

The birth of mediated relationship : how we commit to reality by being parted from the Real

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The farthest we could get to the heart of human consciousness isn't yet – hopefully - out of reach. It is only a matter of asking the right question. How do we create, as an animal species, not only a system of difference in language, but a peculiar system of mediation in our relationship to objects ?

We would like here to bring out a new brick in the 'relationship to object' 's wall. Whether it is a symbolic object in the way Jacques Lacan formulated it, the object of desire, or a real object, or even something in between, transitional in Donald Winnicott's way, we would add here another feature : how the dimension the lacanian object has of being 'not had', hidden, lacking, endlessly out of reach, may have been created at its birth through the experience and some consciousness of impossibility.

That any animal individual may turn unable to reach what it aims at, it then happens that it cannot do it, and that's it : it can't. Maybe it will try again several more times, maybe it will feel disorientated : but what does make human beings state that then it is impossible, that it is out of reach, left to dream of ?

Impossibility may in fact have been provided through a long time ago in our prehistory by the hands and the way it got more and more separated from the motor functions. It's impossible because there is a disruption between the object that is real and the object that I need, that I feel an urge to acquire. Take a child for instance, as one is eating something that will then vanish because absorbed, which existence depends entirely on them and the instance providing them with it, it still happens that it is not quite the same thing as the attempt on eating their own hand. This will not disappear : it will survive.

Then, tension is about holding, and releasing appears more difficult to achieve, because it means to recognize the vanity of the attempt to exhaust what one wants. Relationship to the object of my desire is all about holding the mediation to this object, and being or not afraid of losing it, of its disappearance. As psychoanalyst Darian Leader so precisely pointed out in his book *Hands*¹, it is more about maintaining the stimulation of our hands - that continually need to grasp and tickle - whatever means it takes, than anything else, often including moral issues.

Because hands bring everything else to the rest of the body, including our thoughts. The hands are our primary mediation to objects. But, hands cannot reach themselves or more precisely, one hand cannot be the object of desire and the agent of this desire, so this is a paradox we discussed earlier. This paradox generates a tension, and this tension becomes the agent of phantasy. Because to be able to feel something like an unexpected tension may appear sometimes greater to the subject than the fulfilment of their desire. It turns the subject into a moral subject.

The tension in the relationship to objects is weaving the framework of violence. It is violent because the aggression of the subject cannot be expressed by the means of the action to this object one cannot reach out. They become impotent, but it is not their fault, because it is simply impossible to reach this object. And it is impossible because I know that I am a person that feels.

I isolate myself from the necessity to reach by asking myself how odd it is to get satisfied by the feeling of stating : something is impossible. Something is magical because it is an impossible thing. It cannot happen, yet it happened to me that I saw the opportunity to reach that slipped away because it was simply too big for me. Here, there, outside of me, there is an excess that is not me

1 Most of the books referred to are mentioned in the previous parts of this essay.

though referred to me and to my feeling it.

This situation becomes a play which needs players. Myself, my hand and I are playing for the world to see. This is exactly the kind of process described by the Third Party in the mirror phase in the creation of one's ego, reflected on by Jacques Lacan since his early work. Someone must be looking at and for me whom I'm playing these representations of my ideal self for. Except that we are reflecting on this through the perspective of early humans. A proper mirror effect of imitation could have taken place in these prehistoric societies, as Ellen Dissanayake proposed in her work on neuroaesthetics, notably in the mother-infant relationship and their dialogue through the shifts of facial expressions.

But to fully grasp the birth place of such circumstances, we would first have to loosen up the web of what is pre-conceived and pre-manufactured in our current and contemporary societies. Again, as Darian Leader suggested, our relationship to daily objects for example has shaped our environment and our perspectives. What is possible and what is not have been woven in conditions that lean on the early creation of our relationship to our daily objects. This relationship is based on a very simple rule : there are objects one can handle and even destroy as they wish, and others that they should not handle and even less destroy.

It makes sense to most people when they tell a child not to touch that fancy vase, or that pen that belongs to the grand-father's desk. What Darian Leader's approach to technology is highlighting at this point, is that we've come to be so much accustomed to be living with and surrounded by objects that give us what we want them to and that have been designed to do so, that we forgot completely how much a natural environment could be unpredictable.

Pathologies emerge at this point where we cannot expect anything more from our daily objects that, eventually, cannot give us anything but a reflection of ourselves. The mirroring effect of objects, whether they are simple daily objects, high-technology objects or social objects, such as social and moral values, or even phantasies, 'pure' objects of desire, is located in their genealogical aspect. These objects pertain to the writing of the cultural web and its tightening. The closest we are to these objects, the closest we get to the culture and to the social community we want to belong to or are trained and appealed to do so.

Hence the more our behaviour is predictable, readable from this social and cultural perspective, the more we keep the appropriate cultural narrative tight, and the more we think that its web, its network of moral values we learnt as children is stable and still valid.

The creation of the object in the child's mind, as described by Donald Winnicott, is central to the extent it sets the importance of how they are personal to us, intimate. We expect from these objects to tell us something about the world we are living in, the reality, and to guarantee its validity. However, when one is looking carefully at a tree, at how tall or how little it is, there is no guarantee the tree would have expected to confront itself to me. On the contrary, its growing has nothing to do with pleasing or easing me. It is one fact I cannot exhaust, except for my trying to destroy the reality that it represents, if not itself.

The resistance of the subject to give up what is necessary to maintain one symbolic setting amongst objects that are connected to a primitive moral order ('Don't touch that') is significative. It tells us very much about one's necessity to make these lively connections to this particular setting, which has been validated by figures of a moral authority that are intimate to the person, something that prevails over any stranger point of view that would be external to this network of signification. Once the subject has been tightly binding themselves to this network of signification that put them at the centre of the world, reality depends on it, and from the outside part of their world, it gets difficult for anyone else not to be absorbed in this logic and at the same time, not to be judging their attempt of self-cure in some pathological cases.

It has been pointed out by analysts such as Winnicott, Georges Devereux (notably in *Renunciation of identity*) and Darian Leader as well when talking about psychosis. And it gets

echoes to Ellen Dissanayake's interpretation of what the Arts could have meant since the beginning of their manifestation : in her words, an *artification* of the early humans' environment. To mark a stone with painting, with a colouring substance, is not that of a language yet as much as it is a way to make the stone belong to the individual's inner world. 'It belongs to us *now*.' And the *now* is very important because it is the print of a conscious choice made over a certain perception of reality.

We could as well find inspiration in philosopher (however controversial) Mircea Eliade's work featured in *The Sacred and the Profane*. The shapeless wild environment surrounding the early humans should have been organised through the marking of objects in the world that were thus invested of something more than the rest, *saturated* of people's minding it, given an importance that was exceeding their practical value : made Sacred. This 'sacred' quality is something that can never be reached nor had, but only referred to and desired.

The fact that I have or do not have the object I'm seizing with my mind to get it into my imaginary world, is quite striking. And the workings of imagery is deeply connected to how we perceive our hands : hands have a clear shape, articulated, plural. It is me and it is *not me* because in my vision and through the sensorimotor interactions between motor functions and sensory perceptions, it is *only* responding to me. I cannot address a wish to them and question them at the same time. Whether I'm using them or am I feeling myself in possession of such a power to use them : knowing you have a power is sometimes more striking than using it, because it is up to you to decide whether to use it or not.

Then there is a marking of the mind on my hands. And there is a consciousness of my body because I can stop myself from moving while watching myself having hands at the end of my arms. Hands are both separated from and joined to me by my arms and by one mental link. I have them, but when they act, they belong to their action – and to the objects they're acting toward. They're identified with the intention they carry.

It is a difficult choice to decide whether my hands belong to me or to their actions, to their *doing things* that are useful, but not quite as powerful as observing me holding them. Then even myself becomes stranger, because who am I ? Am I located in the intention I provide my hands with to do things, or is my identity below that, before, somewhere hidden, inside my feeling of myself ? And then what is the world ? Is the world equal to my incapacity to be one myself with my action ? And then, the world becomes something indeed separated from my interaction with it.

I become one separated from the world, and the world keeps on getting stranger too.

From there, we can imagine that the early subjects, in that very wild and loose world of a language-based society yet to be constituted and structured, had first to deal both with a natural environment and the progressive constitution of an environment of handcraft objects. And at this point, we have to imagine how groundbreaking it could have been to isolate objects from the world that are steady objects. They are steady not because they don't move, but because they don't move *within* our not moving either. We invest them with our capacity to stop, to *delay or lag* our responses to the stimulations of the outside world – to use again neurobiologist Gerald Edelman's formulation.

We can then more and more commit to a world that we choose to commit to because we have been parted from its symbiotic unity. The symbiotic unity of the living is based on the sensorimotor principle : I interact constantly with my environment, that is as well created, perceived through the possibilities offered by my biological constitution.

As we discussed it earlier, we join neurobiologist Francisco Varela's proscriptive approach to animalian behavior and evolution as well as to cognitive sciences when say that the individuals of a species are free to act as they will, as long as it doesn't endanger their survival and reproduction. If they happen to find another way to be, to live and behave than a supposedly optimal standard, nothing prevents them from doing so.

Hence, human societies emerged with the possibility to grant common objects with the

privilege of being representations of themselves, of people's capacity to reflect on themselves as *being able to make some conscious choices*. This is this capacity to part ourselves from the imperative of responding to our direct environment that allows us to build something else such as an environment made out of handcraft – and later machine-craft – objects, made and meant for us.

It is important that we don't forget to look upon this capacity in a way that enables us to open a dialogue between how we react to our current mixed environment and how we respond to constant solicitations from the symbolic environment of our cultural network.

For that, we should address the inner participation to the stream of conscious, the continuous flow of thoughts and voices that shape our mental world and gives room to the imaginary representation of our thoughts and feelings. These voices often aren't our own. The phenomenon of impression we find in the actual stream of conscious reveals the attachment we have to make our inner world relevant to us. The people whose voice tend to embody our thoughts are figures of a certain authority. We give them authority to express our thoughts and states of mind through their particular way of being publicly represented in the symbolic order of the world.

There is a *mimesis* effect that is proper to include different aspects of reality into our own personal narrative. As philosopher Paul Ricœur pointed out², narration is both a matter of intrigue and of the plurality and richness of its rhythm. There is a strong print of stylistic impressions that we borrow from here and there to make our own tapestry of a story which we hope is our story. It should tell something about us and more importantly, that allows us to be in a state of expressing ourselves.

Staying a lively being, whose structure is active, alive and not dead, can take many forms, including nourishing a delusional form of reality that might be a way, eventually, to stay alive. It is so to that extend that we keep creating a distance between the world of what is Real - that would have our nose directly plunged into seeking food and solace - and what is symbolic, guaranteed by the community and by the tightening of the cultural network.

To understand that the closest we are to the others - with less and less regard to what Darian Leader calls a 'livable distance'-, whether it is on the physical level or on the symbolic level, the hardest it gets to part from this relational symbolic unity we tend to bind ourselves to. On that level, the unconscious bonds are the more resistant to their untying and also the more resilient as to their capacity to adapt the interpretation we have on meanings to their own purpose.

We wished here to lay a path to an anthropogenealogical approach of analysis, analysis of individuals as well as of cultural, philosophical and scientific issues. We believe it to be useful as long as we can keep in mind that we can't live in a world only made of mirrors.

2 *In his book Temps et récit I.*