

FREEDOM IN RELATIONSHIPS

ROEL KAPTEIN

*Distinguished Scholars Lecture
Faculty of Medicine
The Queen's University of Belfast*

Published July 1993

Copyright © 1985 Roel Kaptein

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in any retrieval system or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, copying, recording or otherwise without written permission of the Publisher.



PREFACE

René Girard is an influential writer in literary criticism today. No-one has done more to make Girardian concepts accessible to the ordinary person than Roel Kaptein. A large number of people in Northern Ireland owe a considerable debt of gratitude to Roel for his support, supervision and training in a variety of spheres ranging from conflict studies to clinical training, from political guidance to individual and group psychotherapy. In all of this and beyond, Roel Kaptein has brought great clarity and encouragement in the application of Girard's ideas. Within the time frame of a 90 minute lecture, *Freedom In Relationships* captured the essence of these insights.

Fortuitously, the lecture was recorded and now at last it appears in print. The work provides a new and refreshing perspective on the human predicament - a shift of focus from society's present pre-occupation with personal autonomy to the centrality of human relationships. The work has considerable relevance for a variety of interpersonal situations and will be of interest to workers in the caring professions, education, conflict, industry and all of us in everyday family and work situations.

**Distinguished Scholars'
Lecture**

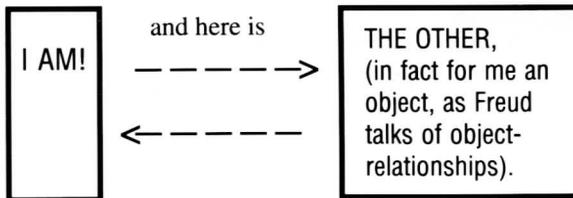
Faculty of Medicine

**The Queen's University
of Belfast**

I will try to find my way in our subject by following, at least in part, the work of René Girard, a Frenchman who has worked for forty years in the United States and to whom I personally owe very much. His first book, published in 1961, was called *Mensonge Romantique et Verite Romanesque*, properly translated as 'Romantic Lie and Romanesque Truth' but rendered as 'Deceit, Desire and the Novel', in the American translation.

My first task is to try to define a little what is Girard means by the romantic lie and romanesque truth.

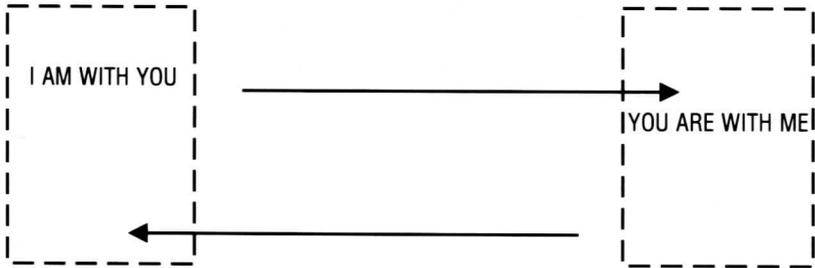
Put at its most simple, the romantic lie is: I am I. We can make a drawing of this:



I am a person, complete and totally on my own, with no crucial relationship to others. Fortuitously or even maybe unfortunately I sometimes have to deal with other I's, with other people. Nevertheless, at root, I am me. I am proud to be me.

What Girard calls the romanesque truth is totally different. In this view, I am only I because from the very beginning, I am always together with all the 'Yous' I live with. In contrast to our model of the romantic lie, I am not an unchanging person with my own nature, my own permanent identity. I am a person, changing and changing. In meeting

people and having the possibility to meet them, I am in fact together with them. In some of these meetings, I may find freedom and so the whole of my life might change. On the other hand, in other meetings I remain in the mechanisms of unfreedom. We can make another drawing of this:



It is the relationship which is in fact constitutional

The romantic lie also divides between good people and bad people. We are all living in this romantic lie. We divide the world into “goodies” and “baddies” where we are the “goodies” and the “baddies” are elsewhere. We can always show that the bad guys are the others. In any case we are always the good guys. Because we live in this romantic lie we can play the beautiful game of scapegoating: they did it, they are the cause of all of our difficulties. On the other hand, the romanesque truth is different. Because you and I, we, are always together, endlessly influencing each other, there are no “goodies” and “baddies”. We all have good and bad possibilities. Ultimately, it can depend on very small things whether we become more or less good people or we become very bad people for parts or the whole of our lives. Whether I am sent to prison or I am one of the senders to prison is fortuitous, a matter of luck. Fundamentally there are no “goodies” and no “baddies”.

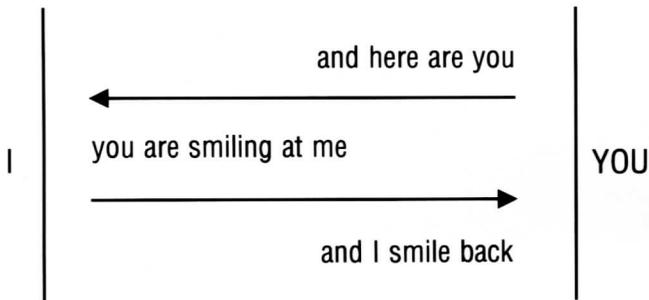
In the romantic lie, the world is ‘ontological’, the world is about things, each with their own essential being. We even refer to our beautiful feelings as “good things” We also make each other into things. In our jobs we quickly stop using each other’s names. We refer to each other as functions, for example a patient is “the lung”, “the liver”, or with titles. Soon we may all have a number which will become our so-called identity. We are making objects, things out of one another. In Freud’s language we even have an object-relationship with our husband, our wife. In the romantic lie, relations are functions of things, the things we are and the things we become. The more we become things, the less the relations are important at all.

In the romanesque truth relations are the most important aspect and everything, including us as persons, only exist in these relations. We are, in a sense, outcomes of relationships. The deeper the relationships, the more unimportant are the “things” as such.

In our romantic world, relationships are increasingly disappearing. In the romanesque truth there are no “things”, no persons as such, everybody and everything gets their place within the whole of the relationships. The romantic lie is the world of violence we live in. The romanesque truth is the possibility of a world of freedom and love which we long for.

There is however, one fundamental given, one fundamental fact, one fundamental, and now I may myself sound romantic, “thing”. It happens between us and is the cause of everything happening between us. Furthermore, it is the origin of culture itself. This is mimesis.

Mimesis is a Greek word which means: I am doing what you are doing. Here am I,



I don't think about it, I do it, immediately. It 'just happens'.

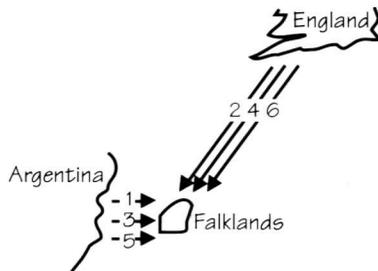
We can give another example. In a room we put eight identical toys and eight children come into the room. One of the children is the first into the room and picks up one of the toys. Almost at the same moment, the other seven begin fighting with the one for the toy which the first one took. Because the first boy picked up that toy first, it must be the best, the most desirable. All the children desire what the first child obviously desired. The seven other identical toys are worthless, are not even seen. All the fighting is about the one toy.

Another example. We are walking along the street and everybody begins to run. Now there are two possibilities. One is that we run too. We don't know why but we run

anyway. The other possibility is that we become very nervous, nervous because we don't know what is happening. Without acknowledging it we are very torn in ourselves because we have two wishes at the same time: To run together with the others and at the same time not to join in in what may be senseless running. We don't understand what is happening: Everything in us wishes to run and we don't run, or we run with the others not wishing to run. We do what the others do, desiring what the others desire which probably is to run. At the same time we wish not to be like everybody else, showing that we are very special, not running when everybody is running. Here again is the romantic lie.

Another example: A colleague applies for a job. We never thought about applying for this job but our colleague tells us how beautiful the job is and how much he desires it. At home we report that "John is applying for this job." I am asking myself: Should I not apply for that job as well? Probably it is a wonderful job. I never thought about it before now, but I'm sure it must be a very good job." I desire what the other is desiring, the other who gave me the desire. I am 'in the mimesis' with him. Furthermore, it is already clear that I am asking for difficulties. Out of a desire which is not mine, I am already rivaling.

Being in the mimesis of desire, desiring what the other desires, means rivalry, in fact means danger. This is not only true for people. It is exactly as true for small and for big groups. As an example we can take good old England, Argentina and the famous Falklands:



Nobody in England ever thought about the Falklands. If the members of government ever thought about the Falklands, then they asked themselves how to get rid of the islands without cost. But now Argentina is in difficulties and to get out of them the regime looks for a scapegoat. It finds an easy target in the Falklands (line 1). However, precisely because these Argentinians, (automatically bad people for the English) desire the Falklands, the Falklands must be very, very desirable. As a result, the vast majority of the English people, most of them without the slightest clue where these islands are, desire the Falklands (line 2). Then, because the English, a very important people at that,

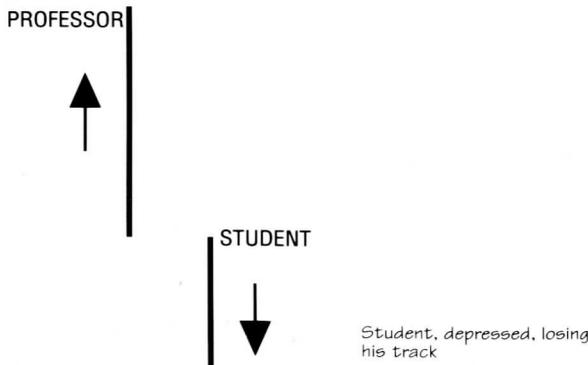
In the picture(1) we can see that the professor is big, the student is very small. The student is no danger for the professor even though he is very able. The professor recognizes this ability and is happy to have such a promising student. He desires to have a pupil to be proud of. The student himself has desired since childhood to have a scientific career and so he is very much in the mimesis with the professor. He desires what his professor desires. His professor desires to be a very able, well-known man and so the student desires the same and as a result he works hard.

We can develop this story. Imagine that this professor is a professor from long ago, from a time when professors still knew their students by name. The professor says to his wife: "I have such a good student, could we invite him to have dinner with us?". She, delighted that he has such a good student, agrees.

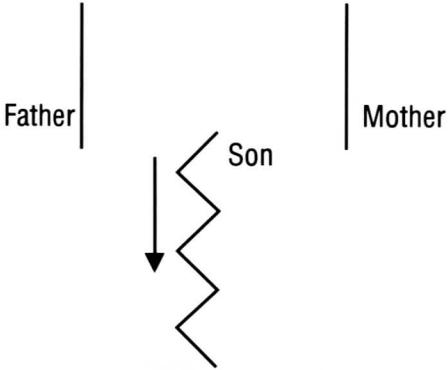
Because the student has dinner with the professor he comes closer to the professor and more into mimesis with him. He is proud of his close association and studies more and more. In terms of our diagram, the student becomes bigger (2).

Of course the professor does his best to stay ahead but now and then the student talks to him about books he hasn't read and even about books he hasn't heard of. Now the professor finds himself saying to his wife: "I don't understand what is happening. He was such a promising student, but if I'm honest I don't like him at all." She of course commiserates with him. What has happened is that the student has overtaken the professor (3).

The next time the student comes, the professor is distant and unfriendly. He announces to the student that their meetings are over. "Unfortunately I am much too busy." At that very moment, the student falls down from the heights he reached into the depths of despair and depression:

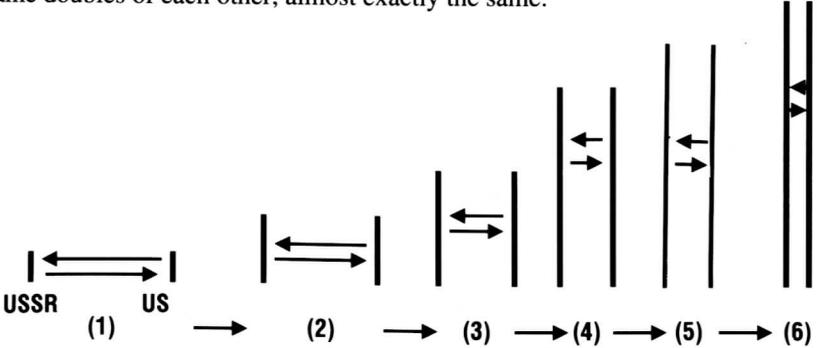


sense that there is something wrong with him, but he doesn't know what. He ends up 'down', in the pit:



Just because the son did what his father asked him to do, imitating his father as he was asked, the son carried this "trauma" for the rest of his life. Those of you who have read Bateson and the work of the Palo Alto school will recognise this as the double bind. The professor says to the student: "Do as I do", and "You should certainly not do as I do" at one and the same time. The father says to the son: "You should do as I do and you mustn't do as I do". We are all caught up in double binds of this sort throughout our lives and for as long as we are thus caught up we are unfree and there are no real, no free relationships.

As I have already said, mimesis is the reality which belongs to all being. Furthermore, mimesis is always escalating, building up. During the Cold War, the USA and the USSR built up against each other while the differences between them became smaller and smaller. The more they built up against each other, the more they came nearer to each other. Because the mimesis becomes all-pervasive, the one did exactly the same as the other. As a consequence, differences between them began to disappear. Ultimately they became doubles of each other, almost exactly the same:



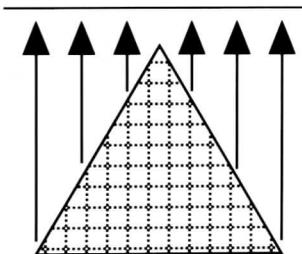
In the end there are no longer any differences left, There is always the risk that some time they will start to fight like mad to become different again, in so doing destroying the last remaining differences (6). This is the endless threat of the cold war.

So there are troubles between groups as we are having here in Northern Ireland, troubles between nations, troubles between human beings. The building up against each other can become so all-pervasive, the troubles because of that so deep, that parties become crazy or only one, the weaker, becomes crazy. So Nietzsche became crazy, rivalling with Richard Wagner, Hoelderlin became crazy building up against his father-in-law, Friedrich Wieck, with whom he rivalled for his wife Clara, the daughter of Wieck.

Out of mimesis came culture, but mimesis is too the cause of all violence and all unfreedom. We cannot live without mimesis, life would not exist without it and in the same time it is very dangerous. Therefore culture always took care to make it impossible that mimesis between humans became too big. Mimesis has to do with our human being, as it has to do with everything existing and so mimesis is something culture has to cope with.

I will try to tell you a little bit about the history of mimesis in our culture to show you the situation we are in now, the situation which leads us to think about a theme like *Freedom in Relationships*. If relationships were not a problem we would not be here. In fact this was not always a problem as it is now. I will try a little bit to show you how it became a problem.

I begin in the Middle Ages. In the Middle Ages everybody lived more or less in the structure of society. Everybody, of course first of all theoretically but very often too practically, had her or his place in the whole of society in structure and everybody was, with all the other men and women, in the mimesis with God, with Christ. Everybody was in that point more or less agreeing. They were completely agreeing about the most important aspect of their lives. They were in the imitatio Christi, in the imitation of Christ and agreeing in this manner, being parallel in this manner, they had room, space. Having their places in structure and not rivalling in the most important aspect of their life they had freedom. In the model:



GOD, CHRIST,
VERTICAL TRANSCENDENCE

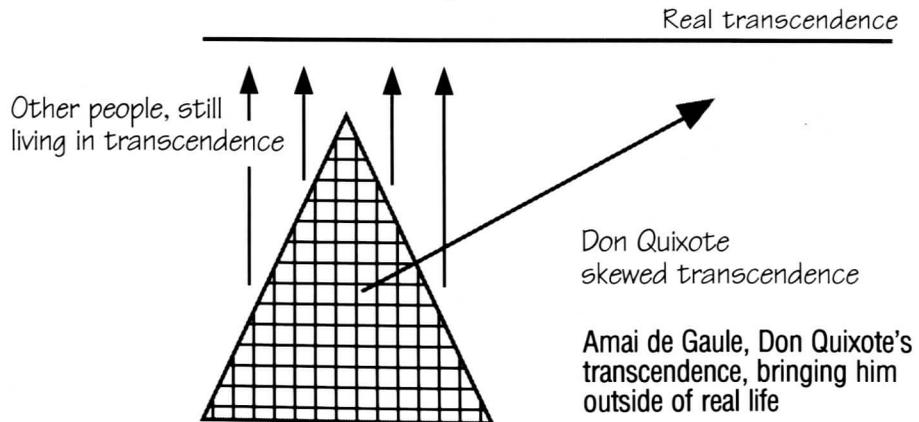
Everybody is agreeing with everybody
about the relationship with transcendence

Everybody has her/his own place

In 1605 the first part of the novel *Don Quixote* written by Cervantes was published. The hero of the novel, Don Quixote, himself read novels. This was the origin of his difficulties. Reading novels is dangerous when you take the characters in them too seriously and come into mimesis with them. In Don Quixote's time this was still quite exotic. The priests still told the people how things were and brought people in a vertical transcendence with God. People believed them, followed them and were, in that sense, in mimesis with them. But Don Quixote read novels and so he more or less escaped the medieval triangle with its vertical transcendence. He was not any longer in mimesis with God or Christ but with Amadis de Gaule, a knight of old in the romances he read. He was entirely fictional. He was also an excellent rival though seemingly very pious. Don Quixote was totally fascinated by him and wished only to imitate Amadis, so rivalling with him and if possible outdoing him.

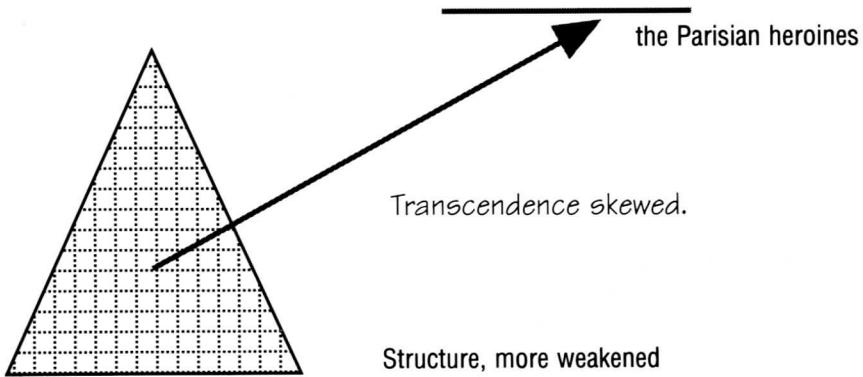
Very consciously he was in the mimesis with Amadis. Because Amadis did so many great acts of heroism, he wished at least to equal him. In order to do these great deeds he had to see the world in a manner that they could be done at all. So when he saw a herd of sheep it was an army and when he saw mills, these were knights on horses and so on. When he saw a woman with a man he was convinced that the woman had been kidnapped by him and he had to deliver her. As a result, he made a considerable nonsense out of his life and also of the lives of everybody he met.

His transcendence was no longer God, no longer vertical, although when he died he returned to it. Instead, it was skewed, oblique and so he saw the whole of reality skewed, in his own way. He divided all the people he met into the good and the bad. The good ones were the real knights, in fact only himself and Amadis. The bad were all those who did not understand his knightly ideals. In this manner he more or less destroyed structure. We can show this in a model again:



In the centuries which followed, transcendence has lowered more and more. Our ideals, the "gods" whom we follow have become more common, more petty. As a result, the structures of the world are crumbling as well.

In the 19th century, Flaubert wrote his novel, *Madame Bovary* about a farmer's daughter, Emma Bovary. Again, she reads books but this time they are novels about heroines in Paris, women of the demi-monde in fact. She was never in Paris, so the women could remain wonderful and at the same time they were much more common, much closer than Amadis. Again we can draw a model:



She disappeared into her dreams and reality had to comply. Her husband, a country doctor, who she married to escape the life of a farmer's wife, was a nice though ordinary man. She forced him to do a special, in fact criminal, act of medical heroism and so she destroyed him. "I have to have the life of all these wonderful women I read about in my books". She had her love-affairs, blind to the simple humanity of her husband, blind to the real character of her lovers and the consequences of her actions. In the end she commits suicide.

By following her models, her much more skewed transcendence, she destroys her life and that of her family. Don Quixote still has the possibility to return to reality when he is dying. For Madame Bovary this way is blocked. Once, she goes to a church desperately seeking solace but she comes back empty handed. She is too far down the road of desire.

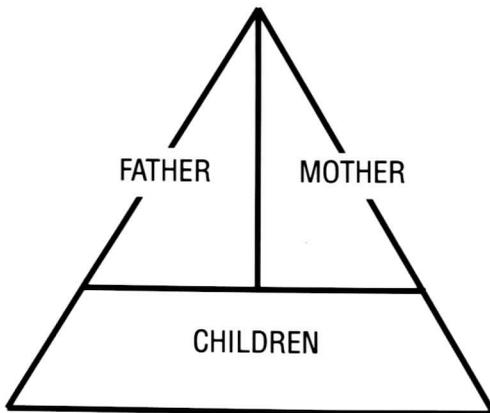
Through Cervantes novel we see the process beginning in the 17th century. In his novel, published in the 1850s, Flaubert says: 'In our day we are reacting to reality like this, living in our dreams of desire and destroying ourselves and each other'. But this is not the end of the development.

Even earlier, in the 1820s, Stendhal wrote *Le Rouge et Le Noir*, *Scarlet and Black*. In this novel, transcendence has gone. There is nothing outside of everyday life which can give direction to life. Everybody and everything are together on one level. This means that structure has virtually disappeared.

Monsieur de Renal, the mayor of the town, no longer has his own place in society, which protects him against nonsensical desiring. He rivals constantly with M. Valenod, a bourgeois. Indeed M. Valenod has become his model. Speaking to his wife, M. de Renal notes that Julien Sorel is back in town. Sorel is a teacher. Renal believes that Valenod wishes to have Sorel as the tutor for his children. M. de Renal therefore decides to get in before him.

De Renal is not asking whether he needs a teacher or whether the man is a good teacher for his children. He wishes to have the teacher only because he thinks that Valenod wishes the same thing. Likewise, Valenod wishes because de Renal wishes. They both fight to get a teacher in which neither is actually interested.

There is no transcendence, no structure left. Both men are 'alone with themselves'. The game goes on throughout the whole novel. The game is of (two) men, or (two) women, always fighting for the same object or person. They fight not because there is any authentic wish, as we always think is the case for ourselves, but only because another is wishing the object of the wish. When transcendence totally disappears, life becomes much more dangerous than before. I will enlarge on this later. Nevertheless, up until now the family remains outside of this process. The family is still more or less like this:



The family still has structure. The husband, father, the wife, mother, the children,

everybody has her, his own place and space and their own rights and obligations. Life is still clear. People can still honour each other. There is still vertical transcendence.

Dostoevsky writes about the disappearance of transcendence in the family. In his novels everybody is fighting with everybody on all levels, desiring because the other is desiring. Here, in the novels of Dostoevsky we already see happening what is now happening all around us. The game of desire has found its way into families. Women fight with men and women, men fight with women and men, children fight with their parents and the reverse. Dostoevsky, living in 19th century Russia in a society which moves from feudalism to modernity in one step, describes the disappearance of families in vicious circles of rivalry.

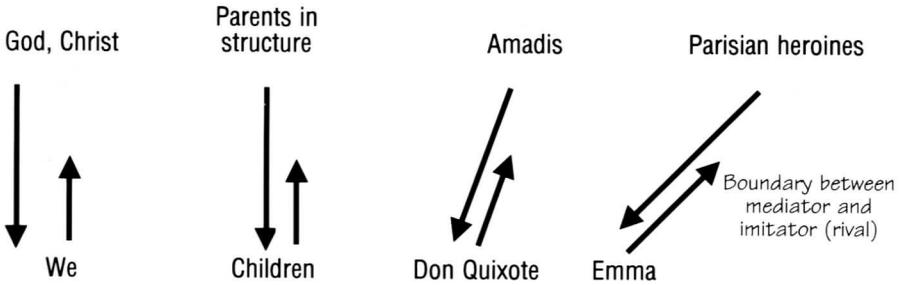
Some years ago a Dutch film, "*The Darlings*" appeared in which a family, husband, wife and children destroyed each other and themselves totally. In the end the house was burned out and the parents buried under concrete.

Curiously, wherever the film was shown, the audience always roared with laughter, although what was shown was actually tragic. What does this laughter mean? Laughter means that something comes to us, enters us, which is so frightening, which so upsets us, that our only wish is to get it out of us and our lives. As a result, we laugh. The film showed the truth about us, us and our children, us and our parents nowadays, which we cannot stand. Although the film was extremely serious and tragic we couldn't stay serious. What was shown to us was laughed away because our predicament is much too dangerous to see at all. We don't want to be reminded of it.

As long as there is some transcendence in the relationship, for example between God, Christ and us, between Amadis and Don Quixote, between the Parisian women and Emma Bovary, the imitator cannot come into direct contact with the imitated. The imitator can rival with the imitated, but the imitated does not rival with the imitator. When the transcendence is vertical, this is very clear. People in the Middle Ages could follow and imitate God, but God did not imitate them. He was totally beyond their reach. In a family with structure, there was, and eventually still is, distance between parents and children. The children imitate the parents, but not the reverse. So the double bind and neuroses are avoided. In the relationship between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, his servant, Don Quixote still remains in structure. He does not rival with his servant, although the latter rivals like mad with his boss, wishing to become the governor of a province.

Even when the transcendence is skewed and the model is, unlike God, comparable with ourselves, but out of reach, this remains true. Don Quixote could imitate Amadis and rival with him, but Amadis did not react. Sancho Panza could rival with his master, but

he did not react. Madame Bovary could imitate the heroines of the novels and rival with them, but they did not react. The line is always in one direction. We call this external mediation, mimesis with the desires of a person from outside. To put it again in diagrams:



Before the middle of the last century, children imitated their parents as they still do nowadays, but parents generally did not imitate their children. They were not jealous of their children as they often are today. Parents were not rivalling with each other nor were they rivalling conspicuously with others in their neighbourhood. So here again the mediation was always one way. Parents were the models for the children. Real learning processes were still possible. The mediation of the desire always went from the “higher” person to the “lower”, never the other way. The difference between external mediation and internal mediation, in which the mediator belongs to our own world is that although you could make a fool of yourself, there was no fight.

External mediation deserves much more time because it is so important for our lives. In fact there is not enough space to do this here but I will return to it later.

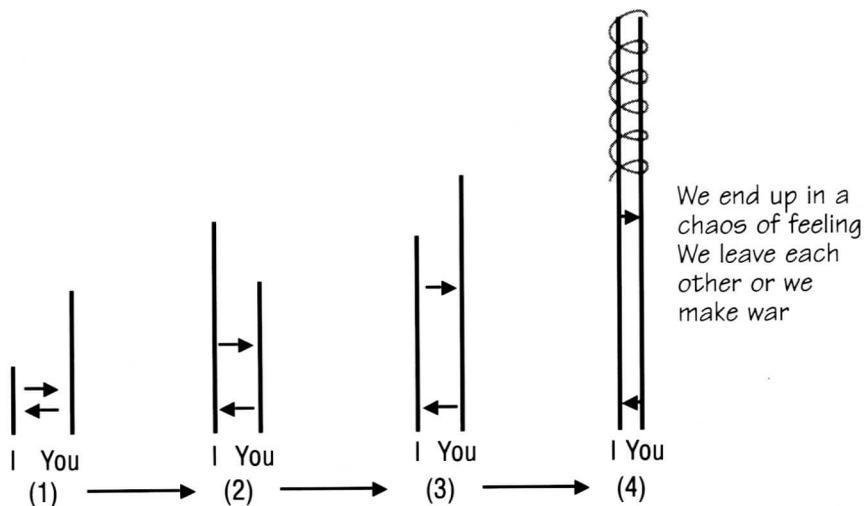
Now we come to our present situation, without any transcendence and structure, in which I am imitating you and you are imitating me. Because I am desiring and therefore you are desiring, I am desiring more and so we are in ever more vicious circles. Ultimately we are at each other’s mercy, with nothing between us. We are fascinated by each other and so we are totally unfree.

Because all mediation of desire is now internal to our situation, there is no space at all. Don Quixote was a fool and at the same time, he was still a happy fool. He followed Amadis and rivalled with him like mad. But there was still space between them because Amadis was far away. There was some freedom. When an amount of money was found it did not matter to Don Quixote at all. He gave it to his servant. When he was wounded

he did not tell everybody so that everybody would pity him. For him it was a risk a wandering knight runs, a sign of his nobility. He shrugged his shoulders and went on. He sought another adventure which he hoped would be more rewarding. He was clearly fascinated and at the same time there was still space in his fascination.

We need now to say a few words about fascination. Fascination is a word to describe the complex feelings we have when we are rivalling. These feelings are the tensions of the rivalry which determine our very existence. We are fascinated by all forms of rivalry, by so-called love, by fighting, by violence, by chaos. These are all aspects of the mimesis of desire which is all around us and in us. Fascination is always unfreedom, slavery no matter how beautiful a feeling it sometimes is or how fulfilling life feels. Of course sometimes we enjoy our slavery even though it often destroys us in the end, bringing despair and depression. Our fascination, the fascination of internal mediation, is of a different character to the fascination of skewed external mediation of Don Quixote and even Emma Bovary. For us the other is very near and totally on one level and so there is no space left. We can no longer move.

I will try again to show this in a diagram. Here am I and here are you (1):

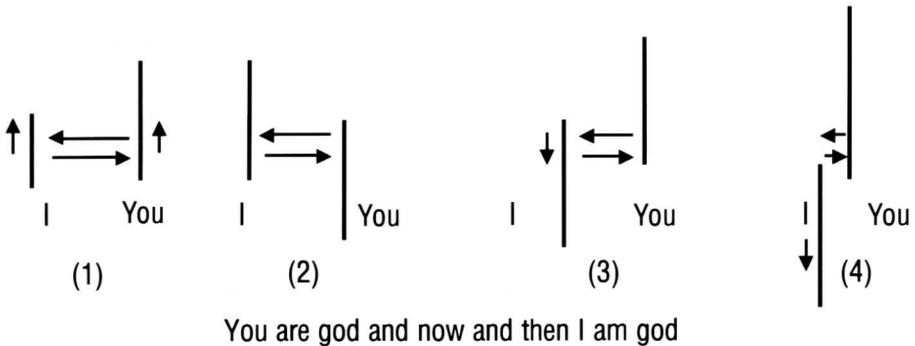


I am admiring you. I am building you up. In fact by admiring you, I build up my model which I wish to follow and at the same time I am already making myself important by having such an important model. At this stage, there is still the possibility that I might stop further building up. I might keep my admiration within bounds. I might also begin to rival more earnestly. Ultimately in this process we begin building up against each

other. We end up in rivalry and chaos. We come to the conclusion that though we once thought that we were very good friends, we were clearly mistaken. The other isn't nice at all.

There are other possibilities. Perhaps I need my model to be all-important because I wish to become so important, so beautiful, so clever myself. However this very fact makes it absolutely impossible to win at all. My friends can't understand why I admire the model so much. I am fascinated and cannot liberate myself from it. I cannot win because winning would mean that my model is not so special. As a result, if there is any risk that I might win, I idolise him even more. And so I become very depressed. Life has become worthless.

Again in a diagram:



We have in fact become elated, alternately very depressed and then elated, egoistic and very altruistic, gliding further and further into the abyss. The other is excited and happy that we admire him or her so much and at the same time deep down they are frightened for she, he knows, without consciously articulating it, that the whole balance can reverse any moment. The admired becomes the slave; the slave the master. Adored and adorer change places.

In internal mimesis there are no stable points, no transcendence and no structure, so everything, all relationships, can change at any time in any direction. In internal mimesis, things become desirable because others desire them. In the game of internal rivalry, this is also true for human beings who all become 'things' or objects as well.

That is, until she too gives in to his desiring and leaves him..

In these ways we play the game of desiring, either losing and being depressed as a consequence or “winning” and in the end losing again. Proust, who describes internal mimesis coming into bourgeois circles, says already: If you are no longer sure that you love your wife, bring her into the situation in which there is a risk that she will be seduced and you will love her.

We are all caught up in this internal mediation, this eternal rivalry, in many ways. In internal mediation, we are all full of fear. There is no freedom, no real winning and certain loss. In the end, time and again we become obsessed by things or ideas and more or less mad.

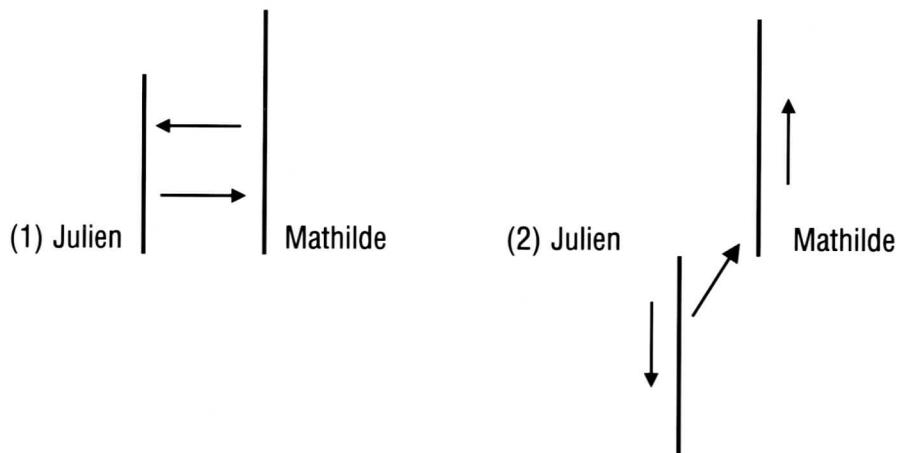
I will now try to take the next step. It is clear that there is only freedom in relationships if we are not caught up in internal mediation, in relationships without transcendence and without structure. The only possibility for relations is that we live in external mediation, with a third reality outside of our normal world which is with us when we are together with others or with the other. In other words, there is only freedom in our life, freedom between us, and so in our relationships, if this reality of internal mediation is not the only reality we live in. We are unfree and unable to relate if we and everything are all on the same level, without the different levels of culture in structure and without a transcendence above us.

Don Quixote had a strange idol in Amadis but at least Amadis was unreachable. Don Quixote was crazy, in a sense, but being mad he was still free. We constantly make each other and ourselves into gods and we are totally unfree.

External mediation makes us free and gives us the freedom to have relationships with others. At the same time, because we are not totally unfree, it gives us the possibility to be reliable. As long as we are only in internal mediation we are always unreliable. There are no fixed points. Everything, including ourselves, is constantly moving around, with our loves, our solidarities, with everything. We always love until love ends, which in fact means that the fascination, the rivalry ends. It is a kind of fatalism. We have no will of our own. Everything ends when other desires take over, taking us, or her, or him away.

A beautiful example of all this is the hero of Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, Julien Sorel. In the novel Julien understands the games of desire and he always takes care to

play the game in the right manner so as to rise higher and higher in society, using the desires of women to achieve a career. But then he made a mistake.



Mathilde loved herself very much, she loved herself, she desired herself. She was a coquette. Julien wished to have her, to further his career but he made the mistake of showing that he desired her. He had learnt the lesson that in internal mediation you never show your desire, because then the other becomes more desirable and so unreachable, but the desire with which Mathilde desired herself was so strong that he forgot the lesson. He “fell” for her, for her desire, her coquettishness.

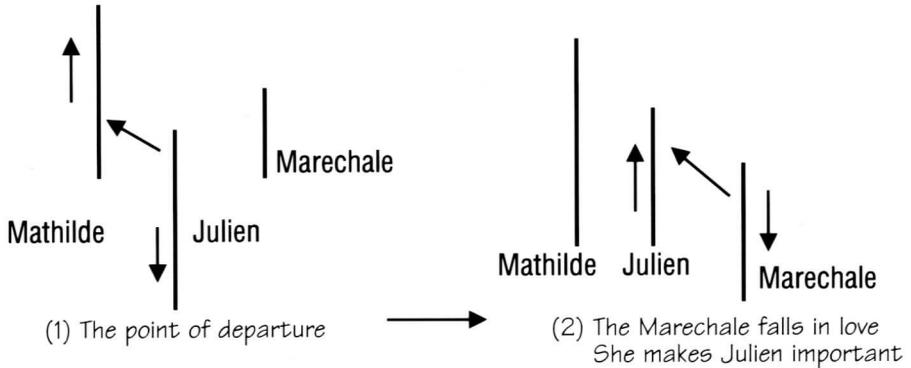
Mathilde was very happy that he desired her because that meant that she was even more desirable than she already knew she was. As a result she became unattainable for Julien. His desire grew and the possibility of winning disappeared. He began to pray to the unattainable and untouchable madonna (2).

Maybe we have all had such experiences. There are many such curious, untouchable madonnas. In fact of course they are not untouchable but we make them so by our desiring with the desire they in fact desire themselves, making them, both men and women, coquettes.

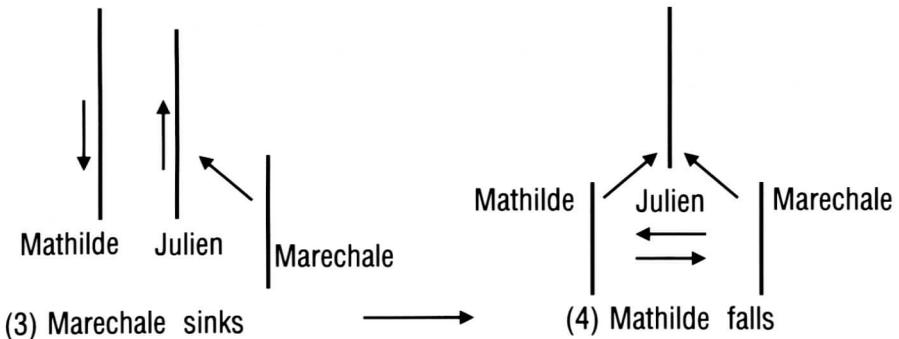
In the novel, however, Julien has a friend who was not part of the game. He not only saw that Julien was making mistakes, he saw which ones. This friend said to him: Use the Marechale de Fervaques. Play the game with her only reverse it. Go to her, walk

around her, not showing her any interest ever. Show her that you love yourself very much and that she is not interesting at all.

This Julien did and the Marechale, feeling undesired desired Julien with the desire Julien desired himself. She came into the mimesis with him. Again in a diagram:



Everything is relative, so because of the desire of the Marechale, Julien rose and in the same movement Mathilde sank (3). Because Mathilde was in mimesis with the Marechale and with Julien who now desired himself, he became desirable for her. As a result, Julien got Mathilde as well (4).



This is like the remedies you can find in these American “How to” books like “How to Seduce a Woman in the Shortest Time Possible?”. There is clearly a market for such books, as there is a market for books like “How Do I Keep My Partner in My Own Bed?”. We can translate them all as: How do I stay desirable? In one sense, of course, these books are innocent. However, they are a sign that we live in exactly this sort of society and also that many boys and men, girls and women did not learn the lesson and still need these books.

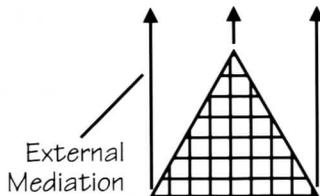
In any case, in the world in which we are now living none of us is truly reliable. Nobody is innocent in the real meaning of the word. We all are the playthings of the mimesis of desire. Only if we live in the reality of an external mediation, on which our life rests and which gives us space, do we have the possibility to be ourselves. Then we can have relationships in freedom and be reliable. This transcendence might be God, or Jesus. It might be an ideal encompassing the whole of humanity, all human beings. But it can not be an ideal for some and against others. That again is already romantic, a lie, although even such an ideal, a skewed transcendence, can give some freedom, as it gave Don Quixote.

Only when we live in some sort of external mediation is there the real possibility to be interested in each other, to give the other her or his own place and to respect her or him there. In internal mediation we are only interested in ourselves. We are threatened when we discover that somebody has her or his own place and become jealous. We try to destroy it, as we destroy everything we did not yet touch all over the world. We cannot leave it alone, in peace.

Internal mediation always means rivalry, destroying all differences. In fact we cannot endure differences. All relationships are ambivalent. Egoism and altruism alternate, as do love and hate, depending on the fact if we are one-up or one-down. One-up we can love and be altruistic or only love ourselves and be egoistic. One down we can hate and be egoistic, or adoring and altruistic. And so it goes on, and on..

All this is true for personal relationships. It is exactly as true for groups, for peoples. We desire, building up against each other, escalating, sadistic in fighting and winning while playing downward, masochistic in fighting and losing. And again it goes on and on.

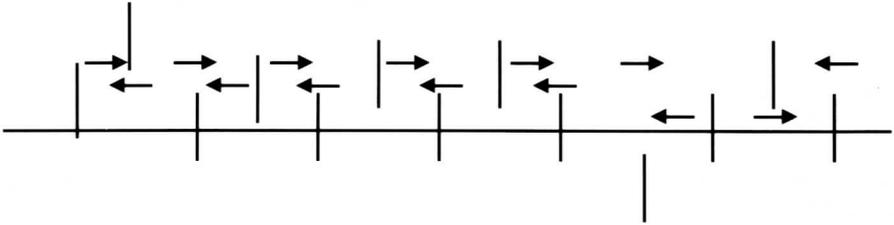
Stendhal who lived in a time that structures and transcendence were breaking down saw as a novelist very clearly what was happening. Selflessness, really forgetting yourself, which is freedom, really selfless passion, which Stendhal so greatly admired, all disappears. To put it again in a diagram:



the triangle of culture - between the persons is freedom, space
(1) TRANSCENDENCE

Living in this triangle we have a place, space, inner trust. People and things, material and spiritual realities have a meaning and an importance on their own. Having this place we can be stable and in our deeds even transcend ourselves, doing things which never could be expected. In fact in freedom we transcend our situation, constantly doing the unexpected.

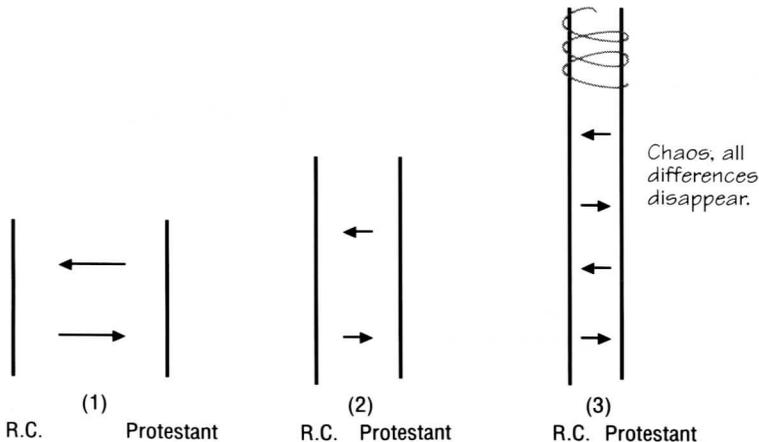
When we come into internal mimesis, everybody and everything becomes the prey of the mimesis of desire. Everything becomes predictable. All true meaning disappears. Having only one another in the eternal game of one-upmanship we all become corrupt, as we in fact are becoming in these times. Again in a diagram:



Everybody is rivalling with everybody. No space left.

We are all dancing on this line, up and down, down and up and probably in the end all down. Extremely exciting, wonderful at times and finally, if we go on without escaping, the dance of death.

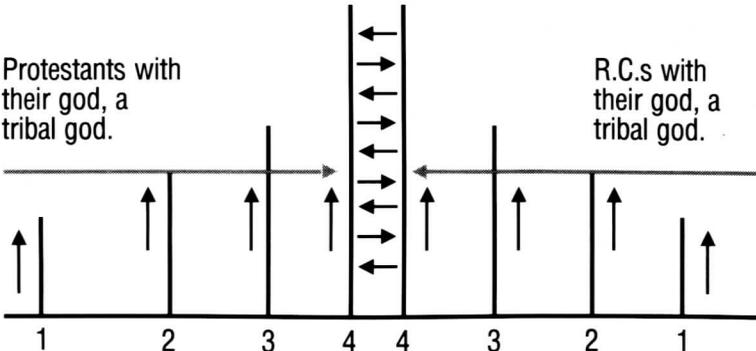
I will try to give an example which has to do with Northern Ireland. These are the Roman Catholics and these are the Protestants:



We all know that we are in mimesis with each other, which means that we are becoming more and more like each other. As a result, we become more and more violent, very openly or, as is usually the case with us nice people, very hidden. And of course, as always, the other way round, we become violent and so we destroy differences. Things have evolved a little bit further in the Lebanon. There, there are many groups fighting with each other, but when you ask the fighters what they are fighting for, almost no one knows. They are just fighting. Fighting with the same guns, in the same uniforms, with the same materials against the same people, creating chaos.

In Northern Ireland there are two possibilities. First, Catholics and Protestants organise everything they have and everything they think they believe and use it in the fight. As a result, the Protestants are totally sure that the Roman Catholics are not Christians at all and that their God, if they have any, is not "our" God, because our God is certainly fighting for us, so he is as certainly fighting against them. We have ideals for the future, but they are only for us, not for "them". The Catholics, "them", are simply bad. Of course, the Catholics are in the mimesis, as we are, and so they are doing exactly the same. Who began it, the inter-punctuation question, remains unanswerable.

In the end there is nothing but the fight. Although very pious language is used, language which does not free anybody from the fight but is used as part of it, transcendence has disappeared. There is only internal mediation. For as long as they stay in this situation, neither group can do anything to solve the problem. They are prisoners of themselves and prisoners of each other because all the possibilities to solve the problem are lost exactly in this curious and nonsensical fight. Even God has become part of the problem:



God is ending up as a weapon in the rivalry

There is another possibility.

In this case they do not make gods out of themselves and of their cause. They stay down to earth, very simply human. And both know that God is, that Christ is, far above all these differences between the parties. He is the God of us all, our God and their God. In the relationship with him is external mediation and so in this relationship, in which there is space, I am free. I am able to see the relativity of all the nonsense we are making when I know about the God who is God of both of us. My freedom no longer depends on my relationships with other human beings, in which there is no freedom at all. Instead we are free in the relationship with God, in the relationship with Christ and so we are free together to seek and find solutions.

When things become very serious in real life, this even goes further. When we are in mimesis with Christ we are in the mimesis with him who had no power and who did not wish to have any power. And so at last, when we are following him, there are two groups of people, both knowing about their powerlessness, two groups of powerless people who no longer rival. Just because they are powerless and accept the fact, they always find solutions. There are always hundreds of good solutions only we never find even one of them as long as we are fighting. We are blind for them, because we only see each other.

It might be that it need not be God or Christ who has transcendence in our life and gives us freedom. In any case it need not be God and Christ as they are preached in the churches. It might be that other transcendence is in our life which gives freedom from internal mediation. Every transcendence which 'works', for example, a human vision, a real human romanesque ideal, a Saint in some form for our time - makes us, if even in some circumstances, free. In any case, there is only freedom when there is external mediation, only freedom when we are not shut up, imprisoned exclusively in relationships on the same level.

So, we come necessarily to the question: Is there anything to say at all about how to get out of the crazy situation of our so-called modern culture? Are there any possibilities of having freedom in relationships?

First of all there is the possibility we quite often fantasise about, that we all are the same, all are equal. We are the same, we have the same, we are exactly as all others. We think that as soon as that happens we will have heaven on earth. This is the old utopian dream and the dream of old socialism.

Alas, it is certain that even if it were achieved, which it clearly never can be without

violence, the fighting will be endless because we are and remain mimetic. So if we all are and have the same we will fight harder for smaller things, for trivialities, as we now already so often do. If there is nothing worthwhile to fight for, and in fact nothing is worthwhile to fight for, we fight for the things which are not worth fighting for. In that situation we will still fight, and probably more than ever, to be special, to be gods, while others will fight back to be themselves more special, to be the one-ups, to be even higher gods.

The old ideal that we can find a peaceful world by becoming and making everybody equal is seeking for a world of madness. In madness everything is and becomes equal and, the other way round, making everybody and everything equal is organising chaos.

Culture can exist only because there are differences. The whole of culture always existed and can only exist because we are different. So an egalitarian utopia is not a possibility.

There is another way but it is not a way which is very desirable. In Cervantes' novel just before Don Quixote dies he realises at last that it is of no use to be in the mimesis any longer, that desire is of no use any more. He is free of desiring just because he is dying and so desiring has become useless. Thus free, he sees the folly of his life and he finds God and so himself. As a result, the last days of his life are the real days of his life, without desiring and without the estrangement belonging to it.

Exactly the same happens in *Scarlet and Black*. Julien knows, before he is executed, before he dies, that desire destroyed his life. "I made out of my life a folly although or just because I was striving for so many things". In the last days of his life he found real love and so himself for the first time.

This occurs time and again in the novels which understand what real love is, love outside of the mimesis of desire. Perhaps you know the sentence: "I hope I will succeed in the hour of my death". In my generation in any case this sentence was very well known. Although I often said it when I was much younger, I did not know what it meant. But it is this: When you know that you die, things are completely over. The folly of life is over. Peace and freedom begin. I suppose that here in the audience there are at least some or maybe several medical people. When they saw and see people die, it happens.

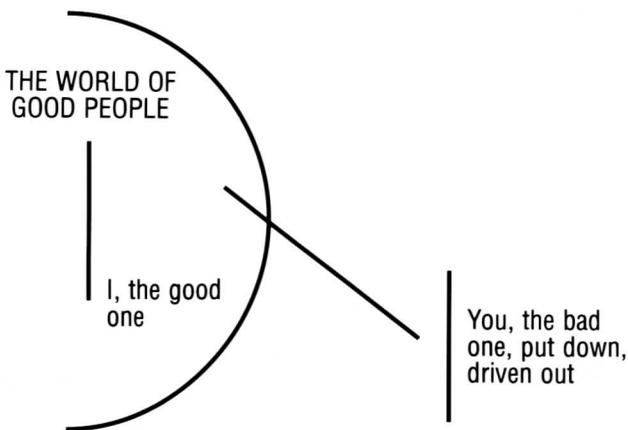
So don't lose hope, because in any case there is an opportunity in death. Of course we all wish to have a little bit of freedom before we die. Freedom in our life, meaning freedom in our relationships. It may now be clear that only real external mediation gives

freedom. This reality is well-expressed in a phrase which I used long, long before I knew anything about this: 'A star which is going with me, which shows the way and which I cannot reach, which in fact goes its own way.'

Luckily, we can learn. Even if there is no external mediation in our lives, we can learn about it. We can learn about it by learning to know who we are and how to change, coming into another world with small steps. I suppose I could speak about that for a very long time, but I will give you some examples of things we might learn.

First of all, if there is any external mediation in our life, if there is a star which leads us, making us free because it is free of us, whether it be God, Jesus, a real humanism or whatever we can seek never to use it or him against others. If we use our transcendence against others, we will lose it and disappear into internal mediation and the culture of neurosis.

Secondly, we can be careful every time we speak about others as "the baddies", "the cause" or saying "He always was a bad guy" or "You never could trust her" and so we could go on. By doing this we are in the romantic lie. Although apparently quietly, we are disappearing into internal mediation, in internal rivalry. By saying that somebody is bad we are trying to remake the old distinctions: "Here we are, the good guys, and there are the others, the bad guys." We are in fact scapegoating, the common possibility in our culture to get rid of our responsibility. When we are scapegoating the fight goes on, each of us always trying to be one-up.



When we say that the other is bad that of course does not mean that the other is in fact

bad. It only means that we are unfree, that very deep down we are afraid and because of that we need to say such things. It has nothing to do with his badness.

The big adventure we can have in our lives is that we are with people in such a way that in the end we are sure with the totality of our existence that all the others are no better and no worse than I am. I am just like them with all the possibilities of being good and being bad. As long as I know others to be worse than I am, or also the reverse, that I am worst of all, I am unfree and I cannot have free relations.

I suppose that we can learn to recognize, that we can register in our heart that we are in an power game. We are in power games to get jobs, we are in power games to show that we are the best, we are in power games to have what we wish to have or what we wish to happen, we are in games to show who is the boss, in fact that I am a god. We are in the game that

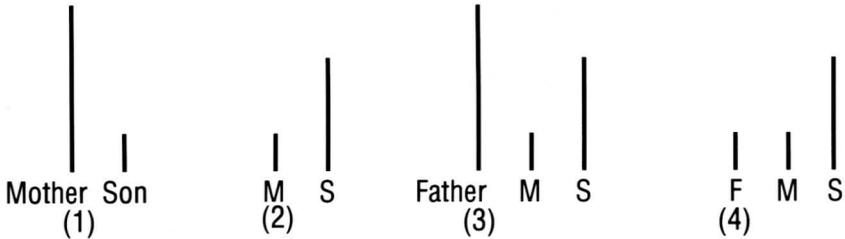
I am here

and the others are there

All of these often very nice and exciting games we play in universities, in hospitals, in our homes, with our children. We play them everywhere. As soon as you know, discover what you are doing, register in your heart that you are in a power game, please get out of it and do the unexpected.

I will tell you a story, a true story which shows how dramatically things can change when we get out of the power game. There was once a boy, a six-year-old, and his mother. One day the boy said to his mother: "I won't go to the toilet anymore." The mother could have said: "That's very interesting indeed, wonderful! I have a son who never goes to the toilet. I can tell all my friends that I have such a remarkable son." Unfortunately she did not do that. Instead she said to her son: "But that's impossible! You'll get sick!" The son thought, without consciously doing so, but simply knowing: I have the power in the relationship with my mother! So he said to his mother: "Well I'm not going", and he didn't.

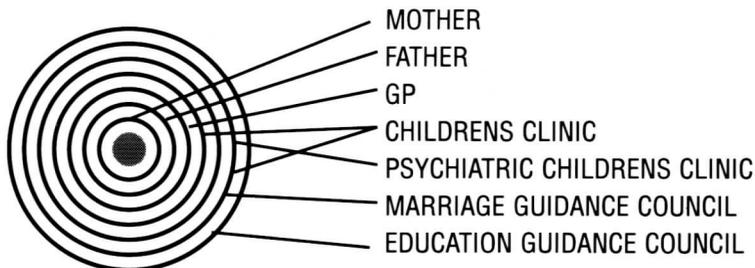
When his father came home, his mother said to him: "I am so glad that you're home. Johnny has been so difficult", and she told what was going on. The father, in the mimesis with the mother, also became frightened and he too said to Johnny: "But you have to go to the toilet! It isn't normal!". However, for the boy this merely confirmed what he already knew and of course he wouldn't go. In the context of the power game he had enormous power, and the parents became very small:



The boy was brought to the G.P. and the G.P. too said: "What you are doing is dangerous for your health. If you don't go yourself, we have to force you and we will have to put things into you." Still the boy refused: "No, I won't go to the toilet." Next he was brought to a psychiatric children's clinic and because the parents now had difficulties in their marriage, the parents went to a Marriage Guidance Counsellor. And so the game went on, the boy winning time and again:



Then the boy was brought to the Educational Council where I was a supervisor. The whole council were very scared of the whole thing. They were frightened of failure as everybody is and frightened of being scapegoated. They thought that it was a very difficult case, indeed a very dangerous case because of the health of the boy. In fact they were in the fascination with the case because so many were already fascinated. Until then, the boy had managed to become something like the sun with all the planets circling around him:



If the boy had been able to go on he would have become the most important person of his country, which probably was in a sense exactly what he wished. Then I had an idea and said to the psychologist who was in charge of the so-called case: "If you have the freedom to do it, please say to the mother: "We have made mistakes. Please say to your son: 'I have thought about it and I understand at last that I did wrong. I didn't know it but I always thought that all children went to the toilet. Now I am sure there are children, although there are only a few, who can't and you are one of those boys. We have to live with it.'"

The team resisted strongly because they were very afraid that the health of the boy would be harmed. Luckily the psychologist, a woman, in mimesis with me, did it with inner freedom and the mother who was again in mimesis with her also became free. Finally she told the boy. Because the mother was free the boy listened and as soon as he heard what his mother said he rushed to the toilet to show that his mother was wrong and that he could go. Since then he has always gone to the toilet. The game was over.

What was happening? The boy who was building his imperium up into the sky could only do so for as long as everybody was in mimesis with him, trying to win. Parents, clinics, everybody. But now the mother stopped being an opponent. She simply said: "Okay, if you are like that, then it is all right". The boy could no longer build up. Instead, he fell into a void and the game was over:

By coming out of the powerfight, by not building up, becoming a “dot”, the freedom of the mother was overwhelming for the boy. His imperium disappeared at that very moment. They could be together again.

Of course this seems a rather strange story, but it is a true one. All of us can do many such things every day in our own lives. By stopping with the mimesis and the rivalry we find a little bit of freedom for the people around us and for ourselves.

We can think of other possibilities for learning. We are all in the habit of driving out the person and of sticking to functions. As soon as we come into a modern institution we are no longer Mr or Ms so and so, we are a nurse, a doctor or whatever. Nurses are spoken about by the doctors as ‘the nurses’, and the nurses speak about the doctors as ‘the doctors’, with all the various accents we can give it. We also speak about the patients, a word which increasingly means that they have to be patient. Much better still for the system, we speak about ‘the cases’, ‘the lung’, ‘the leg’, ‘the heart’ and so on.

We are driving out humanity, we are driving out the human relations and we are living in ontology, in the world of things. Culture is more or less forcing this on us, because everybody does it. As we are in mimesis with everybody, we naturally do as they are doing. In fact we drive out relationships because we are afraid of them. In internal mediation you never know what will happen if you establish a relationship.

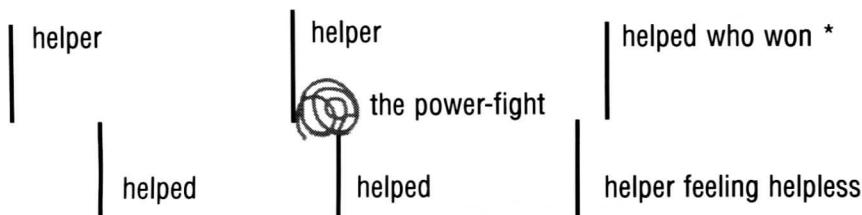
When we don’t play the game with all the others, our friends ask us if we are mad and try to bring us back to normal. We all wish frantically that everything changes if only we don’t have to change. So we drive out human relationships and stick to functions, objectivating ourselves, splitting ourselves up into ‘roles’. If we want to have any freedom in life we have to reverse the whole of these mechanisms back to humanity.

We can give examples of how far things can go. A good friend of mine and a very nice man is a medic working in a university doing nuclear medicine. I asked him once when we knew each other only for a short time, to try to explain to me what he was doing. “What exactly is this nuclear medicine of yours?” He made a face, thinking that it would be very difficult for him or rather for me. In fact it was difficult, but he kept telling and telling. When he took a breath I said: “You can stop, you needn’t tell me any more. I have the impression that you have one very big drawback in your work”. He was astonished because he was quite sure that I did not understand a thing of what he was talking about and asked: “What do you mean?” I said: “Your big drawback is that your patients are still alive, living human beings. They should be dead. If they were dead it would be much simpler for you to do your work, to cure them.” In the first moment he

was a little bit taken aback and then he began to laugh. “Yes” he said, “that’s true!”.

In our science, as in our relationships, we are driving out humanity. In this context of course there is a big question: For whom are hospitals? Are they there for the staff, to have an important life, making other people dependent, getting for all that a nice salary or are they there, with the staff, for the so-called patients?

To change is difficult. It is much easier to stay the same. We have our tricks, unacknowledged even by ourselves, to stay in our romantic world and so to stay, in fact, unhappy there. One of these tricks is that of the helper while you are the helped. We all use this trick and as long as we are the helper, we play the power game with somebody who is dependent on us, so forcing the so-called helped to play the power game too. Here is the “helper” and here is the “helped”, caught up already in the circle of the power game, so making it impossible to heal, only trying by mechanical means to cure. (Situations 1, 2 and 3).



*helped who won not wishing to be helped, so making it impossible for the helper to have a good result, instead of being together in a healthy relationship

Here again the very big question is whether we can be in freedom with the other. Freedom is the only possibility to heal, to give each other, both “helper” and “helped”, wholeness. In fact this is not to change things by curing but to heal, so changing human real life. There is only healing, a real renewal, if there is a relationship in freedom. As soon and as long as we are living in the helper-helped model, there is no freedom, only unfreedom. It is one of the endless possibilities of power games and no real change is ever possible.

Our last example must again be general. As soon as we desire, and we all know what it means to desire, we can desire very, very high things: To become the best painter in the world, the best footballer in the world, or, to attract everybody’s gaze to us, in fact to become a god. We can desire a house or a painting, a job, a man, a woman, we can

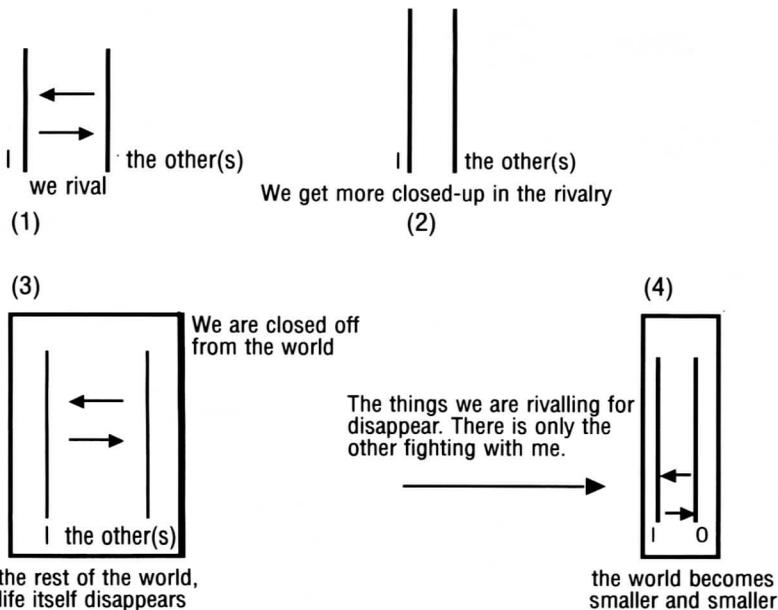
desire everything. We desire as soon as somebody else is desiring and the reverse. As soon and as long as we are desiring we are unfree, caught up in internal mediation. We are losing our time, the real possibilities of our life because there is only life in freedom.

When we are desiring, we are unfree. All cultures know or at least knew that. Not only in the Old Testament is the big commandment: "Thou shalt not desire!". It is the central commandment of all cultures, of all religions. Only we, the extremely clever people of the West, are totally sure that this is nonsense, that we have overcome it and that it is a very good thing to desire. Consequently it is a very good thing to be unfree. It is a very good thing to be closed up in rivalry.

Even the most so-called primitive peoples, in the heart of New Guinea and elsewhere, who know much less about facts than we do and have much more wisdom about life than we have, know very clearly: "If you wish to live, you shall not desire. Desire destroys life itself." Because desire means rivalry, chaos, unfreedom.

Maybe one of the possibilities we can take with us to get a little bit of freedom is to learn that we are desiring and what we are desiring and to find out how to get out of these pits.

I want to draw one last diagram: When I am in this internal mediation, in this rivalry with the other, all the others, we often come to an inevitable conclusion when we can't get out:



Being in this fight I frantically seek all the possibilities to win in the rivalry. Of course I very seldom find the best ones, because I am too caught up. I don't even see the rest of the world with all its possibilities. Mostly we are not aware of being closed-up and if we are aware we are annoyed.

Many of us know of situations where we have said or thought: Life is not worthwhile, because I don't get or have this or that. And then our friends say to us: "What are you talking about? There are all your nice friends, there is the beauty of nature, there is your nice wife, and so on..". But in the situation we think: None of this matters at all because I don't have the one object of my desires, be it a job, a house, a girl, a boy, fame. I am closed up in desiring and I no longer know about the realities and possibilities of life. Worse still, I am so closed up that I simply see nothing at all. I am depressed and life is hopeless.

Of course, these are extremes, but we constantly run the risk of ending up in hopelessness. In internal mediation we are always closed up in desires and rivalries and we only see a very small part of reality.

I have very often said that there is something so strange, something so idiotic happening when we are in this situation. We always know only the six wrong solutions of our problem. There are certainly thousands of right solutions, but we don't see any of them, because we are closed up in the situation in which we are rivalling, closed off from the world with its endless possibilities. When we are free the world is open for us. There is happiness just because there are relationships.

I began with Rene Girard and I will end with him. In his book *'The Romantic Lie and the Romanesque Truth'*, he says that we, as human beings only have one freedom, the freedom to make the choice who we follow, with whom we are in mimesis. Do we stay in the situation we are in, not making a choice at all, imitating, being without choosing in the internal mimesis with each other and everybody till death? Or do we rethink the situation and make a choice? If the theme "Freedom in Relationships" is a serious theme for us, then making the choice might be urgent.