

The Temporal Foundation of the Self and the Other: A Phenomenological Reading of Narcissism

Joel Pearl

Published online: 8 July 2012
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2012

Abstract Rethinking the manner in which psychoanalysis articulates the self's relation to the other, this paper returns to the primordial stage of narcissism. The paper traces the consequences of the Freudian and Lacanian notions of narcissism and offers a new, alternative picture of the narcissistic stage by suggesting, in light of Heidegger and Loewald, that temporality must be recognized as a constitutive dimension of the self's openness to the Other.

Keywords Heidegger · Freud · Lacan · Loewald · Temporality · Other's-self and self's-other · Narcissism

Introduction

As an attempt to rethink the link between the self and the other in the psychoanalytic encounter, this essay offers an account of modern and postmodern psychoanalytic formulations of the formation of the self from a temporal perspective.

Relying heavily on scientific methods, the modern approach disclosed the therapeutic subject as an isolated object of investigation rather than a living subject. While the postmodern renunciation of Enlightenment aspirations allowed psychoanalysts to rethink the therapeutic encounter without paying any dues to the substantial subject, this led to a new set of problems. The postmodern therapist understands human existence as entirely absorbed in social, linguistic, and historical contexts. Hence, every trace of a personal dimension is reduced to contextual structures. When human life is portrayed from this perspective, one's actions are never one's own. Rather, they are the constant manifestation of organizing structures which fundamentally transcend one's personal being.

While the modern analyst-patient encounter reveals an isolated subject that can never find herself with the other, the postmodern psychoanalytic encounter reveals an inter-subjective

J. Pearl (✉)
Tel Aviv Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis, 34 Sirkin St., Tel Aviv, Israel
e-mail: joel.pearl@gmail.com

sphere in which the other is entirely absorbed in one's Self, foreclosing the subject's capacity for personal experience.

Rethinking the manner in which psychoanalysis articulates the self's relation to the other, this paper returns to the primordial stage of narcissism. I trace the consequences of the Freudian and Lacanian notions of narcissism—as representative of the modern and post-modern views, respectively—and offer a new, alternative picture of the narcissistic stage by suggesting, in light of Heidegger and Loewald, that temporality must be recognized as a constitutive dimension of the self's openness to the Other.

The Freudian notion of narcissism

Sigmund Freud explains the narcissistic stage in terms of libidinal energy and its ability to cathect objects and actions. This early stage, in which the entire repository of libidinal energy is used to cathect the mother, later develops into a mature ego. The development of the ego includes a retreat of the libido from its primary narcissistic state, its accumulation in the ego, and the transition to the secondary stage, the ego-libido, in which the ego utilizes stored libidinal energy to cathect objects. The retreat of the libido from its primary state toward a stage in which the ego functions as a repository of libidinal energy, cathecting the objects around it, is in fact a journey from childhood to adulthood, conducted toward gaining the ability to recognize and experience objective reality. The process holds immense significance for psychological development as it entails the transition from a period in which the world appears in its pre-objective form to one in which it appears through the prism of objective reality.

The Lacanian notion of narcissism: the mirror stage

Much like Freud, Jacques Lacan advocates the assumption that early infancy is best characterized by the notion of narcissism and thereby considers the infant's life during this phase as undifferentiated from its surroundings and its mother. In his famous paper regarding the 'mirror stage,' published in 1949, Lacan describes the process through which the subject becomes differentiated from its surroundings as triggered by recognizing her image reflected in a mirror. In contrast to the Freudian approach, which stresses the role of libidinal energy in the formation of the subject, Lacan (1997) sees the Imaginary as the core of the process:

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of fantasies that extend from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopedic. (p. 4)

Noticing her reflection in the mirror enables the subject, on the one hand, to realize the boundaries of her form (Gestalt), allowing her previously fragmented bodily sensations to assemble around the presence of her nascent image, thereby differentiating her from her surroundings. The image appearing in the mirror teaches her of her own being. However, as it is fundamentally a reflection, it is, as such, other than herself. This presence of otherness in the midst of her being implies that the subject's possibility for being contains a priori the dramatic tension between the I and the other, as well as the modus of self-alienation. The attempt to resolve this tension leads to inevitable failure since at its core lies the impossible desire to return to the primary narcissist stage in which I and other were still inseparable.

Lacan's account of the formation of the ego as stemming from the narcissistic stage underlines the fantastic capacity of the image to allow the infant to see itself as other. This ability, however, is also seen by Lacan as the origin of the self-alienation inherent in human life. In other words, the subject always alienates herself from her ego as, after all, it is an imaginary construction.

Both Freud and Lacan describe the ego's individuation from primary narcissism as a dramatic moment in individual development. Moreover, they construe this moment as the initiation into the objective world (for Freud) or the symbolic order (according to Lacan). For Freud, this stage allows the use of an object to develop into a sexual identity. In Lacan, this stage allows for the imaginary to be structured symbolically. From either perspective, the individual has departed from the narcissistic stage. From this point on, when residues of this stage resurface in the personality, they are diagnosed as neuroses. At the heart of both Freudian and Lacanian theory we find two fundamental modes: the narcissistic stage, a pre-objective/pre-symbolic state, and a post-narcissistic stage, which enables life in the objective world. Although both thinkers see the shift between the two modes as marked by the subject's varying relation toward the other, there is a profound difference in the particular way they account for this other. In order to illuminate this difference, let us go back to the myth of Narcissus.

In the Roman version of the myth, Narcissus is a handsome young man who refuses to respond to the courting of any woman or man who admires his beauty. Echo the Nymph, cursed by Hera and thus able to speak only by repeating the words of others, is especially offended by Narcissus's behavior. Angered at Narcissus's arrogance, the gods send Nemesis, the goddess of revenge, to cast a spell on him so that he cannot fall in love with anyone but himself. Once Narcissus notices his reflection in the pond, he becomes trapped by it, unable to remove his gaze from his own reflection. Echo speaks to Narcissus by repeating his last words but, instead of hearing her, he hears only an echo of his own voice. Nemesis's curse turns out to be devastating, since Narcissus's inability to distinguish between himself and his own image leaves him incapable of acknowledging the reality principle, thus causing him to die. Narcissus's rejection of his male and female suitors was interpreted by the gods as a refusal to identify with the other, which thereby led the gods to deprive him of the ability to see himself in the other. Regarding the moral of the myth, there is wide consensus that in order for the subject to recognize reality, the other must somehow be present before her gaze, but in what way and to what extent the other is present for the subject there is, evidently, much dispute.

Freud speaks of the myth of Narcissus in terms of libidinal energy, heralding it as the prototype of all neuroses. However, since the prism of the objective world is only available once the infant is able to let the other appear as a separate entity, Freud's explanation implicitly revolves around the notion of the other. In contrast, Lacan, who understood the latent consequences of the Freudian account, gives the other a fundamental role in his model of the process of individuation. Sadly enough, Narcissus's autopsy paints a rather gloomy picture. Since the Freudian other is *a priori* isolated from the subject, Narcissus had no choice but to be solely self-observed. The same goes for Lacan's postulation of Narcissus's possibility for becoming himself. Since Narcissus's only path for becoming himself is through the other as an image, Narcissus did not really have any other choice but to hold on to the image of himself as if it were the desired other.

Freudian theory, caught up in the lure of the modern worldview, re-writes its premises about the therapeutic subject by disclosing it as a fundamentally isolated being. Lacanian theory, caught up in the lure of the postmodern worldview, re-writes its own premises—that the subject is utterly absorbed in social, linguistic, and historical contexts—and thus

discloses the subject as a fundamentally fragmented being. There is another side to Narcissism, though, one that is utterly suppressed by the abovementioned explanations.

The other side of narcissism

Taking the myth of Narcissus as a point of departure for a new reading of the narcissistic drama, I would like to propose that if we were able to put our finger on what it is exactly that Narcissus cannot recognize when Echo approaches him, we could gain a better understanding of what the psychoanalytic reading of narcissism lacks. Note that Echo's repetition of Narcissus's words is not an exact duplication of them; in fact, since it is uttered in Echo's voice, it is already a modification of Narcissus's words. Thus, Echo's repetition presents Narcissus with an aural (sonorous) reflection of his self. Drawing a distinction between Narcissus's immersion in his own reflection and his inability to recognize his reflection in Echo's words, we could argue that while the conditions for the appearance of his reflection and Narcissus's immersion in it are grounded in a space actualized in the present, the condition for hearing his own voice reflected in Echo's is grounded in temporal duration.

We could thus conclude that Narcissus's inability to hear Echo's voice is indicative of a certain failure, on his part, to make room for the temporal structure that underlies Echo's utterances. Against this background, we can now see that the Freudian and Lacanian accounts of the narcissistic drama—the libidinal cathexis, on the one hand, and the organizing imago on the other—are, in fact, grounded in a spatial perspective which, in its forgetfulness of temporality, reproduces the narcissistic disposition it seeks to overcome.

Hence, in order to open up the possibility of coming to terms with the significance of narcissism, I suggest that a reconsideration of its temporal horizon must be taken into account. Consequently, I shall attempt to offer a temporal reading of the narcissistic drama and will do so in a manner that relies on two intersecting views on temporality, a psychoanalytic prism and a philosophical prism, found in the thought of Hans Loewald and of Martin Heidegger. More specifically, I will address specific texts in which Loewald addresses the Freudian notion of consciousness and the formation of the ego from a temporal point of view, and I will discuss the particular places in Heidegger's writings that explicate his own notion of temporality.

Paving the way to temporality

In Lacan's reading of Freud, the constitution of the subject takes place by granting predominance to the realm of the imaginary. However, as we have seen, the fact that the other is the imaginary generator of our sense of being discloses the subject as a self-alienated entity. Is it thus possible to approach the role Lacan confers upon the imaginary differently? Can the event of identification be reinterpreted in such a way as to preserve its constitutive status regarding the subject, without trapping the subject in self-alienation?

The psychoanalytic writings of Hans Loewald offer a unique starting point for rethinking the ontological status of the identificatory event because he grounds his analysis of ego-formation in temporal manifestation. In what follows, I will demonstrate, first, that the Lacanian notion of identification can be construed as part of what Hans Loewald describes as primal introjections and projections and, second, that these primal introjections and projections are themselves psychological manifestations of temporality.

Loewald and the formation of the ego

In his 1951 essay, “Ego and Reality,” Loewald asserts that the psychoanalytic doctrine has implicitly developed two essential models of reality: one threatening and represented by the father and one safe and represented by the mother. In Freudian theory, the concept of reality is governed by the paternal model. Thus, the notion of reality as threatening provides the grounds for portraying the ego as a defense mechanism. When referring to the second model of reality, Loewald claims that the primal relation between the ego and reality is not a defense against external menace but manifests an organizing relation:

The relatedness between ego and reality, or objects, does not develop from an originally unrelated coexistence of two separate entities that come into contact with each other, but on the contrary, from a unitary whole that differentiates into distinct parts. . . . It is from here that the synthetic, integrative function of the ego can be understood. The ego mediates, unifies, integrates because it is of its essence to maintain, on more complex levels of differentiation and objectivation of reality, the original unity. (p. 14)

For Loewald, the dangers that the ego encounters cannot be understood solely in terms of frustrated attempts to cathect objects in an effort to substitute the mother. Danger abounds on the other side of the Oedipal triad as well, that is, on the part of the enveloping mother:

The original unity and identity, undifferentiated and unstructured, of psychic apparatus and environment is as much of danger for the ego as the demand of the “parental castration threat” to give it up altogether. (1951, p. 15)

From Loewald’s point of view, the ego’s defense mechanisms are activated in response to two types of anxiety. On the one hand, there is the threat of losing reality as the ego is cut off from the cathected mother (castration anxiety); on the other, there is the threat of losing the boundaries between the ego and reality (engulfment anxiety). Between these two types of anxieties, which comprise the borders of existence, the ego organizes different levels of reality. In other words, the formation of the ego and the borders of reality both result from the identification with the narcissistic unity (the mother) and from the identification with a state of separation (the father). Hence, prior to the presence of the ego and the Oedipus complex there are identificatory predispositions toward the mother, which establish this twofold model of reality. According to Loewald (1951), these identificatory predispositions are constituted by primal projections and introjections:

The various processes of infantile aggression, the various stages of incorporation and projection are considered as early stages of the activity of the primitive ego, whose synthesizing and differentiating is still much more concrete action than the comparatively abstract activity of the fully developed ego. Introjection and projection are such early stages of ego activity. (p. 17)

It is true that the infant’s process of individuation is associated with the formation of the ego once the infant passes the narcissistic stage; however, as Loewald argues, the process begins with primal introjections and projections, which are concrete acts of unification and separation. The theoretical tendency to distinguish between two hierarchic layers of psychic development—one of ego formation, leading from primary narcissism toward the Oedipal complex, and one comprising the post-Oedipal stage—generates a dogmatic spatial image of the psyche, which diminishes the complexity of human life. Indeed, mature object relations only become possible after the Oedipal stage, and yet we must take into account that

introjections and projections take place throughout all stages of development. Loewald indicates several situations in the adult world, such as intense desire and ecstatic states, which, though not pathological, still tend to dissolve the firm distinction drawn between the subject and the other. Loewald's (1973) claim must not be taken as valid only in respect to extreme experiences but also regarding the structure of the psyche as a whole:

Even where the subject–object distinction seems firmly established, where there seems to be no question of weakening or loss of ego-boundaries as we may observe it in exceptional or pathological states, the situation is less clear than we often assume. Any close, intimate object relationship has narcissistic features, identification are involved. (p. 15)

Any meaningful encounter with the other involves elements of intimacy, and intimacy, in turn, always encompasses narcissistic elements. Hence, since primal introjections and projections always exist in the background of any meaningful encounter with the other, the distinction between the subject and the other is never hermetic. Moreover, primal introjections and projections retain an intermediate area in which the subject is not clearly separated from the other.

Loewald's temporal reconstruction of the structural model of the mind

The inner world is fully established once the super-ego comes into being at the end of the introjection and projection process that completes the structural model of the mind. In other words, only after the super-ego is in place can the subject live in a world characterized by the distinction between an internal and an external world. In his 1962 essay, "Superego and Time," Loewald examines the relation between time and the structure of consciousness (1962/1980). Referring to the way in which Freud, in the "Interpretation of Dreams," describes the mental event as an occurrence belonging to the present, Loewald writes:

Freud thought there was no need to assume a spatial arrangement of psychic systems, even though he speaks, by analogy, of the idea of psychic locality, but that it would be sufficient to assume, as he puts it, "that in a given psychical process the excitation passes through the systems in a particular temporal sequence." (S.E. 5:537) The concept of time involved here is that of objective time, not of psychic, active time. (p. 45)

Loewald draws a distinction between psychic and objective time; the former, characterizing human life as a form of psychic organization, is understood as an 'active' time rather than a linear succession of moments. In his attempt to understand the structure of consciousness from the vantage point of time, he describes the Super-ego as follows:

Insofar as the superego is the agency of inner standards, demands, ideals, hopes, and concerns in regard to the ego, the agency of inner rewards or guilt, the superego functions from the viewpoint of the future ego, from the standpoint of the ego's future that is to be reached, is being reached, is being failed or abandoned by the ego. (p. 45)

Approaching the Super-ego from the point of view of the ego, it appears as the ego's future. Hence, within the structure of consciousness, the Super-ego is characterized by the temporal mode of the future. As the faculty in charge of the psyche's relation to reality, the

ego, in its representative roles and in its construction of defense mechanisms, dons the temporal mode of the present:

When we speak of the object representation, object presentation, drive representation, a concept of time is implied in which “present” is understood as an active process—to present something. (p. 44)

When the ego is seen from the point of view of the Super-ego, it becomes evident that the present is disclosed from the future. The Super-ego, as the last faculty established in consciousness, entails a relation to the id. The id, as the faculty that embodies the genetic past and the archaic form of organization into which we are born, represents the temporal mode of the past. In this context, the Super-ego, which mediates between external reality and the id, contains the id as it ought to be organized. Therefore, the specific way in which the id contains the past actually presents itself in the way the past appears from the point of view of the future.

The superego then would represent the past as seen from the future, the id as it is to be organized, whereas the ego proper represents the id as organized at present. (p. 45)

The formation of the Super-ego completes the subject’s inner world by disclosing to the psyche its own temporal structure, in which the past is seen through the future as bearing the potential to reorganize the present. Loewald’s reading of Freud succeeds in showing that at the heart of the spatial conception of the structure of consciousness resides a temporal structure that indicates the predominance of the future in psychic life.

Loewald and the Heideggerian notion of temporality

As he avows in the preface to his *Collected Papers* (1980), Loewald’s unique interpretation of Freud was inspired by Heidegger’s philosophy:

Philosophy has been my first love. I gladly affirm its influence on my way of thinking while being wary of the peculiar excess a philosophical bent tends to entail. My teacher in this field was Martin Heidegger. (p. ix)

Naturally, the brevity of this essay precludes a comprehensive account of the Heideggerian project. Instead, I would like to offer an outline of the particular portions of his ontological project which are relevant to Loewald’s psychological sensitivity toward the temporal aspects of human life.

***Dasein* and the ontological difference**

In many ways, Heidegger’s project is a daring philosophical attempt to offer an alternative approach to the Western tendency to base philosophical explanations on the categorical division between subject and object. In order for his philosophical investigations to be attentive to the pre-thematic relation between ourselves and our world, Heidegger approaches the philosophical inquiry from a new starting point (1996). His point of departure includes the subject’s a priori involvement in the world. For Heidegger, *Dasein* (the human being) is a being whose existence is-always-already an event involved in the “here and now” in which we live. Based on a pre-thematic understanding of human existence, Heidegger draws an “ontological

distinction” between the manner in which Dasein exists in the world and the manner in which objects do:

Da-sein is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather, it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned about its very being. (p. 10)

Understanding human existence as an event rather than as a thing in itself makes it possible to distinguish between a number of layers in the encounter between human beings and the world. At the ontic layer, the world appears in its everyday meaning. At the second layer, the ontological one, the world appears in its existential meaning, facilitating the everyday encounter with the world. According to Heidegger’s existential analysis, Dasein concerns itself (*Besorgen*) with ontic matters, but can be and is also concerned with other Dasein (*Fürsorge*), as well as with its own being. In elucidating the ontological structure underlying Dasein’s involvement with the world, Heidegger argues that Dasein’s possibility for being concerned is existentially grounded in the phenomenon of temporality (*Temporalität*).

Ecstatic temporality

Heidegger’s temporality is a primordial threefold phenomenon that contains the future (*Zukunft*), past (*Gewesenheit*), and present (*Gegenwart*). Since “there” is part of Dasein’s existence, temporality enfolds within itself three modes of openness: the future, as the moment that enables Dasein’s being-ahead-of-itself; the past, as that which grounds the very possibility of Dasein’s being-already-in-the-world, and the present as that which makes possible every relation to something as something. However, since in everyday life we tend to understand ourselves and the things around us as entities persisting along a linear sequence of now-moments (as they are perceived from an egocentric perspective), this primordial phenomenon is not readily conceived and remains, for the most part, concealed from our gaze.

Dasein derives the time with which it reckons, as well as the linear sequence of nows, from its own temporality. As such, it is a self-transcending being, namely, in being outside of itself in its very existence. Dasein understands and relates to itself by expecting its own possibilities and retaining what it has already been, along with the way it now finds itself. Thrown away from itself toward what occupies it, Dasein exists outside of its own present while being carried away to its own future and past.

Dasein’s self-transcending structure is the three-fold ecstatic character of time. Every moment of Dasein’s life is structured by the unity of the three ecstasies that are intrinsically open toward a horizon in which beings and events manifest themselves. Each of the ecstasies opens up toward a horizon that determines the boundaries within which beings and events can appear. Heidegger speaks of two distinct motions within this horizontal structure of temporality which generate two distinct time-formations within ecstatic unity. In the first, the horizon of the present dominates the other two ecstasies; it generates a concealment of the ecstatic nature of time and represses their ontological difference. The outcome of this temporal disposition is that the world appears as a sequence of events grounded in the law of causality and ordered in a linear flow of before and after. The second, dominated by the future ecstasy, offers an alternative to the notion of linear time. Instead of conceiving time as a succession of moments stretching out from the future toward the present and the past, this time-formation actualizes itself in the present only after Dasein’s possibilities (future)

become its own (past) and appear as presence (present). In other words, in original temporality time stretches itself from the future to the past and on to the present.

The relevance of the horizon of the future in Loewald's notion of the psyche

While Loewald speaks of the Super-ego as the faculty modifying the structure of the psyche from the perspective of the future, Heidegger speaks of the future as the horizon from which beings and events appear. Explaining the temporal structure that grounds our everyday notion of linear time, Heidegger's ontological inquiry discloses the temporal foundations of what has been termed by Loewald as active time or psychic time. What makes this notion of temporality extremely relevant for the psychoanalytic process is the fact that it discloses the subject's process of individuation. When considering the analytic subject in light of a linear notion of time and in light of a temporal notion of time, a fundamental difference comes into view. The former portrays the subject as utterly absorbed in a causal universe which tramples and reduces the singularity of the subject's experience to a more or less coherent sequence of nows. The latter accommodates the singular experience of the subject by disclosing the unique temporal span that belongs to her and her alone. That is to say, the very way her future passes from the past onto the present is her own personal existence. In other words, her personal existence is the singular way in which her self transcends itself within the ecstatic nature of time. Hence, while observing the subject through the prism of linear time, we confine our gaze to a developmental or pathological sequence of events rather than to the subject's personal disposition within this sequence of events. In order to realize the subject's own individuation processes, we ought to give time its proper place.

Primal projections and introjections as primordial manifestations of temporality

Looking at the narcissistic stage from the point of view of the live subject, we notice that in primary narcissism, the world appears without the categorical divisions of subject/object and inside/outside. Moreover, the narcissistic stage is the particular spot within Freudian theory which explicitly manifests a non-linear form of time. As noted earlier, Loewald's analysis states that the emergence of the ego out of primary narcissism is grounded in primal projections and introjections. In this section, I would like to tie in the non-linear mode of time belonging to the narcissistic stage with these primal projections and introjections.

Generally speaking, the narcissistic stage can be portrayed as the domain in which, through her responses and behavior, the mother, whose psychic structure is far more organized than that of the infant identifying itself with her, shapes its possibilities for future existence. If we consider the infant's future as molded by the mother, as a time that is not-yet-now, we remain in the Freudian framework of meaning and disclose the process of identification as purely imaginary event. However, if we regard this process from a temporal perspective, we could consider the infant's identification with its mother as a mode of being in which the infant transcends itself. In other words, while identifying with its mother, the infant is being-ahead-of-itself. In this sense, the Heideggerian being-ahead-of-itself already consists of the presence of the other. For example, the infant can identify with its mother as a figure who inspires it with self-confidence, although this feeling of self-confidence is not its own creation. Identification, as a particular mode of being, opens the infant to its future as it transcends itself toward its own self-possibilities. From this perspective, early psychological identifications are the primordial manifestations of the future ecstasies in the infant's life.

Respectively, introjection would be the particular way in which identification resides in the psychic structure, after the future possibilities held by the mother have been exhausted. Namely, introjections are a particular type of relation that the infant has to the self that it was; they are its self-transcendence toward what it was. As such, they are the primordial psychological manifestation of the ecstasy of the past.

Primary narcissism as a temporal unity

According to Loewald, alongside the processes of projection and introjection the ego begins to differentiate itself as a psychic faculty that represents the present. Observing the ego from the prism of temporality discloses it as a particular way (present) in which the infant opens up to its self-possibilities (future) as part of itself (past). Accordingly, the present is never an absolute presence but is rather the infant's particular ability to exist in light of its past self-possibilities. Consequently, the ego should be comprehended as a psychological manifestation of the infant's openness to its own present—the ecstasies of the present.

By giving time its place and adopting the point of view of the living subject, I believe we can gain a closer and much more intimate insight into the role the other has in the individuation processes of the self. Let us take the first step of our temporal analysis in respect to the Freudian formulation of ego-formation. In the “Interpretation of Dreams” (1900), Freud describes ego-formation as a withdrawal of the libido from total identification with reality: “Originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself” (p. 68). Freud's account leaves the process of ego-formation shrouded in mystery; what does Freud mean by asserting that the ego contains reality? Should we conclude that the ego preceded its separation from reality? This inference is somewhat problematic given that none of the activities the ego is in charge of, such as organizing and employing defense-mechanisms, could take place prior to its differentiation from reality. Understanding the human psyche as a temporal entity can shed new light on Freud's enigmatic assertion. Having singled out primary narcissism as a mode of being in which time does not appear in linear form, and having posited ego-formation as a process by which the infant discloses itself (to itself) through the three temporal ecstasies, we could now interpret the state in which it is undifferentiated from the mother as a mode in which the three forms of time are united.

In his essay “The Experience of Time” (1972), Loewald describes two fundamental modes of experience which represent the boundaries of human experience: eternity and fragmentation. Relating to the former, he writes:

At one extreme is the experience of eternity where the flux of time is stayed or suspended. Eternity is to be distinguished from sempiternity or everlasting time. Scholastic philosophers speak of the *nunc stans*, the abiding instant, where there is no division of past, present and future, no remembering, no wish, no anticipation, merely the complete absorption in being, or in that which is. (p. 405)

The lack of differentiation between infant and mother is not to be explained in empirical terms or as an erroneous perception of reality which both sides must overcome. This non-differentiated mode is a manifestation of the infant's immersion in a temporal unity where the nexus of future, past, and present has not yet been disclosed as part of its Self. Since the separation and integration of the three forms of time are in fact pre-conditions for the very appearance of entities in the world, the infant's lack of differentiation from its mother is viable as there is, for it, nothing yet to be separate from. Departing from the mode in which

eternity contains and consumes every other particular mode of being can only occur once the infant is able to realize the dominance of the present (ego), following his revelation of the future (identifications) as having a past (introjections). In this context, we can now clarify Freud's puzzling statement that the ego includes reality. In a certain sense, from a temporal perspective, the ego was already present before the withdrawal from reality and is genuinely identical to reality, insofar as eternity, as a temporal unity, is actually a perpetual present. As long as the infant is utterly immersed in such a temporal unity, its being is *de facto* being-identical to its mother. Primary narcissism is, therefore, a manifestation of binding temporal unity, and secondary Narcissism is an expression of the mode in which the infant begins to disclose its Self (to itself) through time.

Other's-self and self's-other

Lacan's postulation of the mirror stage perceives the infant's identification with its own mirror-image as responsible for assembling fragmented bodily sensations into an existing ego. Lacan focuses on the image as an imaginary event that permits the infant to see the other as itself and, hence, to recognize itself as a subject with an ego. As already mentioned, Lacan sees these events as the origin of the self-alienation prevalent at the core of human existence. In contrast with the Lacanian interpretation of the narcissistic stage, I would like to shift our gaze away from the spatial modality and call attention to the temporal conditions underlying the possibility of identification. Consequently, I suggest that we understand the moment in which the infant identifies with the other as *it-self*, and begins to realize its ego, not as an imaginary event, but as the moment in which the prevailing temporal unity opens up to the future ecstasies as part of its own self.

The uniqueness of this mode, that is, of being open to self-possibilities, lies in the ontological characteristic of the horizon of the future. As an ecstatic temporal being, Dasein's own possibilities fundamentally include that which is other than itself (the other's-self). Likewise, coming back to itself from its future possibilities to its ecstatic past, Dasein's own existence already includes its self-otherness (the self's-other).¹ Hence, as a temporal being the infant's self is simultaneously structured by its other's-selves and by its self's-others. According to this reading, it is not the image or the withdrawal of libido that stands at the heart of the individuation process, but the infant's self-disclosure through future and past ecstasies that enables the self to transcend itself towards itself. Observing the self in keeping with a linear notion of time, we are bound to comprehend identification as an imaginary event, or, alternatively, when we observe it in light of temporality, it appears as the core of human reality.

It is true that the infant cannot embrace the ecstatic future as part of its own being without the other (the mother); however, the nature of ecstatic temporality does not posit the other as an isolated entity which precedes the infant's self-possibilities but rather as a temporal being—the infant's self is simultaneously structured by the other's-self and by the self's-other. In other words, secondary narcissism—commencing with the process of differentiation from the mother as seen from the perspective of the living subject, the ecstatic temporal being—is ontologically structured in terms of self's-other and other's-self.

¹ These terms, self's-other and other's-self, serve to capture the unique intricacies of the encounter between self and other in light of Heidegger's ontological insight and the structure of temporality in particular; together, they constitute the existential structure of the self's being-in-time.

Going back to our analysis of the myth of Narcissus, we could say that, caught up in the lure of his image, deprived of the presence of the other, Narcissus is trapped in a perpetual present that leads to his death. From Narcissus's autopsy we learn that the cause of his death is the absence of the other in his self reflection/recognition. Unlike Lacan's interpretation, in which the other generates the self-alienation endemic to the human psyche, my reading considers the lack of the other, which is an integral part of the self's temporal structure, as the etiology of Narcissus's death and the source of the human—all too human—phenomenon of self-alienation. From a different perspective, the moment the self-other cannot appear as part of the self, the otherness of the self is denied, and the possibility of coming back from its future-possibilities to itself is sealed off.

Properly articulated, the other's-self and the self's-other are neither independent or separate linguistic concepts nor transcendental notions regulating our consciousness, nor are they pure psychological notions or mere cultural constructs one has to accept in order to come to terms with the estrangement life offers. Rather, they are the frontiers and the abyss of our compelled motion within the scope that temporality already unveils for us.

References

- Freud, S. (1900). The interpretation of dreams. In J. Strachey (Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 5). London: Hogarth Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1996). *Being and time*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Lacan, J. (1997). The mirror stage as formative of the function of the *I* as revealed in psychoanalytic experience. In A. Sheridan (Trans.), *Ecrits: A selection* (pp. 1–6). London: Routledge.
- Loewald, H. W. (1951). Ego and reality. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 32, 10–18.
- Loewald, H. W. (1962/1980). Superego and time. In *Papers on psychoanalysis* (pp. 43–52). New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Loewald, H. W. (1972). The experience of time. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 27, 401–410.
- Loewald, H. W. (1973). On internalization. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 54, 9–17.
- Loewald, H. W. (1980). Preface. In *Papers on psychoanalysis* (pp. ix). New Haven: Yale University Press.