



THE PROBLEM OF NARCISSISMO IN MEDIA SPACE

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Abstract:

The article "The problem of narcissism in media sphere" is about the contemporary philosophical problem of the identity's crisis. The author of this article connects this phenomenon with the development of media technologies in XXI century. Given article represents psychoanalytic perusal of the identity's problem in the conditions of new media. Narcissistic identification is the unique way to acquire ourselves in the modern world of media. Narcissism is the type of subjectivity in XXI media-century. Domination of the Image and the space of Imaginary are the result of intrusion media technologies into human sphere of being. The modern person finds identity through the surface of the inter-face which broadcasts infinite number of images. Now human-identity becomes media-identity. And peoples try to find themselves behind the screen. The hero of XXI century is Narcissus who takes pleasure through himself and who perceives his body as the partial object. Measurement of Other is lost for the modern person. This article is the psychoanalysis of daily occurrence, where media is the analysant (the patient). Media is the analysant (patient) of XXI century.

Key words: the mirror stage, narcissism, moi, je, Lacan, media.

A credulous man, why are you getting hold of a running ghost?

You are craving that which is not; should you turn away - that which you love will
disappear.

The shadow, which you see, is just a reflected image, nothing more.

(Ovid "Metamorphoses")

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"Alas to me!" - exclaimed Narcissus, looking at his reflection, before death closed his eyes. "Alas to me!" - responded the Echo. Thus, Narcissus died, not having had time to be born. To be born as a subject of statement in the order of the Symbolic.

" *Helas a moi !* " - Narcissus would have exclaimed, had he known French.

" *Alas my own self.* ", " *Alas self!* " - Lacan would have translated this phrase if he had written in English.

The above mentioned word combination sounds as an inviting cry of a child, as an unarticulated desire, as an exclamation of disappointment in self, discovering the prematurity of one's birth, acknowledging one's own insufficiency. The unconscious sees "alas self (*moi*) "at the encounter with a mirror surface, being unable to say I (*je*), yet.

Narcissus's drama is that he was incapable of dealing with alienation, which appeared at the encounter with his own image. "He is me! I understand. I was misled by the image!" Narcissus couldn't put up with the fact that *his own self* did not belong to him. It turned out unbearable for him to face his own insufficiency; he was unable to endure his own split. It is the impossibility of connecting the physical - me and the image-of- self that evokes the undertone of "Alas" in alienation. "Alas" is a disunited body, which is found behind the illusory unity of one's own self. "Alas" is the Other, whom I constantly need, because he has got my desire.

"Alas to me! Alas self!" is the first cry of the incipient subject, the first step on the road of its formation.

Of the two possible outcomes from the imaginary mirror slavery, which are death or identification, Narcissus chose Death, or, maybe, Identification with Death. What destiny is prepared for the Narcissus of the XXI century media will show.

Narcissus, who is unable to say anything about himself





In psychoanalytical reading the myth about Narcissus is a poetical description of the theory of the mirror stage, which was presented in the work by Jacques Lacan « The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Ego, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience » (1949r). The mirror stage is the starting phase of human development on the way of his becoming a subject. It is the period, in which a person, like Narcissus, finds himself as another person, coming across his double in the reflection of a mirror surface. The person becomes seized with his own image, which appears as the product of his visible illusions. That which he sees in the mirror is a returned form of himself, a projection of his own body outside, a certain optical frame of his bodily self.

The mirror stage, as becomes clear from the title of the article, holds a shape-generating function. What does it mean? It is at the mirror stage that the person meets himself for the first time. Thanks to a visible image an integral idea of one's own body, one's own self, is formed. Auto-erotic corporal atomism is replaced by an imaginary sense of integrity and fullness through identification with a visible image. A construction of body in the image and likeness of oneself is taking place. It is such a condition between auto-erotism and object love that can be characterized as narcissism.

Lacan divorces the notions of my own self (*moi*) and I (*je*). At the mirror stage my own self (*moi*) is formed as an image of self, which refers to the register of the Imagined, and a spacial identification is introduced, which in its turn sets the relations between the image of self and the visual environment. While I (*je*) refers to the register of the Symbolic and is connected with the language and the ability to identify one's place in the world of others, to pronounce, "It is I". In other words, I (*je*) is the ability to speak about myself (*moi*). The *I* is a subject placed into a symbolic structure where the law of the Other, of language, of culture, and of order reigns. The *I* is in the place, which is the font of the first





signifier, from which the endless sliding of signifiers, concealing the truth of desire, is launched. It is here that the history of the subject's formation originates.

Narcissus deals with *his own self*, he is a prisoner of the looking glass, dweller of the Universe of the Imagined. He is a man without a place, without a desire, without words. His place was occupied by the other on the other side of the mirror. This other person is a ghost, ideal - I, who is nothing else but the result of primary identification of the mirror stage. Ideal - I is the instance, which occurred while going through initial narcissism, which will be an example for all the consequent repeated identifications. As for Narcissus, having identified himself with the ideals of his own self, he fell into imaginary relationships with an image, excluding surrounding people from his visual field, which doomed him to a complete absence of object love:

" - That which I can't touch,

I will at least contemplate, feeding my unhappy passion!"¹

It is libido being closed up on oneself which characterizes the condition of narcissism, typical of autoerotic phase of development. Narcissus looks like an autistic being, deprived of connection with the visual environment. He is overfilled with superfluous pleasure, wandering in his body. Finally, it found the way out in a lethal discharge.

As we see, Narcissus's eroticism turns into autoeroticism. Narcissus is terribly in love with himself. Meanwhile he is extremely aggressive to the other in himself. The aggressiveness is directly connected with the phenomenon of alienation: I do not see myself in the reflection, but the other. The other possesses the fullness of being, the other receives pleasure instead of me, the other is self-sufficient. The opportunity to suppress aggressiveness and to enter into relationships with the other is carried out through the





projection of ideal - I on the Other, which will become the bearer of the ideal, thus making it unreachable. It is the other who saves from a deadly closeness to ideal - I, creates deficiency and constitutes desire. From now on I do not belong to myself, I need the Other. The Other is the bearer of my desire. Now it is not I who looks at myself from the mirror, it is the Other who is looking at me. That which becomes important is not how I look, but how I look in the eyes of the Other. I have eyes but I can't see, because my look is on the side of the Other, my look is always returned. A look is the spot from which I am looked at.

And what if I am looked at from the screen? Or I myself am looking at myself from the screen? Or, maybe, I am looking at myself, at others and at the visual environment from the screen? But what does *self* fail to see on the other side of the screen?

Media Is Looking at and Showing

I cannot see object *a*. It is a spot, a blind spot, which appears behind the mask of void. This spot avoids me, because it is from here that the screen (media) returns my look, looks at me. In the point of object *a* the look becomes written into the visual field of reality.

So, media is a point of view. It is the point of view of the returned look, which constitutes you from without.

Media is a person's prosthetic device, his continuation in the world. The prosthetic device, which belongs and doesn't belong to the subject, is his own and foreign to him simultaneously. Fulfilling the function of a prosthetic device, media is on the border of the outward and the inward, thus establishing and violating these borders. *Media are looking at you from within and are showing you on the outside.*





Media is a part of the psychic space, The Universe of the Imaginary, which tempts us. Media space works as a reflecting surface, which allows to see oneself, but to see in the reflection, for the person perceives him- or herself different from what he or she is. Media space is extremely narcissistic, it deploys a field of endless identifications, where the subject becomes captured by images (ideal - I's), the images of self in the capacity of others. Media is a factory to produce imaginary doubles.

Media is a narcissistic trap, the bait of which is the elusive object α . The screen in all of its manifestations is an aggressive machine of eliminating desire, which is always a desire of the Other. Imposing a desire upon the subject, commanding to receive pleasure by means of one's own body, the screen destroys the dimension of the Other, liquidates deficiency and brings a person to a narcissistic self-worship. Thus, a narcotic effect is manifested in media space. Media is a syringe to inject narcosis into Narcissus's body.

That is why the XX and XXI centuries are the Era of controlled narcissism, controlled by means of media - a system of consumption, advertisement ideology, and vogue. The contemporary person lives in "the autoerotic Land of Tenderness", where everyone is responsible for their own body and must use it with profit. Nowadays it is not the image which constitutes and forms the body, but the body is shaped in accordance with the screen image. A person acts as a designer of his or her own body, changing him- or herself in compliance with the scheme of prestige and consumption. The Narcissus of the XXI century is a victim of plastic surgery, who is obsessed with altering his own body. Dependent on the scalpel, Narcissus has made his body a place of public discussions. In the endless play with images of his body he has turned into a practicing transsexual, who does not follow a normal desire of possessing a definite identity. Surgery acts as a means of bringing nearer the internal image and the outward looks, doesn't it? As a result, there





is no need to identify oneself with the image given from without: "Everything I thirst for is with me. I became poor because of wealth.

Oh, if only I could part from my own body!"²

A postmodern subject does not accept the authority of the foundations of law, society over modeling of identity. He or she believes in the possibility of self-creation, in the possibility of playing with his or her own sexual identity, in the possibility of turning him- or herself into an artwork. Narcissus of the XXI century doesn't believe in the Other. In other words, a contemporary person does not believe in the faith of others. The Other is fiction, a masquerade of public, religious, and family rituals. Today The Other is just words, which are not believed in, it is symbolic fiction. A society, which is deprived of law, authority, father, excluded from the symbolic order, either falls into the Real, or functions in the Imaginary register. Evidently Apocalypse has already taken place, we just still don't believe in it:

" Even afterwards - admitted in Hades' dwelling -

In the waters of Styx did he look at himself."³

The Other Does not Exist

What was the source of mistrust (missed trust) to the Other? Why has the post-modern subject lost ability to use the Name of the Father? Who has published the fact that the father was castrated, that he himself is an empty and impotent subject? Where has the information come from that the Other has "betrayed" the man?

The Other does not exist in the sense in which he existed before in the eyes of the subject. The main problem of nowadays is washing away the symbolic grating, which has led to universal psychosis and perversion. The destruction of the patriarchal system and social authorities gives everyone an opportunity to form their own identity, not obeying





the imposed norms and ideals. In the modern society the Other is still set in authority, for socialization is usually carried out through obeying the symbolic law, the authorized representative of which is parental authority. In the current post-modern society radical changes in the organization of the family have taken place, which have led to *the subject's new attitude to the symbolic order*. In this connection our society in its certain manifestations is approaching the pre-modern form of organization. Doubts concerning the identity with the premodern subject are rid by an initiating gesture, confirming the identity by a cut (a mark) on the body. It is an original answer of the Other to the subject's question, "Who am I?" The identity of the modern man is not written on the body, for it is enough that *the ego* has suffered a symbolic castration. Then how can we explain all-round popularity of the art of tattoo, piercing, body-art, the return of the ritual of clitorodectomy in the post-modern epoch? What else can it be but a reaction of the subject to the absence of the Other? Can we say that the subject has taken the ritual of initiation into his own hands? What kind of therapy is it, that the subject has prescribed himself, and that on his own body?

For a post-modern subject castration turned out to be not effective enough, so he is in the constant search for the law which would promote the end of castration. Therefore, perversion, which is widely spread nowadays, is not outside the Law, but is an attempt to obtain the Law. This testifies to the fact that the subject is still marked by a symbolic prohibition, but can no longer identify himself with authorities, who allegedly sanction these prohibitions. It is evident that the symbolic structure today is further and further exchanged for imaginary similarities, which the subject identifies him- or herself with. Media space creates an imaginary game, in which a person can control his or her identity, submitting to fashionable rituals, losing his or her sex, nationality, faith in God. Life becomes a screen, on which everything is alterable. A man becomes a wide-screen





LCD monitor with a maximum resolution of identifications, supplied with a button for automatic picture tuning and the Internet connection. Such a monitor person can decorate any interior. In the age of screen technology a child is born into the font of media, for the font of language, symbolic culture, and the Other does not exist.

The Narcissus of the XXI century is looking for the Real. A cut, a tattoo is an attempt to find a part of the Real the other side of the skin. It is a dramatization of castration on the surface of one's own body. Such an act of simulation contains rejection of the symbolic function of castration and its turning into a sign. A cut acts as a line of demarcation, setting a relation between the signified and the signifier, which are represented by various parts of the body. Thus, the body which I desire happens to be my own, for its one part or another is raised to the level of a phallic signifier. In other words the subject doubles his or her body with a phallic mark. In the same way, in mirror self-closing the subject seduces him- or herself. To be more precise, he or she seduces his or her desire, locks it in the body which has been doubled by signs. This imaginary loophole helps a person to avoid the desire of the other, that is to hide from his or her own deficiency, and to abide in narcissistic self-admiration, seeing only oneself and remaining invisible to others. Thus, the logic of sign links up with the logic of perversion.

In pre-modern and post-modern societies the law of the Father had a repressive, prohibitive character and spread on genital sexuality (the prohibition of incest); thus, it was a condition of symbolic exchange. Nowadays the maternal law of Caprice rules. The post-modern perverse subject is a living phallus of the mother, her narcissistic fetish, who when fulfilling his or her own desire, in reality realizes the mother's desire. Thus, the XXI century is experiencing the situation of incest, when the subject is completely defined by his or her self-identification with the mother's phallus, turning into a clockwork toy of the mother's desire.





Is it possible to destroy the manipulative symbiosis of the mother and Narcissus?

How to disturb the mirror-like surface of media space?

Will the media font of the XXIst century finally replace the font of language?

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