CHAPTER 4

Early American Sociology

Abstract George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley, and Erving Goffman are central figures within American sociology. In this chapter, Rousselle explores the structure of their sociological discourse to reveal its pragmatist, and hence capitalist, roots. In each case, there is a replacement of the symbolic injunction of the father with the maternal affirmations of the mother. Or, in other words, there is a fall of the symbolic function and a subsequent rise of the imaginary.

Keywords George Herbert Mead · Charles Horton Cooley · Erving Goffman · Symbolic interactionism · Mirror stage · Looking-glass self · Dramaturgical analysis · Frame theory · Sigmund Freud

George Herbert Mead

The ethos of early American sociology forbade psychoanalytic discourse. These scholars were immersed in the ideas of philosophical pragmatism and worked alongside such luminaries as William James and John Dewey. They were also steeped in the psychological teachings of Wilhelm Wundt, whose work G. Stanley Hall introduced into the American academy well before he introduced Freud. Many of these sociologists were later brought under the banner of "symbolic interactionism" by another

D. Rousselle, *Jacques Lacan and American Sociology*,
The Palgrave Lacan Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-19726-1_4

American sociologist named Herbert Blumer (see Blumer 1963). Blumer described the project of symbolic interactionism in the following way: first, there is a presumption that "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them," second, meaning arises from social interaction among human beings, and; third, meanings are always implicated in interpretative processes (Blumer 1986: 2). The question of the relationship of symbolic interactionism with psychoanalysis cannot be resolved in this essay, but I want nonetheless to begin to address it.

Herbert Blumer was influential in developing and promoting the work of George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929), and others. He focused especially on their theories of the "social self" and the "significant symbol." In some sense, the early school of symbolic interactionism became synonymous with early American sociology. George Ritzer, a foremost American sociologist, has claimed that "symbolic interactionism came […] to dominate American sociology in the 1920s and early 1930s" (Ritzer 2008: 31). Symbolic Interactionism still holds considerable influence within sociology departments across the continent, and it is possible that it has remained the dominant paradigm of American sociology (if only because it has influenced cognate fields).

The popularity of symbolic interactionism is evident within the foremost professional sociological organization, the American Sociological Association (ASA). The Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction (SSSI) meets at each conference of the ASA and maintains an active research journal titled *Symbolic Interaction*. The project of symbolic interactionism is described by the editors of that journal in the following way:

> Symbolic interactionism, the society's theoretical foundation, is derived from American pragmatism and particularly from the work of George Herbert Mead, who argued that people's selves are social products, but that these selves are also purposive and creative. (SSSI 2018)

It is possible to locate similarities among Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and the theories of the early symbolic interactionists. For example, the Freudian "ego-ideal"—which refers to the image one has of oneself when viewed from some external vantage point—is synonymous with Mead's notion of the "Me." Indeed, it is seldom acknowledged that

Mead sought to relate his social theory of the "Me" to Freudian doctrine. He wrote, "[i]f we use a Freudian expression, the 'Me' is in a certain sense a censor" (Mead 1934). We should ask ourselves why Mead decided to relate his concept of the "Me" to the Freudian concept of the "censor" and not to the aforementioned Freudian "ego-ideal," or why he chose to relate the "Me" to the Freudian doctrine at all if he planned to do so in such a superficial and oddly selective manner.

Mead wrote that "the 'Me' is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself [sic] assumes" (1934). It was Jacques Lacan who made an interpretive cut within Freud's work by drawing out the consequences of a split within the ego among the "ideal-ego" and the "ego-ideal": the ego-ideal was to some extent within the domain of the "symbolic" mental agency because it was the "imaginary" sense of self that the subject assumes for oneself from the vantage point of the "big Other." On the other hand, the ideal-ego was to a considerable extent more firmly situated within the "imaginary." The discovery of a distinction in Freud's writings on the "ideal-ego" and "ego-ideal" was one of Lacan's first major interventions in the Freudian field, and it occurred in his first major seminar (see Lacan [1953] 1991: 129–142). During that initial Serge Leclaire argued that Freud eventually made a change in his presentation of the Ego. Lacan responded: "Exactly. And Freud makes use there of the *Ichideal* [ego-ideal], which is precisely symmetrical and opposed to the *Idealich* [ideal-ego]. It's the sign that Freud is here designating two different functions" (Lacan [1953] 1991: 133). Lacan continued: "one is on the plane of the imaginary, and the other is on the plane of the symbolic—since the demand of the *ichideal* [ego-ideal] takes up its place *within* the totality of demands of the law" (Lacan [1953] 1991: 134). What Lacan said next about the ego-ideal is very important: "Freud […] identifies it with censorship" (Lacan [1953] 1991: 135).

George Herbert Mead's central contribution, which is, arguably, his social theory of the "Me," was a much less developed and poorly articulated alternative to the Freudian theory of the "ego-ideal." It missed entirely the distinctions and various "knottings" later made by Jacques Lacan among the "imaginary," "symbolic," and "real" agencies. These were concepts that Lacan discovered to be always latent in Freud's work but not expressed as such; it was by expressing them as such that we unlock some of the doors for the Freudian discovery. In some respects, they are very useful alternatives to the other post-Freudian notions, still immensely popular within America, of the "Id," "Ego," and "Super-ego."

Relatedly, Mead missed the importance that Freud placed on the law, and, more particularly, on the law of the father; or, put differently, Mead missed the importance placed on the function of the father within Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Had Mead engaged in Freudian doctrine with the attention of Lacan he would have noticed an odd conflation of "Me" and "imaginary." He would have also noticed the way in which his theory supplanted the symbolic agency of the *Name-of-the-Father* as law, while disavowing its function. The symbolic order is here both "censor" and guarantor of the imaginary sense of self—but it could only offer the latter because of the former function. To my knowledge, Mead allowed himself access to only one of the popular Freudian concepts: the "censor." He picked only what he needed from the Freudian toolbox, only what he needed to gain additional credibility for his theory (in this case, a single concept from Freud's most popular work at the time, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1899) and opted to not follow the Freudian insight any further. Like most American sociologists, he chose to relate his work to the Freudian discovery in order to gain legitimacy, even while rejecting the Freudian discovery in practice.

On the other hand, Mead's related concept of the "I" was described with the following two components: first, the "I" is not a "Me" and can never become a "Me"; and, second, the "I" is a response of the organism to the attitudes of others [that is, to the "Me"] (Mead 1934). If, in the first case, Mead neglected the Freudian discovery of "symbolic" agencies by focusing only on the "imaginary" agencies, then, in the second case, he neglected the possibility that the "I" was related to a *real* agency. Admittedly, the concept of the "real" was developed many decades later by Lacan, but it nonetheless was already present in the details of key works from Freud (especially in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). The most popular example of the real within Freudian theory was in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which there is always also the "navel" of the dream. The navel of the dream is that portion of the dream-work that exists beyond any meaningful interpretation:

> There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unraveled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. (Freud 1899: 525)

The real was already conceived in the work of Freud but its theoretical and practical consequences were seldom drawn by those who only dabbled. The real is that hard kernel of the dream that exists beyond interpretation, beyond the latent and manifest content, it is the "navel" of the dream. But it is also the radical libidinal stratum of the organism which resists absolutely any symbolic or imaginary determinations. However, as Lacan indicated in his 19th seminar, the real is produced as a necessity within and by discourse: "I propose to define [it] as what is produced by the necessity of a discourse. […] The real is affirmed in the impasses […]" (Lacan 2018: 29). The real was perhaps even there in a more naïve form during Freud's early theories, as the remnant of the "things" existing outside of the mental apparatus (see Rousselle 2013), as the various versions of the "reality" principle.

The real is one of Lacan's most misunderstood and elusive terms precisely because it describes the elusiveness beyond discourse, language, and image. Lacan put it in no uncertain terms: "the real is that which resists symbolization absolutely" (Lacan [1953] 1991: 66). On another occasion he warned his students to "be wary of the image." The real is the only agency of the tripartite structure of "Symbolic," "Imaginary," and "Real" that is not at all conditioned by or incorporated into Mead's conversations of "gestures," which are supposed to be the primordial ingredients of social interaction. Indeed, the real operates through its very resistance to these gestures hitting their mark within the social link. Mead, working through theories from Wilhelm Wundt, claimed that human beings are to be distinguished from other animals because they can imagine the significant meanings of various gestures within the Other's mind. Human beings are capable of anticipating responses from the Other, and, indeed, of bringing those responses from the Other into being. What makes a gesture truly "significant"—note that "significant" is another word for "signify" or "signification," through the Latin *significantem*, for "meaning"—is the ability to "arouse in the individual making [the gesture] the same responses which they explicitly arouse, or are supposed to arouse, in other individuals" (Mead 1934: 47). Thus, we can feel what the Other feels, and come to therefore have a bond with the other precisely through significant symbols.

I want to take a moment to break down the theory of gestures. The gesture begins, according to Mead, through the voice. Thus, a gesture is another word for what Ferdinand de Saussure or Jacques Lacan named a "signifier." Initially this first signifier is without meaning,

without signification, or, to use the Saussurean expression: it is without a mental "concept." It is only a "significant" gesture when the social link is established with the Other, at which point we have what Saussure named a "sign," or what Lacan claimed to be a retroactive tying of signifiers into an imaginary meaning. The subject is constituted—or, if you like, "mind" is constituted—only through this hooking around the Other through signification. No doubt, this is why Mead argued that a vocal gesture must turn or loop back in upon itself so that one can in a sense speak and hear at the same time. Mead wrote:

> It is by means of reflexiveness — the turning back of the experience of the individual upon himself — that the whole social process is thus brought into the experience of the individuals involved in it; it is by such means, which enable the individual to take the attitude of the other toward himself, that the individual is able consciously to adjust himself to that process, and to modify the resultant of that process in any given social act in terms of his adjustment to it. Reflexiveness, then, is the essential condition, within the social process, for the development of mind. (Mead 1934: 132–134)

It is the "I" as real that constitutes the "cut" in the social bond: it cuts into the social fabric of the Other, it cuts into the social fabric of the "generalized other," or, finally, it cuts into the "Me." The problem is that Mead did not adequately explore the implications of the "I" for sociology, and he was not able to extend its function into other domains of mental or social life in the same way that Lacan did through his "return to Freud."

The importance of these gestures for the establishment of a social bond has nowhere been more obvious for me than in my assessment of casual everyday exchanges between individuals within Canada and within the United States. Within Canada, for example, when one bumps into another person on the street there is an iteration of apologies. Or, to take another example, when an individual wishes to cross a highway on foot, a driver will stop his car in the middle of the street and motion for the individual to cross. The individual will resist this gesture, and then insist that the driver continue along his journey uninterrupted. The driver will then insist once again, and the individual will reluctantly cross the street. It is only after this series of exchanges that both parties can continue their day *but now with a sustained reflection on how unsettling*

was the entire interaction. It is in this way that the social link is made. In the United States midwest something different seems to occur: when one bumps into another person on the street there is an instant apology, with the returned statement "No, you're fine." Canadians, in my example, seem to use kindness as a front for a social bond based around antagonism with the Other, while Americans use kindness as a quick and dirty solution to engagement with the Other. For Americans, the social bond dissolves very quickly, it is a fleeting experience, and for Canadians the social bond is sustained through neurotic antagonism vis-à-vis the Other.

There is also a similarity among Mead's concept of the "Generalized Other," which is, roughly speaking, an internalized repository of social values, and Jacques Lacan's more obtuse notion of the "big Other." If the Meadian notion of the "I" could have been advanced to account for the agency of the real, then, similarly, the Meadian notion of the "generalized other" could have been explored at some point in its relation to the Lacanian "big Other." The problem was that Mead flattened out the Other (the "generalized other") by placing it squarely within the imaginary: it refers to the imaginary semblance of self. Mead wrote that "[t]he organized community or social group […] gives to the individual his *unity of self* may be called 'the generalized other.' The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community" (Mead 1934; emphasis added). The "unity of self" may otherwise be referred to as "consistency of ego," or, "imaginary self-presentation." In psychoanalytic communities this is often referred to as the process of "introjection," a concept coined by Sandor Ferenczi. However, introjection, claimed Lacan, is not an introjection of images but rather of signifiers—it is therefore crucial that one has elaborated a theory of signifiers, a theory of the symbolic. American psychoanalysts, especially those who take up the work of Melanie Klein, refer to the introjection of "objects." Lacan, in his *Ecrits,* claimed that this is a problematic and one-sided view of Freud's process (Lacan 1977: 655). To correct the theory, Lacan claimed that one *projects* images (this is the theory of "projection") and one *introjects* signifiers.

Mead famously dreamed up the following game analogy:

> The fundamental difference between the game and play is that in the latter the child must have the attitude of all of the others involved in that game. The attitudes of the other players which the participant assumes organize into a sort of unit, and it is that organization which controls the response of the individual. The illustration used was of a person playing baseball.

> Each one of his own acts is determined by his assumption of the action of the others who are playing the game. What he does is controlled by his being everyone else on that team, at least in so far as those attitudes affect his own particular response. We get then an "other" which is an organization of the attitudes of those involved in the same process. (Mead 1934)

Symbolic rules (pertaining to the game) become reduced in their function to an excuse for the discovery and production of a fuller sense of self, that is, to the projection of an imaginary ego. What mattered for George Herbert Mead was not that one come to understand the symbolic coordinates of the game—its prohibitive rules (e.g., "thou shall not …"), its "grammar," and so on—but that the imaginary roles of each of the other players be internalized so as to properly "organize" or produce this "unity" embodied in the "social self." Thus, the social self is rendered as an imaginary consistency by Mead.

These are merely two cases wherein Mead mistook the symbolic for the imaginary, two cases wherein he replaced the symbolic function for a sufficient substitute imaginary semblance: the case of the "Me" as "social self" and the case of the "generalized other" as the coherent internalization of societal attitudes. I have pointed to these two cases only because they seem to me to be the most repeated aspects of Mead's theory within sociology courses in America. Put simply, the lesson is this: Mead's pragmatic sociology forbade any symbolic function which could hold his discourse together. No wonder the word "father" appears nowhere in his pioneering *Mind, Self and Society*, while the word "mother" appears time and again: "a child plays at being a mother, at being a teacher, at being a policeman; that is, it is taking different roles" (Mead 1934). These roles may be understood as the circulation of S1s across the imaginary axis of identification—Mead could not here accept the father as an intervention into the sort of roles that the Mother provides for her children. According to Mead, it is only in the later stage of maturity that these "roles" become consolidated into fixed identifications. With luck, they may even achieve a more stable and long-lasting identification (organized into a "unit") for the subject, thereby forming its more mature social self. In a word, the theory of the mother devours most of Mead's theory, and the father never really steps in except as a substitute through the grammatical semblance of rules involved in playing at games.

In fact, for Mead, part of the ordinary development of mental life for children is not to respond to the name-of-the-father but rather to seek out and turn towards a substitutive imaginary paternal function:

> [Children] *make rules on the spot* in order to help themselves out of difficulties. Part of the enjoyment of the game is to get these rules. Now, the rules are the set of responses which a particular attitude calls out. You can demand a certain response in others if you take a certain attitude. These responses are all in yourself as well. (Mead 1934; emphasis added)

It is the ability to make rules on the spot that helps to fabricate a social link. The pragmatic turn toward imaginary rules assists in the production of S1s. In Meadian language, these S1s perform the function of imagined rules which stabilize the child and form the backdrop of all of the child's later demands within discourse: $\$ \rightarrow S1$. It is only after passing through this stage that all of the attitudes of others cohere into a network of signifiers, otherwise referred to as knowledge. This may be formulated in the following way: $\$ \rightarrow S1 \rightarrow S2$. Notably, this is the flow of capitalist discourse. It is not that there are universal rules in the form of prohibitions which the child actively attempts to repress (obsession) and to combat (hysteria) but rather that there are endless props which sustain the setting of our social interactions, of our social bond, with our audience, with the Others that exist within the theatre of our everyday performance of self.

What is most remarkable about capitalist discourse, indeed what is most remarkable about George Herbert Mead's theory, is that it does not at all discuss the social implications of love. How could one of the most central of social relations not at all be discussed during the period of the formation of the school of symbolic interactionism? Jacques Lacan famously said in one of his late seminars that "any discourse that resembles capitalism leaves aside what we will simply call the things of love, my friends" (Lacan 1972). He also claimed that capitalism has as its key project to not only quickly flee from subjective destitution but also to get rid of the obstacles of love and sex: "that's simply capitalism set straight. Back to zero, then, for the issue of sex, since anyway capitalism, that was its starting point: getting rid of sex" (Lacan 1972). Is this not what happens today within the so-called secular West? Tinder, dating agencies, and a culture of happiness/enjoyment, of "cool" careers and jobs, are more important to many Americans today than love and marriage.

At best, the "cool" career (and here I am using the word "cool" in all of its McLuhanian luster), the pursuit of happiness and enjoyment, determines, precisely, our love lives: it is the career and our personal happiness/enjoyment which *must* come first, and *then*, if we are lucky enough, serious love interests can be pursued. If we get married, it is the "prison" of our enjoyment, of our happiness. But we should only get married if it does not seriously pose an obstacle to our enjoyment or to our career.

Does this not demonstrate not only that "arranged marriages" exist in a more nefarious form within so-called Western "secular" American culture but that, moreover, our marriages and love lives are increasingly arranged not by the personal preferences of our close loved ones (e.g., family, father, etc.), but rather by the much more impersonal capitalist market itself? Today our love lives are arranged almost entirely by the market, and more and more we become objects of the obscure algorithms of capitalism: by dating agencies, by dating apps, by our coworkers, and so on. The contingencies, vulnerabilities, and risks associated with sex are a thing of the past. It is the removal of *risk*, that is, of the *obstacle*, that demonstrates the ingenuity of capitalist discourse: it is without the *real* obstacle of the *relationship*.

We could have seen warning signs of the current situation in the work of the early American sociologists. They also did away with the problems of sex and love. Mead wrote:

> In the more or less fantastic psychology of the Freudian group, thinkers are dealing with the sexual life and with self-assertion in its violent form. The normal situation, however, is one which involves a reaction of the individual in a situation which is socially determined, […] he brings his own responses as an 'I'. (Mead 1934)

The above passage demonstrates that Mead, like many American thinkers and sociologists, believed that Freud dedicated far too much time to sexual life. Indeed, the American sociologists never wanted to address sexual life or psychoanalytic theory in "its violent form." They saw this as a defect of Freudian theory: the agency of the real, of death-drive, of *jouissance*, and so on, were all reasons to avoid a full engagement with psychoanalysis. Thus, they opted for piece-meal psychoanalysis, they opted for psychoanalysis without the real. Yet, the real is precisely what returns, in a strange and troubling form, in the undeveloped theory of the "I." Indeed, the "I" could have been introduced as a site of real sexual obstacle—the violent form—since it was "a response of

the organism," it could have been understood as the site of subjective destitution, $. Instead, it withdraws immediately because of prior social identifications registered in the "Me": $ → S1 → S2 → *a*. In their eagerness to construct a caricature of Freudian psychoanalysis as overly concerned with "biology" these sociologists certainly neglected the real. Yet, Mead, nonetheless invented an "I" which had its support in biology.

Other rudimentary elements of Mead's work may be compared with Lacan's theory, such as, for example, the Meadian "significant symbol" or "gesture" and the Lacanian "unary trait." The theory of the "unary trait" is already apparent in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913), but Lacan advanced further by finding within the unary trait the subject's possible emergence into language, that is, into the world of signifiers. The unary trait is located at the juncture of the symbolic and the imaginary, and it permits the subject to push from the latter towards the former (imaginary → symbolic, rather than symbolic → imaginary). Hewitson (2018) wrote that "Lacan's innovation on Freud's initial insight was to move us beyond thinking of these unary traits as merely imaginary traits, and instead conceive of them as purely formal marks, like those made by the prehistoric cavemen." The Lacanian theory of the unary trait has become very important in recent discussions of subjectivity within psychoanalysis. I have argued elsewhere that the unary trait functions as a compensatory function for the subject after the collapse of the paternal (symbolic) name-of-the-father (Rousselle 2018). This point was made wonderfully by Veronique Voruz: "[the unary trait] punctuate[s] [the] enunciation in its progressive making sense of the real" (Voruz 2004: 290). We can see how the unary trait may be key to understanding the movement of the psychotic subject into the perverse world of language: the unary trait offers the subject a social link on the spot. It now seems as though the unary trait has more to do with the origin of the subject for the signifier: it is not simply that the subject was passive in the first place, but rather that the child actively brings himself into being as a subject through the prohibition of the mother's desire.

Charles Baudelaire, the famous poet and translator of Poe, elaborated with careful artistry the situation of a small boy who witnessed his father dressing: the boy "looked at the arm muscle, the colour tones of the skin tinged with rose and yellow, and the bluish network of veins" (Baudelaire 1964: 8). This is how the father was brought into the world as a social link, as an Other, for the subject. This is how the child became not the *poet* of everyday life but rather the "painter of everyday life."

Mead wrote that:

> [A] gesture […] calls out an appropriate response; in the present case we have a symbol which answers to a meaning in the experience of the first individual and which also calls out that meaning in the second individual. Where the gesture reaches that situation it has become what we call 'language.' It is not a significant symbol and it signifies a certain meaning. (Mead 1934)

The gesture, like the Lacanian "unary trait," strives towards meaning, it strives towards language and the network of signifiers (S2), and it achieves that dignity only, finally, when it has *imagined* the appropriate response in the mind of the other. One has only to add to all of this the following: it succeeds only when it *imagines* a response in the mind of the Other at that place within the Other which the subject finds to be lacking. This is the basis of language, and it is the basis for the establishment of S2 as such: the subject refutes the possibility of a lack in the Other: s(Ⱥ) (signifier of the barred Other). The perverse subject responds by disavowing the lack in the Other and, similarly, by disavowing the lack in himself.

I turn now to the work of Charles Horton Cooley and Erving Goffman.

Charles Horton Cooley and Erving Goffman

There is something obvious about the relationship of Charles Horton Cooley's theory of the "looking-glass self" and the early Lacanian theory of the "mirror stage" (see Cooley 1922; Lacan [1949] 2006). Indeed, because my aim is not to state the obvious, but rather to attempt an intervention, I shall avoid the obvious similarities and focus on more urgent matters concerning the inadequacies of Cooley's work in relation to Lacan's. In both cases, the mirror is used as an analogy for understanding the social formation of the self: put simply, one obtains a sense of self through the perceived judgements of another who acts, analogously, as one's mirror image. What is most peculiar is that even this similarity of Cooley's "Looking-Glass Self" theory and Lacan's "Mirror Stage" theory has not, to my knowledge, been explored by any scholar.

Cooley introduced his theory of the "looking-glass self" in the following way:

> A social self of this sort might be called the reflected or looking-glass self: 'Each to each a looking-glass […] reflects the other that doth pass.' […] In imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it. (Cooley 1922: 152)

The looking-glass self is radically imaginary in that it is situated somewhere at the juncture of the imaginary relationship among egos (i.e., "object relations") and its judgements. Lacan's earlier teaching focused on the axes of the *a*-to-*a′* relationship, that is, the specular relationship. Indeed, Lacan claimed that the *a*-to-*a′* relationship fundamentally obscures the unconscious "symbolic relationship" of the subject to the big Other (the "S-to-A" relationship). Cooley was not at all interested in exploring the symbolic unconscious as an independent agency, he did not at all see the symbolic unconscious as foundational for the specular relationship of egos. Indeed, because of this, he was not at all prepared to explore the *real* unconscious—the drives and the navel of the interpretation.

We might follow this logic through to the end: first, against the position of subjective destitution, which is the threat of not knowing the self, we imagine ourselves, according to Cooley, from the perspective of the other; second, we react or respond to a perceived judgement concerning that idea placed inside of the repository of the other's mind; and, third, we proceed to reformulate our sense of self, that is, our ego, in a higher and more consistent or authentic form. This maps into three sub-processes of the internalization of a sense of self: (1) subjective destitution → *imagine*, (2) react → *judgment*, and (3) knowledge → *self*. It is through subjective destitution, or, rather, with subjective destitution as the 'cause' of the circuit, that imagination sets in; next, it is through the reaction of that imagination that one reacts to oneself with a judgement, and; finally, it is from the judgement that some knowledge or self-awareness becomes produced precisely about our self (e.g., who we are in this world, and so on). I shall provide the following example: (1) subjective destitution → imagine myself as a wonderful professor (compensation), (2) react → I perceive students who doubt my abilities, who perhaps think I may be an idiot, and (3) knowledge → I reformulate myself more modestly as a professor who is not so wonderful. Thus, we have the following series of stages in the formation of the social self: (1) imagination, (2) judgement, and (3) self.

Put another way: (1) we *imagine*, in that we imagine our "self" from the perspective of an other—Why?: to overcome a self that is lacking in some respect, a self that has been experienced as tortured or suffering, a self that strives to be more than it can be: that is, to *exist*; (2) we react by responding to some perceived *judgment*—as Cooley put it, it is an "imagined judgement," in that what matters is not whether or not the judgement really exists but rather that it is perceived to be threatening for the subject; and, finally (3) we become our fuller and truer self, in that we constitute for ourselves some knowledge about our self—it is this *knowledge* that provides some compensation during the dark moments of subjectivation. Thus, in the Lacanian algebra these three stages would be written as follows: (1) $, (2) S1, (3) S2.

Thus, the movement is: $ → S1 → S2; from *imagination* to *judgment*, and, finally, towards the constitution of a body of *knowledge*. Crucial, here, is that, logically speaking, the judgement comes after the imagination, after the image. This is quite different from the classical Lacanian theory of the image: the image, in Lacan's early teaching, is the retroactive construction of a judgement—the judgement of the name-of-the-father. We can see this most especially in Lacan's seminar on ethics: "[t]he presence of judgement […] is essential to the structure [of subjectivity]" (Lacan 1960: 240; my translation). No wonder Cooley wrote the following: "[t]he power to make these judgments is intuitive, imaginative, not arrived at by ratiocination, but it is dependent upon experience" (Cooley 1922: 71).

Cooley went on to discuss the imaginary quality of a judgement, which always involves a game of imitation by the subject, and which succeeds (e.g., its "cash value"): "we can tell by the tone of a dog's bark whether he is a biting dog or only a barking dog" (Cooley 1922: 71). Curiously, it is often the dog, as a classical "phobic object," that the child chooses as a stand-in object for the threatening father. This is demonstrated most effectively in Freud's discussion of "Little Hans" (in his "Analysis of a Case of Phobia in a Five-Year Old Boy") where the little boy's fear of horses was exposed as a substitution or displacement not of the mother but of the father's castration function: the little boy's real father did not adequately intervene as a function of castration. A phobic object occurs as an imaginary object which substitutes for a symbolic paternal function (e.g., the dog, the horse, and so on). In any case, for Cooley, the imaginary takes on symbolic significance, it substitutes for symbolic efficacy. A large portion of Cooley's work was devoted to "the

case of those arts which imitate the human face and figure," as in painting, illustrating, art and literature, and so on (Cooley 1922: 71). This is curious in that it demonstrates a preference not for the function of castration—and its consequence in the real—but rather for the image, figure, and face of beauty.

The imaginary substitute for symbolic judgement appears nowhere more forcefully than in the Lacanian expression of the "mirror *stage*." The "stage" in the mirror analogy should be understood today not as if it were a *phase* of mental development but rather as a theatrical stage upon which our role and performance is secured. For Cooley, a consistent role is achieved by way of the audience whose gaze the actor feels as a judgement. The work of a later Canadian-American sociologist, Erving Goffman, famously made use of theatre as an analogy for understanding the social construction of "self." Although Goffman's work has many benefits over similar work conducted by Judith Butler, it nonetheless also comes with its fair share of problems.

Take his most famous work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956). According to Goffman, it is the analogous theatrical stage that helps the actor overcome the traumatic real of subjective destitution. There is for Goffman nothing behind the superficiality of the performance, of the act, of the roles. Put another way, one never takes off the imaginary mask that is used to conceal lack itself: thus, for Goffman, there is no real self beneath the mask or role. When someone says, as my ex-wife often did, "if only you knew the real Duane …," there is the comforting assumption that Duane is merely putting on a performance and that there is another more authentic self that has been hidden somewhere from the public. Goffman's view is that there is no more authentic self that is hiding behind the mask, rather, there is something even more authentic, precisely, in taking the mask seriously *as mask*. You cannot take off the masks, you cannot stop the performances, but this point has never been adequately explored in any dramatic way by any of the American sociologists. The impossibility of there being anything beneath the mask is the very name that Lacan gave to the *real*, and it is this *real* that makes possible our sustained conviction that the imaginary performance is *reality*. This is why Alenka Zupancic recently wrote: "in this precise sense, [the real] is of ontological relevance: not as an ultimate reality, but as an inherent twist, or stumbling block, of reality" (Zupancic 2017: 3). What Zupancic means here is that the real is not the images you see before you in your everyday life: it is rather the distortion,

disruption, confusion that by necessity bleeds into those images of everyday social interaction. Goffman wrote that "the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality" (Goffman 1956: 10). When this happens the actor loses the frame—Goffman sometimes referred to this as "down-keying"—and becomes duped by the comfort of the image at the expense of the revelation of the performance as threaded together by a fundamental impossibility.

Goffman provided us with the thread, but he did not pull on it: he distinguished among the *real* and *reality*. The performance—imaginary as it is—is never the *real* reality, it is only an *imagined* reality, but, nonetheless, for that very reason, it appears to us as *more real than the real*. Reality is always this *more-real* than *real* experience, it is always there to keep us from confronting the traumatic real which forms the authentic backdrop of our everyday lives. In this sense, the real is subtractive. Nonetheless, there are moments when belief in the reality of the performance breaks down. These are moments when the real slips into the act: an actor forgets his or her line, the performer trips on stage, the musician vomits, and so on. I have referred to these "slips" as moments of "subjective destitution." These are the moments when the image is revealed in its real foundation. We stop suspending our disbelief in the image, and begin to believe, precisely, in the inadequacy of the act.

Is it not interesting that an audience tends to suspend their disbelief in the performance during those moments when the performance stages itself precisely as artificial? For example, it often amazes me how there are no critical discussions of the unreality of superhero movies, and yet people continue to view them and fall entirely into its imaginary universe. Yet, the realism of a film like *Gravity* (2013) by Alfonso Curon was the subject of critical commentary—"one of the screws floated in the wrong direction," "Sandra Bullock's hair was moving too much in one scene," and so on—because of its apparent inability to suspend our disbelief. What this demonstrates is that the audience requires, quite fundamentally, more artificiality, more virtuality, in order to suspend their disbelief and immerse themselves into the fantasy as if it were a reality as such. Conversely, the audience requires more realist pretensions within film in order to achieve the critical distance required from the film and see as a performance (e.g., Goffman might have named this "up-keying," that is, exposing the frame as *frame*; Goffman 1974). We can therefore

understand the power of theatrical performances of antiquity as compared to the power of cinematic performances today.

Goffman discovered moments of "over-identification" or "cynicism" in actors and audience members. He wrote:

> I have suggested two extremes: an individual may be taken in by his own act or be cynical about it. These extremes are […] a little more than just the ends of a continuum. Each provides the individual with a position which has its own particular securities and defenses, so there will be a tendency for those who have travelled close to one of these poles to complete the voyage. (Goffman 1956: 11)

The voyage is complete only when one recognizes, as Robert Park once put it, that "the word person, in its first meaning, *is a* mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role […] it is our truer self" (Robert Park as quoted by Goffman 1956: 11–12). Goffman repeats here the problem of Mead, while nonetheless making a crucial advancement: judgement is reduced to an imaginary projective function: "when an individual appears before others, he wittingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which a conception of himself is an important part" (Goffman 1956: 155). This structuring sense of self, of imaginary ego, becomes the sole support of a judgement, and, moreover, the sole support of any social situation. We might even say that it becomes the sole support of his discourse and social link.

Whereas social interaction is often understood in relation to the imaginary exchange of meaning, Goffman was able to develop a situational or structural analysis that has its principal function as imaginary. Goffman's structuralism, unlike French structuralism, did not have a symbolic dimension, and this is why Goffman was cherished by symbolic interactionists and structuralists alike. Goffman's level of analysis is best revealed in the following passage:

> [W]e often find that the individual may deeply involve his ego in his identification with a particular role, establishment, and group and in his self-conception as someone who does not disrupt social interaction or let down the social units which depend upon that interaction. (Goffman 1956: 156)

Incidentally, there are numerous stories told by sociologists within the academic gossip-mill about Goffman's personality. Rumors and gossip abound about his perverse social behaviour. For example, once at a conference I was told about Goffman slowly removing furniture from a classroom while two people were in dialogue with one another. He did this to witness whether the frame of their social interaction would be disturbed; put psychoanalytically, he did it to attempt to provoke anxiety in the Other. Goffman was actively involved in his own impression management, and found within social theory a conduit for judgements concerning his own self. His attitude was no different from the current attitude of the Canadian actor Jim Carrey. As Carey once put it: "Jim Carrey does not actually exist […] There is no me. […] Jim Carrey is an idea my parents gave me. It's like an avatar. These are all the things I am. You are not an actor, or a lawyer. No one is a lawyer. There are lawyers, law is practiced, but no one is a lawyer. There is no one, in fact, there" (Carrey 2018).

References

Baudelaire, Charles. 1964. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. J. Mayne. London: Phaidon Press.

Blumer, Herbert. 1963. Society as Symbolic Interaction. In *Human Behavior and Social Processes*, ed. Arnold Rose, 179–192. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Blumer, Herbert. 1986. *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Methods*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Carrey, Jim. 2018. There Is No Me. In *The Talks*. As Retrieved on September 2, 2018 from http://the-talks.com/interview/jim-carrey/.

Cooley, Charles H. 1922. *Human Nature and Social Order*. New York: Charles Scribner's Press.

Freud, Sigmund. 1899. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Leipzig und Wien: Franz Deuticke.

Goffman, Erving. 1956. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Random House.

Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Hewitson, Owen. 2018. Shades of Subjectivity III. *Lacan Online*. As Retrieved on July 14, 2018 from http://www.lacanonline.com/index/2013/07/shades-of-subjectivity-iii/.

Lacan, Jacques. 1960. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: l'Ethique, 1959–1960. As Retrieved on September 2, 2018 from http://staferla.free.fr/S7/S7%20L'ETHIQUE.pdf.

Lacan, Jacques. 1972. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX (1972–1973). As Retrieved on April 22, 2018 from http://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/s20_encore.pdf.

Lacan, Jacques. 1977. *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan and ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. London: Tavistock Publications.

Lacan, Jacques. [1953] 1991. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, trans. John Forrester and ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. New York: W. W. Norton.

Lacan, Jacques. [1949] 2006. The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function. In *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink and ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, 75–81. New York: W. W. Norton.

Lacan, Jacques. 2018. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XIX: … Or Worse*, trans. Adrian Price and ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Cambridge: Polity Books.

Mead, George Herbert. 1934. *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. As Retrieved on June 18, 2018 from http://livros01.livros-gratis.com.br/bu000001.pdf.

Ritzer, George. 2008. *Sociological Theory*, 8th ed. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Rousselle, Duane. 2013. The New Hysterical Question. In *Umbr(a): The Object*, ed. Joan Copjec, 71–88. New York: The Center for the Study of Psychoanalysis and Culture.

Rousselle, Duane. 2018. A Portrait of Baudelaire as a 'Man of Genius': Ordinary Psychosis Within the Age of Modernity. *Psychoanalysis Lacan* 3. See http://psychoanalysislacan.com/.

SSSI. 2018. Society Information. As Retrieved on July 13, 2018 from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/15338665/homepage/society.html.

Voruz, Veronique. 2004. The Topology of the Subject of Law. In *Lacan: Topological Speaking* ed. Ellie Ragland and Dragon Milovanovic, 282–313. New York: Other Press.

Zupancic, Alenka. 2017. *What Is Sex?* Cambridge: MIT Press.