

Chapter 1

How See Myself Seen

Peur de perdre les siens, mais aussi de se perdre lui-même, de découvrir que derrière la façade sociale il n'était rien.

E. Carrère, *L'Adversaire*

He smiled understandingly, much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced--or seemed to face--the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

On January 9th, 1993, in his house in the region of Gex, between Switzerland and Jura, Jean-Claude Romand kills his wife, his five and seven-year-old children, his parents and their dog. He then attempts to kill his mistress in the forest of Fontainebleau, where he had brought her to have dinner at Bernard Kouchner's house, whom he does not know and who does not have a house in Fontainebleau. Lastly, he sets his house on fire, takes a sleeping pill and falls asleep, hoping to never awaken. He nonetheless wakes up from the coma provoked by the barbiturates and burns. He is charged with having committed the most atrocious crimes and is immediately convicted. According to the public prosecutor of the republic that followed the case, "The motive of his crime was of the fear of the counterfeit doctor of being exposed."

How is it ever possible that confessing a lie, even an outrageous lie, becomes more difficult than exterminating one's own entire family? How could his reputation have counted more to him than the life of his children? This book tries to answer this question.

The somber story of Jean-Claude Romand became famous due to Emanuel Carrère's

book, *L'Adversaire*¹. The author narrates the trajectory of a man who built himself a reputation as a successful doctor, working at the *World Health Organization* in Geneva, and friend of political men and internationally renowned researchers. All this based on a lie. In fact, he never finished his medical studies, and during ten years, instead of working, he had been spending his days in his car in the parking lot of the WHO in Geneva or loitering in the woods or in cafes until it was time to go home. He had thoroughly taken care of his false identity down to the smallest detail, bringing home fliers and brochures from the WHO every chance he could go to the library that was open to the public on the ground floor of the organization's headquarters. If he left on "business trips," trips he took to the pitiful hotel close to his house where he would watch TV and read the guidebooks of whatever country he was supposed to be visiting, he never forgot to call his family every day to tell them what time it was in Tokyo or Brazil and he always returned from these trips with credible gifts. He took care of his false existence, his fictitious reputation, as if it were real: the endeavor led him to the point of destroying his entire family because the façade began to collapse due to money problems. Which was his real life? The one that his family thought he lived, full of success, trips and international recognition, or the one that only he could know, spent reading in his car, or in the crummy cafes of Bourg-en-Bresse, or walking in the mountains of Jura? Basically, his second life only existed for him: nobody else knew about it, it was only a way to maintain his dream life. When his friends from the village realized that Jean-Claude's entire life was a lie, he ceased to exist for them, he was no longer Jean-Claude: "When they talked about him, late at night, they could no longer call him Jean-Claude. They didn't call him Romand either. It was something outside of life, outside of death, he no longer had a name"².

We have two *egos*, two identities that make up who we are and how we behave: our subjectivity, made out of our proprioceptive experiences, our physical sensations, embodied in our body, and our *reputation*, the powerful reflective/retroactive system that constitutes our social identity and that integrates into our self-awareness of *how we see ourselves seen*. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the American sociologist

¹ Emmanuel Carrère, *L'Adversaire*, Paris, P.O.L., 2000.

² Carrère (2000) p.

Charles Horton Cooley³ called this second ego, *the looking glass self*. The perception of our identity is woven into the thread of time, incorporating what we think others think of us. In fact, this understanding of ourselves is not created simply by *reflection*, but by the *refraction* of our image divided and multiplied in the eyes of others. The social self, who controls our lives and leads us to extreme acts, does not belong to us: it is the part of us that lives inside others. However, the feelings that it provokes – shame, embarrassment, self-esteem, guilt, pride - are very real and well anchored in our deepest emotions⁴. Biology demonstrates that our body “treats” shame as a physical wound, releasing a quantity of chemical substances that provoke inflammation and increase the level of cortisol⁵. A slap does more harm to our self-esteem than to our red burning cheek.

In his work on the *culture of honor*, the psychologist Richard Nisbett and his collaborators measured the level of cortisol of participants before and after an experience where they felt their honor had been “hurt.” The study went as follows. A group of 83 students from the South and North of the United States were invited to participate in a psychological study. Before the experiment, the subjects were asked to fill out a form with their personal information and to return it to an experimenter who was not in the room of the study, but at the end of a hallway. It was only when they left the room to hand in their forms that the “true” experiment began: an experimenter pretended to be an employee of the university organizing files in a rolling file cabinet that was placed in the middle of the hallway. To allow the student to pass, the fake employee had to move the cabinet. Once the student reached the end of the hallway, after turning in his form, the fake employee had to once again move the cabinet to allow the student to pass by him. He did this while sighing, aggravated, and murmuring, “asshole.” At the end of the experience, the levels of cortisol in the Southern students, who felt that their reputation (and their virility) had been damaged, were much higher⁶ than at the beginning of the experiment. Feeling that their reputation was hurt provoked a real chemical

³ Cooley (1864-1929) is seen as one of the founders of social psychology. His idea was to anchor the study of society in the mental processes of individuals. According to him, the concept of the individual was an abstraction, empty without that of society, but the concept of society was equally empty if the mental states of the individuals that made it up were not taken into account. The idea of the *looking-glass self* was developed by Cooley (1902).

⁴ These are the emotions that psychologists call “self-awareness,” reflexive emotions that depend on social interaction. See Elster (1999).

⁵ See Lewis (2002); Gruenewald (2004)

⁶ See Nisbett & Cohen (1996)

transformation within them, a well-known hormonal reaction that normally corresponds to a preparation to respond with physical violence.

What I think you think about me

More than a third of homicides in the United States are attributable to trivial motives such as a particularly aggressive verbal exchange, an insult, or a question of precedence in a parking lot. Among the most convincing sociological explanations for crimes without serious motives are honor, pride and reputation⁷. Many of these crimes are committed by people who do not have a psychopathic psychological profile. Nevertheless, they are driven to the point of killing by the stupid question of precedence. Everyone can have *furious* reactions during futile arguments: with the offensive waiter, who abuses his little “power” over us, or with the woman in the car who refuses to move five centimeters forward to let us turn left... These violent reactions are very often caused by injuries that we imagine are inflicted by what others “owe us”. They are true emotional injuries that we feel and that are provoked by the feeling that we did not get the appropriate consideration, that that was not the way that others should have treated us. How could this imaginary, inexistent thought, that is nothing but a trace, a shadow⁸ of us in others, have such precisely determinable psychophysical effects? The paradox of reputation resides in the apparent disproportionality between the psychological and social value that we give it and its purely symbolic existence: to have honor, reputation, to be honorable, is all only being thus recognized by someone else. Why do give such value to this reflection of our image, which resides within others, since we are the only ones obsessively interested in our reputation- except for celebrities, whose reputation everyone is interested in?

Mark Leary, a social psychologist at Duke University, advanced the hypothesis that humans have a genuine *sociometer*, a psychological mechanism, a motivational structure that works as an indicator of the “social temperature” around us, a kind of internal

⁷ See Gould (2013).

⁸ I will return to the chapter on the idea of reputation as a shadow: *shadow of the past* in classical game theory, and the *shadow of the future* in the evolutionist explanations of cooperation. See Miller (2012); Axelrod (1984).

thermometer that registers social acceptance or rejection, using the *degree of self esteem* as a unit of measurement⁹. Our social emotions would thus be a way of tracing this part of us that passes through others. Therefore, even if our reputation is only a reflection, the emotions accompanying it have a physical and psychological reality that serves to oversee this reflection.

The main problem of psychological explanations of this kind is that they presuppose that the sociometer is probably adjusted, that the emotions that it provokes within us and the external social temperature co-vary in a coordinated fashion. But, unfortunately, as George Elliot says, “the last thing we learn in life is our effect on others.” We proceed by trials and errors, trying different selves, building façades that are nothing but drafts. Then we see the effects that they have on others, we adjust them until we are able to, and sometimes we surrender and leave the image of ourselves that we have solicited in the eyes of others since we can’t control it anymore.

The anguish that accompanies the loss of reputation, the Proustian anxiety on the perennial uncertainty of our *status* and the profound ambivalence that these feelings provoke are due to the lack of control that we have on our image.

Our second ego is not the opinion of others, but what we think those opinions are, or sometimes, what we would like others to think of us. In the quote from Fitzgerald that opens the chapter, Gatsby’s smile reassures the young Nick Carraway since he is finally seen as he would like to be seen, no less, no more. It is a feeling of emotional comfort that allows us to let us go since we have finally been seen by someone as we would like to be seen. The mysterious Gatsby with his sulfurous reputation is the only one able to give Carraway the correct assessment of himself, to provide him the profound satisfaction of being seen at last as he truly is. And he gives him the rarest and most beautiful present: to feel for an instant his two egos reunited. To feel at last the suspension of the eternal ambivalence between the being and the seeming. Carraway is an accomplice of Gatsby’s since he understands his profound need to build a dream self, a second self that is not only a social façade, but that represents what he would like others to think of him: “He invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen year old boy would be likely to

⁹ That self esteem is directly linked to social approval is a controversial theory. See Elster (2013), for example, who affirms that the concern of having a good reputation is independent of social acceptance.

invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end.” Nick Carraway also harbors his own other self when he says: “Each of us imagines having at least one of the cardinal virtues, and her is mine: I am one of those rare honest people I know.” And it is this cardinal virtue that Gatsby recognizes by his smile.

Our social image is both familiar and a stranger: it provokes in us reactions that we cannot control- like, for example, blushing before an intimidating crowd- it makes us lose our means and constitutes at the same time the part of us that is the most precious, that which we take care of the most carefully. Failure to distinguish between these two aspects of ourselves can make us lose a sense of our actions, to the point of provoking in us states of extreme distress, in which we no longer understand the reasons that moved us.

This book tries to understand the logic of this double ego. Reputation is a mystery: its way of increasing or decreasing under the gaze of others, of spreading or changing “valence” suddenly, seems random. A good concept, in short, for the proverbs and literature that contain so much knowledge and life experience, but that seem destined to speak of that which cannot be explained by other means. One such example is in Rochefoucauld’s maxim: “Self-esteem is more clever than the cleverest man in the world”¹⁰. The reference to a double intentionality that guides actions is evident, but only vaguely resonates in the ambiguity of the maxim... However, much of the mystery that surrounds reputation comes from the fact that it is a notion neglected by social sciences, for several reasons. Firstly, reputation is a concept that has a bad reputation: it is considered a vestige of a pre-modern and anti-individualistic society. The *fama*, the *prestige*, and the fierce battle to defend a position in the social hierarchy are part of a world of aristocratic values that modernity does not cease to demolish and whose study may have just a historico-cultural interest since there is no real object of study in these phenomenon. They are symbols of an ancient world, not of a phenomenon that has a psychic or social reality. It is as if someone undertook a systematic study of the *aura*, of a certain *luminosity* that surrounds people, in particular supernatural beings - the nimbus of saints, which is part of Christian and Muslim iconography, being a sign of the presence of this aura. This phenomenon can be studied from a historic-cultural point of view, looking

¹⁰ See Rochefoucauld (1678), maxim 4

for example at its evolution in the history of art, or in poetry- the *aura* is often described in verses of poems of the Middle Ages and in religious literature - but to choose the aura as a genuine phenomenon to scientifically investigate, describes more paranormal than natural and social sciences. Reputation seems to have the same status: it is something that can be studied from a historical perspective but, since it does not exist as a social or psychological phenomenon, cannot be studied systematically. To reify reputation, by giving it the status of an object of study in the social sciences would mean to substantiate fantasies from the world of castles of the olden times and of aristocratic balls...

In addition, reputation is a psychological *illusion*: we react to it as if it existed, as if it counted for us, but in reality we are wrong and this mistake can be fatal (as in the tragic destiny of Jean-Claude Romand). If it were studied psychologically, it should be classed among the cognitive *biases* that cloud our judgment. However this erroneous representation that can have extreme consequences, even if it is no more than an illusion, is anchored enough in our spirit to motivate a *parallel action* in our lives whose objective is not explainable without it. Take the notorious case of Orlando Figes, a rich and famous British historian who used to spend his nights on *Amazon.co.uk* harshly criticizing his colleagues' books and writing long eulogies about his own works... to end up incarcerated and completely drained of the precious elixir he attempted to distill online: his reputation...¹¹

The management of our image is not just a matter of *make up*: it is a deep strategic matter of *social cognition*. We try to manipulate other people's representations of ourselves from the perspective of the idea we have of their representations. It's an arm-race, an escalation game of believing and make-believing, of manipulating other people's ideas and being manipulated by them. Everyone knows the triumph one feels when he thinks he's been appreciated at his right value. All previous humiliations are canceled, the world recognizes us at last for what we knew we deserved. And everyone knows, alas, the opposite feeling of surrender when we adopt the others' perspective and feel evaluated by them, accepting their own measure. The shame that Vinteuil cannot hide about his

¹¹ On the vicissitudes of Orlando Figes in 2010 see:
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/7601662/Leading-academics-in-bitter-row-over-anonymous-poison-book-reviews.html> and my article:
<http://gloriaoriggi.blogspot.com/2012/01/reputazione-sirena-del-presente.html>

homosexual daughter in Proust's *Remembrance* is of this kind: "But when M. Vinteuil regarded his daughter and himself from the point of view of the world, and of their reputation, when he attempted to place himself by her side in the rank which they occupied in the general estimation of their neighbours, then he was bound to give judgment, to utter his own and her social condemnation in precisely the terms which the inhabitant of Combray most hostile to him and his daughter would have employed; he saw himself and her in 'low,' in the very 'lowest water'".¹²

The results of the management of our self-representation are highly uncertain, yet sometimes spectacular: it is the uncertainty of the result that make the interest of the reputation game. The words and the images we use for manage our reputation are "like shells, nor less integral parts of nature than are the substance they cover, but better addressed to the eye and more open to observation", in the words of George Santayana¹³. This second nature whose substance seems to be made for the sake of the appearances, owes its reality to the social environment. It is the social and distributed nature of our reputation, its refraction through the thoughts and the words of others that I want to detail in the following pages.

The presentation of self

Like snails, who leave behind a trail of slime while moving along, our social interactions leave an informational trail that cannot be deleted anymore. This trail is indelible yet fragile: we do not control it entirely, even if we cannot help leaving it behind. How does it compose and recompose? How does it become stable and public, which mediations and supports do make it diffuse and circulate?

The social contexts that record this informational trail vary from face to face interactions to gossips and rumors in the absence of the target person, and to the media and the Internet. These various means of transfer of social information shape specific biases and magnifying effects that have been studied from different disciplinary perspectives.

Erwin Goffman is certainly the most notable expert of the face to face dimension of our

¹² Cf. M. Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past. Swann's Way*. Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff, 1922.

¹³ Cf. G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and later soliloquies*, New York, Scribner's 1922, p. 131.

interactions. His impressive and detailed work on the micro-sociology of everyday interaction laid the foundations of the contemporary *impression management* techniques, so dear to consulting firms and marketing divisions. In his fine-grained analyses of how people care about their presentation in social interactions, Goffman developed a sort of *strategic theory of everyday life*. The face to face interaction is the arena in which we negotiate our social image, the place in which our double ego plays the role of the protagonist. The staging of our self can be more or less cynical. We may wish others to think highly of ourselves, no matter how real are the hidden qualities we advertize on stage. We may more or less adhere to the character we are playing, become the mask we wear, or keep a certain distance from the role we are playing. Yet, in Goffman's perspective, a part of identification with our own mask is inevitable. It is not a case that, in Latin, the word *persona* means *mask*. The shadow line that separates being and seeming is very difficult to draw. Goffman takes this idea from Robert Ezra Park, one of the pioneers of American sociology, who writes: "In a sense, and insofar as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to—this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons"¹⁴

We can find an ideally suited example of the moral transformation suggested by Park in a 1959 Italian movie directed by Roberto Rossellini, *Il generale della Rovere*. It tells the story of a petty thief, Emanuele Bardone, who is hired by the Nazis to impersonate an Italian resistance leader, General della Rovere, and infiltrate a group of resistance prisoners in a Milan prison. Once in prison, he gets acquainted with the other resistance heroes, and appreciates the more and more the recognition and esteem that everybody have for Della Rovere, the character he is impersonating. He becomes so attached to his mask that, when the fascists decide to execute some of the resistance leaders in prison in response to the killing of one of theirs, Bardone/Della Rovere assumes his role until the end, and dies with his "comrades" on the cry "*Viva l'Italia, viva la libertà*". Bardone becomes his reputation and his end is somehow heroic, even if he is not truly Della Rovere. This passage from a natural identity, to be taken at its face value, to a

¹⁴ Cf. R.E. Park (1950) *Race and Culture*, p. 250.

constructed, artificial social identity is well taken in the Italian expression: “*Ci sei o ci fai?*” which can be translated as: “*But are you so or do you act so?*”

There is a moral principle in the sociology of everyday life that organizes the social interaction and that explains why, in the end, even Bardone/Della Rovere can be considered as a moral character. According to Goffman: “society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in a correspondingly appropriate way »¹⁵

His 1956 book on the presentation of self in everyday life details the strategies that “actors” put at work to monitor their social image and influence other people’s perceptions in social settings. Goffman conceives social life as a stage in which players strut and fret their hour in order to project a convincing image of themselves. The first appearance of each actor determines immediately a context in the eyes of the audience and solicits a series of expectations about the subsequent moves. From then on, our behavior and appearance assume a social significance: the way in which we dress, our accent, our physical aspect, our age, the fact of finding ourselves on that situation at that very moment, all speaks about ourselves and constraints the way in which we can construct our image. This projection is governed by an implicit deal between the actor and the audience, that is, the audience will accept and respect the image projected by the actor and won’t try to make him lose his face. It is this implicit deal that sustains our social interactions. We dose our presentation by taking into account what others can and cannot accept. That is why first impressions are so important and so difficult to revise. Because they project the social *script* to which we will conform in the rest of the interaction. Of course, there are moments in which this projection is weakened, even contradicted. In these cases, the actor feels the embarrassment of the situation, but, given the implicit deal, he can count on the fact that his audience won’t let him down. Still, the situation may break down at some point: I ask for a loan to my bank, I present myself in an elegant dress, with a frivolous and detached attitude that should convey an image of myself as a wealthy lady who is always late in payments not because of lack of funds but just because of distraction. Then, the banker starts to ask me more precise questions about how I am thinking to reimburse the loan, and I reply incoherently, start to sweat, my

¹⁵ Cf. Goffman (1956), p. 6.

façade starts to break down and he doesn't feel committed anymore to my initial projection. He lets me down.

Many theater plays and movies construct their dramatic narratives around a breakdown of a social situation that turns sometimes into tragedy and sometimes into comedy. The *gaffe*, the blunder, are exactly the disruption of a social interaction whose projections were previously accepted by all participants. The situation slowly deteriorates, the actors can no longer play the roles they had negotiated at the beginning and someone "loses his face". The *moral* dimension of reputation and the feelings it may cause of humiliation and shame depend on this kind of disruption in the interaction management: we feel betrayed because the others don't respect anymore the initial deal of accepting the image we decided to project. They let down our double, the best part of ourselves. The breaking of the deal creates a feeling of resentment and humiliation, the indignation of not having been treated as we expected to be, even if we knew that we were staging an ego and that part of what we were projecting was a fake, it was just an invented reputation.

Of course, we cannot project whatever we want. Each social context forces us to project an appropriate image, that is, the one that embodies the shared values of the society to which the interaction belongs. As Cooley says, this is an essential part of our social learning: we project an ameliorated image of ourselves that embodies what we think the others expect from us: "By awaking social-self feelings, other persons give life and power to certain sentiments of approval and disapproval regarding our own actions. [...] The self of a sensitive person tends to become his interpretation of what the others think of him and is a prime factor in determining the moral judgments of all of us"¹⁶ A way of becoming what the others think of us is to deceive them and project the self that they would expect from us. It is a virtuous circle that makes us act socially in a more appropriate way to fulfill expectations about the social values we would like to exemplify. Yet, a virtuous circle may become a vicious one insofar as it reinforces *social conformism*. If our social self becomes too important for us, we risk of becoming slaves of it and conform to other people's imagined or actual expectations.

The way in which we represent and sometimes embody others' expectations can be definitely awkward. In Moliere's *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, Monsieur Jourdain is a

¹⁶ Cf. Cooley (1902), p. 355.

comic character because of his perpetual gap between what he thinks about the “people of quality” and what they actually are, and his clumsy attempts to conform to their imagined manners. Madame Verdurin, an ambitious Proustian character who is envious of the Parisian aristocratic *grands salons* which she is not admitted to, convinces her friend, the Baron de Charlus, to organize a *soirée* at her house inviting all the important aristocratic people she would love to meet. The Baron accepts, invites everyone, but once at Madame Verdurin’s place, nobody even think of getting acquainted to her: they treat her as she were transparent and her hope of integrating at last the high society vanishes in the most bitter disappointment. Also, our social codes may change as well as our thoughts about other people’s expectations on us. In Balzac’s *Lost illusions*, the outfits of Madame De Bargeton, which appeared to him the ultimate elegance once in Angoûleme, seem plain and unfashionable in the new context of a Parisian theatrical performance.

It is clear that the back and forth between our self and our social image, the progressive adjustment between what we think others see of us and what we wish others recognize of us is the essence of our social learning. And in this back and forth we sometimes go beyond the imaginary demand of the social world and try more hazardous presentations of our selves, thus creating spaces for social innovation. Simone de Beauvoir says something very deep about the innovative potential of the social self in her description of the way in which women deal with fashion. Beyond social codes, each woman who dresses and makes up “doesn’t present *herself* to the observation. As a painting or a statue, or as an actor on the stage, she is an agent through which someone who is not there is alluded to – the character she represents but she is not”¹⁷.

Goffman’s *impression management* is a fine-grained analysis of face to face interactions that are structured in a *front*, - the frontal stage in which the interaction takes place, articulated in *appearance* (what is presented as inherent to the physical person) and *manner*, and a *back-stage*, that is, all that is to be set up in order to play the scene. The impression management implies to hide some motivations and put forward others and keep a certain coherence with different expressions of our self. Goffman’s analysis reduces thus the *face* to a property of the interaction and not of the individual. And the

¹⁷ Cf. Simone de Beauvoir (1949).

“live” aspect of the face to face interaction excludes the cumulative effects of *reputation*, that is often constructed and transmitted “off line”, that is, in absence of the actor. Yet, the social emotions of shame, pride, glory, resentment, etc., are not generated only within face to face interactions. Even if they are essentially relational and comparative emotions, the social conditions that solicit them can be minimal. Social psychology shows that the mere presence of an eye-icon on the screen of a computer during the performance of a cognitive task changes the results of a performance¹⁸ that involves, at least indirectly, social approbation or disapproval. And, as we have seen in the sad history of Jean-Claude Rolland, the interactions that put our social ego under unsustainable pressure, are sometimes just imagined, inexistent: children can break down under the imaginary pressures of their parents about their achievements. Fear of deception is very often a fantasy. Actually, most of the times, nobody cares whether we triumph or fail.

Thus, if these emotions are the product of the interaction, they do not depend on *actual* interactions, but can be elicited also by simple mental vestiges of these interactions, perhaps provoked by the thousands of past social interactions that left a trail on our minds and bodies and shaped our cognition.

How reputation comes to the mind

According to the psychologist Philippe Rochat, reputation is what makes us human. What distinguishes us most from other species is the interiorized gaze of others. Instead of seeing the anxiety for reputation as a sociological trait of present times, Rochat reconstructs its possible ontogenetic roots in the infant’s minds. The anxiety of *how I see myself seen* emerges very early in childhood. Hence, the hyper-attention to our image is not the “mark of modernity” as some authors have argued¹⁹, but a perennial trait of our psychology. According to Rochat’s experimental research, the two years old child has already a “co-consciousness” of himself, which is related to the famous, or infamous, *mirror stage*, studied by many psychologists and psychoanalysts²⁰. In the standard

¹⁸ Cf. Haley & Fessler (2006).

¹⁹ Cf. for example Charles Taylor, *The Making of the Self. Sources of Modern Identity*, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

²⁰ First studied by Henri Wallon (1934), the mirror stage has been discussed by René Zazzo, Jacques Lacan,

psychoanalytic interpretation of the mirror stage, the child has a jubilatory reaction to the recognition of his image reflected in the mirror, a positive experience that depends on the feeling of reunification of his bodily perception. Conversely, Rochat's experiments show that children associate this experience to a feeling of embarrassment, of being "caught" in an attitude they were not aware of. The experience of the social self is at the same time precocious and painful. By passing the *mirror stage test*²¹, children not only become self-conscious, but also co-conscious, that is, aware of the fact that there exists a social gaze on them. The precocity of this feeling could depend on the existence from the very early childhood of a capacity of *joint attention*. The child's survival depends on his capacity to solicit the attention of his caregivers. Monitoring other people's attention is thus one of the most precocious abilities children develop. Children do nonsensical things to attract mothers' attention while they are talking on the phone or are distracted by a conversation in the street.

The social aspect of our cognition could thus be very precocious. The infant comes to the world "equipped" with cognitive mechanisms - like joint attention - that allow him to control the social environment and predispose him to take care of the mirror image of himself, as if the cocktail of consciousness and social cognition makes of us a species that is particularly sensitive to social judgment. Thinking through others and thinking with others predispose ourselves to think of what others think of us.

The internalization of the social world is well shown by the difference between the emotion of shame and guilt. Shame depends on the social gaze, true or interiorized, whereas guilt can be developed in absence of any social interaction: in the second case, the measure of other people's judgment is so interiorized that we can end up exposing ourselves to public contempt in order to save the morality of our social self.

Even Cyrano de Bergerac, the hero who fights against hypocrisy, against the appearances, the romantic hero of "the being" against "the seeming", goes to the heaven without the laurel and the rose, but with something that is "free of hurt or stain": his *panache*²².

D.W. Winnicott, Françoise Dolto and others.

²¹ Cf. Amsterdam (1972); Gallup (1970).

²² Cf. The last lines of Edmond Rostand's play *Cyrano de Bergerac*.