his father's objects—including the mother—indeed as they are indeed his father's. In short, if the son turns toward his father's objects it is because he is following the example of his model, and this model necessarily turns toward his own objects—those that are already in his possession or that he hopes to acquire. The disciple's movement toward the objects of his model, including the mother, is already accounted for by the concept of identification as defined by Freud. Far from discouraging such an interpretation, Freud seems initially to have encouraged it.

Because disciple and model are converging on the same object, a clash between them is inevitable. The resulting rivalry appears "Oedipal," but it takes on a wholly different meaning. Because it is predetermined by the model's choice, there is nothing fortuitous about it; nor is it, strictly speaking, a question of one person's usurping what belongs to the other. The disciple's attraction to the model's object is wholly "innocent"; in seeking to take his father's place with his "mother as well," the son is simply responding in all candor to a command issued by the culture in which he lives and by the model himself. If we pause to consider closely the model-disciple relationship, it should become clear that the so-called Oedipal rivalry, reinterpreted in terms of a radically mimetic situation, must logically result in consequences that are at once similar to and quite different from those attributed by Freud to his "complex."

Earlier on I defined the effects of mimetic rivalry and affirmed that they invariably end in reciprocal violence. This recency is the result of a process. If there is a stage in human existence at which recency is not yet in operation and at which reprisals are impossible, that stage is surely early childhood. That is why children are so vulnerable. The adult is quick to sense a violent situation and answer violence with violence; the child, on the other hand, never having been exposed to violence, reaches out for his model's objects with unsuspecting innocence. Only an adult could interpret the child's actions in terms of usurpation. Such an interpretation comes from the depths of a cultural system to which the child does not yet belong, one that is based on cultural concepts of which the child has not the remotest notion.

The model-disciple relationship precludes by its very nature that sense of equality that would permit the disciple to see himself as a peerable rival to the model. The disciple's position is like that of a worshipper before his god; he imitates the other's desires but is incapable of recognizing any connection between them and his own desires. In short, the disciple fails to grasp that he can indeed enter into competition with his model and even become a menace to him. If this is true for adults, how much truer it must be for the child experiencing his first encounter with mimetic desire!

The model's very first no—however softly spoken or cautiously phrased—can easily be mistaken by the disciple for an irrevocable act of excommunication, a banishment to the realms of outer darkness. Because the child is incapable of meeting violence with violence and has in fact had no real experience with violence, his first encounter with the mimetic double bind may well leave an indelible impression. The "father" projects into the future the first tentative movements of his son and sees that they lead straight to the mother or the throne. The incest wish, the patricide wish, do not belong to the child but spring from the mind of the adult, the model. In the Oedipus myth it is the oracle that puts such ideas into Laius's head, long before Oedipus himself was capable of entertaining any ideas at all. Freud reinvokes the same ideas, which are no more valid than Laius's. The son is always the last to learn that what he desires is incest and patricide, and it is the hypocritical adults who undertake to enlighten him in this matter.

The first intervention by the model between the disciple and the object is a traumatic experience, because the disciple is incapable of performing the intellectual operation assigned him by the adult, and in particular by Freud himself. He fails to see the model as a rival and therefore has no desire to usurp his place. Even the adult disciple is unable to grasp that conflict with the model is indeed rivalry, is unable to perceive the symmetry of their situation or acknowledge their basic equality. Faced with the model's anger, the disciple feels compelled to make some sort of choice between himself and the model; and it is perfectly clear that he will choose in favor of the model. The idol's wrath must be justified, and it can only be justified by some failure on the part of the disciple, some hidden weakness that obliges the god to forbid access to the holy of holies, to slam shut the gates of paradise. Far from reducing the divinity's prestige, this new attitude of vengeful spite serves to increase it. The disciple feels guilty—though of what, he cannot be sure—and unworthy of the object of his desire, which now appears more alluring than ever. Desire has now been redirected toward those particular objects protected by the other's violence. The link between desire and violence has been forged, and in all likelihood it will never be broken.

Freud, too, wants to show that an indelible impression is made on the child when he first discovers his own desires overlapping those of his parents. But because he eventually rejected the mimetic elements that had initially intrigued him, he takes a different approach. To appreciate this difference, let us look again at that crucial passage in Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego: "The little boy notices that