

## From the Ego of desire to the Ego of will

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### RESUMEN

Este trabajo aborda tres cuestiones principales. Primero, la paradoja entre deconstrucción y reivindicación del sujeto en René Girard y Jean-Michel Oughourlian. Segundo, proponemos cinco figuras del yo del deseo que encontramos en Oughourlian. Finalmente recorreremos el camino que va del 'yo del deseo' al 'yo de la voluntad'.

### TEMAS

filosofía del sujeto · Jean-Michel Oughourlian · psicología interindividual · René Girard · teoría mimética · yo del deseo

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## Introduction

In this work I will present three points. First of all, I will speak about the paradox between deconstruction and reivindicación of the subject in René Girard and Jean-Michel Oughourlian. Secondly, I will propose five figures of the Ego of Desire that I have found in Oughourlian's work. And finally I will try to make the transition from the Ego of Desire to the Ego of Will (1).

### 1. The paradox between deconstruction and reivindicación of the subject

There is a big paradox in Girard and perhaps in Oughourlian too. On the one hand, one of the consequences of the mimetic theory is the deconstruction of the subject. The accusation concerning the romantic lie. That means, there is no authentic desire, of one's self and there isn't a subject as an essence either. Desire is mimetic and the subject would be something like a ghost according to Girard who is more radical than Oughourlian in his point of view. Oughourlian is more specific and he talks in a more accurate way when he speaks about the subject as a structure that is changing all the time and in a continuous interaction. The subject isn't the main structure but the mimetic relationships. Because of this, Girard and Oughourlian speak in the terms of the "interindividual psychology" (Girard, Oughourlian 1978: Livre III).

Nevertheless, on the other hand, for Girard the concept of conversion is fundamental, and there is no conversion without a subject. For the converted subject it is possible: to be conscious about his mimesis and his tendency to rivalry and violence; to renounce and to resist as much as possible negative and violent mimetism. The converted subject could choose his pacific models of imitation too. In Oughourlian's work also there would be one invitation to become an "initiated subject", one invitation to wisdom, to give up mimetic conflicts and mimetic competition. Therefore, this is the paradox: we find a deconstruction of the subject considered as inessential and dissolved in interindividual relationships, and, at the same time, we find a reivindication, an invitation to become a converted subject, a conscious and wise subject.

How can we understand this paradox? On the one hand, we have to consider always this fact: What is the man?, and particularly, what is the subject?, is a philosophical question that refers to an enigma, a mystery. It will never be possible to answer definitely this question. Girard and Oughourlian both remind us of this:

- Girard when he speaks about the paradox of the human being as a Self, described by him as a "mysterious unity, in each person, of the most radical autonomy and heteronomy" (Girard 1990: 183-184).

- Oughourlian, in one of the most beautiful passages, claims: "the key of love consists too in the recognition of the mystery of the other, understanding that I will never be able to own that which I love, to circumscribe and to define him, to confine him in one identity or in a definitive nomination. To understand that he will always escape, and to understand, it is this freedom that we have to preserve, trying not to coerce it, because it lets us keep the love, that is fed by this mystery, by his common and reiterated recognition " (Oughourlian 2007: 259-260).

On the other hand we propose a solution. The key is to recognize different senses about what an individual and a subject are. David Hume, Nietzsche, Foucault, Barthes, Daniel Dennett... have claimed the death or the inexistence of the subject or of the Ego or the Self, or his definition as something fictional. In the case of Girard and Oughourlian we can underline they are speaking according to the approach of the interindividual psychology. So, we don't have to renounce the existence of the individual. We don't have to renounce the existence of the subject as a physical, biological and corporal entity. But we can also speak about the subject as a psychological entity, at least in this sense: a psychic subject with a stable identity throughout time and with a personal history (a narrative identity, according with Paul Ricoeur). Nevertheless, thanks to the mimetic theory, we know that this subject and his ontogenesis are possible thanks to mimesis, to mimetic desire and we know the subject is always shaped by others.

We propose the concept of "multiplex unity" by Edgar Morin, for talking about the subject as an open, changing, dynamic structure, as Oughourlian claims too. The Ego has emerged thanks to mimetic desire, that we affirm in

the first person as a subject, as a unity that makes the federation of the multiplicity of selves of desire possible (Morin 2001: 104-105).

In this way we can consider the compatibility between the mimetic deconstruction of the subject and the reivindication and the invitation to become converted, conscious or wise subjects. We can not describe the subject as an autonomous, romantic, modern, essential or substantial entity, but we can conceive its origin linked to the mimetic desire and, again we can understand the subject as an open and federal structure of a multiplicity of selves of desire.

In fact, Oughourlian presupposes some different figures of the ego of Desire. All of them have a common characteristic: to be understood according to the Copernican turn in the understanding of desire, that consists of passing from thinking of the desire as a property of the Self, to understanding the Self as a product or a secretion of desire.

We have found five figures of the Ego of Desire. We are going to simplify the matter making only one reference to a page of the book *The Mimetic Brain* by Oughourlian (2016) in the French edition (*Notre troisième cerveau*, 2013), in which we can see all of them together. We will present this page translated from the French edition because it is different to the American edition, where the content is not exactly the same. We will speak about five figures of the Ego of desire.

## 2. Five figures of the Ego of desire

- Ego of desire 1. Durable and conscious structure (originated by mimetic desire too). **[1]**

- Ego of desire 2. Psychological movement as a result of the suggestion-imitation dynamic, between an individual and another individual or material, social or cultural phenomenon or element. **[2]**

- Ego of desire 3. Equal to number 2 but equivalent to a more durable psychological movement with more intensity or an ensemble of movements in plural. For example: in hobbies, personal relationships, jobs and so on. **[3]**

- Ego of desire 4: Personality as a sum of identifications, as a patchwork of all the models of our desires. **[4]**

- No conscious dimensions (5). Mimetic dimensions ignored. **[5]**

"The psychological "self" [is] always *a self-between* constantly formed and reformed by the back and forth of interindividual relations and other external realities encountered throughout life, as well as idealized models [...] suggested by culture". **[2]**

Eugene Webb joins us, René Girard, and myself, to reflect on how there is

no more a *self* inherent to person A, than there is a *self* inherent to person B. One could even say that each time we [0] (a) encounter someone [0], or that we enter into a relation with someone, a new self is formed [3]. What we commonly call our "personality" is nothing but the sum of our self-between, which was formed between our childhood and our youth, in large part due to the influence [*suggestions* (fr.)] of our parents and our family, and later on our friends and our mentors [4]. Even our most profound self-between, which is more or less stable, is constantly reformed by our models. The "self" is a patchwork of all of these models [4] and, according to the circumstances of the moment, one "self" or another can leap to forefront; sometimes it's our mother or our father, and sometimes it's one of our friends or teachers. Personal experience confirms the reality of this phenomenon, and we are often surprised [1] [5] (b) (sometimes disagreeably) to recognize [1] that we're reproducing the habits or tics, of a former professor, or we realize [1] we're speaking just like our mother, or reacting like one of our friends, or even talking like someone who was on TV the previous night" (Oughourlian 2013: 26).

### 3. From the Ego of desire to the Ego of the will

We could add another type of Ego in addition, that is present in Oughourlian's work. It would be called the Ego of the Will. What does this Ego of the Will consist of? The self or the ego is a secretion, result of the mimetic desire and they identify each other reciprocally. So there are as many egos as desires. In the same way, the will would be the crystallisation of desire, its solidification. And, therefore, we could also speak about the ego of the will or about a variety of wills, identifying them with those solid desires in the long term. They could be a translation of the wisdom of each person. Because a wise or conscious person is one who is able to choose some of the enormous quantity of suggested desires, and is able to appropriate them as their own desires, forging their own selves. Choosing some of them, they are able to renounce the other desires and they have exercised their freedom.

Not to be able to do this would be a symptom of desire illness.

Oughourlian is very critical concerning present-day societies where there are almost no rites and taboos or authority models, and where an absolute equality is proposed. This absolute equality would not be possible because, even if we could achieve an equality related to possessions and property, we could never achieve equality in the order of "being" (personal qualities, symbolic differences...). Mass media and the publicity industry are continuously encouraging mimetic desire. And this is an enormous and problematic obstacle to creating our own will attached to our self-consciousness. The tendency to satisfy desires continuously and immediately can lead us to the incapacity to transform desires into will, that means, it can degenerate into the agenesis of desire. In other words, we are talking about the incapacity to make a personal appropriation of desires in the long term and so, we are talking about the absence of well-structured and structuring Ego or Self.

Oughourlian denounces this problem in his first important book: *The Drugg Addict Person* (*La personne du toxicomane*, 1974) in which he diagnoses the weakness and the inconsistency in the drug addict's personality, incapable of any engagement or link with plans in their lives in a durable way (Oughourlian, 1974: 255-256). In *Psychopolitics* (*Psychopolitique*, 2010), Oughourlian speaks again about the necessity of mobilizing energy to get out of the crowd and not to become a sheep. He denounces the agenesis of desire as a way of being handicapped, above all in young people, because it is the desire that "produces, builds, shapes, programs and creates the self" (Oughourlian 2010: 115).

Jean-Michel Oughourlian invites us to experience the same process described by René Girard as "conversion". He prefers to call it initiation, wisdom or ascetics of desire. Here it would be fundamental to develop the Ego of the will that, for him, "we can only practice in full consciousness, in the context of a powerful mental synthesis" (Oughourlian 1982: 203). As a result of this consciousness we could achieve more freedom to choose desires in a more conscious way, without considering them as possessions or as something which is essentially our own and, therefore, not necessary for us. This could help us to renounce mimetic conflicts and rivalry and also to liberate us from the individualistic lie that denies the mimetic nature of desire (Oughourlian 2013: 315; Oughourlian 2007: 60, 61).

#### 4. Conclusion

Oughourlian, as we said at the beginning is also conscious of the mystery of subjectivity because, as he claims, there is the "fundamental and almost ontological problem" of which is the role of the individual in the interdividuality (Oughourlian 2013: 109, 117).

We will never have a definitive answer. We can never run away from mimetism. But we will be able to assume the mysterious dimension of human subjectivity and to learn the lessons of mimetic desire theory. In this way we can accept ourselves as we are, and so, in addition, accept that mimesis of desire is also contributing to our freedom, as Oughourlian underlines. Freedom linked to the possibility of choosing our imitation models, by means of the exercise of discernment and will.

We have the challenge of choosing our plans in the long term, to favour as much as possible the solidification of desires, for their transformation into will (Oughourlian 2017: 142). The challenge of the freedom to renounce the rivalry and mimetic conflicts (Oughourlian 2017: 141, 136). And the challenge of the freedom to walk in an iniciatic way to mimetic wisdom. From the romantic lie, from the desire of the Ego, to the Ego of desire and the Ego of will.

This humble contribution would wish to pay homage to professor Oughourlian. In gratitude for giving us the conceptual tools that help us to live better, to swim in the restless sea of desires, arriving to the safe ports of will, freedom and health.

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## Notas

1. This work was presented in the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R) 2017, Madrid, 14<sup>th</sup> July.
    - a. Individual, person.
    - b. We can be surprised or not and we ignore it before being surprised.
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