Day 16: Mirroring

In Theory: Heinz Kohut, a central figure in self psychology within psychodynamic theory, proposed that a basic human need, beginning in infancy and continuing throughout life, is to have experience recognized and reflected back as real. The caregiver who responds to a child with attunement and visible recognition is providing mirroring. In later relationships, similar processes occur when one person reflects back another's experience in a way that confirms it without distortion or judgment. Within self psychology, without sufficient mirroring, the sense of self can remain unstable, marked by a difficult search for recognition. This vulnerability demonstrates the extent to which our cohesion depends on external witnesses, as the self continuously seeks a steady psychological mirror to confirm its own worth.

In Experience: Someone tells a story that matters to them. The listener responds by shifting the focus to their own experience. The first person becomes quieter. Something in the exchange contracts noticeably. Over time, similar moments can accumulate across relationships, shaping how willing a person is to speak, how much detail they choose to share, or how quickly they begin to withhold.

In Thought: To be seen in a way that matches one's experience is less common than it appears. The absence of that recognition leaves an identifiable mark.

In Print: Miller, A. *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (1979)

In Attention: Notice what happens when listening without responding.