

# The Self as a Psychic Agency

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**Abstract** - This text, published in 2011 in *La Complexité de soi*, presents our conception of the self as an agency in its own metapsychological right, generated by narcissistic recursivity. The cathexis of the ego by the ego's own love modifies its internal structure, giving rise to an agency of higher complexity.

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## The Three Paradoxes of the Self

In French, the word *soi* designates a third-person singular reflexive personal pronoun. As a pronoun, it lacks semantic consistency in its own right ; it depends upon another element, the noun, to which it refers back. As a personal pronoun, it stands in a relation of delegation to the person ; it answers to the requirements of grammar, whether for reference back to the subject or for complementary distribution.[1] As a third-person reflexive pronoun, the *soi* is not the *moi* (the "I") of the first person — it requires reflexivity. To be sure, one can say, in the first person, "I wonder [about myself]" (*je me demande*), where reflexivity upon oneself is present, but it is only intelligible through a doubling of the self. Finally, as a singular personal pronoun, the *soi* is unique. We can write, in the plural, "they wonder about themselves" (*ils se demandent*), but we can only mentalize this sentence as the summation of individual reflections. In French, then, the word *soi* is a grammatical word — it is dif-

ficult to attribute substance to it and to write "the self" as a noun in its own right. English, by contrast, readily grants substantive status to the term *Self* (as in the expression "Take care of your Self"). The term *Self* was in fact used in the French-language psychological literature as a substitute for the awkward expression *le soi*, though this usage did not endure. The expression *le soi*, however, has entered the human sciences in a fully substantivized form, and we shall retain this usage here. The self is not a mere reflection of linguistic contingency, but a psychological reality. This reality presents itself under the guise of three qualities.

The first of these qualities is the continuity of our body across time and space. We are one with our presence in the world. Our self remains constant despite our movements through space. Only pathological, addictive, or mystical experiences allow us to feel a splitting or an escape from our own body. The feeling of presence in the world depends on the felt experience of

our body. Yet our body changes over the years, while our sense of self remains the same. We can change our inner point of view on the world, on others, on ourselves; we can adopt new ideologies, change languages, perhaps even change our face — yet our self remains unchanged. Only a radical amnesia can bring about a genuine forgetting of the self. Fiction regularly seizes upon this theme, since it constitutes a limiting horizon of human existence. The continuity of our sense of self is enigmatic: our body and our environment are in constant flux, and yet we remain continuous with ourselves.

The second paradox is that of demarcation. We are distinct from others, and yet others are within us. This paradox plays out across every dimension of human experience. We cannot bear solitude, and yet we cannot bear the other either. Developmental psychology shows that we construct our sense of self not only through knowledge of our own mirror image, but also through identifications with the people around us. Being oneself requires being similar to the other, through identification, and different, through demarcation. A distant illustration of this can be found in advertising strategies, which attempt to offer consumer goods that answer the paradoxical desires of being both similar and unique.

The question of the demarcation between self and other is not the exclusive province of psychology. Immunology, too, is confronted with the question of organismic identity. How are we to understand the fact that the mother does not reject her embryo, even though it is, immunologically speaking, a foreign body? Why does the immune system consider certain of the organism's own tissues foreign, as in autoimmune diseases? How can the immune system be modified by psychic disturbances? Immunology has been able, in part, to answer these questions by descri-

bing the local interactions between antigens and antibodies and by conceiving of the system as a whole in dynamic terms. It stands as an example of a science capable of integrating a complementarity of perspectives between the local and the global scale. It also sheds new light on the question of identity. The sharp distinction between self and non-self cannot answer every question raised by immunological phenomena[2]. We are, in part, composed of symbiotic organisms; no fixed, stable boundary can therefore be drawn between self and non-self. If we transpose this continuity between self and non-self into the domain of psychology, we might imagine that the demarcation from the other is, in the same way, illusory. The loss of a loved one amputates a part of ourselves. The clinical experience of grief attests that we are intimately constituted by the existence of the other.

The third paradox is that of our feeling of unity. We are capable of carrying out actions oriented toward a single goal, even though these actions require the conjunction of distinct functions. This is a classic problem in psychology: how can unified conduct be achieved from separate constitutive elements? In its phenomenological version, the problem is that of constructing a unified mental object from the disjointed data of perception. In its cognitive version, the problem is that of the cohesion of information processing carried out by distinct modules. Our feeling of the unity of the self is linked to our capacity to carry out intentional acts in a coherent manner — a capacity requiring the coordination of perceptual, cognitive, and muscular systems. Any alteration of this coordination results in a loss of the sense of self, and the clinic of sensory impairment furnishes striking illustrations of this. The sudden loss of a sense produces feelings of strangeness, until — in fortunate cases — a reorganization restores a sense of self.

**Clinical vignette.** A woman in her forties, an actress working intermittently in the performing arts, mother of three, with progressive hearing loss since adolescence. The worsening of her deafness produced a decompensation of the self, with loss of self-esteem, self-deprecation, abnormal paranoid sensitivity, and feelings of bodily strangeness. Cochlear implantation was carried out, somewhat belatedly. I set up post-implant psychotherapeutic follow-up. The new auditory perceptions were difficult to integrate into her pre-existing auditory memory. She experienced a feeling of strangeness toward these new perceptions — they did not belong to her. She could focus her attention on them as though they were external, but could not assimilate them to herself. I helped her put these experiences into words and encouraged free association, in the hope that a restoration of the self would, in turn, facilitate the internalization of the new auditory sensations.

This feeling of unity paradoxically requires a duality. We can only become conscious of ourselves through an inner dialogue. The ego cannot define itself by itself; an intra-systemic differentiation is necessary for self-consciousness — one that stands in contradiction with the very requirement of unity needed in order to be oneself. One must be two within oneself in order to feel like one. But if I can integrate my constitutive duality within an intimate inner dialogue, I can only be myself through the certainty of my originality. The paradox of uniqueness is resolved only through the injunction to originality: there exists no being in the world entirely identical to me, and I am therefore unique. Yet I can only exist as an original being through my own singular actions. My bodily attributes alone do not suffice — they must be magnified through my choices of dress, even at the risk of falling into mere conformity with fashion. But these attri-

butes alone cannot guarantee my originality either. Only my discourse upon the world — that is, my action — differentiates me. It is through action that reality is transformed, and the trace of this transformation upon reality is what secures my singularity. This is why the self exists only in the creation of works — however banal, such as growing flowers on a Parisian balcony or maintaining a bicycle, or however socially valued, such as composing a symphony or running a company. Conversely, the philosophies of the East seek to annihilate the sense of self, considered the root of our suffering, through a suspension of action.

These three paradoxes of the self present a genuine challenge to psychology. We cannot think uniqueness and otherness, cohesion and diversity, continuity and change, all at once. We are faced here with a problem typical of complexity: the coexistence of opposites. But, as with every complex problem, an avenue of approach exists. Narcissism is the guiding thread that unravels the complexity of the self. There can be no self without some form of self-love.

## The Necessity of Narcissism

In psychoanalysis, narcissism designates a stage of the libido in which the child takes itself as its own object of love, before choosing external objects. Narcissistic cathexis draws libido away from the world of objects, and conversely, the cathexis of object relations draws libido away from the subject. Within the framework of the first topography, the stage of narcissism was interposed between the auto-erotic phase and the object phase. With the emergence of the second topography, Freud postulated the existence of a primary phase in which no external object yet exists. At the outset, there is an anobjectal stage — a primitive state termed primary narcissism,

marked by an absence of differentiation between ego and id — of which intrauterine life is the prototype, and sleep its daily resurgence. Narcissism can allow for the internalization of a relation to the object (narcissistic identification), as in melancholia, where "the shadow of the object" falls upon the ego. According to this thesis, only subjects presenting psychoses reflect a fixation at this narcissistic phase; psychosis is associated with an increase of narcissistic libido within the ego and an impoverishment of object relations.

Today, most psychoanalysts have abandoned this notion of primary narcissism, accepting instead the findings of human ethology, which have demonstrated the existence of early interactions involving, in one way or another, object relations. For Melanie Klein, object relations exist from the very outset, and only narcissistic states — defined by the return of libido onto objects previously internalized — exist thereafter. Balint likewise rejects the existence of a primary narcissism, on the grounds that it contradicts the requirements of vital exchange and the clinical evidence showing that narcissistic personalities are, in fact, highly sensitive to external reality. For Paul Federn, the collapse of the world experienced in psychosis is the effect of a narcissistic impoverishment and a retraction of the boundaries of the ego. For Freud, the ego ideal — heir to primary narcissism — is guided by a phantasy of return to the lost narcissism of childhood, which the ego projects ahead of itself. The gap between the ego's actual accomplishments and its ideals is evaluated by the superego, heir to the Oedipus complex.

In the earliest stages of psychic life, the ego ideal helps the ego differentiate itself from the id by supplying it with figures of realization. The formation of the ego ideal would thus have the value of an initial model, while the superego would function as a secondary evaluator. Yet in

Freud's own texts, these two functions are often conflated, and the differentiation of the ego ideal as an autonomous agency is never clearly established. Laplanche and Pontalis define the ego ideal as "an agency of the personality resulting from the convergence of narcissism (idealization of the ego) and identifications with the parents, their substitutes, and collective ideals. As a differentiated agency, the ego ideal constitutes a model to which the subject seeks to conform" [3].

Genetically speaking, the ego ideal ensures a progressive structuring of the ego, allowing it to bear the frustrations imposed by the reality principle and the relinquishment of narcissistic omnipotence, through a form of partial gratification — that of conformity to one's ideals. But how could such conformity be evaluated at the very outset of psychic life? A third agency is logically required. This might be thought to be the superego, but the superego is not yet constituted, since it is the heir of the Oedipus complex, which appears later. There is thus a genetic difficulty in understanding the relations between the ego ideal and the other agencies. The only solution to this aporia is to attribute agential status to the ego ideal — and thus to narcissism itself.

To posit narcissism as an agency constitutes a major evolution in the conception of the psychic apparatus. A great many authors flirt with the idea of a narcissism possessing its own dynamics and its own economy, yet hesitate to grant it the status of a full topographical agency :

The self would define this moment of development in which, within primary narcissistic cathexes, the cathexis of the subject by itself comes to include the cathexis of the subject by the mother and the contributions emanating from her... This self would function as a differentiated agency having, throughout development, its own functional destiny, intervening in the vicis-

situdes of later phantasmatic organizations and intrapsychic conflicts[4].

The title of Green's 1966 paper sums up the question well :[ 5] is narcissism an agency with its own operational autonomy, its own limits, its own properties — or is it merely a state resulting from the ego's drive-based cathexes, as the very term "narcissistic libido" suggests ? The notion of the self (*Self*) among Anglo-American analysts reflects this latter position. One speaks of the self, the false self, distortions of the self, defining it as resulting from a narcissistic cathexis of the ego. The self is regarded as an organization made up of ideal representations of the ego. But it is not, in this conception, an agency in the full metapsychological sense — a point underscored by Jean Laplanche, who notes that the use of this notion tends to render the ego autonomous from the unconscious :

" in my view, the notion of the Self put forward by the British school (Winnicott) — a notion insidiously gaining ground on French soil — is only intelligible in complementarity with that of an adaptive, autonomous ego. The notion of the self as a self-identificatory image serves, in my view, to exonerate an adaptive and autonomous ego, an ego untouched by any distortion in its relation to reality. (...) That said, while I myself remain highly critical of the autonomous functions of the ego, I do not mean to deny the existence of certain self-preservative biological mechanisms. (...) the theory attributes to the ego the mechanisms of self-preservation precisely because the ego attributes them to itself : the ego reclaims, in the name of its own self-love, the self-preservative mechanisms" [6].

## Grunberger and the Self as Agency

Béla Grunberger took this further step. He grants narcissism the rank of an agency with

a metapsychological status comparable to that of the ego, the superego, and the id[7]. Within this new topography, narcissism can stand in opposition to the other agencies. Narcissism exists from the very beginning of antenatal life. It is a primary, undifferentiated state linked to a perfect homeostasis, in which there exists neither subject, nor object, nor conflict. From fetal life onward, there coexist a drive-based life already containing, in germ, the sexual drive (whose physiological manifestation is cellular proliferation) and an aggressiveness placed in the service of the interests of the ego (whose manifestation is the fetal metabolism's parasitic use of the maternal metabolism). Since the mother assumes the whole set of vital functions, the fetus lives in a state of absolute elation, the trace of which will constitute the active narcissistic nucleus throughout life and which, over the course of psychic development, will become an agency — the self. After birth, this narcissistic state continues in sequential form. The infant sleeps a great deal in order to recover its narcissistic homeostasis. When the first frustrations occur, the child is led to reorganize itself in the face of unsatisfied drives. The structuring of the psychic apparatus is achieved through conflicts between drives and agencies. But the frustrations linked to drive-based dissatisfaction are softened by recourse to narcissism — now become an agency — which allows the child to construct itself as the valued object in its mother's gaze. Narcissistic confirmation is the compensation for the ego's anxieties in the face of drive-based demands.

Grunberger proposes an interesting revision of the foundations of the pleasure principle. The Freudian thesis of the reduction of excitation — which does not hold up against the fact that an increase in excitation can itself be pleasurable[8] — could be refuted and replaced by a thesis of narcissistic gain[9]. The child integrates its drives

by transforming them into narcissistic phantasies. As an agency of transformation, narcissism stands in opposition to the drives. The child projects figures drawn from this narcissistic agency onto another agency — the ego ideal — which will serve as an anticipation of the ego's own realization.

At every stage of its development, the ego must receive narcissistic compensation. If narcissism is wounded — through humiliation, trauma, or bodily alteration — the ego is likewise wounded. Analysis allows us to observe the relations among the self, the ego, and the superego. At the beginning of analysis, it is the self — the source of the demand for analysis — that is reinforced at the ego's expense; then, over the course of analysis, the transference neurosis develops and the situation reverses. Grunberger conceives of the relations among the agencies as those linking several inhabitants of the same house, with the id in the cellar, the self in one room, the superego in another, and the ego as the household's butler and grand unifier, tasked with making this whole little world cohabit :

This unification will allow the house's former occupants to persist, each with their own proper functions, and only the adapted, efficient coordination among them will bear witness to the change that has occurred. The Self will insist on isolating itself in a room it has fitted out for its own use (I shall say nothing here of the old tenant of the cellar, the id, or rather of what it has become). The autonomy the Self has thus managed to secure for itself will continue to furnish the Ego with the narcissistic component it always needs for the smooth running of the household, whose management the Self has entrusted to it[10].

## Kohut and the Bipolar Structure of the Self

In parallel with Béla Grunberger, though without knowledge of his work, the Viennese-born psychoanalyst who emigrated to the United States, Heinz Kohut, developed a closely related theory. Kohut's thought remains little known in France, largely owing to the effects of Lacan's ostracism, which caricatured North American psychoanalysis. The entry on Kohut in Roudinesco's *Dictionnaire de la psychanalyse* also contains a misunderstanding regarding the notion of the grandiose self, mistakenly understood as an idealized parental imago — whereas Kohut in fact distinguishes clearly between the two. Agnès Oppenheimer's presentations remain faithful to the texts; her analysis, however, in our view, misses the essential thrust of Kohut's thought : his attempt to think a domain beyond drive-based organization.

As Kohut writes :

"In my view, then, the essence of psychoanalysis lies in the scientific observer's protracted empathic immersion into the observed, for the purpose of data-gathering and explanation. All further progress — the contributions made by Freud's ordering mind, by his courage and persistence; the contributions made by the best of the succeeding generations of analysts — is logically connected with the essence, and the activities that bring it about, directly or through trial and error, occur in intelligible sequences...psychoanalysis is a psychology of complex mental states which, with the aid of the persevering empathic-introspective immersion of the observer into the inner life of man, gathers its data in order to explain them"[11].

Kohut's starting point was his analysis of narcissistic disturbances in his patients. Most adult patients seeking analysis are not, in fact, suf-

fering from neurotic distress, but from narcissistic wounds. The transference thereby established does involve an Oedipal dimension, but it is always bound up with the repetition of situations in which narcissism itself is at stake. The patient's attempt to restore a wounded narcissism is the source of the dynamic underlying most analytic cures. Unlike Grunberger, Kohut does not regard the self as a metapsychological agency, but rather as a content of the psychic apparatus[12]. Nonetheless, his descriptions of the self invite us to think that he did, in fact, hold a structural view of it.

For Kohut, the self is a bipolar entity, composed of a first pole combining the grandiose self and exhibitionism, and a second pole linked to the construction of an idealized parental imago. The grandiose, exhibitionistic self corresponds to the statement : *I am perfect, and you admire me*. The second pole corresponds to the statement : *You are perfect, and I am part of you*. These two poles are the source of two types of narcissistic cathexis, which coexist side by side with differing degrees of salience. These narcissistic cathexes unfold in parallel with the object cathexes described by classical psychoanalysis. In order to treat narcissistic disturbances, one must be attentive to the manifestations of the grandiose exhibitionistic self and of the idealized parental imago. Manifestations of the grandiose exhibitionistic self reveal themselves in the need to be unique, in megalomania, in solipsistic self-attention, and in the need to be admired. Normal integration of the grandiose self results in a realistic self-esteem. Certain subjects, however, remain fixated at archaic configurations of the grandiose self and at narcissistically overvalued objects — objects that are not felt as separate and independent from the self. In his last two books, *The Restoration of the Self* and *How Does Analysis Cure ?*, Kohut returns to this

question of archaic objects, acknowledging the existence of *selfobjects*, necessary to the subject, whose narcissistic cathexis is a condition of psychic health[13]. The cohesion of the self depends on the maintenance of these selfobjects — which is why, in narcissistic disorders, the fear of losing the object takes precedence even over castration anxiety.

Manifestations of the idealized parental imago reveal themselves in the unconscious presence, within the self, of an admired, omnipotent object. They reveal themselves in the admiration felt toward others and in the constitution of ideals. Pathologies of the social bond, religious beliefs, and ideological convictions all draw their source from a fusional identification with this imago. The integration of the grandiose exhibitionistic self together with the idealized parental imago leads to the establishment of a cohesive self. Pathologies of narcissism stem from a disturbance of the self and from its conflicts with the reality-oriented ego. There can thus exist a contrast between the (unconscious) grandiose self and a conscious feeling of inferiority. Conversely, the image of the grandiose self can become inflated with phantasmatic narcissistic cathexes, producing a megalomaniac self-image. If the self, still in the process of formation and hence vulnerable, has suffered narcissistic traumas, the grandiose self will seek to realize its archaic aims. This movement is observable in mirror transferences, in which the patient seeks to encompass the analyst within their own grandiose self.

Two forms of splitting can be observed when the grandiose self suffers a defect of integration. Vertical splitting separates the grandiose self into one section marked by a lack of self-esteem, hypochondriacal feelings, and shame, and another section in which vanity is expressed. Horizontal splitting, analogous to repression, separates an unconscious grandiose self

from a sense of reality (the reality-oriented ego), resulting in diminished self-esteem. If the admired adult (parent, partner) has proven disappointing, the idealized parental imago becomes an archaic, persecutory selfobject, and the transference becomes an idealizing transference onto the analyst. The analytic situation gives rise to the installation of narcissistic transferences of various kinds (mirror transferences and/or idealized-parental-imago transferences). All these transferences are driven by the search for a restoration of the self, repeating traumatic injuries within the transference in an attempt to overcome them.

From these two components of the self — the grandiose self and the idealized parental imago — Kohut developed a synthetic theory of narcissistic pathologies. In the normal state, the grandiose self is transformed into an evolved, positive form of self-esteem, offering the subject the security of self-confidence. If, through a defect of integration or through regression, it is altered, solipsistic demands for self-attention appear. A further step in regression brings about a partial fragmentation of the grandiose self into separate nuclei; this fragmentation gives rise to hypochondria and narcissistic rage. Narcissistic rage aims at destroying the other; it arises from the fear of one's own fragmentation, of being annihilated oneself. Finally, if there is a defect of integration preventing the constitution of the self altogether, or if the regression is massive and irreversible, one observes an attempt at constituting the grandiose self accompanied by an unreal sense of grandeur marked by affective coldness, as in the psychoses.

On the side of the other component of the self, the idealized parental imago, the same potential dynamic is observed. In the normal state, the development of the internalized omnipotent object leads to an evolved form of admiration for

others and a capacity for enthusiasm. If there is a disturbance in the integration of this object, an irresistible need for fusion with the omnipotent object arises — this is the stage of the idealized parental imago. A further step in regression fragments the idealized omnipotent object into scattered nuclei; mystical religious feelings or ideological alienations then appear. Finally, if the regression is more massive still, it becomes irreversible, and a delusional reconstitution of the omnipotent object arises, complete with persecutory figures and influencing machines.

Kohut attempted to explain the lack of clarity in Freud's thinking on narcissism by appealing to Freud's own particular narcissistic difficulties — the hypothesis that Freud's personality was marked by an exacerbated narcissistic sensitivity, which prevented him from bringing the full breadth of his genius to bear on this particular question. This is a plausible hypothesis, though unproven, and not especially useful. More productive, in our view, is the observation that the notion of the self is particularly difficult to pin down precisely because it is typically complex. It possesses a conscious valence — we are conscious of ourselves — but also an unconscious valence : the self is vulnerable to unconscious traumas. It is bound up with the other agencies : the self is inseparable from ideals, and thus from the ego ideal. Its relations with the ego are likewise complex. These relations become clearer if we consider the following distinction. The ego can be grasped in its opposition to the id and the superego. It cannot, however, be used to understand the motives governing an individual's action in the world, nor the choice of object relations. The ego and the self cannot be apprehended jointly — they stand in a relation of complementarity. If we observe the ego, and thus its opposition to unconscious motions, we lose access to the observation of the self. Conversely, if

we observe the self in its project of realization (what Kohut calls the "nuclear program" of the self), in its failures as much as in its successes, we lose access to unconscious motives (reaction formations, defenses, unconscious phantasies). For Kohut, recognizing the self and its narcissistic transferences requires a modification of analytic technique. Empathy becomes the analyst's principal instrument for gaining knowledge of the disturbances of the self[14].

**Clinical vignette.** A sixty-five-year-old man, with a long analytic history dating back to childhood on account of perverse conduct — pedophilia. He had been a patient of primal-scream therapy in the 1970s. He subsequently managed to overcome his disgust toward women and toward the absence of a penis, married, and had a child with Fragile X syndrome and autism. He resumed therapy with me at this point. I adopted, as a technical stance, an empathic approach centered on narcissistic aspects, with few interpretations and a stance of neutrality, while also warning him against exposing himself to risky situations (young children, and so on). He managed to contain his pedophilic drives, aided by their natural decline with age. Work on restoring his self-esteem centered on a successful professional sublimation connected to the world of art.

Empathy is a method for acquiring knowledge, as well as an affective bond between two people. Only empathy allows us to know the states of the self. The child needs empathy the way its survival depends on oxygen, to borrow Kohut's own image. In analysis, an analyst's failures of empathy wound the patient's narcissism. Conversely, patients may develop an idealizing transference toward the analyst, accompanied by a desire for recognition — the repetition of a need frustrated in the course of narcissistic development. If the analyst, through a failure of empathy, perceives this demand for recognition as a resistance linked to a manifestation of Oedipal rivalry, they

miss the demand for narcissistic restoration altogether and trigger further trauma. The analyst's empathy is necessary to detect the patient's narcissistic wounds. This does not mean the analyst must remain constantly within empathic understanding — one of the most original contributions of Kohut's thought concerns a clinical epistemology of complementarity : either the analyst listens to the patient's self through the empathic resonances occurring within their own self, or they listen to object-related drive movements and their Oedipal vicissitudes — but they cannot do both simultaneously. The two modes of listening are complementary in the strict epistemological sense of the term. The art of analysis lies in the skillful handling of this complementarity between the two approaches.

This was an original contribution, but one that Kohut himself gradually abandoned as the psychology of the self developed, becoming the sole approach at the expense of drive analysis and the analysis of Oedipal disturbances — much to the delight of the censors of psychoanalytic institutions, who regarded his thought as heretical. Though an active member of the IPA and a presence within the circle around Anna Freud, Kohut was, by the end of his life, regarded as the author of a heretical thesis and was excluded from the International Psychoanalytical Association. The psychology of the self subsequently emancipated itself and attempted an autonomous development, which later merged into the intersubjectivity movement[15].

With the contributions of Grunberger and Kohut, we have a solid foundation for approaching the complexity of the self. They do not exhaust the whole of psychoanalytic thought on narcissism, but they suffice for our present purposes. Narcissism is at once a constant energetic force and is associated with a structure named the self,

whose status remains problematic within analytic theory.

Before approaching this question through complexity theory, we must underscore one further dimension of narcissism. Narcissism is not solely at the service of self-love, maintaining the unity of the ego — it is also necessary for constructing the self-representation required for the exercise of thought itself. As Daniel Widlöcher writes :

To think of someone always situates that person, that event, in relation to oneself. More precisely, in relation to a self-representation, since the two poles of the represented action are inseparable, and the targeted object, the situation evoked, define a partial self-representation — a self-representation-in-situation. When the evoked scene is charged with a positive or negative value, the self-representation can be regarded as the locus onto which the pleasure or displeasure generated by the represented scene is projected. . . depending on the case, object-cathexis or narcissistic cathexis will predominate[16].

Daniel Widlöcher has clearly shown that narcissism is not solely implicated in relations of self-love or in the pursuit of narcissistic objects — it is necessary for self-consciousness itself. Narcissism has a cognitive valence that is actualized in mental representations and in every intra-subjective relation. Simple conscious introspection of mental evocation and of anticipatory thought is always associated with a self-image within the mental scene. In other words, mentalization requires self-representation.

## The Contradiction

We are faced here with a contradiction. The self exists in its clinical manifestations, but it is unthinkable within the framework of Freud's

theory of the psychic agencies. If we grant it the status of an agency, its relations with the other agencies become incomprehensible — it becomes a kind of hybrid agency, comprising functions of the ego, figures drawn from the ego ideal, productions of the id, and superego injunctions. Granting the self the status of an agency on a par with the other agencies produces logical contradictions and impoverishes the conceptual power of the articulation among the three agencies of the second topography. Granting it the status of a qualitative state of the ego, on the other hand, fails to account for the narcissistic relation. Reducing it to the ego ideal, a function of the superego, fails to account for its role in the maturation of the ego prior to the establishment of the superego. Nor can we content ourselves with the aporias to which the ego's own narcissistic self-cathexis leads us (how can the ego be both subject and object?), nor with a purely specular theory of narcissism (the ego as the sum of its identifications), since this leaves us unable to understand its function in cognition.

The difficulties surrounding the conception of a narcissistic agency stem from the very notion of "agency" as understood in Freudian metapsychology — that of an entity endowed with intentionality. The ego decides, chooses, makes compromises ; the superego demands ; the self distributes gains ; the id imposes, and so on. These are anthropomorphic metaphors — illustrative, useful — but they have their limits when it comes to thinking through their origins and their differential relations. It is far from certain that the metaphor of the shared household of the agencies is the best available image. We must move beyond these metaphors and attempt to understand the notion of the self differently. Epistemically, narcissism — an entity observable in its clinical manifestations — leads us to the very

edges of psychoanalysis and invites us to explore new theoretical horizons.

## **The Emergence of the Self**

The theory of complexity in organizations has familiarized us with the possibility of stratified structures endowed with autonomy, whose interactions give rise to new organizational strata possessing unprecedented properties. Emergence is a phenomenon that arises in complex systems subject to recursion. Complex systems are systems in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, entailing a phenomenon of emergence expressed in the appearance of new properties at the global level. In the terminology of information systems, emergence can be described as follows : the feedback of a system's outputs onto its own inputs (recursion) generates the appearance of an agency of that system. This emergent agency contains a global representation of the underlying system, but possesses new properties that cannot be deduced from the properties inherent to the system itself. A higher, unprecedented level of complexity emerges, irreducible to the known constitutive elements of the system. In systems-theoretic terms, the system self-finalizes by generating, within itself, an agency protected from its own inputs and outputs, capable of generating deductive inferences about its own functioning. This new agency sits at the summit of the system's dynamic evolution. It possesses new properties, but it also integrates a representation of the system's possible states. The evolutionary history of the system is encoded, in an unprecedented form, within this agency. Equipped with this concept — whose applications are manifold and independent of any particular substrate — we can now construct our model of the self.

The cathexis of libido onto the ego is a recursive process. What, indeed, is secondary narcissism, if not the ego emitting a libidinal cathexis that returns to its own source? This return is analogous to recursion — a return upon the emitter. In keeping with what we know of complex dynamical systems, this recursivity gives rise to the emergence of a new agency of higher complexity. This agency is the self. It encodes properties emanating from the ego. Within the self are encoded representations of the magnified body and of ideals. In agreement with Kohut's thesis, and its constant confirmation in our own clinical practice, we shall accept the existence of a bipolar structure within the self : on the one hand, a grandiose self that must be exhibited for admiration (Kohut) in order to obtain narcissistic compensation (Grunberger) for the frustrations linked to the refusal of drive-based satisfaction ; and, on the other hand, a pole of identification with an idealized parental imago. These two poles hold the self in tension and sustain the agency's maintenance. The emergence of this agency, and its maintenance, requires a constant energetic investment — this is the economic role assigned to narcissism, the drive-based cathexis of the ego that gives rise to the emergence of the self. Narcissism is not a stage in psychosexual development ; it is an energetic investment whose permanence is necessary for the emergence of the self.

## **The Developmental Genesis of the Self**

Our model presupposes the existence of an ego prior to the self, since the latter emerges through recursion. One might imagine that the ego differentiates itself from the id through adaptation to reality, and then grows more complex through the progressive integration of partial drives. The recursive return of libido would then give rise to

the emergence of a higher-complexity agency : the self. This linear chronological picture, however, is too simple. It presupposes the existence of an ego without self-awareness prior to the integration of partial drives — a picture that does not correspond to reality. A child at the end of its first year already possesses self-awareness well before the integration of oral, anal, and phallic drives. All consciousness is consciousness of self. Yet we cannot return to the hypothesis of a primary narcissism, which contradicts what we now know about infants, nor can we adopt theses positing the innate existence of intersubjectivity from the outset, since these fail to account for its actual development.

We must instead imagine a developmental model in which a self can emerge quite early on. In keeping with numerous clinical observations and theoretical hypotheses proposed by various authors, we propose to consider as real the existence of disjointed nuclei of the self from the very beginning of psychic life — and probably in utero. These nuclei of the self emerge around fragmented sensory experiences and are subsequently unified through multimodal integration in the relation to a poly-sensory object.

This unification requires a coupling with the mother (or the adult partner), such that the disjointed sensory experience is unified through the mother's own psyche (Bion's maternal reverie). Several critical moments have been described. The first is that of feeding (breast or bottle), where the exchange of gazes between mother and infant, and the reconstitution of the dyad, allow for an integration of the nuclei of the self. A second critical moment is that of joint attention, around the sixth month. The mother directs her attention toward an external object ; the child follows the orientation of the mother's gaze and jointly directs its own attention — now voluntary — toward that object.

The genesis of the self is thus one of a progressive integration of innate nuclei of the self, present from fetal life onward and organized around sensory structures. Birth is not, in itself, a decisive stage in the construction of the self — it is a change of milieu, in which the mother comes to assume the same functions of protection and nourishment previously assumed by the uterine environment. The self probably develops from psychic nuclei present from the very beginning of neuronal embryogenesis during fetal life, and which agglomerate (barring autistic pathology) during the first months of life, up to the moment of crystallization of the self observed during the joint attention shared between the adult parent and the child. This joint attention precipitates self-consciousness, since the child becomes aware of the distinction between the relations of self and other with respect to the third object. Joint attention toward a third object is the prototype of the individuating experience.

The relation between sensoriality and the emergence of nuclei of recursivity allowing for a primitive self-consciousness falls within the general framework of *precurrance* — a phenomenon described by the English physiologist Sherrington (1857–1952). The term was coined in 1906, later taken up again by Georges Thines in the 1980s in his work on animal psychology, and has since fallen into disuse in both ethology and cognitive science[17]. Sherrington had noted the following fact : across different evolutionary lineages, the development of central nervous system structures is always achieved starting from the sensory organs enabling perception at a distance (vision, hearing, smell) — as opposed to sensory organs such as touch and taste, which require direct contact and are associated with a lesser degree of development. From this observation, Sherrington inferred that the distal senses present a particular functional characteristic :

they allow for the anticipation of a predatory attack and prepare behaviors of flight or counter-attack. This anticipation — which Sherrington termed *precurrence* — induces the development of an "inner" space, distinct from reflex reactions, and entailing anticipatory representations. Through this anticipatory function, precurrence entails the development of a "subjective" space and of a temporality proper to the organism — in other words, a form of self-consciousness.

This is a remarkable theory. It links sensory experience to an evolution toward cognitive complexity ; it links the construction of mental maps in which objects are embedded (predator, prey, partner) to self-consciousness. This self-consciousness is necessary for the virtualization of potential courses of action prior to any decision to act. It stands in opposition to the organism's automatic reactions, through a mentalization of possible actions[18]. Since human beings, too, are biological creatures inscribed within an evolutionary lineage, precurrence in the infant likewise contributes to the emergence of a self-consciousness organized around sensory experience. The entire clinical literature on sensory impairments — to which we have devoted much of our own research — confirms the importance of precurrence. In cases of profound congenital deafness, early cochlear implantation allows for the emergence of cognitive and psychic processes not observed in deaf children without implants who experience the world primarily through vision. This does not mean that deaf children living a purely visual experience of the world cannot construct a sense of self and develop intelligence — but the developmental pathways in the two clinical situations are qualitatively distinct. Comparing these two pathways is a source of first importance for studying the relations between self-consciousness and the qualitative development of cognition[19].

The emergence of the self is thus achieved through recursivity — first in fragmented form, organized around perceptual precurrence, and then through the integration of these nuclei into a cohesive self endowed with an essential property : self-consciousness. The infant's psychic life alternates between moments of cohesion and other moments in which, of necessity, the self becomes non-cohesive.

## An Evolutionary Digression

The explanation of this fact lies in our own phylogeny. The earliest hominids had to leave the shelter of the forest (fruit-gathering) and venture into the savanna ; they gradually assumed an upright posture over the course of evolution. Standing upright required childbirth to occur at nine months of gestation, rather than the twelve months that would correspond to full human morphological maturity — we are premature beings, missing a full trimester of fetal life. Bipedalism led to the freeing of the hand, the lowering of the larynx, and the shortening of the female pelvis. The pelvic canal thereby became too narrow relative to the volume of the newborn's brain, resulting in the premature triggering of human birth before the brain's complete maturation. To accommodate an increasingly difficult parturition, evolution favored the birth of increasingly premature fetuses — which, requiring ever more extensive and prolonged care, in turn required a greater structuring of the social group, and thus the development of new competencies and an evolution toward hominization[20]. In exchange, human beings became dependent, after birth, on intense maternal care, owing to the immaturity of their relational apparatus (perception, motor function, the immunological self — acquired only several months after birth). It follows that the mother must take charge of the im-

mature functions of the child — a fetus born too soon, whose self is not yet integrated. The self is an agency acquired over the course of development, then stabilized throughout life, capable of reorganizing itself but only within certain limits. We can change inwardly, yet we remain ourselves — in our own skin, within our own history.

## **Dreaming and the Renewal of the Self**

The self requires a permanent re-initialization, one that is ensured by dreaming. For physiologists, the essential function of dreaming is that of a mental activity necessary for the maintenance of neuronal networks through the activation of episodic memory[21]. REM sleep maintains neuronal networks and consolidates long-term memory through the work of dreaming. Dreaming performs an individuating function; it ensures the renewal of individuation by maintaining variability among individuals within a population, stabilizing idiosyncratic experiences through visualization in episodic memory — which is why visual experience predominates in dreams. The self would thus be periodically consolidated through dreaming. Note that this thesis is not in contradiction with Freudian dream theory : dreaming may be necessary for the maintenance of neuronal networks while at the same time serving the fulfillment of unconscious wishes, all while preserving slow-wave sleep and its other functional restorative processes.

The phylogeny of sleep states demonstrates that all sleep states possess functional utility[22]. The four states of sleep — drowsiness, light slow-wave sleep, deep slow-wave sleep, and REM sleep — recapitulate the adaptive responses of organisms over the course of evolution. The circadian constraint is linked to variations in luminosity, which influence genetic clocks. Gravity imposed muscular hypotonia to permit sleep in ver-

tebrates emerging from the aquatic environment. The homeothermy of birds and mammals allowed for an adaptive gain, making possible the colonization of the globe beyond tropical zones — but it required permanent activation, with a high risk of exhaustion. The nervous system adapted through deep slow-wave sleep, which reduces glucose and oxygen consumption in the brain; slow-wave sleep facilitates restorative processes. But because the nervous system is slowed during deep sleep, there is a risk of synaptic deafferentation. To limit this risk, evolution developed REM sleep, which reactivates synaptic function under conditions of sensory isolation and paralysis. The ethological constraint encompasses the full set of dangers presented by sleep; the greater quantity of REM sleep observed in predators is explained by the advantage it confers in terms of cerebral plasticity.

Human sleep recapitulates these various evolutionary moments, but curiously, their acquisition in the child follows the reverse order. From fetus to human adult, the various constraints appear in the reverse order of species evolution : the circadian rhythm appears after REM sleep and slow-wave sleep. The phylogeny of sleep is, in any case, explicit : the full set of sleep phases constitutes a necessary recapitulation of adaptations. The dream of the REM phase — the most recent development in adaptive complexity — may serve the fulfillment of unconscious wishes (Freud), serve the maintenance of psychic individuation through the self (Jouvet), and protect sleep itself.

## **Cognitive Cohesion**

One of the most persistent enigmas of psychology is the phenomenon of vicariance : a function normally assumed by one organic system is, under certain circumstances, assumed by another.

The most evident example is that of balance, normally assumed by the vestibular system and its receptors for gravity, posture, and acceleration — a function that can, in the event of bilateral destruction of the vestibular apparatus, be assumed instead through the integration of visual and proprioceptive information[23]. In psychotherapy, we have followed numerous congenitally profoundly deaf children with bilateral vestibular areflexia who were nonetheless able to construct correct postural references through multimodal compensation. But this compensation is only intelligible if there exists an integrative agency that ensures the function despite the deficiency of the organ in question. This integrative agency is the self.

Neurophysiological descriptions of vicariance have achieved remarkable degrees of refinement, but they cannot explain its very nature. If two distinct systems can substitute for one another functionally, then either they transmit identical information, or a third system is capable of correctly interpreting the information even when it arrives in a different format. The first alternative is false : gravitational information from the vestibular system is not encoded in the same format, nor does it transmit the same content, as information from tendon receptors. We must therefore infer the existence of a third system endowed with an informational constancy, capable of using all manner of different information to arrive at an identical functional outcome. The self — the narcissistic cathexis of the ego — is precisely this agency, capable of achieving such integration by deploying the holistic image of the body. Any modification of the body modifies the self, and conversely, any modification of the self has repercussions on the body. If the afferent input necessary for a given function is impeded, the holistic body image draws on other afferent

inputs to maintain that function, with varying degrees of success.

We must specify what we mean by the holistic image of the body. The distinction between the neurologists' "body schema" and the psychoanalysts' "body image" is no longer operative. It must be replaced with the notion of a complex structure comprising : (1) the image resulting from efferent copies of action (mirror neurons);[24] (2) the image of the body as perceived, both in the mirror and outside the mirror, actualizing older phylogenetic mechanisms ;[25] (3) the image of our recognized body, integrating the recognition of our identity as an individual, which requires naming and thus language ; (4) the recognized body that allows us to describe ourselves, for instance, as left-handed or right-handed, and which entails knowledge of our own body (integrated within the dominant hemisphere, whereas the perceived body is integrated within the non-dominant hemisphere) ; (5) the figured body, as in a child's drawing of a human figure, which entails knowledge ("a hand has five fingers") ; and (6) finally, the body cathected with narcissistic libido — the body loved by the ego, and upon which collective ideals exert an impact (as in advertising). The integrated whole of these six images constitutes the holistic body image present within the self. Any modification of one of these components has repercussions on the holistic synthesis, which reacts to compensate for the modification — as attested by the clinical experience of acquired sensory impairments and of amputation (phantom limbs).

There exist cognitive functions that the ego can carry out without any reflexive consciousness whatsoever, but attention to an object — whether external or internal (mental) — requires the contribution of the self. Self-consciousness is necessary for attention to an object, since attention requires choosing a level of focal intention-

nality. Faced with a decision, the ego can only arrive at a choice by cathecting an imaginary representation in which the subject is represented acting according to one or another of its options. This imaginary evocation makes use of self-representation. The narcissistic cathexis of the ego is thus an adaptive necessity for cognition. Translated into a linguistic statement, this process would be expressed in the first person : "I choose to look precisely at this object, disregarding the objects surrounding it." This attentional activity has neurophysiological correlates; it has a phylogenetic history and a biological substrate (prey capture); and it carries a cognitive cost[26]. It cannot be sustained for long, and it requires the activation of working memory. It requires an intention. The ego alone cannot decide upon an intention without evaluating its purpose, without an anticipation of its realization — which entails the self-image. It is in the tension between the self and the ego (reflexive consciousness) that attentional intentionality has its source. The attentional beam allows for the constitution of the represented object as a differentiated representation set against the contextual background, which must be inhibited. It is the result of an accommodation of the ego, in the sense given to the term by Paul Valéry : "an accommodation is a variation that a system must undergo in order to satisfy given conditions. Every system capable of accommodation is complex." [27]

Attention prepares action in animal life. It is triggered by the detection of typical forms that activate affordances — integrated cognitive entities combining perception, attention, action, and meaning[28]. The inhibition of affordance is a function devolved to the self, one entailing reflexive consciousness. In human beings, attention prepares mentalization. When we fail at some act, we feel humiliation — all the more so if we

are under the gaze of another, and all the more so still if that other is a narcissistic selfobject. The banality of this phenomenon should not obscure its importance : the small emotional events of everyday life can be indices of complex psychic dynamics. Narcissism is implicated in emotional responses linked to the success or failure of undertaken actions. The emotional experience accompanying the evaluation of one's own action is a consequence of one of the functions of the self — namely, the reflection of the act. The self is the space of reflection of the ego, in both the optical and the intellectual sense of the term : the ego cannot take itself as its own object except by passing through the reflection of the self. Any narcissistic alteration has repercussions on the cohesion of the self, resulting in an attentional disturbance. This disturbance first manifests as difficulty concentrating on internal objects, and only secondarily on external objects. Finally, if the self is more severely altered, motor automatisms may appear, attempting to restore the cohesion of the self (a self-soothing function).

## Individuating Demarcation

The self is charged with the construction and maintenance of a sense of individuality, and thus with demarcation from others. This sense arises from the tension between the two antagonistic poles constituting the self, following Kohut's account. The relation between the two poles of the self is dynamic and can be represented in terms of a conflict between attractors — using these two poles of the self.

The first attractor is the grandiose exhibitionistic self. It draws to itself representations and phantasies in which the subject imagines (or realizes) itself as unique, accomplishing some feat of exceptional attributes, placed upon a stage where it is contemplated and admired by ano-

ther. This other may be the subject's object of love or desire, but may equally be a group, or even an anonymous crowd. At the heart of this attractor lies the individuation of the self, distinct from the other, who has become the admiring gaze upon the self's own realization. The developmental model here is that of the mother's loving, admiring gaze upon her child's accomplishments — a gaze the child, seeing that admiring gleam reflected back, takes in as a source of pride and increased self-confidence.

The second attractor is that of the idealized parental imago. It draws to itself representations and phantasies in which the self feels driven to merge with the other (the parental imago), perceived as an idealized being of extraordinary capacities and magnified omnipotence. Driven to become the other, to merge into it, the self seeks to lose its own individuality and uniqueness — it wishes to abandon itself within the other. This search for fusion grows all the stronger as the imago becomes idealized to the point of losing all reference to any bodily reality. Developmentally, the model here is that of the child perceiving the parent's omnipotence, their absolute magnificence, and seeking to merge into them in order to experience a state of elation.

These two attracting positions are in conflict within the self, and the structural instability of the self results from the permanence of this conflict. Since we are dealing here with a dynamical situation involving two attractors, the various possible resolutions of this conflict can be readily represented. If one attractor dominates the other, it draws the self into a univocal position. Dominated by the pole of grandiose realization, the self feels individuated, singular — but is drawn into behaviors of constant search for admiration for its accomplishments. If admiration fails to materialize, narcissistic mortification, rage, and hatred toward the other in-

vade the self. Conversely, if the self is dominated by the idealized parental imago, it seeks constant contact with the idealized substitute object, from which it cannot bear to be separated. If fusion cannot occur (and it is, tangentially, always impossible), the feeling of solitude becomes painful, accompanied by an impoverishment of self-esteem and a hatred toward the idealized object that has neglected it. In religion, the illusion of a potential fusion is maintained, generally preventing the emergence of hatred toward God.

A third trajectory passes through a zone of instability. The self then passes rapidly through unstable states, with rapid, chaotic bifurcations between the domination of one attractor and the other. The self may thus seek individuating admiration and simultaneously seek fusion with the other, or alternate rapidly between the two states. Finally, a continuous trajectory can be traced, drawing the self into an optimal position — at a good distance from both attractors, without falling entirely into either one. The self is then individuated, singularized, without an excessive need for the other's admiration, while remaining, at the same time, an integral part — though not fused — with a collective ideal, heir to the idealized parental imago.

## Virtualization

The virtualization of the self arises from the instability generated by the tension between the two poles — the grandiose self and the parental imago. If one of the two attractors gains the upper hand over the other, disorganization results, which can only be compensated for through an external contribution. Thus, the tendency toward collective alienation, whether religious or ideological, can be explained by the domination of the self by the idealized parental imago. Reli-

gious alienation can be reinterpreted, then, not merely as illusion, but as a solution to the problem of otherness arising from the domination of the self by the idealized parental imago. The weakness (or distortion) of the antagonistic pole — the grandiose exhibitionistic self — brings about a difficulty of individuation and a tipping of the self into fusion with the idealized imago.

The prevalence of religious phenomena in our contemporary societies obeys a logic of identity. The believing subject can only be themselves through narcissistic fusion with a belief shared by others. The same dynamic exists for ideological commitment — ideologies are secular religions. They obey a set of multidimensional determinations; the content of ideologies cannot be reduced to psychological dimensions alone, since they also result from economic, sociological, and cultural determinants. But the narcissistic dimension within ideologies is strong; it aims at maintaining the self in a position of ideality. For example, "left-wing" ideology results from an identification of the self with an idealized imago, taking the form of an ethical stance — helping the weakest, class consciousness, identification with a discriminated minority. This idealization bolsters the subject's self in a narcissistic position ("I love being on the left, and I dislike people on the right, who are bad, selfish, stupid, potential fascists," and so on), but often leads to a departure from the reality principle (raison d'État, natural inequality, practical necessities, and so on). Symmetrically, "right-wing" ideology allows the self to identify with an egotistical position ("me first, others after") at the expense of understanding the constructive meaning of solidarity for the weakest — and thus, often, at the expense of intelligence itself (helping the weakest being constitutive of the social bond from which we all benefit).

Conversely, the domination of the grandiose self also produces a disorganization of the self that must likewise be compensated for. Pathology is one mode of compensation; individual creativity is another.

The virtualization of the self explains the predominance of narrativity. Fiction as a source of pleasure for human beings has been little studied as such. Why do we take such pleasure in fiction? Is this simply the pleasure taken in the sublimated expression of a repressed phantasy (as in Jensen's *Gravida*, analyzed by Freud), or does fiction also serve a necessary function in the anticipation of self-realization? For the self is structurally unstable and can only be maintained at the price of an anticipation of its own realization. It draws on sources from the infantile past (elational narcissism, the lost paradise), projecting these forward as a target-representation of its own transformation. Fiction is a realization of this anticipation. It is not solely the fulfillment of a wish, but ensures a primordial function of psychic activity: the cohesion of the self through its own fictional decentering. The capacity to narrate one's own story is not merely a narrative performance engaging linguistic conduct in the telling of a tale[29]. Fiction is not a pure work of imagination devoid of truth-value[30]. Fiction is a necessary production of the self. It may be created by an author, received by a reader, watched by a spectator, or enacted within a video game — it is always an anticipatory creation.

The self is a third-person singular reflexive personal pronoun. To the already long list of its grammatical qualities, we may now add one more, in the future tense.

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## Notes

[1] : Chevalier, J.-C. *Grammaire du français contemporain*. Paris : Larousse, 1997, p. 235.

[2] : Pradeu, T. *L'immunologie et la définition de l'identité biologique* (Doctoral dissertation). Paris I, Sorbonne, 2007.

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[4] : Kestemberg, E., Kestemberg, J., & Decobert, S. *La faim et le corps*. Paris : PUF, 1972/1977, p. 275.

[5] : Green, A. "Le narcissisme primaire, structure ou état." *L'Inconscient*, 1966, 1, pp. 127–156; 1967, 2, pp. 89–116.

[6] : Laplanche, J. *La sublimation, Problématiques III*. Paris : PUF, 1980.

[7] : "Analysis, as a means of narcissistic restoration, can only be desired and undertaken by someone who wishes for that restoration, and thus for the change in question. It is this narcissism to which we have just granted the dignity of a psychic agency, baptized the Self." Grunberger, B. *Le narcissisme, essai de psychanalyse*. Paris : Payot, 1971, p. 140.

[8] : In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy has admirable pages describing the officers' pleasure as soon as they are seized by the multisensory excitement of combat — at least at the outset of engagement.

[9] : Cf. Grunberger, op. cit., p. 144.

[10] : See "Préliminaire à une étude topique du narcissisme," *Revue française de psychanalyse*, May–June 1958, published in Grunberger, B. *Le narcissisme, essai de psychanalyse*. Payot, 1971, 1993.

[11] : Kohut, H. *The Restoration of the Self*. University of Chicago Press, 1977/2009, p. 302.

[12] : "Thus, like object representations, the self is a content of the mental apparatus, but not one of its constituents; it is not an agency of the mental apparatus." Kohut, H. *The Analysis of the Self*, 1971; French trans., *Le Soi*, 1974, PUF, p. 7.

[13] : Only *How Does Analysis Cure ?*, published in English in 1984, has been translated into French, un-

der the title *Analyse et guérison* (PUF, "Le fil rouge" series, 1991).

[14] : "Empathy is a mode of knowledge particularly well suited to the perception of complex psychological configurations." Kohut, H. *Le Soi*, 1971, p. 313.

[15] : See Goldberg, A. (Ed.). *Progress in Self Psychology*, Vols. 1 & 2. The Analytic Press, Hillsdale, NJ/London, 1995. Most of the texts in these volumes add relatively little to Kohut's own work; the most interesting concern the epistemology of psychoanalysis : "Toward a Pure Psychology of Inner Conflict" (Robert D. Stolorow); "Can This Be Psychoanalysis?" (Michael Franz Basch).

[16] : Widlöcher, D. "La relation narcissique." *Traité de psychopathologie*. Paris : PUF, 1994, p. 431.

[17] : Sherrington, C. *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System*, 1906, Cambridge, 1952.

[18] : In many of Caspar David Friedrich's paintings, a figure is seen from behind, alone, gazing at the immensity of nature. Beyond the Romantic theme of the philosophy of Nature, this is a fine illustration of the virtualization bound up with the experience of the self : solitude, and the virtualization of a possible act of conquering the world.

[19] : See Virole, B. *Surdité et sciences humaines*, L'Harmattan, 2009, and *Psychologie de la surdité*, De Boeck, 3rd ed., 2006.

[20] : Susanne, C., et al. *Anthropologie biologique*. De Boeck, 2003.

[21] : Jouvet, M. "Programmation génétique itérative et sommeil paradoxal." *Confrontations psychiatriques*, No. 27, 1986.

[22] : Jouvet, M. *Neurophysiologie des états de sommeil*. Paris : CNRS, 1965; and Poirier, R. *Phylogénie et ontogénie du sommeil*. Institut Danone, 2010.

[23] : See Berthoz, A. *La simplicité*. Odile Jacob, 2009.

[24] : Every bodily action sends an efferent copy that is stored neurally.

[25] : The scratch reflex is integrated at the level of the spinal cord and allows the organism to rid itself of

foreign bodies. In therapy, it is not uncommon to see a patient scratch themselves at the very moment the analyst becomes aware of some element that remains unmentalized for the person scratching.

[26] : "Thus, through selective attentional phenomena, mental energy is devoted to the accomplishment of a given task while ignoring other stimuli that present themselves. Attention then produces modifications in the characteristics of the visual field that we once believed to be static." Bear et al., *Neuroscience : Exploring the Brain*, Williams & Wilkins, 1996.

[27] : Valéry, P. "Attention." *Cahiers II* (La Pléiade). Gallimard, 1973, p. 260.

[28] : Gibson, J. J. "The Theory of Affordances." In R. Shaw & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Perceiving, Acting and Knowing : Toward an Ecological Psychology*. Hillsdale, NJ : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1977.

[29] : Golse, B., & Missionnier, S. *Récit, attachement et psychanalyse*. Érès, 2008, with contributions including that of Laurent Danon-Boileau on the theme of narrativity as the construction of the self.

[30] : On the theme of the truth-value of fiction, see Pavel, T. *Comment écouter la littérature ?* Paris : Fayard, "Leçons inaugurales du Collège de France," 2006.

*Translator's note : This is a scientific English translation of the French original by Benoît Virole. The passage originally quoted in English from Kohut's The Restoration of the Self has been restored to its original English wording rather than back-translated from the French ; all other quoted material (Grunberger, Laplanche, Widlöcher, Kestenberg et al., Valéry, Bear et al.) has been freshly translated from the French source. Key terms follow established English usage in Kohutian self psychology (grandiose self, idealized parental imago, selfobject, mirror transference) and in complexity theory (emergent agency, recursivity, attractor).*