

*By Jacques Lacan  
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ÉCRITS: A SELECTION  
FEMININE SEXUALITY  
THE FOUR FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS  
OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

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JACQUES LACAN

THE  
FOUR FUNDAMENTAL  
CONCEPTS OF  
PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

Edited by  
JACQUES-ALAIN MILLER  
Translated from the French by  
ALAN SHERIDAN



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## ANAMORPHOSIS

*Of the foundation of consciousness · The privilege of the gaze as objet a ·  
The optics of the blind · The phallus in the picture*

*Vainement ton image arrive à ma rencontre  
Et ne m'entre où je suis qui seulement la montre  
Toi te tournant vers moi tu ne saurais trouver  
Au mur de mon regard que ton ombre rêvée*

*Je suis ce malheureux comparable aux miroirs  
Qui peuvent réfléchir mais ne peuvent pas voir  
Comme eux mon oeil est vide et comme eux habité  
De l'absence de toi qui fait sa cécité<sup>1</sup>*

You may remember that, in one of my earlier lectures, I began by quoting the poem, *Contrechant*, from Aragon's *Le Fou d'Elsa*. I did not realize at the time that I would be developing the subject of the gaze to such an extent. I was diverted into doing so by the way in which I presented the concept of repetition in Freud.

We cannot deny that it is within the explanation of repetition that this digression on the scopic function is situated —no doubt by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's recently published work, *Le Visible et l'invisible*. Moreover, it seemed to me that, if an encounter were to be found there, it was a happy one, one destined to stress, as I shall try to do today, how, in the perspective of the unconscious, we can situate consciousness.

You know that some shadow, or, to use another term, some 'resist'—in the sense one speaks of 'resist' in the dying of material—marks the fact of consciousness in Freud's very discourse.

But, before taking things up again at the point we left them last time, I must first clear up a misunderstanding that appears

<sup>1</sup> For a translation of the poem, see page 17.

to have arisen in the minds of certain members of the audience concerning a term I used last time. Some of you seem to have been perplexed by a word that is simple enough, and which I commented on, namely, the *tychic*. Apparently, it sounded to some of you like a sneeze. Yet I made it quite clear that it was the adjective formed from *tuché* just as *psychique* (psychical) is the adjective corresponding to *psyché* (psyche). I used this analogy at the heart of the experience of repetition quite intentionally, because for any conception of the psychical development as elucidated by psycho-analysis, the fact of the *tychic* is central. It is in relation to the eye, in relation to the *eutuchia* or the *dustuchia*, the happy encounter and the unhappy encounter, that my lecture today will be ordered.

## I

*I saw myself seeing myself*, young Parque says somewhere. Certainly, this statement has rich and complex implications in relation to the theme developed in *La Jeune Parque*, that of femininity—but we haven't got there yet. We are dealing with the philosopher, who apprehends something that is one of the essential correlates of consciousness in its relation to representation, and which is designated as *I see myself seeing myself*. What evidence can we really attach to this formula? How is it that it remains, in fact, correlative with that fundamental mode to which we referred in the Cartesian *cogito*, by which the subject apprehends himself as thought?

What isolates this apprehension of thought by itself is a sort of doubt, which has been called methodological doubt, which concerns whatever might give support to thought in representation. How is it, then, that the *I see myself seeing myself* remains its envelope and base, and, perhaps more than one thinks, grounds its certainty? For, *I warm myself by warming myself* is a reference to the body as body—I feel that sensation of warmth which, from some point inside me, is diffused and locates me as body. Whereas in the *I see myself seeing myself*, there is no such sensation of being absorbed by vision.

Furthermore, the phenomenologists have succeeded in articulating with precision, and in the most disconcerting way, that it is quite clear that I see *outside*, that perception is not in me, that it is on the objects that it apprehends. And yet I

apprehend the world in a perception that seems to concern the immanence of the *I see myself seeing myself*. The privilege of the subject seems to be established here from that bipolar reflexive relation by which, as soon as I perceive, my representations belong to me.

This is how the world is struck with a presumption of idealization, of the suspicion of yielding me only my representations. Serious practice does not really weigh very heavy, but, on the other hand, the philosopher, the idealist, is placed there, as much in confrontation with himself as in confrontation with those who are listening to him, in an embarrassing position. How can one deny that nothing of the world appears to me except in my representations? This is the irreducible method of Bishop Berkeley, about whose subjective position much might be said—including something that may have eluded you in passing, namely, this *belong to me* aspect of representations, so reminiscent of property. When carried to the limit, the process of this meditation, of this reflecting reflection, goes so far as to reduce the subject apprehended by the Cartesian meditation to a power of annihilation.

The mode of my presence in the world is the subject in so far as by reducing itself solely to this certainty of being a subject, it becomes active annihilation. In fact, the process of the philosophical meditation throws the subject towards the transforming historical action, and, around this point, orders the configured modes of active self-consciousness through its metamorphoses in history. As for the meditation on being that reaches its culmination in the thought of Heidegger, it restores to being itself that power of annihilation—or at least poses the question of how it may be related to it.

This is also the point to which Maurice Merleau-Ponty leads us. But, if you refer to his text, you will see that it is at this point that he chooses to withdraw, in order to propose a return to the sources of intuition concerning the visible and the invisible, to come back to that which is prior to all reflection, thetic or non-thetic, in order to locate the emergence of vision itself. For him, it is a question of restoring—for, he tells us, it can only be a question of a reconstruction or a restoration, not of a path traversed in the opposite direction—of reconstituting the way by which, not from the body, but from something

that he calls the flesh of the world, the original point of vision was able to emerge. It would seem that in this way one sees, in this unfinished work, the emergence of something like the search for an unnamed substance from which I, the seer, extract myself. From the toils (*rets*), or rays (*rais*), if you prefer, of an iridescence of which I am at first a part, I emerge as eye, assuming, in a way, emergence from what I would like to call the function of *seeingness* (*voyure*).

A wild odour emanates from it, providing a glimpse on the horizon of the hunt of Artemis—whose touch seems to be associated at this moment of tragic failure in which we lost him who speaks.

Yet is this really the way he wished to take? The traces that remain of the part to come from his meditation permits us to doubt it. The reference-points that are provided in it, more particularly for the strictly psycho-analytic unconscious, allow us to perceive that he may have been directed towards some search, original in relation to the philosophical tradition, towards that new dimension of meditation on the subject that analysis enables us to trace.

Personally, I cannot but be struck by certain of these notes, which are for me less enigmatic than they may seem to other readers, because they correspond very exactly to the schemata—with one of them, in particular—that I shall be dealing with here. Read, for example, the note concerning what he calls the turning inside-out of the finger of a glove, in as much as it seems to appear there—note the way in which the leather envelops the fur in a winter glove—that consciousness, in its illusion of *seeing itself seeing itself*, finds its basis in the inside-out structure of the gaze.

2

But what is the gaze?

I shall set out from this first point of annihilation in which is marked, in the field of the reduction of the subject, a break—which warns us of the need to introduce another reference, that which analysis assumes in reducing the privileges of the consciousness.

Psycho-analysis regards the consciousness as irremediably limited, and institutes it as a principle, not only of idealization,

but of *méconnaissance*, as—using a term that takes on new value by being referred to a visible domain—*scotoma*. The term was introduced into the psycho-analytic vocabulary by the French School. Is it simply a metaphor? We find here once again the ambiguity that affects anything that is inscribed in the register of the scopic drive.

For us, consciousness matters only in its relation to what, for propaedeutic reasons, I have tried to show you in the fiction of the incomplete text—on the basis of which it is a question of recentring the subject as speaking in the very lacunae of that in which, at first sight, it presents itself as speaking. But I am stating here only the relation of the pre-conscious to the unconscious. The dynamic that is attached to the consciousness as such, the attention the subject brings to his own text, remains up to this point, as Freud has stressed, outside theory and, strictly speaking, not yet articulated.

It is here that I propose that the interest the subject takes in his own split is bound up with that which determines it—namely, a privileged object, which has emerged from some primal separation, from some self-mutilation induced by the very approach of the real, whose name, in our algebra, is the *objet a*.

In the scopic relation, the object on which depends the phantasy from which the subject is suspended in an essential vacillation is the gaze. Its privilege—and also that by which the subject for so long has been misunderstood as being in its dependence—derives from its very structure.

Let us schematize at once what we mean. From the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his own failure. Furthermore, of all the objects in which the subject may recognize his dependence in the register of desire, the gaze is specified as unapprehensible. That is why it is, more than any other object, misunderstood (*méconnu*), and it is perhaps for this reason, too, that the subject manages, fortunately, to symbolize his own vanishing and punctiform bar (*trait*) in the illusion of the consciousness of *seeing oneself see oneself*, in which the gaze is elided.

If, then, the gaze is that underside of consciousness, how shall we try to imagine it?

The expression is not inapt, for we can give body to the gaze. Sartre, in one of the most brilliant passages of *L'Être et le Néant*, brings it into function in the dimension of the existence of others. Others would remain suspended in the same, partially de-realizing, conditions that are, in Sartre's definition, those of objectivity, were it not for the gaze. The gaze, as conceived by Sartre, is the gaze by which I am surprised—surprised in so far as it changes all the perspectives, the lines of force, of my world, orders it, from the point of nothingness where I am, in a sort of radiated reticulation of the organisms. As the locus of the relation between me, the annihilating subject, and that which surrounds me, the gaze seems to possess such a privilege that it goes so far as to have me scotomized, I who look, the eye of him who sees me as object. In so far as I am under the gaze, Sartre writes, I no longer see the eye that looks at me and, if I see the eye, the gaze disappears.

Is this a correct phenomenological analysis? No. It is not true that, when I am under the gaze, when I solicit a gaze, when I obtain it, I do not see it as a gaze. Painters, above all, have grasped this gaze as such in the mask and I have only to remind you of Goya, for example, for you to realize this.

The gaze sees itself—to be precise, the gaze of which Sartre speaks, the gaze that surprises me and reduces me to shame, since this is the feeling he regards as the most dominant. The gaze I encounter—you can find this in Sartre's own writing—is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other.

If you turn to Sartre's own text, you will see that, far from speaking of the emergence of this gaze as of something that concerns the organ of sight, he refers to the sound of rustling leaves, suddenly heard while out hunting, to a footstep heard in a corridor. And when are these sounds heard? At the moment when he has presented himself in the action of looking through a keyhole. A gaze surprises him in the function of voyeur, disturbs him, overwhelms him and reduces him to a feeling of shame. The gaze in question is certainly the presence of others as such. But does this mean that originally it is in the relation of subject to subject, in the function of the existence of others as looking at me, that we apprehend what the gaze really is? Is it not clear that the gaze intervenes here only in as much as it is

not the annihilating subject, correlative of the world of objectivity, who feels himself surprised, but the subject sustaining himself in a function of desire?

Is it not precisely because desire is established here in the domain of seeing that we can make it vanish?

## 3

We can apprehend this privilege of the gaze in the function of desire, by pouring ourselves, as it were, along the veins through which the domain of vision has been integrated into the field of desire.

It is not for nothing that it was at the very period when the Cartesian meditation inaugurated in all its purity the function of the subject that the dimension of optics that I shall distinguish here by calling 'geometral' or 'flat' (as opposed to perspective) optics was developed.

I shall illustrate for you, by one object among others, what seems to me exemplary in a function that so curiously attracted so much reflection at the time.

One reference, for those who would like to carry further what I tried to convey to you today, is Baltrusaitis' book, *Anamorphoses*.

In my seminar, I have made great use of the function of anamorphosis, in so far as it is an exemplary structure. What does a simple, non-cylindrical anamorphosis consist of? Suppose there is a portrait on this flat piece of paper that I am holding. By chance, you see the blackboard, in an oblique position in relation to the piece of paper. Suppose that, by means of a series of ideal threads or lines, I reproduce on the oblique surface each point of the image drawn on my sheet of paper. You can easily imagine what the result would be—you would obtain a figure enlarged and distorted according to the lines of what may be called a perspective. One supposes that—if I take away that which has helped in the construction, namely, the image placed in my own visual field—the impression I will retain, while remaining in that place, will be more or less the same. At least, I will recognize the general outlines of the image—at best, I will have an identical impression.

I will now pass around something that dates from a hundred years earlier, from 1533, a reproduction of a painting that, I

think, you all know—Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. It will serve to refresh the memories of those who know the picture well. Those who do not should examine it attentively. I shall come back to it shortly.

Vision is ordered according to a mode that may generally be called the function of images. This function is defined by a point-by-point correspondence of two unities in space. Whatever optical intermediaries may be used to establish their relation, whether their image is virtual, or real, the point-by-point correspondence is essential. That which is of the mode of the image in the field of vision is therefore reducible to the simple schema that enables us to establish anamorphosis, that is to say, to the relation of an image, in so far as it is linked to a surface, with a certain point that we shall call the 'geometral' point. Anything that is determined by this method, in which the straight line plays its role of being the path of light, can be called an image.

Art is mingled with science here. Leonardo da Vinci is both a scientist, on account of his dioptric constructions, and an artist. Vitruvius's treatise on architecture is not far away. It is in Vignola and in Alberti that we find the progressive interrogation of the geometral laws of perspective, and it is around research on perspective that is centred a privileged interest for the domain of vision—whose relation with the institution of the Cartesian subject, which is itself a sort of geometral point, a point of perspective, we cannot fail to see. And, around the geometral perspective, the picture—this is a very important function to which we shall return—is organized in a way that is quite new in the history of painting.

I should now like to refer you to Diderot. The *Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient* (Letter on the Blind for the use of those who see) will show you that this construction allows that which concerns vision to escape totally. For the geometral space of vision—even if we include those imaginary parts in the virtual space of the mirror, of which, as you know, I have spoken at length—is perfectly reconstructible, imaginable, by a blind man.

What is at issue in geometral perspective is simply the mapping of space, not sight. The blind man may perfectly well conceive that the field of space that he knows, and which he

knows as real, may be perceived at a distance, and as a simultaneous act. For him, it is a question of apprehending a temporal function, instantaneity. In Descartes, dioptrics, the action of the eyes, is represented as the conjugated action of two sticks. The geometral dimension of vision does not exhaust, therefore, far from it, what the field of vision as such offers us as the original subjectifying relation.

This is why it is so important to acknowledge the inverted use of perspective in the structure of anamorphosis.

It was Dürer himself who invented the apparatus to establish perspective. Dürer's 'lucinda' is comparable to what, a little while ago, I placed between that blackboard and myself, namely, a certain image, or more exactly a canvas, a trellis that will be traversed by straight lines—which are not necessarily rays, but also threads—which will link each point that I have to see in the world to a point at which the canvas will, by this line, be traversed.

It was to establish a correct perspective image, therefore, that the *lucinda* was introduced. If I reverse its use, I will have the pleasure of obtaining not the restoration of the world that lies at the end, but the distortion, on another surface, of the image that I would have obtained on the first, and I will dwell, as on some delicious game, on this method that makes anything appear at will in a particular stretching.

I would ask you to believe that such an enchantment took place in its time. Baltrusaitis' book will tell you of the furious polemics that these practices gave rise to, and which culminated in works of considerable length. The convent of the Minims, now destroyed, which once stood near the rue des Tournelles, carried on the very long wall of one of its galleries and representing as if by chance St John at Patmos a picture that had to be looked at through a hole, so that its distorting value could be appreciated to its full extent.

Distortion may lend itself—this was not the case for this particular fresco—to all the paranoiac ambiguities, and every possible use has been made of it, from Arcimboldi to Salvador Dalí. I will go so far as to say that this fascination complements what geometral researches into perspective allow to escape from vision.

How is it that nobody has ever thought of connecting this

with . . . the effect of an erection? Imagine a tattoo traced on the sexual organ *ad hoc* in the state of repose and assuming it, if I may say so, developed form in another state.

How can we not see here, immanent in the geometral dimension—a partial dimension in the field of the gaze, a dimension that has nothing to do with vision as such—something symbolic of the function of the lack, of the appearance of the phallic ghost?

Now, in *The Ambassadors*—I hope everyone has had time now to look at the reproduction—what do you see? What is this strange, suspended, oblique object in the foreground in front of these two figures?

The two figures are frozen, stiffened in their showy adornments. Between them is a series of objects that represent in the painting of the period the symbols of *vanitas*. At the same period, Cornelius Agrippa wrote his *De Vanitate scientiarum*, aimed as much at the arts as the sciences, and these objects are all symbolic of the sciences and arts as they were grouped at the time in the *trivium* and *quadrivium*. What, then, before this display of the domain of appearance in all its most fascinating forms, is this object, which from some angles appears to be flying through the air, at others to be tilted? You cannot know—for you turn away, thus escaping the fascination of the picture.

Begin by walking out of the room in which no doubt it has long held your attention. It is then that, turning round as you leave—as the author of the *Anamorphoses* describes it—you apprehend in this form . . . What? A skull.

This is not how it is presented at first—that figure, which the author compares to a cuttlebone and which for me suggests rather that loaf composed of two books which Dali was once pleased to place on the head of an old woman, chosen deliberately for her wretched, filthy appearance and, indeed, because she seems to be unaware of the fact, or, again, Dali's soft watches, whose signification is obviously less phallic than that of the object depicted in a flying position in the foreground of this picture.

All this shows that at the very heart of the period in which the subject emerged and geometral optics was an object of research, Holbein makes visible for us here something that is simply the subject as annihilated—annihilated in the form

## ANAMORPHOSIS

that is, strictly speaking, the imaged embodiment of the *minus-phi* [ $(-\phi)$ ] of castration, which for us, centres the whole organization of the desires through the framework of the fundamental drives.

But it is further still that we must seek the function of vision. We shall then see emerging on the basis of vision, not the phallic symbol, the anamorphic ghost, but the gaze as such, in its pulsatile, dazzling and spread out function, as it is in this picture.

This picture is simply what any picture is, a trap for the gaze. In any picture, it is precisely in seeking the gaze in each of its points that you will see it disappear. I shall try to develop this further next time.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

F. WAHL: *You have explained that the original apprehension of the gaze in the gaze of others, as described by Sartre, was not the fundamental experience of the gaze. I would like you to explain in greater detail what you have already sketched for us, the apprehension of the gaze in the direction of desire.*

LACAN: *If one does not stress the dialectic of desire one does not understand why the gaze of others should disorganize the field of perception. It is because the subject in question is not that of the reflexive consciousness, but that of desire. One thinks it is a question of the geometral eye-point, whereas it is a question of a quite different eye—that which flies in the foreground of *The Ambassadors*.*

WAHL: *But I don't understand how others will reappear in your discourse . . .*

LACAN: *Look, the main thing is that I don't come a cropper!*

WAHL: *I would also like to say that, when you speak of the subject and of the real, one is tempted, on first hearing, to consider the terms in themselves. But gradually one realizes that they are to be understood in their relation to one another, and that they have a topological definition—subject and real are to be situated on either side of the split, in the resistance of the phantasy. The real is, in a way, an experience of resistance.*

LACAN: *My discourse proceeds, in the following way: each term is sustained only in its topological relation with the others, and the subject of the *cogito* is treated in exactly the same way.*

WAHL: *Is topology for you a method of discovery or of exposition?*

LACAN: It is the mapping of the topology proper to our experience as analysts, which may later be taken in a meta-physical perspective. I think Merleau-Ponty was moving in this direction—see the second part of the book, his reference to the *Wolf Man* and to the finger of a glove.

P. KAUFMANN: *You have provided us with a typical structure of the gaze, but you have said nothing of the dilation of light.*

LACAN: I said that the gaze was not the eye, except in that flying form in which Holbein has the cheek to show me my own soft watch . . . Next time, I will talk about embodied light.

26 February 1964

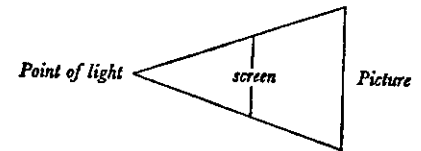
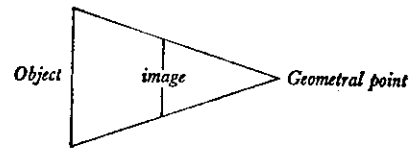
8

THE LINE AND LIGHT

*Desire and the picture · The story of a sardine can · The screen · Mimicry · The organ · You never look at me from the place I see you*

The function of the eye may lead someone who is trying to enlighten you to distant explorations. When, for example, did the function of the organ and, to begin with, its very presence, appear in the evolution of living beings?

The relation of the subject with the organ is at the heart of our experience. Among all the organs with which we deal, the



breast, the faeces, etc., there is the eye, and it is striking to see that it goes back as far as the species that represent the appearance of life. You no doubt eat oysters, innocently enough, without knowing that at this level in the animal kingdom the eye has already appeared. Such discoveries teach us, it should be said, all manner of things. Yet we must choose from among these things those that are most relative to our search.

Last time, I think I said enough to enable you to grasp the interest of this small, very simple triangular schema that I have reproduced at the top of the blackboard.

It is there simply to remind you in three terms of the optics



used in this operational montage that bears witness to the inverted use of perspective, which came to dominate the technique of painting, in particular, between the end of the fifteenth and the end of the seventeenth centuries. Anamorphosis shows us that it is not a question in painting of a realistic reproduction of the things of space—a term about which one could have many reservations.

The little schema also allows me to remark that certain optics allow that which concerns vision to escape. Such optics are within the grasp of the blind. I have already referred you to Diderot's *Lettre*, which shows to what extent the blind man is capable of taking account of, reconstructing, imagining, speaking about everything that vision yields to us of space. No doubt, on this possibility, Diderot constructs a permanent equivocation with metaphysical implications, but this ambiguity animates his text and gives it its mordant character.

For us, the geometral dimension enables us to glimpse how the subject who concerns us is caught, manipulated, captured, in the field of vision.

In Holbein's picture I showed you at once—without hiding any more than usual—the singular object floating in the foreground, which is there to be looked at, in order to catch, I would almost say, *to catch in its trap*, the observer, that is to say, us. It is, in short, an obvious way, no doubt an exceptional one, and one due to some moment of reflection on the part of the painter, of showing us that, as subjects, we are literally called into the picture, and represented here as caught. For the secret of this picture, whose implications I have pointed out to you, the kinships with the *vanitas*, the way this fascinating picture presents, between the two splendidly dressed and immobile figures, everything that recalls, in the perspective of the period, the vanity of the arts and sciences—the secret of this picture is given at the moment when, moving slightly away, little by little, to the left, then turning around, we see what the magical floating object signifies. It reflects our own nothingness, in the figure of the death's head. It is a use, therefore, of the geometral dimension of vision in order to capture the subject, an obvious relation with desire which, nevertheless, remains enigmatic.

What is the desire which is caught, fixed in the picture, but

which also urges the artist to put something into operation? And what is that something? This is the path along which we shall try to move today.

1

In this matter of the visible, everything is a trap, and in a strange way—as is very well shown by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the title of one of the chapters of *Le Visible et l'Invisible—entrelacs* (interlacing, intertwining). There is not a single one of the divisions, a single one of the double sides that the function of vision presents, that is not manifested to us as a labyrinth. As we begin to distinguish its various fields, we always perceive more and more the extent to which they intersect.

In the domain that I have called that of the geometral, it seems at first that it is light that gives us, as it were, the thread. In effect, you saw this thread last time linking us to each point of the object and, in the place where it crosses the network in the form of a screen on which we are going to map the image, functioning quite definitely as a thread. Now, the light is propagated, as one says, in a straight line, this much is certain. It would seem, then, that it is light that gives us the thread.

Yet, reflect that this thread has no need of light—all that is needed is a stretched thread. This is why the blind man would be able to follow all our demonstrations, providing we took some trouble in their presentation. We would get him, for example, to finger an object of a certain height, then follow the stretched thread. We would teach him to distinguish, by the sense of touch in his finger-ends, on a surface, a certain configuration that reproduces the mapping of the images—in the same way that we imagine, in pure optics, the variously proportioned and fundamentally homological relations, the correspondences from one point to another in space, which always, in the end, amounts to situating two points on a single thread. This construction does not, therefore, particularly enable us to apprehend what is provided by light.

How can we try to apprehend that which seems to elude us in this way in the optical structuring of space? It is always on this question that the traditional argument bears. Philosophers, going back from Alain, the last to have concerned himself with it, and quite brilliantly, to Kant, and even to Plato, all expatiate

on the supposed deceptiveness of perception—and, at the same time, they all find themselves once again masters of the exercise, by stressing the fact that perception finds the object where it is, and that the appearance of the cube as a parallelogram is precisely, owing to the rupture of space that underlies our very perception, what makes us perceive it as a cube. The whole trick, the *hey presto!*, of the classic dialectic around perception, derives from the fact that it deals with geometral 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.

The essence of the relation between appearance and being, which the philosopher, conquering the field of vision, so easily masters, lies elsewhere. It is not in the straight line, but in the point of light—the point of irradiation, the play of light, fire, the source from which reflections pour forth. Light may travel in a straight line, but it is refracted, diffused, it floods, it fills—the eye is a sort of bowl—it flows over, too, it necessitates, around the ocular bowl, a whole series of organs, mechanisms, defences. The iris reacts not only to distance, but also to light, and it has to protect what takes place at the bottom of the bowl, which might, in certain circumstances, be damaged by it. The eyelid, too, when confronted with too bright a light, first blinks, that is, it screws itself up in a well-known grimace.

Furthermore, it is not that the eye has to be photo-sensitive—we know this. The whole surface of the tegument—no doubt for various reasons that are not visual—may be photo-sensitive, and this dimension can in no way be reduced to the functioning of vision. There is a certain adumbration of photo-sensitive organs in the pigmentary spots. In the eye, the pigment functions fully, in a way, of course, that the phenomenon shows to be infinitely complex. It functions within the cones, for example, in the form of a rhodopsin. It also functions inside the various layers of the retina. This pigment comes and goes in functions that are not all, nor always immediately discoverable and clear, but which suggest the depth, the complexity and, at the same time, the unity of the mechanisms concerned with light.

The relation of the subject with that which is strictly concerned with light seems, then, to be already somewhat ambiguous. Indeed, you see this on the schema of the two triangles,

which are inverted at the same time as they must be placed one upon the other. What you have here is the first example of this functioning of interlacing, intersection, chiasma, which I pointed out above, and which structures the whole of this domain.

In order to give you some idea of the question posed by this relation between the subject and light, in order to show you that its place is something other than the place of the geometral point defined by geometric optics, I will now tell you a little story.

It's a true story. I was in my early twenties or thereabouts—and at that time, of course, being a young intellectual, I wanted desperately to get away, see something different, throw myself into something practical, something physical, in the country say, or at the sea. One day, I was on a small boat, with a few people from a family of fishermen in a small port. At that time, Brittany was not industrialized as it is now. There were no trawlers. The fisherman went out in his frail craft at his own risk. It was this risk, this danger, that I loved to share. But it wasn't all danger and excitement—there were also fine days. One day, then, as we were waiting for the moment to pull in the nets, an individual known as Petit-Jean, that's what we called him—like all his family, he died very young from tuberculosis, which at that time was a constant threat to the whole of that social class—this Petit-Jean pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can. It floated there in the sun, a witness to the canning industry, which we, in fact, were supposed to supply. It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me—*You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!*

He found this incident highly amusing—I less so. I thought about it. Why did I find it less amusing than he? It's an interesting question.

To begin with, if what Petit-Jean said to me, namely, that the can did not see me, had any meaning, it was because in a sense, it was looking at me, all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated—and I am not speaking metaphorically.

The point of this little story, as it had occurred to my partner,

the fact that he found it so funny and I less so, derives from the fact that, if I am told a story like that one, it is because I, at that moment—as I appeared to those fellows who were earning their livings with great difficulty, in the struggle with what for them was a pitiless nature—looked like nothing on earth. In short, I was rather out of place in the picture. And it was because I felt this that I was not terribly amused at hearing myself addressed in this humorous, ironical way.

I am taking the structure at the level of the subject here, and it reflects something that is already to be found in the natural relation that the eye inscribes with regard to light. I am not simply that punctiform being located at the geometral point from which the perspective is grasped. No doubt, in the depths of my eye, the picture is painted. The picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am not in the picture.

That which is light looks at me, and by means of that light in the depths of my eye, something is painted—something that is not simply a constructed relation, the object on which the philosopher lingers—but something that is an impression, the shimmering of a surface that is not, in advance, situated for me in its distance. This is something that introduces what was elided in the geometral relation—the depth of field, with all its ambiguity and variability, which is in no way mastered by me. It is rather it that grasps me, solicits me at every moment, and makes of the landscape something other than a landscape, something other than what I have called the picture.

The correlative of the picture, to be situated in the same place as it, that is to say, outside, is the point of gaze, while that which forms the mediation from the one to the other, that which is between the two, is something of another nature than geometral, optical space, something that plays an exactly reverse role, which operates, not because it can be traversed, but on the contrary because it is opaque—I mean the screen.

In what is presented to me as space of light, that which is gaze is always a play of light and opacity. It is always that gleam of light—it lay at the heart of my little story—it is always this which prevents me, at each point, from being a screen, from making the light appear as an iridescence that overflows it. In short, the point of gaze always participates in the ambiguity of the jewel.

And if I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen, which I earlier called the stain, the spot.

## 2

This is the relation of the subject with the domain of vision. The word subject must not be understood here in the usual sense of the word, in the subjective sense—this relation is not an idealist relation. This overview, which I call the subject, and which I regard as giving consistency to the picture, is not simply a representative overview.

There are many ways of being wrong about this function of the subject in the domain of the spectacle.

Certainly, there are plenty of examples in *La Phénoménologie de la perception* of what happens behind the retina. Merleau-Ponty cleverly extracts from a mass of writing some very remarkable facts, showing, for example, that simply the fact of masking, by means of a screen, part of a field functioning as a source of composite colours—produced, for example, by two wheels, two screens, which, one revolving behind the other, must compose a certain tone of light—that this intervention alone reveals in a quite different way the composition in question. Indeed, here we grasp the purely subjective function, in the ordinary sense of the word, the note of central mechanism that intervenes, for the play of light arranged in the experiment, all the elements of which we know, is distinct from what is perceived by the subject.

Perceiving the effects of reflection of a field or a colour is quite different—it does have a subjective side to it, but one arranged quite differently. Let us, for example, place a yellow field beside a blue field—by receiving the light reflected on the yellow field, the blue field will undergo some change. But, certainly, everything that is colour is merely subjective—there is no objective correlative in the spectrum to enable us to attach the quality of colour to the wavelength, or to the relevant frequency at this level of light vibration. There is something objective here, but it is situated differently.

Is that all there is to it? Is that what I am talking about when I speak of the relation between the subject and what I have called the picture? Certainly not.

The relation between the subject and the picture has been

approached by certain philosophers, but they have, if I may say so, missed the point. Read the book by Raymond Ruyer called *Néo-finalisme*, and see how, in order to situate perception in a teleological perspective, he is forced to situate the subject in an absolute overview. There is no need, except in the most abstract way, to posit the subject in absolute overview, when, in the example he gives, it is merely a question of getting us to grasp what the perception of a draught-board is—a draught-board belongs essentially to that geometrical optics that I was careful to distinguish at the outset. We are here in space *partes extra partes*, which always provides such an objection to the apprehension to the object. In this direction, the thing is irreducible.

Yet there is a phenomenal domain—ininitely more extended than the privileged points at which it appears—that enables us to apprehend, in its true nature, the subject in absolute overview. Even if we cannot give it being, it is nonetheless necessary. There are facts that can be articulated only in the phenomenal dimension of the overview by which I situate myself in the picture as stain—these are the facts of mimicry.

This is not the place to go into all the more or less complex problems posed by the question of mimicry. I would refer you to the specialized works on the subject—they are not only fascinating in themselves, but they provide ample material for reflexion. I shall content myself with stressing what has not, perhaps, been sufficiently brought out. To begin with, I shall ask a question—how important is the function of adaptation in mimicry?

In certain phenomena of mimicry one may speak perhaps of an adaptive or adapted coloration and realize, for example—as Cuénot has shown, probably with some relevance in certain cases—that coloration, in so far as it is adapted completely, is simply a way of defending oneself against light. In an environment in which, because of what is immediately around, the colour green predominates, as at the bottom of a pool containing green plants, an animalcule—there are innumerable ones that might serve as examples—becomes green for as long as the light may do it harm. It becomes green, therefore, in order to reflect the light *qua* green, thus protecting itself, by adaptation, from its effects.

But, in mimicry, we are dealing with something quite different. Let us take an example chosen almost at random—it is not a privileged case—that of the small crustacean known as *caprella*, to which is added the adjective *acanthifera*. When such a crustacean settles in the midst of those animals, scarcely animals, known as bryozoaires, what does it imitate? It imitates what, in that quasi-plant animal known as the bryozoaires, is a stain—at a particular phase of the bryozoaires, an intestinal loop forms a stain, at another phase, these functions something like a coloured centre. It is to this stain shape that the crustacean adapts itself. It becomes a stain, it becomes a picture, it is inscribed in the picture. This, strictly speaking, is the origin of mimicry. And, on this basis, the fundamental dimensions of the inscription of the subject in the picture appear infinitely more justified than a more hesitant guess might suggest at first sight.

I have already referred to what Caillois says about this in his little book *Méduse et compagnie*, with that unquestionable penetration that is sometimes found in the non-specialist—his very distance may enable him to grasp certain implications in what the specialist has merely stated.

Certain scientists claim to see in the register of coloration merely more or less successful facts of adaptation. But the facts show that practically nothing that can be called adaptation—in the sense in which the term is usually understood, that is to say, as behaviour bound up with the needs of survival—practically nothing of this is to be found in mimicry, which, in most cases, proves to be inoperant, or operating strictly in the opposite direction from that which the adaptive result might be presumed to demand. On the other hand, Caillois brings out the three headings that are in effect the major dimensions in which the mimetic activity is deployed—travesty, camouflage, intimidation.

Indeed, it is in this domain that the dimension by which the subject is to be inserted in the picture is presented. Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an *itself* that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage, in the strictly technical sense. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled—exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare.

In the case of travesty, a certain sexual finality is intended. Nature shows us that this sexual aim is produced by all kinds of effects that are essentially disguise, masquerade. A level is constituted here quite distinct from the sexual aim itself, which is found to play an essential role in it, and which must not be distinguished too hastily as being that of deception. The function of the lure, in this instance, is something else, something before which we should suspend judgement before we have properly measured its effects.

Finally, the phenomenon known as intimidation also involves this over-valuation that the subject always tries to attain in his appearance. Here too, we should not be too hasty in introducing some kind of inter-subjectivity. Whenever we are dealing with imitation, we should be very careful not to think too quickly of the other who is being imitated. To imitate is no doubt to reproduce an image. But at bottom, it is, for the subject, to be inserted in a function whose exercise grasps it. It is here that we should pause for a moment.

Let us now see what the unconscious function as such tells us, in so far as it is the field which, for us, offers itself to the conquest of the subject.

## 3

In this direction, a remark of Caillois' should guide us. Caillois assures us that the facts of mimicry are similar, at the animal level, to what, in the human being is manifested as art, or painting. The only objection one might make to this is that it seems to indicate, for René Caillois, that the notion of painting is itself so clear that one can refer to it in order to explain something else.

What is painting? It is obviously not for nothing that we have referred to as picture the function in which the subject has to map himself as such. But when a human subject is engaged in making a picture of himself, in putting into operation that something that has as its centre the gaze, what is taking place? In the picture, the artist, we are told by some, wishes to be a subject, and the art of painting is to be distinguished from all others in that, in the work, it is as subject, as gaze, that the artist intends to impose himself on us. To this, others reply by stressing the object-like side of the art product. In both

these directions, something more or less appropriate is manifested, which certainly does not exhaust the question.

I shall advance the following thesis—certainly, in the picture, something of the gaze is always manifested. The painter knows this very well—his morality, his search, his quest, his practice is that he should sustain and vary the selection of a certain kind of gaze. Looking at pictures, even those most lacking in what is usually called the gaze, and which is constituted by a pair of eyes, pictures in which any representation of the human figure is absent, like a landscape by a Dutch or a Flemish painter, you will see in the end, as in filigree, something so specific to each of the painters that you will feel the presence of the gaze. But this is merely an object of research, and perhaps merely illusion.

The function of the picture—in relation to the person to whom the painter, literally, offers his picture to be seen—has a relation with the gaze. This relation is not, as it might at first seem, that of being a trap for the gaze. It might be thought that, like the actor, the painter wishes to be looked at. I do not think so. I think there is a relation with the gaze of the spectator, but that it is more complex. The painter gives something to the person who must stand in front of his painting which, in part, at least, of the painting, might be summed up thus—*You want to see? Well, take a look at this!* He gives something for the eye to feed on, but he invites the person to whom this picture is presented to lay down his gaze there as one lays down one's weapons. This is the pacifying, Apollonian effect of painting. Something is given not so much to the gaze as to the eye, something that involves the abandonment, the *laying down*, of the gaze.

The problem is that a whole side of painting—expressionism—is separated from this field. Expressionist painting, and this is its distinguishing feature, provides something by way of a certain satisfaction—in the sense in which Freud uses the term in relation to the drive—of a certain satisfaction of what is demanded by the gaze.

In other words, we must now pose the question as to the exact status of the eye as organ. The function, it is said, creates the organ. This is quite absurd—function does not even explain the organ. Whatever appears in the organism as an

organ is always presented with a large multiplicity of functions. In the eye, it is clear that various functions come together. The discriminatory function is isolated to the maximum degree at the level of the *fovea*, the chosen point of distinct vision. Something quite different occurs over the rest of the surface of the retina, incorrectly distinguished by specialists as the locus of the scotopic function. But here, too, chiasma is to be found, since it is this last field, supposedly created to perceive things in diminished lighting, which provides the maximum possibility of perceiving the effects of light. If you wish to see a star of the fifth or six size, do not look straight at it—this is known as the Arago phenomenon. You will be able to see it only if you fix your eye to one side.

These functions of the eye do not exhaust the character of the organ in so far as it emerges on the couch, and in so far as the eye determines there what every organ determines, namely, duties. What is wrong about the reference to instinct, a reference that is so confused, is that one does not realize that instinct is the way in which an organism has of extricating itself in the best possible way from an organ. There are many examples, in the animal kingdom, of cases in which the organism succumbs to an excess, a hyper-development of an organ. The supposed function of instinct in the relation between organism and organ certainly seems to have been defined as a kind of morality. We are astonished by the so-called pre-adaptations of instinct. The extraordinary thing is that the organism can do anything with its organ at all.

In my reference to the unconscious, I am dealing with the relation to the organ. It is not a question of the relation to sexuality, or even to the sex, if it is possible to give any specific reference to this term. It is a question rather of the relation to the phallus, in as much as it is lacking in the real that might be attained in the sexual goal.

It is in as much as, at the heart of the experience of the unconscious, we are dealing with that organ—determined in the subject by the inadequacy organized in the castration complex—that we can grasp to what extent the eye is caught up in a similar dialectic.

From the outset, we see, in the dialectic of the eye and the gaze, that there is no coincidence, but, on the contrary, a lure.

When, in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that—*You never look at me from the place from which I see you.*

Conversely, *what I look at is never what I wish to see.* And the relation that I mentioned earlier, between the painter and the spectator, is a play, a play of *trompe-l'œil*, whatever one says. There is no reference here to what is incorrectly called figurative, if by this you mean some reference or other to a subjacent reality.

In the classical tale of Zeuxis and Parrhasios, Zeuxis has the advantage of having made grapes that attracted the birds. The stress is placed not on the fact that these grapes were in any way perfect grapes, but on the fact that even the eye of the birds was taken in by them. This is proved by the fact that his friend Parrhasios triumphs over him for having painted on the wall a veil, a veil so lifelike that Zeuxis, turning towards him said, *Well, and now show us what you have painted behind it.* By this he showed that what was at issue was certainly deceiving the eye (*tromper l'œil*). A triumph of the gaze over the eye.

Next time, we shall return to this function of the eye and the gaze.

#### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

M. SAFOUAN: *In the contemplation of the picture, if I have understood you correctly, the eye seeks relaxation from the gaze?*

LACAN: I shall take up here the dialectic of appearance and its beyond, in saying that, if beyond appearance there is nothing in itself, there is the gaze. It is in this relation that the eye as organ is situated.

SAFOUAN: *Beyond the appearance, is there a lack, or the gaze?*

LACAN: At the level of the scopic dimension, in so far as the drive operates there, is to be found the same function of the *objet a* as can be mapped in all the other dimensions.

The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, firstly, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack. I'll explain at once what I mean.

At the oral level, it is the nothing, in so far as that from which

the subject was weaned is no longer anything for him. In anorexia nervosa, what the child eats is the nothing. This will enable you to grasp obliquely how the object of weaning may come to function at the level of castration, as privation.

The anal level is the locus of metaphor—one object for another, give the faeces in place of the phallus. This shows you why the anal drive is the domain of oblativity, of the gift. Where one is caught short, where one cannot, as a result of the lack, give what is to be given, one can always give something else. That is why, in his morality, man is inscribed at the anal level. And this is especially true of the materialist.

At the scopic level, we are no longer at the level of demand, but of desire, of the desire of the Other. It is the same at the level of the invocatory drive, which is the closest to the experience of the unconscious.

Generally speaking, the relation between the gaze and what one wishes to see involves a lure. The subject is presented as other than he is, and what one shows him is not what he wishes to see. It is in this way that the eye may function as *objet a*, that is to say, at the level of the lack ( $-\phi$ ).

4 March 1964