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The Basic Fault

What happens when I look in my [mirror] is that I, who am nothing here, place myself there where I am a man, and project him back upon this centre. Now this is only a specially lucid case of self-observation in general; my glass does for me what my friends do, only with fewer complications. . . . What occurs everywhere obscurely occurs plainly here. . . . Between us, the glass and I achieve a man. . . .

—D. E. Harding,
The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth

The hole of my life flashed before my eyes.
—John Lennon

Some of the earliest childhood memories I have involve family gatherings, when members of the extended family would assemble for some sort of holiday or celebration, or when a few family members would come over to our home simply for the purpose of getting together. As a child, I often enjoyed these gatherings; there was usually a lot of warmth and reassurance in them. Looking back, however, one thing that strikes me about much of this socializing was a marked absence of silence. As is frequently true of such get-togethers, the talking was almost constant. I am sure there were some exceptions to
this, but they do not stand out in my mind. As a family we rarely, if ever, sat around just “being” with each other; that never seemed to happen. The unstated rule seemed to be that empty space was uncomfortable, and that it was necessary to fill it up. Silence—not of the hostile variety, but rather of the kind that simply expresses beingness—was apparently, and I believe unconsciously, seen as threatening. It was as though something potentially dangerous would emerge if the talking were to stop for anything longer than half a minute or so.

I suppose this situation is typical of almost all gatherings, not just family ones. The dinner party is the most obvious example. It is as though silence could disclose some sort of terribly frightening Void. And what is being avoided are questions of who we are and what we are actually doing with each other. These questions live in our bodies, and silence forces them to the surface. If such questions ever get openly asked, the family often falls apart, and the dinner party usually breaks up in a strained and embarrassed way.

It is these types of situations that lay bare the nature of a culture most profoundly, for they go down to the root of our existence. They echo the lessons learned in our bodies from childhood, in a daily and repetitive way, and they are microcosms of our entire civilization. My family experience, in one form or another, was probably not very different from your own; and this despite the fact that there are many cultures on this planet for which silence is a comfortable fact of life rather than a difficulty. The difference may finally be one of embodiment, for if you are in your body most of the time, the Void is not so threatening. If you are out of your body, on the other hand, you need a substitute for the feeling of being grounded. Much of what passes for “culture” and “personality” in our society tends to fall into this substitute category, and is in fact the result of running from silence, and from genuine somatic experience.

The problem of hollowness, then, of a Voidance, is really one of secondary satisfactions, the attempt to find substitutes for a primary satisfaction of wholeness that somehow got lost, leaving a large gap in its place. The British novelist John Fowles calls this emptiness the “nemo,” which he describes as an anti-ego, a state of being nobody. “Nobody wants to be a nobody,” writes Fowles. “All our acts are partly devised to fill or to mark the emptiness we feel at the core.”

When we look around at our society today, it is hard to escape the truth of this judgment. It is especially through the experiences of alcohol, drugs, and sex that most of us are able to re-create a state of undivided consciousness, of the primary satisfaction of unity with our environment. Food, romantic love, religious ecstasy, and even video screens (televisions or home computers) also serve to produce the same effect. In a sense, these things are not as secondary as they might seem, since their effect is so dramatic in their ability to make the nemo go away (for a while). The conflict, the a-Voidance, gets melted down in short order and, for reasons that I believe are rooted in our bodies, we seek that experience desperately.

Many of us, of course, back away from going the drug or alcohol route, or at least from doing so completely, and as a result our lives are filled with activities designed to cover up the emptiness Fowler refers to. We raise children, pursue careers, go to football games, or write books (not that these things cannot be done in a nonneurotic way). We especially knock ourselves out trying to get other people to love us, so that somehow we will be able to love ourselves. But in the end, it is “looking for love in all the wrong places,” as one popular song puts it. Sándor Ferenczi, the Hungarian psychoanalyst, wrote that our real aim in life is to be loved, and that any other observable activity is really a detour, an indirect path toward that goal. All of this follows from the emptiness at the core.

I do not mean to suggest, however, that the search for primary satisfaction is merely a private one, or even a collective private one. The scope of all this is much larger than personal anguish or individual dilemmas. Our social and political life is a charade as well, asking us to take substitute activity seriously. This is particularly true in the case of the world’s dominant ideologies, which are obvious candidates as “nemo-stuffers.” In the capitalist nations, the search for love often takes the form of the drive for success, which we think will get others to love us (it usually has the opposite effect). This ideology of achievement and productivity extends to virtually every activity, even the writing of poetry. Ambition is, for us, unquestionably “good.” The poet who is “not producing” is invariably inferior, in our eyes, to the one who has a “prodigious literary output.” The problem with this ideology, as well as with socialism or any other, is that it finally does not work. If the real goal is to recover a lost primary experience, then worldly or financial or artistic/literary success is all beside the point. Achieving in order to feel whole makes about as much sense as hanging a cross up on your living room wall in order to precipitate an ecstatic experience (as people such as Saint Francis have told us down through the centuries). Our ideologies are as hollow as our organized religions. The millionaire dies a bitter and lonely man; the famous
athlete finds that nobody cares about his great track record of decades past. Success, as the Swiss therapist Alice Miller demonstrates so powerfully in *Prisoners of Childhood*, is one of the hollowest ideologies around.⁴

Ideologies arise when people feel they have no real somatic anchoring. The person who is truly grounded in him- or herself as a biological organism may espouse a cause, but they do not need it in order to feel that their existence is validated. God and country, feminism and sexism, Judaism and anti-Semitism, the religious fundamentalism of Bible Belt Baptists and the self-conscious intellectualism of *The New York Review of Books*—any ism you care to name, really—are all attempts to create meaning for human beings who, if they had not suffered some sort of primary loss early on, would not need it. For the (extremely rare) healthy person, life is its own meaning; they do not need an ism to stuff the gap, to feel OK. In our society, however, isms and ideologies are as widespread, and as addictive, as any drug one can think of.

On some level, we all know this; it is the common somatic heritage we all share. But modern Western culture in particular is a conspiracy not to talk about the world of primary satisfaction, or even about the body at all. Since that is excluded from discussion, we are required to take the world of secondary satisfaction seriously. Blowing the whistle on the game, refusing to take it seriously, declaring that the emperor has no clothes—such behavior has fairly serious penalties in the cerebral societies of Western industrial culture. (Try doing it at work, if you don’t believe me.) Devotion to secondary satisfaction is intense precisely because it ultimately provides no satisfaction, and pointing this out generates a terrific amount of rage. If you won’t shut up, and insist on discussing this issue in public, you are finally going to wind up in serious trouble, of which loss of employment is probably the mildest form. “Success,” career, reputation, money, and the accumulation of material goods are the most obvious forms of secondary satisfaction, although there are many more that are equally hollow and equally “sacred”: spectator sports, patriotism and war, organized religion, and even a good deal of artistic or creative activity. As already noted, none of this ultimately works because it fails to penetrate down to the primary somatic layer. But because that layer has long since been given up on, our secret attitude is: what else is there? And our defeat shows in our bodies: we either “prop ourselves up,” so to speak, or slump in a posture of collapse; and this has a profound effect on the nature of the culture we create. It is thus a civilization problem, not just a personal or individual one, although these are two sides of the same coin. As the Austrian psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich pointed out, characterology and culture go hand in hand. What appears in the infant body is created by the surrounding culture and in turn creates (reproduces) that culture.

There is, then, a larger cultural and historical dimension to all of this, one that I shall be discussing at great length (in fact, it is the subject of this book). To date, however, the problem of the nemo and its existence as a somatic fact of human life has not, at least in theoretical terms, been the territory of the historian (a major omission, in my view), but principally of the psychologist. In particular, the analysis of human ontology and ontogeny in terms of a gap, or fundamental psychic break, is the principal contribution of a number of French scholars, such as Jacques Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Henri Wallon (dealt with later on in this chapter), as well as of the so-called British “object-relations school,” which includes analysts such as Michael Balint and Donald Winnicott (Ronald Laing’s teacher and therapist). This “nemological” approach was also picked up by the Hungarian anthropologist Géza Róheim, whose book *The Origin and Function of Culture* was a path-breaking attempt to interpret human culture in these terms. It is my bias as well; and I am convinced that neither a somatic interpretation of the past nor the construction of a healthy somatic future (which would be the point of this exercise) is possible without a thorough understanding of the infant origins of this phenomenon of the nemo and the way that the resulting dynamic unconsciously permeates our entire adult life. In all cultures, at all times, human identity is heavily conditioned by what happens to the infant body; this is where it all begins. I ask you, then, to sit back and let yourself go on a journey, a journey back in time, both personal and cultural, to the heart of human existence itself. And if, in the course of this journey, memories of your own childhood and infancy come up for you, that is all to the good. If that happens, put this book down, close your eyes, and try to recall as much of those early events as you can. For Reich was right: our cultural history is encoded in our bodies, and as you begin to sort one out, you will sort the other out as well. Let yourself move back and forth, then, between your own bodily history and an examination of larger cultural processes and assumptions. It is in this back-and-forth movement, I am convinced, that real understanding takes place.

One of the most important contributions to this whole discussion was the book published by Michael Balint, *The Basic Fault*, the title of
which, he believed, captured the essence of the human condition. There is a double entendre here: by “fault,” Balint did not just mean a mistake; his analogy was that of a geological fault, a gap or crevice in the earth that produces earthquakes under conditions of sufficient stress. The fault is also a default in terms of the human condition. There is some way in which, during the early childhood of most (if not all) of us, the person who was closest to us (usually our mother) failed to move in harmony with our needs. She was frequently absent when we needed her, or intrusive when we needed to be left alone. In either case, a mismatch occurred, what the Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank called a case of faulty mirroring, which tends to be the rule rather than the exception. The “fit” between ourselves and our first human environment was off, and from that point on, relations between ourselves and the world, Self and Other, were disturbed. This surfaced in our psyche as the feeling that something was not quite right, was somehow missing. A crevice, an abyss of sorts (John Fowles’ nemo) had irrevocably opened up in our soul, and we would spend the rest of our lives, usually in an unconscious and driven way, attempting to fill it up.

The enormous power of this feeling of hollowness, as I indicated earlier, derives from the fact that the basic fault has a biological foundation. It is laid down in the tissues of the body at a primary level, and as a result can never quite be eradicated. To get down to the “ground level,” we have to retrace the steps of human ontogeny and see what happens to the human infant in the course of its early development. The actual appearance of the nemo—the vague perception that something is missing, that one is split, or empty—would appear to date from the third year of life. Can you recall your first conscious moment? Can you recall how old you were when it occurred? (This is a valuable exercise; you might wish to stop and do this for a few minutes, before continuing. Try to recall that moment in as much detail as possible.) I have found, in working with people over the years, that the dating varies anywhere from four months to four years, but that the first memory we have usually dates back to some point between two and three years of age. And I have also found that although the content varies—what one perceived in that moment can literally be anything—the form is always the same. Thus my own first conscious moment was the perception of folding glass doors, with latticework in them, in my parents’ house when I was almost exactly thirty months old. For one student in my class, it was a portrait of John Lennon, and for another, it consisted of wearing a new dress and whirling around on the grass in the afternoon sun. Exactly where one comes to consciousness is totally arbitrary; the thing that remains constant is the awareness that “I” am “here” and that “that” (whatever one is looking at, or is outside of one) is “there.” To use a bit of technical jargon, the ego crystallizes out of an amorphous and undifferentiated matrix. Up to this point, all of us feel ourselves more or less continuous with the external environment. Coming to consciousness means a rupture in that continuity, the emergence of a divide between Self and Other. With the thought “I am I,” a new level of existence opens up for us. There is a tear in the fabric, so to speak, and Self vs. Other remains the issue that we shall have to negotiate for the rest of our lives.

Preconscious unity with the environment, a state of “symbiosis” that has been called by many names—“cosmic anonymity” (Erich Neumann), “infant-world unity” (Kurt Goldstein)—has been taken by psychoanalytic theory as a given of early human life. The question is, however, how early? Research on newborn babies during the past twenty years has pushed the “symbiotic” phase further and further back; it now appears that infants can imitate parental gestures within the first few days of life, and can, if they heard their father’s voice while in utero, recognize that voice within the first hour or two of life. There is of course the question of whether behavior of this sort amounts to true self-awareness (an issue I shall deal with later on); but in any case, it suggests that if we wish to argue for the existence of a somatic memory or primary wholeness or unity, we may have to chase our subject back into the womb, and possibly to the first few weeks of fetal life. Much of what we today call mysticism may be nothing more than a type of body memory that contemporary science regards as impossible; yet certain types of practices seem to dislodge these very early memories. LSD research, Reichian bodywork, and rebirthing techniques (a kind of yogic breathing method) are the major sources of “direct” information here. (“If we consider flesh neurolinguistically,” writes Charles Brooks, “... it surely represents the most ‘spiritual’ aspect of the cosmos!”) The German physician Kurt Goldstein suggested, in 1957, that embryonic life itself undergoes psychic experiences, that it registers conditions of order and disorder (shock, anxiety)—a suggestion that thirty years ago had the flavor of an old wives’ tale (attend concerts while pregnant and your child will grow up to be a concert pianist, etc.). Today, it is not so easily dismissed; we have a good bit of data on the subject of prenatal memory. A few words on this subject are thus in order.
From a somatic point of view, truly undifferentiated existence may be very brief. As the fetus begins to be formed out of zygote and blastula, it "confronts" its first Other—the placenta. Yet because of the harmonious role of the placenta vis-à-vis the fetus, especially during the first trimester, it is only dimly perceived as an Other, if at all. The fetus is nourished and fed by the placenta and provided with oxygen, and its blood is cleansed of wastes and carbon dioxide. It lives in its environment like a fish in water, or an adult human in air. "Foetus, amniotic fluid, and placenta are . . . a complicated interpenetrating mix-up of foetus and environment-mother," wrote Michael Balint.10 Balint, following other psychologists such as Otto Rank (The Trauma of Birth), Phyllis Greenvacre (Trauma, Growth and Personality), and Nándor Fodor (The Search for the Beloved: A Clinical Investigation of the Trauma of Birth and Prenatal Conditioning), believed that intrauterine life was one of pure bliss, and that birth was traumatic, the archetypal separation, the loss of Eden. Undoubtedly, birth is traumatic, but recent fetal research tends to suggest that the womb is not without its disturbances. Evidence collected by the Toronto psychiatrist Thomas Verny (The Secret Life of the Unborn Child) suggests that the pattern of symbiosis-to-differentiation is real, but that Neumann, Goldstein, and others (including Freud) were wrong about the dating.11 Any stress experienced by the pregnant mother is communicated to the fetus, and this (argues Verny) contributes the first stirrings of Other-awareness. (One wonders why Other-awareness can't occur through sensations of pleasure.) By the eighth week, the fetus will kick vigorously if it finds itself inconvenienced, and its heartbeat picks up if the mother has an anxious moment. But, says Verny, one should not necessarily regard all stress as negative; in some form, he claims, stress makes the awareness of Otherness possible in the first place. Experiments with stress have established the emergence of Self/Other awareness in the fetus somewhere between the fourth and sixth month. Maternal anxiety, writes Verny, can be beneficial. Communicated to the fetus, it "disturbs his sense of oneness with his surroundings and makes him aware of his own separateness and distinctness." All of this jolts fetal serenity and leaves a somatic memory trace; cosmic anonyyness is interrupted by a moment of focused awareness. Again, this is not "bad"; the real issue is whether this primitive ego-crystalization occurs in a context that is loving or hostile. There is, says Verny, such a thing as intrauterine bonding; good postpartum bonding (a rarity these days) can merely be a continuation of an organismic memory experience of good intrauterine bonding. Nevertheless, there is a duality of experience here; the drama of good Self and Other-I'm-not-too-sure-about, of merger vs. separation, probably begins at a very early point.

As for the birth trauma, it would seem that regardless of prenatal differentiation experience, and of the possibly liberating aspects of the birth process, it nevertheless remains the most fundamental discontinuity of our lives. The water bag breaks; a new world begins. Verny calls it "the first prolonged emotional and physical shock the child undergoes," and adds that the child never forgets it. "Even in the best of circumstances," he continues, "birth reverberates through the child's body like a seismic shock of earthquake proportions."12 The "best of circumstances" are those of truly natural childbirth, practiced in tribal and traditional cultures, and recently revived by doctors such as Frederick Leboyer and Michel Odent.13 The goal of these "soft" birthing practices, which may include having the delivery in warm water, in a dimly lit room, with no use of anesthetics or forceps, and with no slapping of the baby to get it to draw its first breath, is to preserve the continuity of the intrauterine bond, to minimize the physical experience of separation as much as possible. From the point of view of human connectedness, the twentieth-century hospital practice of industrial societies is the most barbaric; the fact of separation is seared into the infant body in a way that it will never forget. The American therapist Arthur Janov has argued that the traumas surrounding birth today are so great that lifetime careers of overeating, smoking, alcoholism, and every other form of neurotic splitting and dependence are laid down at this time, because the feeling of unity that the womb offers is ruptured in so brutal a way.14 As Michael Balint put it, "[i]n my experience the yearning for this feeling of 'harmony' is the most important cause of alcoholism or, for that matter, any form of addiction."15 If the basic fault was slowly initiated during the fetus-placenta interaction (which is, of course, debatable), it is definitely established under modern conditions of birth. Janov's observations echo those of Perenczi when he writes that the neurotic product of such a birth can never be loved enough: "All of the rest of life is but a poor substitute; a symbolic ploy to the unconscious to try to 'pretend' that the fulfillment has really occurred."16

We cannot be sure, of course, of what is really going on in fetal life on a psychic level, but if some slight Self/Other differentiation has begun, birth is certainly the climax of that. Once that occurs, the newborn baby ideally stabilizes in its adjustment to its surroundings, and the cycle of increasing differentiation and climax begins again.
The next major climax or "punctuation" is the definitive emergence of ego-consciousness during the third year of life. In this sense, egocrystallization is the intellectual recognition of an earlier somatic event. The awareness that one is a separate entity, a Self in a world of Others, is merely the later recognition of an awareness that has been present in the body for a long time already. It is the point at which the child begins to work out consciously what was imprinted on its tiny body at an earlier time: that it is a separate Self. From age two or so, this conscious awareness is accompanied by a growing understanding that this fact has certain emotional consequences.

The education into the world of Self vs. Other is a process that is completely dependent on the bodies of other people. If it does occur in the womb, it depends on the mother, via her "representative," the placenta. But from the time of birth, in any case, one is involved with the bodies of others in terms of gesture, gaze, and touch. The core experience of this differentiation process is the phenomenon of mirroring, i.e., the growth of self-recognition through the medium of other people. Mirroring includes the phenomenon of observing oneself in a reflecting surface, such as water or silvered glass, but this is only a special case of a larger process. It is this larger process that lies at the heart of identity formation.

A major pioneer in the clinical investigation of the mirroring phenomenon was the British psychoanalyst and pediatrician Donald Winnicott. Even more than Balint, Winnicott placed a heavy emphasis on the "fit" between the child and the mother. What he called the "good enough mother" was, in his view, central to a healthy mirroring experience; and the mirroring experience was for him the prototype of the entire human experience. Hence his famous remark, "There is no such thing as an infant," by which he meant that the primary unit is infant-and-mother, or infant-plus-environment. For Winnicott, object relations began at birth, and it was this interaction, he believed, that had to be studied in the clinical situation.  

What exactly is observed in the clinical situation? The baby sees the mother's face, and what her face portrays is related to what she sees in its face. Thus for the baby, the mother's face acts as a mirror; she gives back to the baby its own self. "[I]n individual development," wrote Winnicott, "the precursor of the mirror is the mother's face." The mother's mirroring of her baby is a crucial factor in the development of the sense of self; the Self that results bears the imprint of the mirroring experience. The effect of a "not-good-enough mother" can be seen in a recent experiment with very young infants, in which mothers were instructed to look into their babies' faces without registering any emotion. The babies' expressions and gestures became hectic and disorganized; the infants rapidly went into a situation of distress. One can well imagine what the resulting Self would be like if this experiment were daily fare. Both the American sociologist C. H. Cooley (Human Nature and the Social Order) and the philosopher/psychologist George Mead (Mind, Self and Society) argued that this sort of mirroring is the crucible of self-formation. Cooley introduced the concept of the "looking-glass self," which refers to an individual seeing himself or herself in the ways in which others see him or her. Mead similarly argued that self-concept is the result of the person's concern about how others are reacting to them. As R. D. Laing once put it, there is no Self without Other. The phenomenon of mirroring and that of human identity seem to be closely tied together.

To what extent is the presence of an actual, physical mirror a factor in all of this? For Jacques Lacan, the "French school," and a number of other psychologists and writers, the fact of a reflected presence—the "specular image," as it is called—constitutes a critical factor in the formation of human identity and self-consciousness. The question of how the child sorts out the significance of his or her physical reflection, and the importance of that process for psychic development, is, to these researchers, absolutely crucial, and investigation of the issue actually goes back to Charles Darwin, who studied his own child with a view to this question in 1877. Rightly or wrongly, the mirror was taken, from that date, as an archetype, a pure case of what went on in a more diffuse and general way in a social setting. Hence one American psychologist writes that "even before the experience with an actual mirror, a long experience of emotional 'mirroring' has taken place," and Paul Guillaume, an early (1920s) French student of the subject, argued that the presence of a mirror can accelerate self-recognition, but that because of social interaction, children eventually come into self-recognition with or without it. I shall have to say more about the history of the mirror as an artifact of Western civilization later on, because its archetypal significance is probably open to question if it cannot be shown to be ubiquitous. For now, however, I wish to review the mirror studies of infant development that have been done since Darwin's first investigation of the subject.

Darwin's observation was actually fairly elementary. He found that when his son reached nine months of age and was called by name when in the presence of a mirror, he turned to the mirror and said "ah." Darwin speculated that this was an indication of self-recognition.
on the part of the child. A few years later, the psychologist William Preyer concluded that his own child attained self-recognition at fourteen months of age when it recognized its mother in the mirror—presumably since this would imply a Self/Other distinction. Such early studies were pure guesswork, but nevertheless vitally important, for Darwin and Preyer were not only searching for signs of self-recognition, but were also trying to puzzle out what the criteria for such an event would consist of.24

The first systematic study of infant self-recognition was done in the 1920s by Paul Guillaume in the form of a series of observations on his infant daughter, Louise.25 The first few weeks of life found Louise grimacing in the mirror, or just staring at her reflection. The next stage involved recognizing things in the mirror that were situated next to her (prompted by tactile or auditory sensation). At five months and seventeen days, according to Guillaume, she began turning around to try to see the real person whose image she glimpsed in the mirror. At eleven months and eighteen days, Louise came upon her image in the mirror while wearing a straw hat (which she had had on since morning) and put her hand to her head to touch it. Guillaume took this as an obvious moment of self-recognition, but it was one that did not stabilize: six weeks later Louise was not able to perform on herself, in front of the mirror, acts that she performed on others (pinching the nose, for example). It was only at two years of age that Louise, dressed in a new coat, went to the mirror to check herself out. At two years and eight months, Louise was shown a photo of a group of children, in which she was included; she knew who all of them were except herself. Guillaume told her it was her; the next day, exactly the same thing happened. “We can see, then,” wrote Guillaume, “how very tenuous is the precise notion of one’s own visual form, in spite of what the child learns from looking into a mirror.”

Finally, the first scientific study of this sort, i.e., one done with other people’s children, and not “anecdotally” with one’s own, was conducted by yet another French psychologist, Henri Wallon, over a period of several years beginning in the 1930s.26 During the first six months of life, he found, the infant’s relationship to the specular image is one of “soiabilité”—it regards its reflection as a playmate of sorts, and as late as thirty-five weeks of age it registers surprise when it reaches out to this “playmate” and its hand touches glass. Clear signs of self-recognition—as with Louise and the straw hat—emerge at around one year of age, but (as in the case of Louise) this momentary insight does not stabilize. By and large, Wallon’s findings were not very different from those of Guillaume. In particular, he confirmed the tenuous and nonlinear quality of the whole process. From twelve to fifteen months of age, he found, children will practice certain movements in front of the mirror (experiment with the image, in effect), exploring and checking out what this other self represents. This sort of play and experimentation, he discovered, can go on up to thirty-one months of age. There is something about our body image, and the Self/Other distinction, that is never finished. Accounts are never closed here—a fact that has serious consequences for adult life.

As the reader might expect, research of this sort has expanded dramatically since the days of Guillaume and Wallon, and has (predictably) taken a heavily scientific direction, especially in the United States. Child behavior laboratories attached to major universities now conduct large-scale, long-term experiments, employing a massive technological apparatus: video monitoring, split-screen photography, and, of course, computer analysis.27 In the four major studies conducted in the United States in the 1970s, the criteria for self-recognition included any or all of the following: (a) with a mark (e.g., of rouge) applied to the infant’s nose, the infant looked in the mirror and touched the rouge mark; (b) the infant said its name in response to the mother pointing to its reflection and saying, “Who’s that?”; (c) the infant displayed embarrassed or self-admiring behavior in front of the mirror, including being silly or coy. Although the occasional nine-month-old met the criteria for self-recognition, the overwhelming majority of infants began to display these signs only after eighteen months of age, thus moving the Guillaume-Wallon threshold ahead by about six months. But other than that, it is not clear that these modern scientific studies have altered the conceptual mapping of the two French psychologists in any significant way. Beyond the issue of more precise dating, the conclusions are fairly similar: movement and “practice” in front of the mirror (what are now called “contingency clues”) accelerate the process of self-recognition; it takes a long time for such recognition to stabilize; it all seems to occur in a nonlinear way, i.e., in stages (although there is some debate about this);28 and the process never really ends. The sequence thus remains as Wallon pegged it: “soiabilité” (treating the specular image as a playmate); moments of self-recognition, followed (later) by experimentation with the image; stabilization of the insight that the image is a reflection; and (by thirty months of age) only occasional interest in the image, or in playing with it.

Modern researchers have also spent a great deal of time investigating
the process by which the infant mirrors its environment (including its mother) and have, as a result, been able to push the phase of "cosmic anonymity" further and further back. As Daniel Stern, a leading student of the subject, puts it, "[n]ew infant capabilities are being revealed at an astounding rate." A newborn can imitate the mother within the first six days; if she sticks her tongue out, so will the baby—an action that requires sophisticated visual-tactile correlation. At two to three weeks of age, infants can visually recognize an external object (e.g., a cube) which they had only experienced through touch (i.e., in the mouth, while blindfolded). At three months, they can differentiate between categories of color. At four months, shown two films and a sound track, they will look at the film appropriate to the sound track. Clearly, the newborn is not the amorphous blob of Freud postulated by classical psychoanalysis. This recent research reveals a curious infant, an exploring one. The infant does not "awaken" to object relations, but random for a perceptual-motor-affective dialogue with its mother, or whoever acts as the central caretaker in its life. "Infants," concludes Daniel Stern,

appear to be pre-designed by nature, in the form of perceptual and cognitive pre-organization, such that salient natural categories such as self and other are not left to be slowly and painstakingly learned "from scratch"; rather, they are prestructured emergent entities that result from the interaction between a prestructured perceptual and cognitive organism and natural events in a predictable external world.

What these studies do not address was what Wallon, in his more philosophical passages, tried to come to grips with, namely, what is the psychological and ontological significance of all this? In all of the above studies, no agreed-upon relationship was ever worked out among self-recognition, imitation behavior, and interior awareness (existential identity). That a six-day-old infant can stick its tongue out when its mother does not prove the existence of Self/Other differentiation. It may be part of the biopsychic process of such differentiation—en route to it, so to speak—but more than that we cannot say. Even Daniel Stern qualifies his discussion of early infant abilities by saying that the research in question deals only with sensorimotor schemata, not with "representations capable of symbolic transformations." In other words, infants cannot, on this evidence, be said to have prestructured categories of Self and Other, which "are categories and experiences of enormous complexity, requiring redefinition at each point in development." The same thing can be said of many of the mirror studies discussed here. The problem with drawing substantial inferences for self-awareness from evidence of self-recognition is that a number of animal species, including chickens and goldfish, display a great interest in mirrors. William Preyer concluded, from his observation that his fourteen-month-old child could recognize its mother in the mirror, that this was evidence for self-recognition; but a macaque can do this as well. It is also clear that chimpanzees display self-recognition behavior. Thus the key criterion in the four studies cited above—recognition of a rouge or dye mark on the face—was met by chimpanzees in a study done in 1970. The chimps were marked while anesthetized; later on, shown a mirror, they used it to guide themselves to the dye mark and then inspected their fingers. It seems difficult to maintain that any of these animals have a growing sense of "I"-awareness or existential inwardness that increasingly guides their lives, and thus it becomes problematic to determine whether all of these self-recognition studies amount to, beyond playing the role of a halfway house or developmental stage. Infants also acquire language in the second year of life; this does not make them poets, but they cannot become poets without it. Hence the authors of the most extensive of the four studies cited, Michael Lewis and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, admit that the presence of self-recognition is at most a "window on the emerging concept of self."

These scientific studies are useful in showing that there is an alternating slow and fast buildup of increasing self-recognition, and of Self/Other differentiation; but the shift to true self-awareness is completely discontinuous—a "catastrophe point," as these events are sometimes called. "I am I" is a different level of existence, and it raises questions about ontology and the basic fault that "objective" clinical analysis simply cannot deal with. But what should be clear from all this research is that the body contains, by age three, a dialectic of continuity/discontinuity that is very deeply felt. As a result, crossing the catastrophe point into existential awareness (and it is not, in childhood, crossed "once and for all") is closely tied up with body image, with the mind's perception of the body. Mirroring has a purely physical (tactile) aspect, which I shall discuss later on; but even in the case of the infant confronting its specular image, we recognize that it is a body image we are talking about. Body image and interiority, or self-awareness, are two sides of the same coin—we cannot hope to understand one with-
out the other. "The ego is first and foremost a body ego," as Freud once put it. The onset of self-recognition, and finally self-awareness, is a bodily phenomenon and revolves around the body image, even if neither of these generates a lot of measurable clues for the behavioral scientist. When one talks about the basic fault, or the nemo, one is talking about a somatic process.

So if birth is the moment that the physical body is released into the world, a body that has been in preparation for nine months, the "I am I" experience is the moment that the body image is born, an image that was "conceived" in the process of self-recognition. The physical body is conceived as a zygote and then carried to term and delivered. The psychic body—the body image—is similarly "conceived" during self-recognition and "delivered" at the moment of self-awareness a year or so later on. The pregnancy of the mother with the child's physical body is in a sense replicated by the "pregnancy" of the child with its body image. In this latter case, the mother acts as a midwife; this is what the general process of mirroring is all about. The physical mirror merely generates a faster "delivery."

We are, I realize, in murky territory here, so let me summarize the argument thus far. Basically, three points emerge, facts that are closely related to each other. The first is that like self-recognition, self-awareness is a discontinuous process. The second point is that it is not amenable to scientific verification. The third point is that this development is somatic; it is only partly a matter of conceptual or intellectual understanding. Before I go on to discuss the implications of all this for human identity, it might be helpful to say just a few more words about these three points.

Recall the exercise I suggested earlier, of trying to remember your first conscious moment. Now add the following exercise: try to remember your second conscious moment. Over the years, as a teacher or lecturing, I have given these exercises to people only to discover that recall of their first conscious moment is fairly easy, and recall of their second moment typically nonexistent. Can you recall your second conscious moment? Probably not; and the reason for this is that just as in the case of Louise Guillaume and her straw hat, or her examining herself in a group photograph, existential self-awareness—despite an initial "I am I" experience—is something that grows over time. It is nonlinear, it weaves in and out. The first experience is only the beginning in a series of memories that become increasingly frequent.

The reason that the Self is not amenable to scientific verification is that it does not exist as a discrete entity, but in fact a process; it can never be a clinical object, never be localized in space or time. Thus, whereas self-recognition is trackable via contingency (i.e., movement) clues, rouge marks, and so on, the Self (soul, in the Middle Ages) lies outside the bounds of scientific observation. To begin with, although the experience of "I am I" typically occurs in the third year of life, many people report the experience happening anywhere from four months to thirteen years (!), so the whole thing lacks stable definition. It is also definable in terms of what is not—what I shall refer to later on as the problem of binary opposition. "I am I" can never flash through your consciousness without the simultaneous sense of "I am not that" (i.e., Other). In all the cases I know of—including my own experience with the glass doors—the subject recalled being aware that they were "here" and that the object or situation perceived was "over there." This phenomenon of contrast invariably emerges in studies done on the subject of existential self-awareness, and we are forced to conclude that the real experiential category is not Self, but Self/Not-Self; these two only occur in a bipolar constellation. Whatever the Self is, it is part of a force field; there is no separate entity called the Self. But it exists, lack of hard evidence notwithstanding.

Of course, the sense of "I" finally does stabilize, usually around eight years of age, though it is still not scientifically verifiable. But interviews with eight-year-olds reveal a clear possession of a sense of inner self. This is the point at which conscious deception becomes a possibility for the child, because the child is able to manipulate the relation between external and internal reality. It knows it can have a facade, in other words. The shift that began at about six months of age, from participating consciousness (the experience of Self as being immersed in the world) or what Kurt Goldstein called "concreteness" or "immediacy," to what he called "abstractness" (discrimination), is finally complete. By age eight, the magical or animistic world is finished for children; participating consciousness becomes the exception rather than the rule.

As for our third point, the tie-in of all this to visual experience is the fact that self-awareness is awareness of one's own body as a separate entity, or as a specular image. The concept of the "I," even as a first, momentary flash, is a fully embodied event—as embodied, let us say, as an organ. The Self is a body self; it has no other root than a visceral one. Yet although it remains tied to the body until death, it gets elaborated in such a way as to take a viewpoint on the body, have a conception of it. It is here that our problems begin. The body
image lies at the heart of all human self-awareness; neither the basic fault nor the human history that flows out of it can be understood without understanding what the body image is or how it operates in our early (and subsequent) lives.

What does it mean, then, to look in the mirror and understand, for the first time, in a clear and unequivocal sense, that what you are seeing is nothing other than what other people see when they look at you? For the "French school" of philosophy and child psychology—Henri Wallon, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Lacan—this moment, which marks the birth of your identity as a being in the world, also marks the birth of your alienation from the world. The full understanding of a distinction between Self and Other sets up a tension in the psyche, requiring you to make a decision in favor of one or the other in terms of this identity. Alienation, or what Wallon called "confiscation," involves a shift that can be described in various ways: from Self to Other; from the kinesthetic to the visual; from the authentic (inward) to the social (exterio); or, to use the language of Laing and Winnicott, from the true self to the false one. All of this is not without long preparation; it has been building in all of the stages of self-recognition discussed above. But it is in the leap from self-recognition to self-awareness that the psyche is torn in two. The shock is not that an Other exists, but that you realize that you are an Other for other Others. What now opens up, and deepens until age eight, and is

something you are condemned to deal with for the rest of your life, is that an interpretation can be put upon you that is antagonistic to what you feel about yourself. It is not merely that the Self is something that remains unfinished; it is, more significantly, that its validity, its very existence, can be thrown into question.

Confiscation, then, is another way of talking about the basic fault. What happens inside—the emergence of the nemo—is the very same thing that happens outside, namely the Self/Other dichotomy. These two events are the same process, not just two "aspects" of a single process. The inside "tars" is the outside tars; that is what it means to say, "there is no Self without Other." As infants, we move from "syncratic sociability" (Wallon), the confusion between ourselves and the Other, to the emergence of a "lived distance" that now divides us.62

The loss involved in the shift from kinesthetic to visual awareness, which lies at the heart of confiscation, is no small thing. It amounts to a revolution in consciousness, the crucial feature of which is the decision to distrust the evidence of our senses. Seen in this way, Hans Christian Andersen's tale "The Emperor's New Clothes" takes on archetypal significance, and this is inevitable if identity is a function of social mirroring. In order to win membership in the human race, we are asked to pay a "small" price: everything. We are asked to give up our basic, and most trustworthy, way of knowing the world in favor of a phony charade of polite agreement. This is a colossal mutilation, and it accounts for much of the rage and pain that all of us carry and that erupts periodically in orgies of war and barbarism. It also, as we shall see in Part II, accounts for much of the religious history of the West and the whole cycle of orthodoxy and heretical rebellion that is the major key to the way reality itself is coded and organized in this civilization.49 For regardless of what visual com game goes down, the kinesthetic level always remains. "Through smell, taste, touch," writes Lawrence Durrell, "we apprehend each other, ignite each other's minds; information conveyed by the body's odours after orgasm, breath, tongue-taste—through these one 'knows' in quite primeval fashion."44 We know each other physically—by the way we move, the way we smell, by the sound of the voice, etc.—before we come to know any of this information (or attempt to fog it over) intellectually. This is why as a young child you could sense an atmosphere, or have an intuitive grasp of a social situation, much better than you now can as an adult, and why adults in social situations have to keep talking constantly, so that (visceral) reality will not break through. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, there exists for all of us, initially, a state of precommunication in which our intentions play across the body of another, and vice versa.45 But the truth of the matter is that this never goes away; our intentions always play across each other's bodies, whether we choose to recognize this or not.

Because the kinesthetic precedes the visual, because of the deep archaic origins of merger, as opposed to separation, the "lived distance" that divides us occasionally tends to break down, though these situations are regarded as potentially taboo or hazardous by "visual" society. Both psychic boundaries, as Freud noted in the opening pages of Civilization and Its Discontents, and somatic ones (i.e., the body image), as Paul Schilinder pointed out in his classic work, The Image and Appearance of the Human Body, are highly labile, influenced by a great number of factors and always extending beyond the physical boundaries of the skin or any psychic entity we may choose to call ego or Self.46 This is why, for example, clothing—what Erasmus of Rotterdam called "the body of the body"—is a controversial issue in nearly every society, and why departure from the norm (e.g., hippies, beatniks, punks) generates such a storm. Any public shift to the kinesthetic
threatens to blow the whistle on the agreed-upon visual game, which
a somatically alienated culture both longs for and fears. (Ever wonder
why corporate executives make money and mime performers do not?)
Situations of intense relatedness—romantic love, psychosis, mystical
experience—involves a “regression” to syncretic sociability, wherein it
is impossible to distinguish where Self ends and Other begins (a “con-
fusion of the core of a situation that is common to us both,” comments
Merleau-Ponty48). We long for this, but it is the ultimate horror as well,
the collapse back into the abyss. “Lived distance,” so carefully pres-
erved, collapses, or explodes to include the entire world. Ecstatic
experience is one of total kinesthesia; everything is alive, quivering,
embodied, and it is noteworthy that mystics down through the ages
have insisted that the experience is essentially cognitive, a mode of
knowing.49 (What is it that they know? That Self and Other are identi-
tical.) Schizophrenia is a situation that can be called totally visual: the
person feels transparent as glass, a being completely confiscated, com-
pletely determined by the look of the Other.

Most of our experiences, of course, lie somewhere between these
two extremes; in daily life, the line between Self and Other, or kin-
esthetic and visual, is constantly being negotiated. We are always, in
some sense, being “confiscated,” and this is a dance that is played
around the basic fault.50 But this whole set of behaviors depends on
the final recognition of what the specular image represents. “At the
same time that the image of oneself makes possible the knowledge of
oneself,” writes Merleau-Ponty,

it makes possible a sort of alienation. I am no longer what I felt
myself, immediately, to be; I am that image of myself that is
offered by the mirror. To use Dr. Lacan’s terms, I am “captured,
captured” by my spatial image.

Thus a split opens up between a real, lived me and an imaginary
one. “In this sense,” Merleau-Ponty writes,

I am torn from myself, and the image in the mirror prepares me
for another still more serious alienation, which will be the alien-
ation by others. For others have only an exterior image of me,
which is analogous to the one seen in the mirror. Consequently
others will tear me away from my immediate inwardsness much
more surely than will the mirror.

Inevitably, he goes on,

there is a conflict between the me as I feel myself and the me as
I see myself or as others see me. . . . The acquisition of a specular
image . . . bears not only on our relations of understanding but also
our relations of being, with the world and with others.51

So alienation involves the imposition of a constructed me—one vis-
ible at a distance—on the immediately lived me. This is the essence
of the confiscation, and it anticipates the later confiscation of me by
others. “The visual makes possible a kind of schism between the
immediate me and the me that can be seen in the mirror.”52 All deep
relations with others, as a result, inevitably generate psychological
insecurity.

A powerful description of confiscation occurs in Pär Lagerkvist’s
novel, The Dwarf, which captures perfectly the fear that is involved
here. The dwarf lives in the house of the Prince; the great artist,
Bernardo (Leonardo da Vinci), has been commissioned to paint a por-
trait of the Princess, which she does not want to have painted. “I
understand her only too well!” the dwarf says to himself.

One may contemplate oneself in a mirror, but on leaving it one
does not wish the reflection to remain there so that somebody
else can take possession of it.

No one possesses himself! Detestable thought! No one pos-
sesses himself! Thus everything belongs to the others! Don’t we
own even our faces? Do they belong to anybody who chooses to
look at them? And one’s body? Can others own one’s body? I
find the notion most repellent.

I, and I alone, will be the sole possessor of that which is mine.
Nobody else may seize it, none outrage it. It belongs to me and
nobody else. And after my death I want to continue to own my-
self. Nobody is going to poke about in my entrails. I do not wish
them to be seen by strangers. . . . It is as though I were no longer
sole owner of myself. . . .53

It is interesting that Native Americans have a fear of being photo-
graphed, a fear that the possessor of their picture has in some way
confiscated their soul. As one psychologist has written, “whenever
we deal with the mirror phenomenon, we are dealing with something
enigmatic, uncanny. . . .54 Sartre said that for the adult, the image
is a “quasi-presence.” Even for the adult, the specular image “is mys-
teriously inhabited by me; it is something of myself.”55 This is why
stepping on a photograph is something we feel uneasy about, unless we do it as a deliberate act of aggression. Intellectual understanding is useless here; the "uncanny" nature of the specular image cannot be removed by a course in optics; the "quasi-presence" of the snapshot cannot be eliminated by being told it is merely photographic paper. The whole world of objects and object relations is not a neutral one; it is soaking in questions of ontological survival.

True recognition of the specular image is acquired very slowly. It is not the sort of knowledge on the order of $2 + 2 = 4$ or Paris is the capital of France. Self/Other cognition is never settled; it haunts us all our lives; it cannot be solved by imposing a binary yes/no framework (although we often attempt to do this). Rather, it involves great uncertainty. The specular image acquires a marginal existence only very slowly, and this is why it still exerts a hold over us when we are adults. To the end of our days we continue to check ourselves out in front of the mirror or search ourselves out in a group photograph, to "see what we look like." Similarly, this quality of "presence" implicates our relations with others. The things that really matter in life all have this quality; they can never really be "known." It is finally indefinable quality of our visual image has not deterred behavioral scientists from examining this phenomenon, but as already noted, measurable data prove to be elusive. Scientists such as Seymour Fisher and Franklin Shontz have made major contributions to this field, though their crucial discovery seems to be how extremely plastic the body image really is. The ABD, or adjustable body distorting mirror—a full-length mirror that enables manipulation of the body image by pressure (bowing)—has been a useful tool of research, but experiments with it have yielded peculiar results. Subjects typically forget what they actually look like, and come up with a wide range of reflections that are all different and yet, to the subjects, all valid representations of their bodies! The ABD has proven to be more of a Rorschach test than anything else.

Our inconclusiveness about what we look like, and therefore about who we are, is also the result (in part) of the uniqueness of the specular image. Wallon noted that the child sitting in front of a mirror with its father has before it two visual images that it can compare, but in the case of its own body it has only one. It cannot look at its own body as a whole except in a mirror. Both Guillaume and Wallon noted that this particular visual image is an exceptional phenomenon. Grasping it, said Wallon, requires displacing your own image in order to stand outside of yourself, which is a complex task as long as the image is still felt kinesthetically. Knowing oneself and confiscation—which confuses the knowing—seem to be completely inseparable. If the Uncertainty Principle has finally stood classical physics on its head, a similar sort of effect operates in psychology to an even greater degree.

Jacques Lacan has gone over much of the same territory Merleau-Ponty has, being much more aggressive than other psychologists about what he regards as the catastrophe of the gap, or Self/Other split. The consequence of this split, he says, is that the ontological structure of human life is paranoid (the Self can always be invaded by the Other). The kinesthetic-to-visual shift means the irrevocable fragmentation of the body: "paranoiac alienation... dates from the deflection of the specular I onto the social I." An ego is constructed to paper over this gap, making it (the gap), in repressed form, the dynamic force of our lives. In other words, we attempt to heal the basic fault by identifying with a visual image of ourselves. What most psychologists regard as a sign of health, viz., a strong ego structure, Lacan thus regards as the symptom of a disturbed psyche. The authority of the ego over our psychic life is itself the symptom of our problem and the basis of our unreal relations with ourselves, he says, and it is the mirror stage (stage du miroir), as he calls it, that generates the ego as an entity modeled on the body image. For Lacan, the ego is rooted in what he calls the realm of the Imaginary, the world of images, doubles, mirrors, and specular identification. It emerges as an either/or relationship, a construct founded on the opposition and identity between Self and Other, and as such is paranoid. For our fundamental relationship with the world is one of connection; the stage du miroir, the whole process of specular identification, tricks us into believing that the Other is something to be feared. Hence Einstein's reply to a reporter who had asked him if there was a single crucial question that the human race had to answer: "Yes," said Einstein, "it is this. Is the universe friendly?" For Lacan, the realm of the Imaginary marks the attempt of the Self to master trauma through the "mirage of self-sufficiency." "The mirror or visual me," writes Michael Eigen, "the actor for an audience, comes to be used as a defence against authentic body feelings, especially one's vulnerability and insufficiency."
this, for he has pointed out that all of what we learn about the Self/Other dynamic in infancy occurs in an affective, tactile, and emotive context—it is not merely a question of gazing into eyes or silvered glass. Hence Lacan’s word for the gap, the Self/Other separation, is sévage, a word that means “weaning” as well as “severance.” When we talk about object relations, we are not talking about just any objects, but—among other things—hands, faces, and breasts. The remedy emerges in a context that is erotic, fleshy, libidinally charged. From a Freudian viewpoint—and Lacan and Winnicott can certainly be put in this camp—this is the crucial issue in the matter of separation and attachment. It was for this reason that Winnicott argued that the real drama was not Self vs. Other but Self vs. Mother—a theme recently reworked, from a feminist perspective, by another Freudian writer, Dorothy Dinnerstein (The Mermaid and the Minotaur). It is in this highly emotive context that the infant has to work out the ontological puzzle of self-identification, and this is why—Piaget and modern science notwithstanding—cognition and emotion are closely bound up with one another, for adults as well as for children. Object loss triggers not just terror of the Void, but a heavy component of rage, pain, and sadness, which reflect the energy of sexual attachment. So there is more to this whole thing than meets the eye.

For the most part, the object-relations theorists did not have much to say about human sexuality. Balint held that object relations are completely independent of erotogenic zones, and even Winnicott, when faced, in his pediatric practice, with the fact that the play that goes on in transitional space is sometimes sexual in nature, preferred to ignore it. Object relations sees the basic issue of the human condition as being one of meaning and cognition, and object loss (loss of Other) as being fundamentally the loss of a comprehensible world. As such, object relations seems to be primary in the hierarchy of human needs, and in fact there is much to suggest that this is true. John Holt, the American educator, has argued that children come into the world with a desire to make sense of it—what we might call the “cosmological urge.” He claims that this urge is biological, stronger than the need for food. Infants who are feeding, for example, will stop and look up with great curiosity if something interesting (i.e., meaningful) happens in their environment. Since feeding is, in psychoanalytic theory, a libidinal activity, we can see already that it is capable of being usurped by a deeper hunger, namely the search for a comprehensible world. Consider also the couple that stays together, year after year, without engaging in sexual activity or even in the occasional touch or caress, simply because something bad is preferable to nothing at all. “Nothing at all,” as the object-relations school would argue, is the worst thing we think we can face.

I am, however, not completely convinced by all this, because in actual practice, sexuality and ontology tend to run together from a very early point, in particular if one takes sexuality in its broadest sense to mean a sensual and erotic relationship with the world. From birth, some degree of physical contact with others is so strong an aspect of our ontological development that prolonged absence of it later in life makes us feel that life is meaningless without it (to me, a reasonable conclusion). By the time the infant is into the mirror stage and the process of self-recognition, it is immersed in a libidinal network. I believe it is for this reason that the two energies, ontological and erotic, often seem to be so similar. Both have a fierceness to them, as well as a quality of “drawing one in.” The person with a new guru, new therapist, or new philosophy of life is visibly animated and excited, and this often has a sexual feel to it. The crossover between sexuality and religious ecstasy is a well-known phenomenon, whatever religious context it occurs in. No matter how “spiritual” the cosmological urge may seem, it is, I want to emphasize, thoroughly grounded in the issues of the body; meaning is part of the bodily self.

So a “pure” object-relations position is difficult to maintain. Infants literally die if they are not held; just being looked at lovingly isn’t enough. Paul Schilder’s empirical studies revealed that the construction of the body image is libidinal as well as social, and that those parts of the body that are erotogenic are perceived by subjects to be closer to them in terms of physical distance than nonerotogenic parts. Michel Odent reports ecstatic states and orgasmic gratification of women at the moment of birth (at least in the case of completely natural childbirth), and Frederick Leboyer’s description of how the newborn should be caressed upon delivery is frankly erotic:

Our hands travel over the infant’s back, one after the other, following each other like waves. One hand still in contact as the other begins. Each maintaining its steady rhythm until its entire journey is concluded. Without rediscovering this visceral slowness that lovers rediscover instinctively, it is impossible to communicate with the child.

But, people will say, you’re making love to the child!

Yes, almost.
To make love is to return to paradise, it is to plunge again into the world before birth, before the great separation. It is to find again the primordial slowness, the blind and all-powerful rhythm of the internal world, of the great ocean.\textsuperscript{72}

The importance of touch as a form of (positive) mirroring, and therefore as a source of self-creation and ontological security, was explored very fully in one of the most significant essays to appear in the English language in recent years, \textit{The Continuum Concept} by Jean Liedloff.\textsuperscript{73} Liedloff began to understand the role of being held in human identity-formation as a result of living with the Yequana Indians of Brazil for about two years' time. Yequana babies are held—"in arms," as she puts it—twenty-four hours a day for at least the first two years of their lives. The result is that they grow up not experiencing any gap, or sense of having an empty space within themselves. They do not, she says, spend their entire lives trying to prove that they exist, or trying to make up for a missing sense of Self. Confiscation is a rupture in the continuum of life, which is a biological continuum. The Yequana, apparently, get only very mild doses of this, or perhaps none at all. So where we moderns spend most of our lives trying, indirectly and unconsciously, to repair a ruptured continuum, the Yequana never have to think about it—they can just live and enjoy life. For us, the Self comes to be defined as wanting, the Other as withholding. From birth to "I"-consciousness and confiscation, we learn that life is lonely and full of pain and that the universe is most definitely not friendly. We have an abyss, says Liedloff, where a rich sense of Self might have existed. Our basic orientation to life is future-oriented: "I'd be all right if . . . .," "I'll be happy when . . . .," etc. This desire for tactile mirroring, for physical reassurance, says Liedloff, is not about sex—at least not in the narrow sense of the term. In fact, the modern Western preoccupation with sex is really a symptom of continuum rupture. Sex is only a nodal point on an erotic, object-relations continuum. The search for a universe that is loving (not just friendly) is the real issue here. This is what Liedloff supplies that Wallon and others tend to omit: a friendly universe gazes approvingly on the infant, whereas a loving universe holds it. The search for the lost Other is first and foremost an ontological, or cosmological, project, but in practice it turns into an erotic one as well. By itself, then, object-relations theory is incomplete.\textsuperscript{74}

We need, finally, to be able to relate all of this to questions regarding the nature of culture and society at large. Before we can do that,

however, a few words concerning the mirror as a physical object would not be out of place. For up to this point, our discussion has been primarily psychological in nature, and psychology often tends to assume that human beings are fundamentally, in all places and at all times, the same. History, on the other hand, does not necessarily bear this out. To put the issue directly: silvered glass is not that old, historically speaking. It is, in fact, a relatively recent invention. If so, much of this psychological material, including discussions of confiscation and alienation, is really (as Ivan Illich puts it) epoch-specific and therefore suspect. It may only represent a modern pathology, not "the human condition." Of course, it would seem to be the case, as I have already indicated, that the physical mirror is only an archetype, or condensed instance, of the larger phenomenon of human mirroring, and the researches of Darwin, Freyer, Guillaume, Wallon et al. tend to bear this out. The physical mirror—specifically, silvered glass—can thus be seen to "reflect" the accelerated condition of modern times. But how do we know this? Before we can turn to the consequences of the phenomenon of mirroring for culture at large, it will be necessary to examine the history of the mirror as a physical object. Just how archetypal is it? is a question that can only be answered by means of historical investigation.

To anticipate for a moment, the history of the physical mirror would seem (as far as I can determine) to run parallel to the development of consciousness itself; it itself mirrors the larger cultural milieu of which it is a part. For the evolution of reflecting surfaces is not really about technology, but about psyche and soma. Its real significance is that it is an icon of the kinesthetic/visual balance at any moment in time. The mirror grows as an archetype, in other words, although the process is (as with consciousness) not a linear one. Periods of strong self-awareness are curiously accompanied by sharp increases in the use, distribution, or manufacture of mirrors, with the heaviest emphasis occurring in the modern period. Thus the mirror emerges, strangely enough, both as an archetype and as an indicator of pathology. The torn condition of modern man, in other words, is an extreme case of a situation that is, at the very least, dormant in the human condition, though there are societies that tend not to trigger the phenomenon of confiscation, if at all. Let me elaborate on this in greater detail.\textsuperscript{75}

The use of reflecting surfaces is probably as old as the human race itself. Going back even beyond those civilizations that used polished metal disks, we find the practice of spitting on a dark, flat stone and rubbing it to give it a shiny, reflecting surface, or simply the use of
pools of water. Some Indian tribes used the glistening body of a fish that had recently been pulled out of the water. Paralleling this usage are stories and myths about mirrors, present in numerous cultures around the world. The Narcissus myth of ancient Greece undoubtedly has a number of antecedents, though its very pointed message—the gods finally got annoyed with this beautiful youth who fell in love with his reflection, and so turned him into a flower—suggests that ancient cultures found this sort of behavior (when it existed) aberrant.

In the case of both the mirrors and the stories about them, however, precise dating is not possible. Plaques of mica, pierced with a hole so that they could be hung in some way, have been found in predynastic Egyptian tombs (i.e., possibly as far back as 4000 B.C.), and they reflect quite well. The earliest identifiable mirror, unearthed in the 1920s about 250 miles south of Cairo, dates from before 4500 B.C., and is made of selenite (a variety of gypsum). A copper one was also found, dating from 2920–2770 B.C. It is probably of Asian origin, and is now in the Sydney Museum. The use of bronze mirrors began ca. 2100 B.C. In general, Egyptian mirrors had a handle, and were typically used for grooming, but were also included in tombs, where they were placed close to the body. Representations of mirrors also occur in tombs, with the famous Egyptian “magical eye” painted on the disk.

There are certain Aegean artifacts (Cycladic culture) that may be mirrors, dating from about 2500 B.C., and there are two mirrors that were found at Mycenae that date to about 1500 B.C. As in the case of the Egyptians, there is evidence that the Greeks used mirrors for grooming, and mirrors were also placed in Bronze Age tombs in Crete and Mycenae. It is, however, from the sixth century B.C., when one sees the growing appearance of self-consciousness in Greece, that Greek mirror production really took off. The Romans continued this, being the first people in Europe to produce glass mirrors, which art they learned from the Egyptians. Mirrors became so popular in Rome that they were even owned by servants; and Seneca (first century A.D.) reported his disgust at one Hostius Quadra, who had himself constantly surrounded by mirrors.

Mirror production in Europe went into abeyance after about A.D. 100; and after Saint Augustine’s development of the mirror as a metaphor for the soul, the mind, Holy Scripture, etc. (this about the early fifth century), little more was heard about mirrors until the twelfth century. This dormancy coincided roughly with a loss of interiority, or self-consciousness, during the early Middle Ages. I discuss this in detail in Part II of this book; but briefly, human self-awareness, for reasons not entirely clear, seemed to disappear during this time and then mysteriously reappeared in the eleventh century. Behavior during the period A.D. 500–1050 had a kind of “mechanical” or robotic quality to it, as a result, and the interest in reflection, in both the physical and the metaphysical sense, was correspondingly low. Thus there was a reference to mirrors by Isadore, Bishop of Seville, in the seventh century; and in 625, Pope Boniface IV sent a mirror to the queen of Edwin of Northumbria; but that is about all. Reference to mirror manufacture reappeared only in the twelfth century, in Alexander of Neckam’s De Naturis Rerum, in which he talked about glass sheets being backed with lead. The intense self-awareness of the troubadour period (also discussed in Part II), which gave rise to a great interest in finding a romantic partner, or soul mate, to “reflect” one’s innermost thoughts and feelings, was matched by a great popularity of mirrors, which were often decorated with scenes of love and gallantry. The knight sometimes carried a sword with a mirror mounted on the hilt as he rode to the defense of his lady, and medieval love lyric is filled with mirror imagery.

Increasing skill in manufacture accompanied all of these developments. The Germans discovered a cylinder process that enabled them to make glass in flat sheets, and they also began to manufacture small convex mirrors out of glass. The art of backing glass with metal, known to some ancient cultures, was rediscovered in the twelfth century. Dutch mirror manufacture also blossomed at this time; in the late thirteenth century, an elaborate Venetian glass guild system moved over to the Isle of Murano, and the use of metallic leaf pressed onto glass appeared for the first time.

From what we can guess, early cultures regarded the specular image in the same way that modern infants do until about two years of age: it was an Other, the manifestation of a deeper reality. It was seen, in other words, as the soul—hence the frequent centrality of the mirror in religious ceremonies and burial rites. One Egyptian term for the mirror was ankh, life, and it was used in an anointing ritual that helped preserve the body for future life. It was also seen as capable of receiving the at (double, Other); the Etruscans similarly regarded it as a vehicle for the soul. All of this suggests, however, that confiscation was regarded as a possibility. Mirrors formed an important part of magical and mystical practices in antiquity and the Middle Ages, and one of the dangers associated with such practices, such as autohypnosis induced by prolonged self-contemplation, was that the Self could get
lost. Premodern peoples, very likely, had less of a nemo, or basic fault, to worry about, though as one student of the subject has written, "[w]orldwide myths warn of the hazard of having one’s soul stolen by a mirror." One psychoanalyst has recorded a number of cases in which her psychotic patients stared into mirrors in an attempt to recover their lost souls.

The sixteenth century was the turning point for all of this, although there had been a period of incubation prior to this lasting about four hundred years. From about 1500 on, the manufacture and distribution of silvered glass increased exponentially. Mirrors began to appear everywhere, along with the "rise of the individual" that so clearly characterized the Renaissance. We find a sharp simultaneous increase in self-consciousness and in the quantity and technical quality of mirror production. The rise of modern mirror manufacture coincided with the rise of the nation-state, large standing armies (even in peacetime), the notion of perspective in art, the emergence of the self-portrait as an independent genre, and the early phase of the Scientific Revolution, which spelled the end of the magical worldview. At the same time that this was going on, Murano was beginning to supply small, cheap glass mirrors to the general public, and widespread usage of mirrors occurred in England after 1550. The process of "mirror foiling" (use of tin amalgam) was developed early in the century, and became dominant in the Venetian industry. In The History of Manners, the German historian Norbert Elias describes how the sixteenth century in particular witnessed the rise of self-conscious etiquette books that discussed table manners from the viewpoint of how one was being observed by others. (We take this for granted today, but it was a novelty in the 1500s.) Some of these made explicit use of the mirror analogy: A Mirror for Magistrates, for example, or The Mirror of Good Manners. Around 1550, books were manufactured with small mirrors inside of them; hand and pocket mirrors were worn in dress.

All of this is about the discovery of the Self; it has to be related to the larger issue of mirroring by the eyes of other persons. Elias’ example of how our manners and body language slowly came to be controlled in this way is a good one. It is likely that, just as most of the cultures of antiquity were not terribly concerned with mirrors, or regarded preoccupation with self-appearance as aberrant, they were also not terribly concerned with how they appeared in the view of the Other. The Other was much less of an Other; the Self, not a very developed thing. As Elias says, even in the Middle Ages spontaneity was much greater; Self and Other were far more mixed up than today.

People tended to be "immersed" in each other more—not so confined. The increasing interest in and production of mirrors as we approach modern times suggests the emergence of an increasing psychic distance between human beings, and within human beings. Self/Other unity begins to break down in the modern period, and mirror manufacture parallels this psychic development. Nation-states, armies, self-portraits, perspective, the collapse of magic—all of these represent an increasing preoccupation with boundaries, with sharp Self/Other distinctions, and the interest in the mirror is really an icon of the whole process. The seventeenth century witnessed the introduction of plate glass, and this stimulated the use of large stationary mirrors as part of the household furniture. The upper classes began to indulge in mirror decoration as a fetish, culminating in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. By 1599 Catherine de’ Medici of France had a mirror room constructed with 119 Venetian mirrors. Mirror rooms and galleries were popular from the seventeenth century on, and by the mid-nineteenth century such rooms were taken up by the middle classes. This type of affectation is surely the product of the torn or mutilated condition referred to above, being as it is so totally Other-directed and Self-preoccupied at one and the same time. We are at the gates of the existential era now; who "I" am is a matter of paramount importance. But we can see that the "French school"—writers such as Lacan and Wallon—overdid its indictment of the human condition, making the modern, acute form of confiscation a kind of norm. All societies probably confiscate to some degree, but not all mutilate, as Lacan has argued. Differences of degree, after all, finally do become differences of kind.

To sum up, then, the story of the physical mirror is really a profile of the evolution of psychic process. Understanding that evolution gives us a certain type of handle, a kind of "cultural psychology," as it were. The outlines, for sure, are gross, but the pattern is nevertheless clear enough. The mirror is indeed an archetype, but the modern period shows the archetype in its most extreme form. When we talk about the development and diffusion of mirrors, then, we are not merely discussing some aspect of the history of technology or of economic history, but the evolution of certain mental structures, specifically of human self-consciousness. This is a first step toward formulating a relationship between individual ontogeny—our private somatic drama—and the larger culture and society of which it is a part.

A second step in this direction—specifically, in relating the basic fault to the origins of culture—can be found in the work of Donald
Winnicott, to whom we have already referred. Winnicott’s approach was, like the history of the mirror, still too gross in nature (at least for historical purposes), and yet his contribution to our understanding of issues such as these was literally enormous. For Winnicott, culture was finally a product of how individuals dealt with the gap, or nemo, and he attempted to demonstrate this in a remarkable (and by now classic) essay of 1951, “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena.” In specific terms, the paper was, in effect, a study of the teddy bear; more generally, of how children come to select an object by means of which they negotiate the basic fault. Even more than the mirror, for Winnicott, the Transitional Object (T.O.) was the material manifestation of the whole confiscation process; its career in the child’s life was the way in which the gradualness of the identification of the specular image actually expressed itself. The teddy bear (or any such object the child might choose) was the intermediary between me and not-me; it served to keep inner and outer reality separated and yet related. Winnicott defined Transitional Objects as “objects that are not part of the infant’s body yet are not fully recognized as belonging to external reality.” The T.O. is an agent of continuity, a defense against anxiety. As such, it has a definite addictive quality for the child; he or she is obsessive, for example, about taking it to bed at night, or along on a trip; and its loss can precipitate severe anxiety or even hysteria."

Interestingly enough, Winnicott regarded such attachment as healthy and necessary. The T.O., he said, made all relations with an Other possible; it provided a secure or neutral area of experience. The real sign that the T.O. was a healthy phenomenon, for Winnicott, was that if things went well, the T.O. got “decathected” over time and the libidinal energy consequently diffused over “the whole cultural field.” In other words, the infant loses interest in his or her teddy bear and goes on to things that are more complex, such as writing books. In what could have been a flash of inspiration Winnicott brought together a whole series of phenomena that arose when the T.O. was finally decathected. “At this point,” he wrote,

my subject widens out into that of play, and of artistic creativity and appreciation; and of religious feeling, and of dreaming, and also of fetishism, lying and stealing, the origin and loss of affectionate feeling, drug addiction, the talisman of obsessioal rituals, etc.

In infancy, the teddy bear is the T.O. Later on, the child and adult graduates to more sophisticated toys: drugs, alcohol, art, religion, and creative scientific work. The T.O. is potentially a very powerful concept, for it would seem to be the bridge between what we have been talking about up to now—kinesthetic, somatic “microhistory”—and the level of the visible, i.e., the stuff that makes it into the newspapers and history books. Winnicott had essentially arrived at a position similar to that of Géza Róheim, that human beings create culture to keep the wolves from the door. What he failed to ask, however, was this: what kind of culture? If the same impulse lies behind heroin addiction, lying and stealing, organized religion, and the paintings of van Gogh, then I suggest that there is something seriously wrong with a culture that includes all of these things. Winnicott wrote that by learning to play in transitional space, the infant “slides out of playing into cultural experience of every kind.” In this way, he said, “the whole torch of culture and civilization is handed on.” As one commentator, Arthur Efron, notes, what Winnicott failed to see was that “this slide may not be altogether a good thing.” The “whole torch,” adds Efron, “is exactly the problem.” As in the case of the mirror, we have to be careful about turning the T.O. into an archetype. Winnicott assumed that the teddy bear (in some form) was a constant of all cultures everywhere, and this is not necessarily the case. Nevertheless, Winnicott finally takes us to the door of the issue I am trying to raise here: history—or at least history of a certain type—arises in the space that opens up between the kinesthetic body and the specular image, and is in fact the product of a desire Lacan describes as the desire for the (imaginary) Other, the desire to close down the gap once and for all. This dynamic is revealed most markedly in situations such as addiction or romantic love, situations that possess a structure that is one of total mirroring. We are, in these cases, in the curious position of running around “trying to find a hole to fill up a hole.”

(“There is no end to desire,” as an old yogic saying puts it.) A choice is implied here, each path having very different implications for culture at large. Option One: abandon the Self, so that Other ceases to be a problem; Option Two: attempt to destroy the Other, allowing Self to reign supreme; and Option Three: work your way back to a Self/Other relationship that is not founded on opposition or confiscation. In the first case, history disappears; in the second case, it continues to be what it has been for about ten thousand years now; and in the third case, it takes on a very different form from what we have known in
the West. These choices are always available on the individual level; what is possible on a cultural level is something I shall come back to a number of times in the course of this book.

We are, nevertheless, finally in a position to say something more specific regarding the relationship between individual psychology and the characteristics of the culture in which the individual is embedded. For the body image, which is a function of both affective and visual mirroring, and which is highly unstable, arises out of confiscation and our early experience of life, and can be used, along with the idea of the gap and the T.O., to understand history and culture in a new way. All of this is very tentative, but we should be able to generate a few preliminary sketches.

Actually we do not have very far to look for data or examples, at least not in the case of modern society. I have a tendency to do my writing in cafés. As it turns out, I am sitting in one of my favorite haunts right now, and the waiter, a young man of about eighteen years, brings me my coffee. As he turns and goes back to the counter or kitchen, I notice a label on his jeans: “Calvin Klein.” I know these jeans are expensive; they may cost anywhere from forty to eighty dollars. The young man may have had to work a full day, possibly two days, to own them. If he would forgo the Calvin Klein label, which consists of a small piece of fabric stitched to the back pocket, he could get a pair of jeans for a third of what he paid for them. But he is not willing to do so; the Klein label is crucial. Furthermore, if I were to ask him why he spent so much money on having the Klein label, he would very likely get defensive or angry, and perhaps tell me that it was none of my goddamn business. I think it is very unlikely that he would sit down at my table and tell me that from early childhood, for reasons he couldn’t understand, he felt that something was somehow missing, that his life was somehow “wrong” or empty, and that wearing Calvin Klein jeans makes no logical sense but is clearly a Winnicottian Transitional Object, enabling him to feel less anxious about his life. Also, that it hasn’t worked; he felt OK for two days after he bought the jeans, but then found that the sense of unease and emptiness returned.

Anyway, my waiter departs. At the next table, a man of about sixty is telling the fellow sitting with him how, when he was a boy growing up in Scotland, people were respectful to the flag. At the conclusion of a movie, they stood at attention while “God Save the Queen” was played; some even sang along. Today, the Union Jack is seen as a kind of joke. People leave movie theaters at the end of the film, he says—walk out right in the middle of the national anthem! He shakes his head and sighs. Continuing my fantasized scenario with the waiter, I lean over to this man’s table and ask him why he needs the British monarchy to create meaning in his life; what difference a hackneyed song or piece of cloth could possibly make to the issues really confronting him. The likely outcome is that he calls me a communist and gives me a black eye. Less likely, he tells me that Samuel Johnson was right when he called patriotism the last refuge of the scoundrel; and admits that by identifying with this larger cause, the Fatherland, he feels much less like the loser he knows, at heart, he really is.

Finally, the waiter and the patriot notice that I have been busy writing in this café for several weeks now, and come over and ask me what I’m writing about. I briefly summarize what I am trying to communicate in this book. They ask me how writing a book which suggests I understand the human condition better than they do, or having the social label “author,” is any different, when you really get down to it, from flashing a Calvin Klein label or a Union Jack. Isn’t it an attempt to mitigate the very anxiety I am talking about, to create meaning on a psychological level as a substitute for a somatic at-oneness with the world that I don’t feel in my body? At this point I get very defensive, call them anti-intellectuals, and leave in an insulted, self-righteous huff, my manuscript (read: T.O.) tucked safely under my arm.

What is involved in these scenarios is much more than the “mundane details” of our daily lives; the truth is that this is where history is ultimately made. For these “details” are finally translatable into socioeconomic and historical events. Far more than the use of sex in advertising, capitalism relies heavily on the anxiety centered around the nemo to generate sales and cash flow in the market. By being able to identify with Calvin Klein, a prestigious (what does “prestige” really mean? That which is “successfully” Other-defined) fashion designer, you simultaneously promote your Self and submerge it, paradoxically, in the Other, in this case the haut monde of Calvin Klein. The game works for a while, and when it wears off, don’t you worry: the folks on Wall Street and Madison Avenue will have something else for you to buy. There is no way that capitalism could function without the psychological fuel of this dynamic, and a number of historians and political scientists have pointed this out. Yet the fact that this is a somatic event never gets discussed. Somehow, in studies of the modern economy from Das Kapital to the New Left Review, the body gets curiously omitted.

Much the same can be said of the patriot. He is easily persuaded
that war is necessary and just, when the whole enterprise is in fact a way of obliterating nemonic pain by submerging yourself in a larger Cause that—for the duration of the war at least—erases the Self/Other split (all is now Other). You may have some problems when peace is finally restored; but between wars, at least, you can sit in cafés and bemoan the decline of patriotism. And never fear, after enough time the nemonic itch will bring about the next cycle of destruction, and you can identify with the heroic Fatherland once again.

As for our pathetic author, he probably makes the least difference of all, at least on the larger historical level. His activity is not translatable into the economy or the political arena, though I suppose it can be seen as an aspect of “intellectual culture” or some such thing. In any case, “knowing” why other people behave as they do is, one suspects, merely a means of generating feelings of superiority. It changes nothing, is largely self-serving, and is in the final analysis only subject matter for cocktail parties (if that), soon to be discarded for the next “new” analysis of the human condition. And so it goes. As Lacan says, so much of what we are doing is a disguised attempt to embrace the body of the specular image; to end the basic fault once and for all. But it doesn’t go away, and our games merely take new forms. Nor, apparently, is anything else possible. For as long as our interpretation of ourselves is visually based, i.e., made from the viewpoint of the Other (as first occurred in the mirror stage), we can never really get back to the body, and so continue to go in circles.

A similar endless, and useless, game that is rooted in the basic fault and that gets played out in a historical and cultural way is the supposed human tendency (it is actually only about ten thousand years old, as I shall argue in Chapter 2) to see the world in terms of black and white. Things are divided into Good vs. Evil, Us vs. Them, Male vs. Female, Old vs. Young, Conscious vs. Unconscious, Sacred vs. Secular, and so on. The strategy here is simple, as the psychotherapist Melanie Klein described it many years ago: if I can split the world into good and bad, and keep good “inside” and bad “outside,” I resolve the problem of Self vs. Other by protecting myself from invasion (which is what, dialectically, I secretly yearn for). It is a position of grim determination: let Self remain Self and Other remain Other; at least we know where we stand. The whole thing works in a rather convoluted way. Since the world is actually gray, rather than black and white, events are constantly intruding on the framework. Yet instead of modifying it, or undermining it, these events only serve to fuel the splitting mechanism even further. Energy must be mobilized to expel the intruder and get the lines of demarcation straight once again. The reason that this whole system ultimately fails is that engagement with the Other, which is systematically denied, is what is somatically desired. Victory on one level turns into defeat on another, more fundamental level.

This type of splitting is easily observable in contemporary politics. Since the early fifties, America has been run by leaders who, to varying degrees, have been obsessed with “containing” (Harry S. Truman’s word, I believe) the “godless communists” who allegedly seek to destroy our way of life. Consider John F. Kennedy’s constant harping on the theme of “missile gap” (there was none, as it turns out) during his election campaign—a phrase that immediately appealed to the Self/Other fears of the American public, because it was really an echo of the nemonic gap. With Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, this Manichaean worldview reached its pathological apogee. But “pathology” is a curious name for this, in that Reagan was reelected to office in 1984 by a landslide margin. So Reagan was quite simply a mirror of the American somatic dilemma: the American people went to the polls and elected themselves to office. This is how, at least in gross outline, unresolved somatic dilemmas work themselves out on the larger historical stage.

Turning to the “good guys,” we often find changes in content but not in form. Ecological fundamentalists, if so they can be called, similarly divide the world into two camps, in this case the evil technologists and those out to save Mother Earth. Now this schema may in fact have some validity, just as the dichotomy of communist/capitalist may; but the problem is the way in which this set of ideas is held. In the Nixon-Reagan case, psychic integrity itself is maintained by the splitting mechanism, and this is the real problem, not “the enemy.” In the same way, many eco-radicals are in the position of making their psychic lives possible by means of an ideology. It is this somatic tension that is the real issue, culturally speaking, far and above any evil technocrats that (as far as I can see) certainly do abound. In historical terms, it is the somatic drama that will determine much more than the loss or victory of either side in the debate, or of the particular set of ideas in question.

Of course, this type of “nemological analysis” is a bit coarse; somatic history will have to do better than merely laying everything at the door of the basic fault. And one way of refining the analysis is to investigate the implications of body image and body boundaries. For the two are not the same; as Paul Schilder argued, the body image
always extends beyond the physical limits of the skin. This generates the possibility of an interactive influence, a kind of moving somatic (and morphogenetic, as Rupert Sheldrake would say) field. The psychologist Seymour Fisher, a pioneer in research in body perception, argues that the immediate experience of one’s body has a powerful impact on every social situation, and that the image changes depending on whom we meet, what moods we are in, or what circumstances we encounter. Schilder’s empirical studies of the human body led him to conclude not merely that the body image was highly plastic, but that it was completely inseparable from social interaction. How did that incomparable actor and mime, Jean-Louis Barrault, once put it?

The whole of life consists in either pulling toward oneself, or else pushing away from oneself, and Oneself is the novel.

Another version of this was recently voiced by the French Canadian writer, Jean-Claude Dussault (following Schilder), who wrote that a relation between two personalities is first and foremost a relation between two bodies. But this leads us to ask: what about two cultures, or two subcultures, or two periods (eras) within the same culture? Much has been written, for example, in the history of science or art, about shifting worldviews; but suppose two different worldviews reflected two different mind/body (body image) experiences? How did Montezuma experience the body language (including the dress) of Cortés? What if the very fabric of modern Mexican history were woven on the somatic level? Is there any possibility that it is not? Perhaps such questions are not as ridiculous as they at first seem. Sociologist John O’Neill writes:

We seek out other bodies in society as mirrors of ourselves... because our own bodies are the permeable ground of all social behavior; our bodies are the very flesh of society... What we see in the mirror is what others see. Here is the incarnate bond between self and society.

A similar analysis might apply to movements of political unification: Garibaldi and the Risorgimento, the forces behind Bismarck, or the nineteenth-century American preoccupation with “manifest destiny.” Is it not likely that all of this is based on the somatic identification with the nation as the body politic, and that the underlying “goal” of such activity is bodily integrity and a secure body boundary? This is reflected in the familiar custom of calling the central part of a nation the “heartland,” and I suspect that more than just metaphors are involved here. In the same way, moves toward decentralization or balkanization might involve a local urge toward having a unified body, one that seems manageable, and not on the verge of fragmentation. Geopolitics, in the end, may be a branch of somatic history.

Schilder’s work makes it possible to examine things such as the layering or texture of a culture, principally because of his emphasis on the plasticity and communal nature of the body image. The body image, he argued, is not given once and for all, but is subject to a series of creations and recreations; we are constantly building it up, but we also tear it down to some extent. There is, in each culture, a dominant image (what Reich called the “modal personality”), but there are different layers of body images underneath this, and even a single interaction with an object suffices to modify it. Object here can mean a lot of things. It can be another body image, but also clothing or even an emotion. How do you react to someone who is heavily tattooed, for example? Could you imagine yourself getting tattooed in such a way? Why not?

Similarly, what do you think would happen to you if you systematically copied the body language of a schizophrenic? A ditchdigger? A famous artist? To what extent do we unconsciously begin to do this when we encounter someone (anyone)? Is this why we feel uncomfortable about tattoos, or class lines? In his book Class, Paul Fussell writes that the central reason why you can’t escape your socioeconomic class is that the key to it is training in body language that goes on from infancy. The upper classes typically have restricted movements, arms kept close to the torso, while the lower classes are less controlled and more expansive. Hence, if you set out to mimic an Oxford accent, wear the right clothes, and even imitate body language, you’ll eventually be found out, because training in class affiliation is total, early, and somatic, and sooner or later you’ll slip and give yourself away. Here again is an example of the link between the somatic microlevel and the historical or sociological macrolevel. And we can easily imagine expanding such an analysis: think of the difference between the mode of physical movement (and, we can guess, body image) of the residents of Yorkshire and those of Calabria, for example, or of that of Germany as opposed to that of Jamaica.

Body image extends beyond the borders of the body, as I mentioned
earlier, and it can also include objects once connected with the body, such as voice, breath, blood, hair, and semen. A friend of mine who teaches voice to actors once said to me, "The voice is the body." (We all know this intuitively.) Control of the breath has played a key factor in Japanese military history. In a famous scene in Akira Kurosawa's film The Seven Samurai, two swordsmen square off and watch each other's breathing for a long time, until one falters. At that moment, the other samurai cuts him down in a single stroke. Similarly, the drinking of blood has historically and anthropologically been a very significant ritual, and not merely for symbolic reasons. Drinking blood undoubtedly alters your feelings and perceptions of your body. In the same way, drinking semen has historically been a central rite in a number of gnostic sects, and it very likely goes on today among certain occult groups. All of this extension of the body image is, once again, part of the lability and communality of that image. Schiöдер wrote:

There exists a deep community between one's own body-image and the body-image of others. In the construction of the body-image there is a continual testing to discover what could be incorporated into the body. ... The body is a social phenomenon.

To influence someone in any serious way, it seems to me, is to have an impact on that person somatically. This may actually be what the word "influence" means.

All of this remains, to date, largely hidden, but as Thomas Hanna says (see the second epigraph to this volume), a whole continent awaits our exploration. Consider this bit of hidden somatic history: years ago I had a friend, an older man, a German Jew who left Germany after Hitler's accession to power and for a few years (1933-38) wound up living in Italy. A biologist, he became a member of the newly formed cinematographic research institute in Rome, where he was an early pioneer in time-lapse photography. A short, stocky man used to show up once a week for a private viewing of popular American films, and my friend would see him dimly through a small window in the door of the auditorium, sitting all alone, sort of huddled up, looking at whatever film they showed him that week, or whatever he had requested. "Who is that man?" he finally asked the director of the institute. "Benito Mussolini," was the reply. "He's afraid of crowds, so he comes here to see movies by himself."

Mussolini afraid of crowds! The man who spent his adult political career addressing huge rallies was terrified of possible body contact.

And his favorite movies? Laurel and Hardy films, the humor of which—they were pioneers of American film slapstick, after all—depended on physical touch: pushing, shoving, tripping, pies in the face, etc. What a difference all this must make for modern Italian history. But I have never read a book on the rise of Italian fascism that mentions any of this, or even tries to work out the physical nature of the Italian people in its relation to political events. And no wonder; the body is (literally) beneath our consideration.

In a work written by Seymour Fisher in 1973 (Body Consciousness), the author extends his empirical and theoretical understanding of body image and body behavior to a number of important cultural phenomena. Fisher found a larger predominance of weak body boundaries in his studies of numerous experimental American subjects, and speculates that this fact might account for the creation of a car culture in the United States—having a steel structure around one is a backup for those weak boundaries. Similarly, he wonders whether the isolationist posture of certain cultures (e.g., the Japanese before World War II) might be related to fear of boundary invasion, and whether certain monastic orders have some of their origin in a similar fear and distrust. (If so, the medieval monastic practice of self-flagellation would represent not merely an attempt to degrade the body, but more importantly, a way of feeling the body that had been desensitized via religious repression.) In cases such as these, it may be possible that the situation of the basic fault creates a kind of porosity in the body image, with a corresponding need to deal with it in neurotic ways that get institutionalized as cultural patterns. How a nation (or culture) treats the bodies of its children, says Fisher, may have its echoes in the behavior of the entire national (cultural) body.

It may also be meaningful to look at race relations and culture contacts in somatic terms. This is why my example of tattooing is not as strange as it seems. Fisher suggests that racial prejudice gets part of its energy from the fear of any human body that is significantly different in appearance from our own. There is, he says, some scientific evidence to indicate that we experience anxiety in the presence of different bodies or body distortions, and that the energy one has toward this different body is a function of the negative self-feeling generated in one's own body, which one then unconsciously seeks to "unload" on that other body. The supposedly eternal war between the sexes, it seems to me, may also reflect some of this dynamic. I believe this is also why, in the fairy tales of almost every culture in the world, the liberator or liberating agent of the person stuck in a
difficult (symbolic) situation is either an animal—the frog that must be kissed to get the prince—or a witch, a disfigured hag, who must be loved or married to release a spell or curse. In the famous nineteenth-century case of the Elephant Man, the freaks discussed by Leslie Fiedler in his book on the subject (Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self), or the people so starkly photographed by Diane Arbus, we are offered redemption from our confiscation, our alienation, by having the Other shoved in our face in its most extreme form. Here is the distorting mirror, the lure of which we can’t resist; and in the case of Diane Arbus, in fact, she eventually was led to get sexually involved with many of her subjects, in an attempt to break out of the Self in which she felt trapped. The fear of a different body, says Fisher, expresses itself in attitudes toward entire races, dwarves, people who are crippled, the aged, as well as toward menstruating women. A special class of monster images, he continues, haunts each culture—just consider how we treat some of these groups—and all of this because we have such a difficult time with our own bodies.

What about mass spectacles and identical uniforms that appear in times of crisis—the swastika and brown shirt, or the Rajneesh necklace and accompanying red and orange outfit? The goal of all this, says Fisher, may be to assuage doubts about the stability of the body. Mass rallies in mass uniforms demonstrate to the participants that their bodies are all alike: it is all right now, you are secure. It is no accident that the horror of miscegenation—body pollution—was central to Nazi cosmology (see Part II), and that it remains a cornerstone of all racist thought.

Much more could be said about the micro/macro connection and the issue of somatic history; all of the above is by way of suggestion as to how such research might proceed. However, what I would like to do now, before making any further suggestions of this sort, is turn the present essay on its head. Splitting, binary thinking, and Self vs. Other translate, in our culture, into a whole spectrum of intellectual thought systems that are sharply dualistic in nature. I am very suspicious of this. It reminds me of the old adage about there being two types of people, those who believe there are two types of people and those who don’t. Consider the rigid dualism of The Communist Manifesto, for example (“Free man and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf... in a word, oppressor and oppressed...”), or how, in the work of Freud and Jung, reality gets divided up into categories of conscious and unconscious. In anthropology, Claude Lévi-Strauss has made binary opposition the theme of culture itself—The Raw and the

The Basic Fault

Cooked, the primitive and the civilized. In Rousseau similarly, and to some extent in Wilhelm Reich, we have natural man hidden under his armored counterpart (“born free, everywhere in chains”); and the whole object-relations school, on which this chapter is based, is itself a binary mode of regarding the human condition, from Melanie Klein’s good and bad breast to Winnicott’s and Laing’s true and false self. This binary thinking may be right, but what does “right” mean, except that all of these thinkers are giving voice to a common somatic experience?

As in the case of the mirror, we have to be cautious about turning epoch-specific situations into transcultural archetypes. As already noted, other cultures, and earlier eras, do (did) not experience the basic fault in the same way modern Western society does, and some may not (have) experience(d) it at all. I have already suggested that the Transitional Object, the use of which Winnicott believed was inherent in human nature and essential to healthy development, is apparently absent in certain cultures, such as the Yequana, as well as among Australian aborigines, who “cathect” the earth, i.e., nature itself, and have no need for substitutes. In point of fact, the toy qua toy—an object manufactured specifically for a child to entertain itself with—is only two hundred years old. Thus the American psychiatrist Simon Grofnick argues that T.O.’s are very likely the product of modern times, and attributes the phenomenon to the fact that it is only over the last few centuries, in the West, that children have been made to sleep alone.

All of this suggests a need for caution with regard to archetypes. Alice Miller has argued (as have others) that Freud’s theories of oedipal rivalry and sexual repression were “correct,” but that he was studying a sick society and taking it as the norm; hence the theories were only correct for that type of society. Surely the same can be said of Winnicott. His subjects were not the happy children of a healthy society, but the depressed and anxious youngsters of modern Britain. One can project the Oedipus complex back to the Stone Age and the Primal Horde, as Freud did, and one can call the cave paintings of Lascaux Transitional Objects, and perhaps in some way they were; but I sense a tremendous ahistoricity in such an approach. In fact, I suspect that the epochal changes that take place across historical “fault lines,” such as Michel Foucault and a few other historians have explored (see Chapter 3), are precisely about shifts in the subjective experience of the body—i.e., about differences in the mind/body relationship. As we now know, practices over long enough periods—i.e., certain dis-
Disciplines of yoga, meditation, and breath control—can radically deepen a person's sense of mind/body relationship and ontological security in the world. If something so fundamental proves to be experimentally plastic, then surely we must conclude that the size and nature of the basic fault is not a historical constant. The behaviors that Jean Liedloff identifies with Western culture—escalating addictive patterns, "if-onlyism" and delayed gratification, self-hatred and self-sabotage—are, perhaps, exclusively modern phenomena. A sophisticated somatic history would not lump everything into the basic fault, but rather chart the changing relationship of mind and body over time. The gap is not of constant dimensions; its career over time, the different ways of treating it, and its translation into a (changing) body image may be the real hidden history of civilization.

In Part II of the present volume I shall try to uncover some of this hidden history (in particular, religious history) by means of somatic analysis, and so chart the changing mind/body relationship in the West over the last two millennia. This is a tall order, I realize, and I doubt I can be more than marginally successful with it. The present section of this book, however, deals with the sources of our fragmentation, and more needs to be said about that before this sort of grand-scale somatic reconstruction can be attempted. If mirrors, T.O.'s, Self/Other oppositions, and basic faults are all artifacts in some sense, it remains for us to try to figure out whence such things arose. How old are these things? Were human beings really, really different at some earlier point? Was there (as some have alleged) a prehistoric Golden Age, during which time the human race was not beset by war, madness, and internal conflict? It is to these issues that I now wish to turn.

2

The Wild and the Tame: Humans and Animals from Lascaux to Walt Disney

Every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth is an abomination. . . .

—Leviticus 11:41

If all the beasts were gone, we would die from a great loneliness of spirit, for whatever happens to the beast, happens to us. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the children of the earth.

—Chief Sealth

Our brief history of the mirror, provided in the previous chapter, suggested that the basic fault is not so basic as we might first imagine. As a psychic entity, the gap is something like an accordion, historically speaking; Self/Other boundaries can be hard, soft, or even—as the American psychologist Julian Jaynes argues with some success—non-existent. As an expression of the psyche, the evolution of the mirror and its vicissitudes in terms of quality and popularity can serve as a
EPILOGUE:
COMING TO OUR SENSES

Nourishment is to live things that are unsayable, that cannot be formulated. This is awareness other than by force of will. If this is what is in store for us, it will not be uninteresting. I say this not as a voyeur but as one whose empathy is to the cohesion of the voyage. I believe the sign is displayed in fragments already on the scene, but the picture has to be put together. The problem of modern man isn't to escape from one ideology to another, nor to escape from one formulation to find another; our problem is to live in the presence and in the attributes of reality. Then we will be able to put the picture together. This picture can only be the outcome of all the empathy given to many things observed in common. When many things are observed in common by the many who constitute a society, we will have reached a condition worth celebrating.

—Frederick Sommer,
The Poetic Logic of Art and Aesthetics

We have inherited a civilization in which the things that really matter in human life exist at the margin of our culture. What matters?
How birthing takes place matters; how infants are raised matters; having a rich and active dream life matters. Animals matter, and so does ontological security and the magic of personal interaction and healthy and passionate sexual expression. Career and prestige and putting a good face on it and the newest fashion in art or science do not matter. Coming to our senses means sorting this out once and for all. It also means becoming embodied. And the two ultimately amount to the same thing.

Some time ago, a close friend of mine lost his job. Jim was a computer analyst for a large industrial firm. The job was made redundant, and he was laid off. For the first few months, he spent most of his time trying to find another job just like the one he had. I suggested, since money did not seem to be an immediate problem, that he relax about it all. There were so many things he wanted to do; why not enjoy himself, at least for a while? He said he felt he didn’t exist without a job; that his job had given him his identity, and that he had to have it back.

But as the months went by, there were no jobs to be had, and Jim was turned down for the few that did come up. Slowly, he began to experiment with therapy, until finally a therapist, a bodyworker, pulled the cork for him, as it were. Jim literally twitched and shook, on and off, for months, as the life energy began to return to a body that had been crushed and repressed since childhood. He was now, in his early thirties, able to face the truth: what really mattered had been so extinguished in his life that he was forced into a total survival mode, which meant creating a career and a persona and a personal snow job that told him that this was what he really wanted out of life. But his body knew better, and ultimately, so did “he.” By the end of his year of unemployment, Jim was still unclear as to how he was going to earn a living; but he was clear about one thing: he would never return to the ranks of the walking wounded.

Jim’s story is a very common one in our society up to, but not including, the point of getting in touch with the body. Most people do not take this step, and we live in a culture in which it is quite dangerous to do so. The problem is the long run: in the long run, it is much more dangerous not to do so. The walking wounded fill our institutions and create our culture. They can be seen in the halls of universities, the offices of government, the corridors of radio and TV studios, on Wall Street, and in Hollywood. They can be seen as well in supermarkets, jails, high schools, factories, and military bases and training camps. We ache to love, but the damage of the basic fault, the loss of kinesthetic awareness, and the relative lack of a happy experience of Otherness, make it very difficult to take chances and very easy to go to sleep in the snow; in effect, to die.

Our hidden history was always a somatic one, the “secret life of belly and bone,” as Delmore Schwartz put it. Creating a history or a culture we can identify with is no academic exercise; at stake is an entire way of life. Understanding how an entire civilization could banish animals to zoos and Indians to reservations, and plunk five-year-old children down in front of computers is to come to terms with how fucked up we really are, and at least open up the possibility of somatic reconstruction. Coming to a somatic understanding of the historical process, i.e., of our past, could make a rather large difference for what we want to do about our future. We may have to bail out individually, one by one, as Jim did; but enough microconversions of this sort and what could ensue is a whole cultural shift toward health and love and sanity. Whether this can happen fast enough remains an open question.

Somatic understanding also opens up the possibility of somatic grounding, and thus, of the end of the need for some form of ism in our lives to plug the basic fault. When you’ve lost your body, you need an ism. From there it is a short step to seeing other isms as life-threatening, and to seeing the Other as an enemy. I once asked a friend of mine who had studied the Feldenkrais technique (a major body therapy) for many years what he had gotten out of it. “Hard to say,” he replied, “except that after a while I began to notice that it became less and less important for me to win an argument.” As I tried to suggest in Chapter 9, this is really the ultimate heresy. Visionary experience is as nothing, compared to this. But it is not an easy point to arrive at, and I know for myself that I’ll have to work at it for the rest of my life.

This has been a difficult book for me to write; I struggled a lot with my own body, which I love and hate, as the pages were filling up with ink. And this is fine, but I am left with one lingering doubt that I wish to share with you, the reader, namely that I have perhaps overvalued the body as a vehicle for cultural integrity. For returning to the body, in and of itself, as Paul Ryan once pointed out to me, is a monistic solution—it can only give you monads. This was the great drawback of Wilhelm Reich, and why he tried, at the end of his life, to believe in a universal energy I spoke of earlier, such as ch’i or ki, by making it scientific (he called it “orgone”). We can recognize the tremendous drawback of the mind/body split, and the severe limits
of dualism and a dualistic culture; but body integrity, finally, doesn't necessarily get you into the social or natural environment, and there is no way that these can be ignored. Of course, in the theory of the five bodies, the fifth is that of large-scale influence by means of the spirit, and Gandhi and Hitler are the extreme positive and negative poles of this. But I mean something else; something... I don't know, more scientific, for lack of a better word. I'm thinking out loud here, and I guess you'll just have to indulge me.

In his remarkable novel, Jacob Atzet, Michael Murphy records the following conversation:

"My body? What do you mean by my body?"
"Just that. The physical body."
"But where is it?" he asked. "Where does it end or begin? For me it's not that simple. Once you've passed through a cell, once you pass through those ordinary boundaries, it's hard to say where the body leaves off. At the tip of my finger or the edge of a cell? Or somewhere in the DNA? Then the whole world looks like one body. Even the solar system and the galaxy and the view through the animan siddhi. All of it still developing, parts dying and being reborn... no, I don't know where this body ends."

I am reminded of a remark once made by that great mime, Etienne Decroux, that people should walk down the street as if they belonged to each other. Yet what Murphy is talking about is much larger than this, I think. There is, here, a stretching out to a Gaia-politik, the conviction that the flesh of my body is also the flesh of the earth, the flesh of experience. To know your own flesh, to know both the pain and joy it contains, is to come to know something much larger than this. "As our souls, being air, hold us together," wrote Anaximenes in the fifth century B.C., "so breath and air embrace the entire universe." Something obvious keeps eluding our civilization, something that involves a reciprocal relationship between nature and psyche, and that we are going to have to grasp if we are to survive as a species. But it hasn't come together yet, and as a result, to use the traditional labels, it is still unclear whether we are entering a new Dark Age or a new Renaissance.

"In a dark time," wrote Theodore Roethke, "the eye begins to see..." It's a hopeful thought; perhaps, the right note on which to end a book.

NOTES
Part I. The Sources of Fragmentation
CHAPTER 1. THE BASIC FAULT
3. Alice Miller, Prisoners of Childhood, trans. Ruth Ward (New York: Basic Books, 1981). This has been reissued in a paperback edition under the original (German) title, The Drama of the Gifted Child.
5. Balint, Basic Fault, passim. Freud's formulation of this (see Balint, p. 35) is worth quoting here: "All object-discovery is in fact object recovery [Die Objektfindung ist eigentlich eine Wiederfindung]." Some years ago, a friend of mine saw the following graffito on a wall in Strasbourg: "Spectateurs! Ce que tu attends, tu l'as deja perdu! (Passerby: What you are waiting for, you have already lost!)
11. On the following see Vony, Secret Life, pp. 19–20, 36–37, 64–66, and 75. The most elaborate argument regarding fetal awareness, which sees the womb as basically a kind of trap (especially in the third trimester) and birth as a liberation struggle, is Lloyd deMause's essay "The Fetal Origins of History," The Journal of Psychohistory, 9, 1 (Summer 1981), 1–89. I find the argument very weak at points, and heavily tinged with existential bitterness; but it is provocative and does raise the question of a very early imprint of the Self/ Other distinction. For useful criticism and commentary, see Thomas Vony