad, Old Man Marley, for Mom.

A strong ego *is* the master, whose tools will never dismantle their own house. Just think of if Kevin were left alone, actually alone? If the Other did not intrude his way, slowly, into his private existence. *What if Kevin were actually free?* He would never recognize Old Man Marley! He would never find new ways of relating to his family. He would not make reparation with his mother. He would not know love, because love is boundaried. He would not know justice, which he has acquired through Old Man Marley, who has also helped to arrest the dangerous wishes inside Kevin. In short, he would be a strong ego. He would be emotionally unhappy, misrecognized always, but still filled with his own private pride, his naïve narcissism – the master's house.

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My own engagement with difference has led me to the question: *is the psyche a site for radical change?* In other words, can the clinician make a difference? I think to answer the question we have to return, just like Lacan suggests, to Freud. Freud's (1917) goal for psychotherapy was that you have to show the ego what the unconscious has seen; "where id was, there shall ego be." There is shame at every level of this ethical search for recognition and self-discovery. The imaginary master (the ego) must recognize its own slavery (to the Other) – that's where freedom begins (Levinas 1961).

My investment in this paper has been one where I go between my own need for recognition, my own visibility, and the demands of the Other, namely, the fact that I need to make this understandable to others, follow a format, etc. The latter is difficult because I anticipate misrecognition, and so defensively draw more from my grandiose idealized others – Freud, Sartre, Lacan, Levinas, etc. They are the screen, the false selves, through which I am trying to vocalize my true self. But, I have also recognized truth in what they have written; I have

recognized myself in Levinas, Lacan, Javi, and in Kevin McCallister (from idealization to absolute vulnerability) – paradoxical recognition indeed.

On the other hand, there is also a need to shush them, to silence their voices so that I may speak for myself. Writing is a practice in doing justice to real Others, not using their theories incorrectly, or to fill in when I have nothing to say. It's a practice in learning from the Other, and using shame to move my writing forward, increasing, hopefully, my potential to be recognized. But as I have moved along my own analytic therapy, I am able to relinquish (i.e. satisfy) my needs for recognition, so that I am not heaping them on my clients, like I did in my case with Javi. I am also integrating my shame so that it is less a pair of blinders to the Other, less of a mask, and more a mirror – it lets me move from similarity to difference, from either/or to paradox. More, I would never had gotten into therapy if I had a strong ego. And I find that to be the greatest strength – the ability to confront vulnerability. "When *weakness* is part of the concept of the building's stance, it can sway and shift around as part of its very own survival mechanism" (Schirmacher 2001). I want psychoanalysis to return to those radical roots – in other words, if you want difference, aka *change*, then start with shame.

My hope is that we do start to "notice" shame, even though that may require being less civilized (Rushdie 1983). It may even require sacrificing privacy.[16] Somewhere between civilization and its resulting discontents, there is a lot of shame. The Lacanians say that the only way to live without the "master" (the ego) is "with a virtue such as shame" (Webster 2008). I've heard something similar from a client this year, Drew, a 37-year-old man in recovery and psychotherapy for addiction. Substance-free for two months, he said from the couch: "I feel more in touch with *my creator*." Isn't this the most radical idea, the very same "creator" that Kevin

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[16] Privacy, to an extent, must only be what the  child learns is excluded from the public, what is ethically unacceptable to the eyes of the other. Working through shame may make differences, well, less different, which in a way might deflate our idealization of privacy and individualism. See Schirmacher (1986).

McCallister stumbles upon at church? But it is not *God* he is looking for, or rather, he *is* looking for his creator, and he finds precisely that, Old Man Marley: *truth accompanied by surprise*.

If we learn anything here, it is that language is perhaps the only reparation, the only offering, we can make to the Other. Operating from a place of shame is the only way Kevin can bite his tongue long enough to get in touch with his creator. At the very end, pride has Kevin hanging from a coathook, as he comes *face to face* with his real aggressive wishes. Destruction, paradoxically leads to new creative possibilities, new relational schemas (Winnicott 1971; Ghent 1992). Old Man Marley's survival turns out to be the key here, so that Kevin is "autonomous" but still retains some shame. *Via Otherness, Kevin becomes a subject*.

And as Kevin bumps up against his own violence, I am up against Freud's. The question Freud returns to in *Civilization and its Discontents* is: what is the answer to discontent and destruction? Freud (1961) searches high and low for answers: guilt, conscience. Erich Fromm (1956) says that "love" is the only "satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence." But, Freud retains, even love is not strong enough to counter all the destructiveness. Freud always chose guilt and not shame, the superego not the ego-ideal, the father in contrast to the mother (even Oedipus seems more consumed with shame than guilt). In his blind spots, I propose shame as the essence of ethical subjectivity, before, of course, guilt. Shame is a reaction to difference, and aggression, but shame does not give us many answers. The truth might be: there are no answers, but shame is the thing that best prepares us to *not* provide answers when there are not any.

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