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Lacan and Gestalt Theory, with Some Suggestions for Cultural Studies

This is a first attempt to deal with the ideas of Jacques Lacan from the point of view of Gestalt Theory. I do this with an eye on visual and cultural studies, where Lacan is ubiquitous. His popularity owes to the fact that his ideas of the “mirror stage,” “the gaze,” and others are simple and suggestive, presenting a compact toolkit that has wide-ranging uses as exemplified by their profitable use by Slovenian philosopher Žižek. Žižek (2002), for example, interpreted the events of 9/11 as the “irruption of the Real into the Symbolic order” (15-16). A sympathetic interpreter of Žižek, Jodi Dean, sees “drive” – a kind of enjoyment of failure – as in lock-step with contemporary “communicative” capitalism.

The topicality of these ideas goes along in general with psychoanalysis, which has always promised an insight into the modern condition with all its flaws. In the past the heroic followers of Gestalt theory pointed out the errors of psychoanalytic work. Does the same apply here? It is worth comparing Lacan to Gestalt Theory, not only because his ideas of the mirror stage actually refer to the Gestalt idea and Gestalt figures, but because it is useful to think about the constitution of cultural studies as well as to force some criticism back on Lacan, which promises a more inclusive notion of Lacan’s ideas.

My method is inspired by Solomon Asch’s (1952) and Norbert Bischof’s (1990) independent discussion of psycho-sexual development in terms of perceptual features. I have applied this methodology in an article on the experience of color and the maternal Id as theorized by Julia Kristeva (Verstegen 2013). What these works on Freud and Kristeva share is an attempt to bridge perceptual to personality and abnormal facts through a naturalistic attitude. In particular, the most important thing I want to accomplish is to understand the way in which Lacanian theory is anti-visual yet replete with visual metaphors, and to come to a resolution.

As I shall argue, this exclusive attitude against visibility encourages hermeticism and limits one’s relation to Lacan to exegesis. Opening the purview not only allows us to keep the theory living and breathing with new input from

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psychology and psychiatry, but also opens Gestalt theory to “irrational” ground beyond the normal “formal” hunting ground of Arnheimian theory. Indeed, a philosopher like Robert Sinnerbrink (2011) can argue that cognitivism (in film theory) simply presumes that films are valuable and commences to analyze them and cannot answer the fundamental question of why we watch them in the first place. In reality, as we shall see, Gestalt theory is already open to the irrational – on its own terms.

After reviewing the Gestalt reception of Freud’s theories, I will review the basic categories of Lacan’s theories, and the work of his contemporary interpreters, particularly Žižek. Then, I will conduct a discussion of Lacan and the psychological problem of naturalism, next passing on to a discussion of the mirror stage, proposing a “perceptual” model of its development. Then I will look more closely at the very notion of “the gaze,” interpreting it in a perceptual way as well. Finally, I review the consequences for Lacanian interests under the rigor of the Gestalt approach.

Disappointment with Freud

Gestalt theory emerged just after psychoanalysis and so had a chance to respond to its ideas; or, rather, the worldview of psychoanalysis in part inspired the counter-claims of Gestalt theory from the beginning. Psychologists like Max Wertheimer regarded Freud as full of scientific ambition but short of methodological circumspection. He promoted a brand of “scientific relativism,” wherein he offered very wide-ranging theories of human motivation but from a protected Enlightenment-style viewpoint. Wertheimer recognized that psychoanalysis worked until it was scrutinized too closely. Then it became unclear how the analysand and the analyst could both be constituted by psychoanalytic principles. While Freud was a medical doctor, he did not stress too strongly how his mental topology could actually take shape. For example, in regard to the unconscious, Koffka already in 1927 concluded that it was based on a substantialist metaphysics. If our conscious mental life has its basis in neural traces, these are the “unconscious”, and so it is incorrect to posit another level. Arnheim (1969), too, has pursued Freud’s topography of the personality as a useful spatial analogy, one that is more of a thought tool than a true map to the mind.

“The Id is the central source of blindly radiating energy. Under the impact of the physical environment, the outer sheath of the psyche develops the organs of sensory perception and becomes a protective bark against injuries from the outside. As an intermediary between the environment and the Self, the Ego reacts to the outer world and controls the libidinal aggressiveness of the Id in the interest of self-preservation” (Arnheim 2009, 285).

According to Arnheim, this conception has the immature simplicity of a figure on a ground, that is, an elementary perception.

Similar charges of a lack of clarity also accompany the mechanisms of behavior. For example, Mary Henle (1982) reviews the concept of *projection*, when neurotic mental contents are projected on others. Even if this has some intuitive plausibility, a more rigorous formulation must be sought. Henle (1982) suggests the following account: basic projection is not an inability to see a characteristic of ourselves in others but rather a reinterpretation of what we do see, that is, a judgment. Compare the theorization of “rationalization.” Rationalization is popularly understood as the giving of acceptable and colorable reasons to explain actions, wishes, motives, and attitudes unacceptable to the ego. Rationalization is like projection except that an action, instead of an item, is reinterpreted. Cases of rationalization include: the smoker who gives all sorts of reasons for not giving up the habit (she would get too fat, she would become disagreeable and her family would suffer, etc.); or the man who does not want to marry and finds fault with every woman he meets. Perhaps with some knowledge of Maurice Mandelbaum’s ethical theory, Henle (1982) has discussed the role of attention in such cases. One fixes one’s attention on one aspect of a situation over another in order to ignore more major determinants in favor of more peripheral ones. She says, “there is probably a vector in such cases, arising from the unacceptable motive or action, causing us not to look in a certain direction, not to push our understanding” (Henle 1982, 886).

Note how Henle’s critique functions. There is no plausible mechanism for projection; furthermore, its very working is blind and irrational. If, however, certain current preoccupations cause us, not to change our perception, but to attend to other things via a judgment, then methodological rigor is maintained. The foregoing brief discussion will develop some themes that will be important for Lacan. First, with Freud there is the recognition of the intuitive or interesting kernel of an idea that is there with an accompanying dissatisfaction not only with the way that it is expressed but also the epistemological consequences. Freud’s irrationalism is not just an unfortunate view of humanity but calls his enterprise into question. At this point, something can be said about actual Gestalt work on pathology (e.g., Levy 1936; Schulte 1924/1986). Gestalt theory has dealt with pathology selectively, on its own terms. Neuroses, for example, are relational errors of part and whole. Because the epistemological stakes are higher with pathology – more is committed to than in ordinary situations – it must proceed more circumspectly.

And that is how Arnheim deals with the popular. When confronted with the rise of the popular film (Arnheim 1932/1933) or with the “soap opera” radio serial (1944), he did not hesitate to invoke Freudian “wish fulfillment” because it was

appropriate (Freud, 1900/1958; 1941). Yet he warned that, “when Freud wanted to show that art, just as dreams, offers wish fulfillment, he limited himself to popular fiction” (Arnheim 1992, 120). The point is that he felt it was not important or at least not primarily important for discussing the most successful works of art.

Ultimately, where Freudian psychoanalysis becomes irrational is where its relation of object to cause is interrupted by the conservative drives, the intrusion of the id into mental life. The basically involuted nature of Freudian theory is precisely retrogressive (Arnheim, 1971, 45; Wallach & Wallach, 1983; Zukier, 1985). In spite of these comments, Freudian psychoanalysis is still potentially therapeutic. At its best, it seeks to rejoin objects back to the causes of their displacement, even if it does so along a very circuitous route. This contrasts with the anti-therapeutic nature of Lacanian theory, as we will see in a moment.

The Lacanian System

Jacques Lacan offered his basic concepts both as a “return to Freud” and a fundamental overhaul of Freud’s basic concepts. Whereas Freud had balanced libidinal instincts (id) with social pressure (superego), resulting in the ego, Lacan was convinced of the centrality of language in creating subjectivity. Thus, like Freud, he rolled a social theory into a psychological theory. However, instead of the three posited parts to the psyche – the ego, id and superego – Lacan nominated the real, symbolic and imaginary.

The infant begins in a pre-subjective state, at one with the Real. The real continues to assert itself occasionally, through the insistence of material resources and the limitations and failings of the material body. Slowly, and discontinuously, it begins to enter the Imaginary, the creation of an ego. Finally, it enters the Symbolic, the linguistic order of the world of adults. Throughout its life, the child balances its imaginary ego with the subject that has been created for it by the social order. As the individual develops, it has different relations of attachment to the Other. First, it responds to real needs. Next, operating in the imaginary order, it has demands. Finally, in the symbolic order it desires.

Domain	Relation	Status
Real	Need	Body
Imaginary	Demand	Subject
Symbolic	Desire	Individual

Zizek has brought clarity to this situation, particularly in the way that Lacan’s ideas have been married, sometimes unhappily, with those of Louis Althusser, to provide explanations of interpellation and how social orders induce recognition in subjects via ideology. Zizek clarifies the series of steps that are taken from human

bodies to individuals. In Geoff Boucher's (2010) very helpful reconstruction, first human bodies are interpellated into subjects moving from the Real to the Symbolic. As there is no referent, no self, the closure to this decentering and loss is found via enjoyment. In the next instance, subjects are interpellated into individuals, as they move from the symbolic to the imaginary. Not referring to a self (performance or enunciation), this move of content or statement is frustrated by a lack of signifier.

Lacan has been discussed by Žižek and Dean because he seems to help explain a very contemporary reality that we face today. As western society has moved from the "Fordist" to "post-Fordist" modes of production, it has also moved beyond a disciplinary mode of conformity to one of control. Monitoring, searching, surveillance, and policing are the new instruments of control.

"In psychoanalytic terms, we can say that symbolic identity is increasingly fragile, uncertain, and meaningless in the society of control. Imaginary identities sustained by the promise and provision of enjoyment replace symbolic identities. And the multiplicity and adaptability of these identities does not mean that subjects are somehow freer or more liberated than they were under the discipline of the welfare state. Rather, they come under different sets of controls, different organizations of enjoyment" (Dean 2009, 66).

Because the Imaginary is an area of constructive organization, in which Lacan specifically saw Gestalt theory as making a contribution, we would think that it is here that Gestalt ideas have a contribution to make.

Lacan and Naturalism

In his paper, "Lacan's Misuse of Psychology," Michael Billig (2006) has presented a rhetorical analysis of Lacan's work with which I am in agreement. Lacan, unlike some of his interpreters, has a working but complex relationship with "academic" authorities. He tends to cite them, never with complete scholarly apparatus, but for their examples. In general, as Billig shows, he stresses the banality of the observation, sometimes referring to authors with the indefinite pronoun ("une Charlotte Buhler"). This has the effect of allowing him to provide the missing interpretive element. But this is still a relationship to sources all the same, and Billig shows how this raises "awkward questions" and in the case of literature on the child's experience before a mirror these sources "were highly questionable at the time of his writing" (Billig 2006, 9).

This is a useful background for my own discussion which follows how in Lacan's work there is a progressive movement from psychology to metapsychology. In his system is a movement from a perceptual idea of identity to one that is linguistic – the Symbolic. By emphasizing meta-psychology and downplaying the interpretation of both the mirror stage and the notion of identity in the Gaze as *visual*, Lacan

successfully unhinged his theory from empirical concerns. This allowed it great freedom to be appropriated in the world of the humanities and particularly in cultural studies where his concepts are quite common. Nevertheless, the relationship must be worked out, even within Lacanian theory itself. For example, must the infant recognize itself in the mirror? What about a blind child? What we see here is that by moving from vision to the linguistic, Lacan is able to distance himself from psychology, causing problems. What I will suggest is that he has to stress sensory components, if only to reframe them in a new “symbolic” way.

Take the example provided by Solomon Asch (1952) and elaborated by Norbert Bischof (1990). They depart from the idea that psychosexual development, when hypostatized as it is by Freud into the “oral,” “anal,” and “phallic,” tends to become rigid (as is also true of the mirror stage). Instead, each reasoned that these short-hand names ought to be referring to something more substantial and in this case it is the differentiation of the infant from a fused, maternal medium and an accommodation of the male father figure.

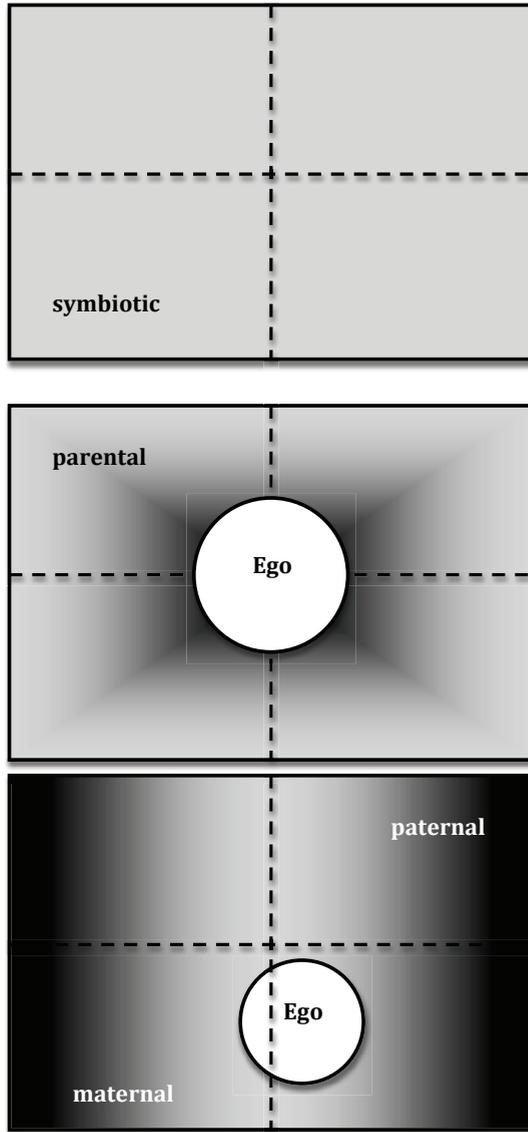


Fig. 1 After Bischof's reinterpretation of Freud's developmental phase doctrine. Above: “oral” situation; middle: “anal” situation; below: “oedipal” situation.

The end result is the creation of three distinct individuals, with the father certainly off to the side, but a result that is largely “perceptual.” As Bischof (1990) explains,

“We propose to conceive of the ‘oral’ phase as an age in which Ego quality and parental quality of the emotional atmosphere are still indistinguishable and strictly medial. In the ‘anal’ phase the quality of Self, according to this view, condenses to a figural Ego which occupies the center of importance, still embedded in, but set off against, the primal medium. Finally, in the ‘oedipal’ phase, this medium is disintegrated and, as it were, lateralized” (Bischof 1990, 373).

Rather than having the stages refer to biological functions, the imagery here is more elementary and indeed spatial.

What this tells us is that Gestalt psychology is not necessarily visual psychology, even though its practitioners revolutionized that subject, but rather an elaborated theory of sensory perception. By making this shift, one is able to gain more specificity for the theory. So is the mirror stage “visual?” Not necessarily, but it must have some *sensory* component. In this way, the apparent dichotomy of the anti-visuality of Lacanian theory and the hyper-visuality of experimental psychology may be overcome.

The Mirror Stage

This is useful background for understanding the development of subjectivity in Lacan but, first, what did Lacan actually say? His theory evolved and was first elaborated for this element (Lacan 1977). The mirror stage is a developmental stage at which a child (called the *enfans*) is able to recognize itself and is central to the Imaginary stage.

This simple cognitive milestone is plumbed by Lacan for its constitution of the notion of subjectivity. It is in this moment of recognition that the child at once recognizes its “true” self but also becomes aware of the discrepancy between its own variety of subjectivity and the challenge of the new specular image. “These reflections”, Lacan says, “lead me to recognize in the spatial capture manifested by the mirror stage, the effect in man, even prior to this social dialectic, of an organic inadequacy of his natural reality” (Lacan 1977, 96). Within the Imaginary, the child learns that demand cannot be satisfied. Here, the child rehearses, as it were, the entry into the language-based realm of the symbolic, by entering into the symbolic. The mirror stage is a kind of *Urbild* of the ego. “The child is constituted in conformity to and by means of the image” (Julien 1994, 32).

Lacan (1977) mentions the concept of the Gestalt for the first time when he discusses this specular self-image:

“For the total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it” (Lacan 1977, 4).

Here, he is clearly relying on the gestalt idea in a popular sense, as something interpolated beyond mere sensation. The gestalt is like art: exterior, constitutive, a frozen contour, a reversed symmetry, in short *resolved ambiguity*. This interpretation stresses the willful fantasy of the ego-Gestalt. In contrast to the more chiasmic idea of subjectivity of his later theory, here Lacan has found a mechanism to suture reality.

I have already mentioned Billig’s (2006) critique and I will not rehearse his criticisms, except to note that he convincingly shows that this concept of mirror recognition was quite well known in French circles at the time of Lacan’s writing. Not only is Köhler inaccurately cited, but more compromisingly French authors sensitive to Gestalt theory like Paul Guillaume’s *Imitation in Children* (1926/1971) and Henri Wallon’s *Les origines du caractère chez l’enfant* (1934/1949). We might add that while Köhler (1927) showed that the child can recognize herself in the mirror, she does not receive, as Lacan suggests, an “Aha-Erlebnis.” Of course, this concept is owed to Karl Bühler (1907) and Köhler was instead associated with the idea of insight (*Einsicht*), as in his experiments with chimpanzees.

In the manner of Bischof, it is possible to specify this dynamic in terms of the phenomenological qualities of both development and, secondarily, looking at a mirror. We can already see that the Oedipal or phallic stage outlined by Bischof is at the root of the very idea of alienation from the parental medium and the differentiation of that medium into a mother and father. Here, Lacan’s observations on self-recognition should be fitted into this larger problem. Clearly, the child recognizes itself and yet there is ambiguity in the pull between the two – formerly one – parental figures. One might say with Lacan that the family drama becomes the *Urbild* of the language-based symbolism.

Following the early research with which Lacan had such an ambiguous relationship, there is newer research. For example, Rochat (2001) outlines the stage of “me as an other,” the child recognizing itself but not recognizing its persistence over time, by the second year (*see Table 1*). This corresponds roughly to Bischof’s clarification of the “anal” stage, where the child clearly differentiates itself from its parental medium. Next, at about three years the child recognizes itself over time, corresponding to the phallic stage. There is a clear sense that, phenomenologically, the image in mirror does have a self-given authority that the child identifies with and yet does not. Rochat (2003) writes that “The mirror

experience of the self carries this fundamental ambiguity and children struggle with it, as we will see, until at least their fourth birthday. Note that this ambiguity is pervasive all through the life span” (Rochat 2003, 726; c.f. 2001).

Mentioning the life span brings to mind the mirror image as a metaphor for enculturation in general. Much work on perception in mirrors brings to light further confusions with regard to mirrors and reflections. According to Bianchi & Savardi (2008), left-right reversals are not a pseudo-problem solved by considering the physics of light. There is a genuine phenomenological conundrum when one’s right arm moves but it appears that one’s reflected left hand has done so. Furthermore, the egocentric (my left or right) predicament is compounded when standing on a mirror, which introduces an exocentric (environmental) framework. There instead of a kind of identity between self and reflection, subjects perceive their reflection as *opposite*. For adults, clearly, mirrors throw up very specific conundrums.

Table 1

Level (Age)	Label	Description
1 (birth)	Differentiation	Self-world differentiation as contingency
2 (from 2 months)	Situation (proto-narcissistic)	Intermodal link between movement in mirror and self-movement
3 (by the second year)	Identification	The birth of “me”
4 (about three years)	Permanence	Sense of “me” extending over time
5 (4-5 years)	Self-consciousness or “meta” self-awareness	Others in mind

Table 1 Specular self-consciousness, after Rochat.

Lacan (1977) always stressed that desire in vision is never purely visual or geometrical: “what is an issue in geometric perspective is simply the mapping of space, not sight” (Lacan 1977, 86) and “it deals with geometric vision, that is to say, with vision in so far as it is situated in a space that is not in its essence the visual” (Lacan 1977, 94). In a way similar to how the “gaze” will be discussed, however, the mirror stage need not be understood literally in visual terms. For Lacan, what is important is that the image that I see reflected back functions as an external picture of me, myself as an other. That indeed is not visual. However, the psychological competencies that lead to how we regard how satisfactory that picture is for us, whether we accept it, are indeed perceptual. The fundamental phenomenology of sameness and difference found when viewing a mirror is at the basis of the notion of subjectivity found when we think of the “mirror” that society holds up to us. Indeed, it is probably true that the kind of sense of self delivered by a smooth polished mirror reflects modern subjectivity, in the sense that a highly technical

representation of the self (like photography, video and audio) is that against which we strive for recognition (“is that *really* how I look/sound?”).

Thus, in the same way that Lacan saw the child in the mirror as a proto-symbolic phase, anticipating future (alienating) developments, we can see how our more phenomenological account with children and adults does the same thing. But importantly a bridge has been built between elementary experiences of subjectivity (viewing the self in the mirror) and more speculative understandings of insertion in the social or linguistic order.

The Gaze

The gaze for Lacan encapsulates human subjectivity. As the individual learns to live with the Symbolic, its proof is that they are subject to the Gaze. Like the mirror stage, it is easy to confuse the gaze with actual looking, and as I will argue there has to be *some* relationship to looking. But it is best to understand at least the concept as developed by Lacan and his followers in a non-visual way. The Gaze is always a personal construction. It is not what is objectively objectifying or interpellating the subject, but what the person *imagines* someone else’s looking to be. In other words, we become a sort of “picture” to be given to the gaze, because we make our self into a given to be seen (Franses 2001). The relation to vision can be put in the following way: it is not so much that we are ourselves and subsequently become a “picture,” but rather that the picture comes first; I desire a picture and then I put myself as what I think the Gaze wants to see.

As with the case of the mirror stage, is this really the case? Consider Lacan’s example. He is fishing with some Brittany fishermen, who embarrass him at one point. He is painfully aware that he does not fit in; he is aware of the Gaze. How visual is this? His standing vis a vis the fishermen may not be visual but it certainly is emotional or related to dyadic and one-to-many relationships. In the same way that we questioned whether the mirror stage must be *visual* but in some non-trivial way must be *sensory* so too can we say the same thing about the Gaze.

From a Gestalt point of view, Lacan’s discussion lacks “ecology” (Lewin 1943) or “environmental determinants” (Heider 1939). That is, the transcendent or “distal” object has to be specified (Koffka 1935). It is important to note that subjectivity is an internal process, but it also must come from somewhere. What is its coordination to the outside world? Why is the Gaze stable? It should be pointed out here that for Gestalt theory at least, the naming of the transcendent object does not mean that it is transparently or unproblematically given; in Maurice Mandelbaum’s (1964) elaboration of Wolfgang Köhler (1938), “we do not have the right to identify *any* of the qualities of objects as they are directly experienced by us with the properties of objects as they exist in the physical world independently of us” (Mandelbaum 1964, 221).

It is because transcendent causes are absent from his system that one can say of Lacan's model, as of Freud's (Galli 1997), that it is individual psychology posing as social theory. But the stakes are even greater, because without an outward directed element to the theory and indeed a recognition that coordination with the world is valuable, the rupture of the entry into the Symbolic (and yearning for the Imaginary), this isn't much different from Freud and other neo-Freudians (and personalistic psychologists) in that therapeutic reality is found in the self, whether the Id (Freud) or Symbolic (Lacan) (see Wallach & Wallach 1983; Walter 1996; Zukier 1985).

The previous discussion opens up the possibility of a rapprochement with usages of the Gaze in visual culture studies. It has rightly been pointed out by orthodox interpreters of Lacan that the idea that dominant audiences produce the Gaze is technically not correct, as it is a non-visual idea (Copjec 1994; Silverman 1992). These clarifications have typically assumed that the male gendering of the Gaze must be revised. But must it? If the ecology is specified in terms of predominant constitution and power relations, couldn't the historicized Gaze still be upheld? Such a move would explain misreadings of Lacan in the direction of Foucault.

In other words, if the gaze is admitted to be non-visual in an orthodox sense, a naturalized variety can accommodate a similar perceptual version of the concept. This view, as that for the Mirror Stage, would accommodate the idea that a gaze is still a relationship of subjects to one another, or to groups, and can change in different contexts. The phenomenological meaning pursued here still acknowledged Lacan's correction that properly speaking the gaze is not visual. It is not directly about looks but it is about relationships that include looks.

General Discussion

In both cases of the mirror stage and the gaze, I have shown how a larger theoretical context can open up the concept, strengthen it, and return it to an empirical basis. Here we can address the original worry that an overly formalized approach to life and art can overlook the very reason people are interested in art in the first place. Lacan and his followers have been so successful with popular art in the late modern period for exactly the reasons that Gestaltists like Arnheim have avoided it. The drift toward popular art and wish-dream fulfillment had divided the two camps.

But they cannot remain divided. Indeed, implicit in their separation is a division of labor that does not speak to their incompatibility. However, even this does not work because both Lacanian psychoanalysis and Gestalt psychology must have a theory of that which they do not cover: great art for Lacan, and cheap entertainment for Arnheim. There is an asymmetry here because while Lacan

would treat a lowbrow film and masterpiece of fiction equally, the discussion of personality and even individual differences is not absent from Gestalt theory and there is substantial work on both the neuroses and the psychoses.

The difference lies again in the essentially anti-therapeutic nature of Lacan's theory. This is not surprising because for Lacan all adult development, that is development in the symbolic order, is imperfect. The impossibility of successful socialization is reminiscent of Freud's instinct theory, which was ultimately hostile to the social order. In Gestalt treatments of neurosis the patient is directed to align him or herself with the surrounding order. Isolation, false points of view, and inability to grasp the way things fit together are the causes of neurosis.

Without a realist basis it is hard to understand the distinction between the profound and the shallow and, indeed, if that line is shifting with the progress of capitalism. The fact that Gestalt psychotherapy (or simply therapy) cannot provide neat handles – e.g. the irruption of the Real into the Symbolic – is probably a good thing. It signals its reflexivity and complexity. The self-exception that is typical of Freudian and post-Freudian thinking is true also of many Lacanian varieties.

Here we return to Arnheim. The foregoing analysis does not pit Gestalt against psychoanalytic approaches but seeks their eventual rapprochement with the wider aims of psychoanalysis treated with the rigor of Gestalt theory. In this endeavor, we can agree with Sinnerbrink (2011) that “some aspects of cognitivist psychology may even turn out to help reform, rather than refute, psychoanalytic theories” (Sinnerbrink 2011, 70). What we arrive at is a new theory of emotional identification in cultural studies (see D'Aloia 2012).

Summary

Lacanian theory has provided a useful toolkit for the analysis of contemporary culture. This essay discusses Lacanian psychoanalysis from the point of view of Gestalt theory, with an eye to cultural studies. After reviewing Gestalt opinions of Freudian psychoanalysis, it expounds the basics of the Lacanian system. Analyzing Lacan's attitude in tension with a naturalistic explanation, it is found that both Lacan's discussions of the “mirror” stage and the “gaze” have an interesting anti-visual rhetoric that blocks a meaningful connection to general psychology. A critique is proposed that allows Gestalt discussions of culture, by Arnheim for example, to address more speculative themes.

Keywords: Freud, Lacan, the Gaze, the Mirror Stage

Zusammenfassung

Lacans Theorie stellt einen nützlichen Werkzeugsatz für die Analyse der Gegenwartskultur bereit. Dieser Aufsatz bespricht Lacans Psychoanalyse aus der Sicht der Gestalttheorie, mit einem Blick auf die Kulturwissenschaften. Nach der Darstellung der Gestaltauffassungen in der Freud'schen Psychoanalyse werden die Grundlagen des Lacan'schen Systems dargelegt. Wenn man Lacans Standpunkt im Spannungsfeld zu

einer naturalistischen Erklärung untersucht wird man feststellen, dass sowohl Lacans Erörterungen des "Spiegel"-Stadiums als auch des "Blicks" eine interessante, anti-visuelle Rhetorik beinhalten, die eine sinnvolle Verbindung zur allgemeinen Psychologie blockiert. Es wird eine Kritik vorgebracht, die es Gestaltdiskussionen zur Kultur wie z.B. bei Arnheim erlaubt, sich mit weiteren möglichen Themen zu befassen.

Schlüsselwörter: Freud, Lacan, der Blick, Spiegelstadium.

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