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John S. Hendrix

Roger Williams University, jhendrix@risd.edu

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The Real and the Gaze of Jacques Lacan

John Shannon Hendrix

The third category of the psyche in Lacanian psychoanalysis is the real (*réel*), which is neither imaginary nor symbolic in conscious or unconscious thought, and which is inaccessible to psychoanalysis itself. The real is not reality in either a conceptual or phenomenological sense, which is the symbolic and the imaginary: it is only proposed as an algebraic concept, as it cannot be conceived. It exists as an absence in the symbolic order (language), as the unconscious exists as an absence in conscious thought. Non-presence can be seen in the real of Lacan, and the gaze, in the dialectic between the imaginary and the symbolic, and in the Hegelian dialectic between subjective and objective spirit. The real of Lacan is exterior to the symbolic, and cannot be represented by the symbolic, and yet the real has an effect on the symbolic, as the unconscious has an effect on conscious thought. The real is the inability of the signifier in language to relate to the signified, the impossibility of meaning in language, and the impossibility of the subject. In every attempt that the subject makes to represent itself in language or perception, according to Lacan, something is missed, or left behind. That something is the *objet a* (*autre*, other) in the register of the real, the register which exists outside of signification. The *objet a* is a remainder (*un reste*) or a piece of waste (*un déchet*). It is that which is represented by the other as an object of desire. The *objet a* in the real exceeds that which is rationalizable, that which can be given by the mechanisms of language and reason.

The *objet a* is the incompleteness of the subject in language and perception, and that which causes its desire in signification for completion. The real is a product of the dialectic of the imaginary and symbolic; it is a product of the failure of the self-definition and self-identity of the human subject, and its impossibility. As that which the symbolic order is not, the real precedes the symbolic order, but as the symbolic order unfolds the real is taken into it, as an absence or as an other, in the becoming absent of presence. The real is thus both prior to the symbolic, to the mechanisms of thought, and anterior to it; it is both the product of thought and that which is exterior to thought. The real is both presupposed and posed by the symbolic. It can be compared to the absolute spirit of Hegel as that which is not meaning or signification, or even existence. It is both thought and the negative of thought; it is “the nega-

tivity of thought, or negativity as it is in itself an essence; i.e. simple essence is absolute difference from itself, or its pure othering of itself" (§769),¹ according to Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is that which is prior to reason, that of which reason is the negative, the non-originary origin of the differentiation of reason.

If thought is defined as lack, as that which is limited and inadequate, then the real is that which does not lack, and which is not inadequate, that in which the subject no longer needs to seek its completion. It is the signifier which introduces lack into the real, but at the same time the real is the lack in the signifier, the lack around which signification is structured. The real is thus as the One of Plotinus. The idea of the One can be found in the dialogues of Plato, in the *Parmenides*, or in the *Phaedrus* as that which is described as the "self-moving, never-leaving self" (245)² which "never ceases to move, and is the fountain and beginning of motion to all that moves besides," as the real is that on which differentiation in reason is predicated, but which itself is not differentiated. In the *Timaeus* of Plato the One might be described as "that which always is and has no becoming," and "that which is always becoming and never is" (27).³ The One of Plotinus participates in all things, but is inaccessible to them.

Desire for Lacan, as it is manifest in the mechanisms of language, is the attempt to attain or understand that which is missing from the being of the subject, which is the *objet a*. The *objet a* is that around which desire circulates, that upon which fantasy is constructed, and that which is the product of *méconnaissance*. It is that which is excluded by signification in language, that of which the subject is deprived as it is solidified into a signifier in language. The elided subject in signification, and the divided subject in language, are the result of that which the subject can no longer be in rational discourse, in the symbolic and the Other. The *objet a* is present in "the existence of everything that the ego neglects, scotomizes, misconstrues in the sensations that make it react to reality, everything that it ignores, exhausts, and binds in the significations that it receives from language," as Lacan described in "Aggressivity and Psychoanalysis" (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 22).⁴ It is the residue of the illusion of consciousness, the mirage of objectification in the perception-consciousness system as conceived by Freud. It is that which cannot be represented by the signifier, those causes and forces which determine the subject, in the unconscious, to which the subject has no access.

The *objet a* represents the inability of the subject to know itself in thought or in consciousness. The Lacanian subject can only say to itself "ei-

ther I do not think, or I am not'. There where I think, I don't recognize myself; there where I am not, is the unconscious; there where I am, it is only too clear that I stray from myself" (*Hamlet*, p. 92).⁵ The *objet a* is thus the absent presence of the subject, the object of the subject's desire, which becomes the other, in imaginary ego object identification and reflection.

The desire of the Other of Lacan, the desire of the subject in language, is transferred to the desire of the other; the other is objectified by the subject to compensate for its lack, the *objet a*. The *objet a* is the residue of the dialectic between the imaginary and the symbolic, the conflict between the identity of the subject as it is defined by its imaginary ego in object identification and the identity of the subject as it is defined by the symbolic order, in its insertion into the Other, and the demands that the Other makes of the subject in relation to its phenomenal and imaginary experience. The demands of the symbolic are manifest in the unconscious as the discourse of the Other, to which the subject does not have access in itself, but which constitute the unknowable foundation of the conscious activities and thoughts of the subject. As the subject enters into the symbolic, into the signifying chain of language, the body of the subject is fragmented, and the experience of the body is divided in the gestalt ego identification resulting from the mirror stage; the *objet a* is that experience of the unified body of the subject which is rendered impossible by language.

The *objet a* of Lacan, the body repressed by language, is the tropic, metonymic representation of the mythological totality of being that is lost by the subject when it is elided in the signifying chain, in its representations to itself of its imaginary ideal ego and the symbolic order in language. The *objet a* is the lack which is the cause of desire, the lack of being in existence, or in Hegelian terms, the self-negation of subjective spirit as it doubles itself in objective spirit. An object becomes an object of desire, as described by Lacan, "when it takes the place," metonymically, as it is differentiated in language, "of what by its very nature remains concealed from the subject..." (*Hamlet*, p. 28), which is that which is repressed by language, or abstraction. The subject seeks the *objet a* in fantasy, in wish-fulfillment, as a result of the failure of all of its identificatory characteristics, as defined by psychoanalysis, to define it to itself; neither the lost phenomenological experience, the imaginary ego in object identification, the vestiges of the figural, nor the symbolic order in language, signification, can compensate for the *objet a*, which is what the subject lacks in all of its self-definitions.

As a result of the division of the subject in the imaginary and symbolic orders, and the formation of the object of desire as the displacement or compensation for the lack of the subject, the subject “cannot fail to recognize that what he desires presents itself to him as what he does not want, the form assumed by the negation in which the *méconnaissance* of which he himself is unaware is inserted in a very strange way,” which is “a *méconnaissance* by which he transfers the permanence of his desire to an ego that is nevertheless intermittent, and, inversely, protects himself from his desire by attributing to it these very intermittences” (*Écrits, A Selection*, pp. 312–313), as described in “The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious.”

The object of desire is the stand-in for the *objet a*, which is concealed from the subject in its *méconnaissance* in the unconscious, in the Other, in the dialectic of interiority and the Other, subjective and objective. The subject knows that the object that it desires is not what it desires, but it does not know why, because the desire is reinforced by the imaginary ego in the identification of the subject in the body and image of the other, as well as by the symbolic order in the identification of the subject in relation to language and society, the historical and cultural, both of which assert themselves to the subject, in temporal and periodic intervals, as given by language and differentiation in the particular, as Hegel would frame it, in the objective, in order to reconfirm the existence of the subject as a desiring subject, although the cause of the desire, and the object of the desire, the *objet a*, are inaccessible to the subject.

Fantasy, the wish-fulfillment caused by the *objet a*, is represented by Lacan by the algorithm $\$ \diamond o$, which is the desire (\diamond) of the elided subject ($\$$) for the *objet a*, the *plus-de-jour*, what is inaccessible to desire or wish-fulfillment. Fantasy is the promise to the subject of that which is unattainable in its existence in being, and it protects the subject from that abyss within itself. The condition of the object of the fantasy, the *objet a*, is “the moment of a ‘fading’ or eclipse of the subject that is closely bound up with the *Spaltung* or splitting that it suffers from its subordination to the signifier” (p. 313). As soon as the subject enters into language, the attainment of the *objet a* is impossible. The subject is split between the imaginary and symbolic, the figural and the formal; the object identification of the imaginary ego provides the subject with the stand-in object of its desire, in the illusion of consciousness in the ego, and the symbolic order robs the subject of the stand-in object of its desire in the fragmentation of the body.

The symbolic is resistant to the absorption of imaginary ego identifications, which survive as vestiges in dreams. Imaginary object identifications create an unconscious which “is made of what the subject essentially fails to recognize in his structuring image, in the image of his ego—namely, those captivations by imaginary fixations which are unassimilable to the symbolic development of his history,” as Lacan described in *Seminar I (Freud’s Papers on Technique)*,⁶ which are the interiority of the subject, the subjective spirit. The inability of the symbolic to absorb the imaginary results in the dialectic, the divided subject, and the *méconnaissance* of the subject. As the subject is unable to identify itself in the imaginary object identifications which remain alien to the symbolic constitution of the subject, the object or the other becomes exterior to the subject, as the particular in the differentiation of reason, and becomes the stand-in for the displaced *objet a* of the subject, which is nowhere to be found in language. Desire negates itself in the doubling of itself in language just as thought does.

Desire was defined by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in the *Letters to de Volder* as “the action of the internal principle which brings about the change or the passing from one perception to another.”⁷ Desire is that which is caught between perceptions or thoughts in language, between signifiers in the signifying chain. Desire is thus as the trace, or the index, that which is not present in language, but whose absence reveals the presence of the unconscious, in the pulsating periodicity of the dialectic of absence and presence in language facilitated by the symbolic order. “It is true that the desire (*l’appetit*) is not always able to attain the whole of the perception which it strives for, but it always attains a portion of it and reaches new perceptions,” according to Leibniz. In the fluctuation of the ego in perception, consciousness is only present as a continuity in the illusion created by the ego.

Perceptions, which are facilitated by the interaction of desire and thought, or the imaginary and the symbolic (desire being the mechanisms of the compensation for the lost object identification of the imaginary ego on the part of the subject), are never complete, or completeable, as manifest in the diagram, but are only fragments of the constructed experience of the symbolic in consciousness, which prevents the subject from being able to see the fragmentary nature of its perception and thought. As in Zeno’s paradox, the continuity does not exist, only the fragmentary and partial perceptions which necessitate a continual retroactive signification, as in language, and are the function of desire, in the search for that which is unattainable, but may be substituted in the multiple fragmentary thoughts and perceptions of

experience, which is, as the luminous embroidered veil of Plato, a curtain held up by the ego of the subject, shielding it from its own absence, its fragmented representation in the symbolic, and the lack for which it compensates in desire in perception.

The result for Leibniz is that “the continuity of the psychological flux is grounded in the continuity of stages of incessantly varying and passing insensible perceptions understood as the basic element or material of the conscious flux,”⁸ in the words of Anna Teresa Tymieniecka in *Leibniz’ Cosmological Synthesis*. The continuity of the incessantly varying perceptions is given by consciousness, but the perceptions themselves are structured in the unconscious, in the intersection of the imaginary and symbolic, as they are insensible, unavailable in substance to the conscious temporality in which they are organized and made to appear to be complete and continuous, by the symbolic order. Leibniz concludes, in the *Monadology*, that “perception, and that which depends upon it, are inexplicable by mechanical causes, that is to say, by figures and motions” (17).⁹ Perception, as defined by Leibniz, cannot be given by the mechanisms of reason alone, or the mechanisms of language. “It is accordingly in the simple substance, and not in the composite nor in a machine that the perception is to be sought.” The simple substance is the monad or inner principle, which contains the force which activates the movement of the percepts, that is, desire, the principle of which is inaccessible to conscious thought, but which is the basis for all conscious mechanisms. The divided subject of Lacan is present in the thought of Leibniz.

This principle of desire in perception, what is between the fragmentary perceptions, is distinguished by Leibniz from consciousness, and suggests the unconscious. The consciousness of perception is referred to as apperception, perhaps to distinguish it from the perception which is based on other than what is conscious. In the *Monadology* of Leibniz, “the passing condition which involves and represents a multiplicity in the unity, or in the simple substance, is nothing else than what is called perception” (14). Unity is seen by Leibniz as something other to thought, in a metaphysical relation; in the theories of perception of Hegel and Freud, the unity is displaced to thought itself, to differentiate it from matter in the particular, or fragmented. Perception “should be carefully distinguished from apperception or consciousness...,” according to Leibniz. Perception is a product of the unconscious, a product of desire which is the mechanism of the search on the part of the subject for the *objet a*, which is inaccessible to consciousness, and which results in a fragmented experience as well as a fragmented subject. Perception

for Leibniz represents a dialectical synthesis of the imaginary and the symbolic, the object and the word.

Desire for Lacan is caught in the dialectic of the imaginary and symbolic and rendered impossible, as the subject is rendered impossible. The object which stands in for the *objet a*, the lack in the subject, might be a fetish object or a collector's object, money, commercial products in advertising, sexual fantasies, identification with the Other in patriotism or racism, or displacements of the subject or the other in the Other in the form of culturally conditioned desires, such as style, fashion, music, architectural forms, a certain profession or activity, etc. In advertising, commercial products are often represented as that which is unattainable, for example Coca-Cola as the "real thing," as pointed out by Slavoj Žižek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. The subject does not desire Coca-Cola; the subject desires the *objet a*, that which it lacks, which is the real thing, in the domain of the real, that which is inaccessible.

The Lacanian subject desires as soon as it enters into language. Desire is not present in phenomenal experience prior to the mirror stage. Desire is the product of the "murder of the thing" (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 104) by the symbol in language, which instigates the lack experienced by the subject. The desire of the subject is thus "the desire of the Other" (p. 264), and it is also the desire of the other, in the dialectic of the symbolic and imaginary. This can be seen in the desire of the dream, which is not a conscious desire, not regulated by the conscious ego. The dream enacts its own desire, which is the desire of the Other in the unconscious. In the same way, the conscious subject is the subject of the desire of the Other in language, rather than its originating agent. Consciousness is a construct of desire in the Other, which uses consciousness in its own regulation and concealment from the subject.

In that the object of desire is a substitute for the *objet a*, the lack of the subject, the object is external to the desire of the subject. Desire is sustained by the subject and not by the object. The subject is an apparatus of absence in which the *objet a* is constituted. "This apparatus is something lacunary, and it is in the lacuna that the subject establishes the function of a certain object, *qua* lost object," Lacan explained in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*.¹⁰ The object of desire is a fill-in for the lacuna in the subject, for the hole in the signifying chain which represents the subject. The desire of the subject is supported by fantasy. "The fantasy is the support of desire; it is not the object that is the support of desire. The subject sustains himself as desiring in relation to an ever more complex signifying ensem-

ble.” As desire is the desire of the Other, desire is socially engendered, through the language of the symbolic.

The subject does not want what it desires, but desires what it thinks it is supposed to desire as a speaking subject, in order to sustain itself in language. Thus “the object of desire, in the usual sense, is either a fantasy that is in reality the support of desire” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 186), the reaffirming by the ego of the subject that it is desiring what it is supposed to desire, “or a lure,” the deception of the subject by its ego that the object is what it is supposed to desire. The desire of the subject is divided in metonymy, which re-affirms the subject as that which is represented in language, and at the same time eliminates the subject from that representation. Desire is both reaffirmed and negated by language, because desire is constructed by language, by the discourse of the Other, which is the unconscious. The subject is only partially existent in the Other, and thus only partially existent in its own desire, which is inaccessible to it, as is the unconscious. The desire of the Other is that which links the signifiers in a signifying chain, as in the principle of Leibniz, and that which results in the elimination of the subject.

The subject of Lacan is alienated from itself in signification; it is alienated from its own desire in language, by language. The subject, as in the Hegelian subject, is self-alienated in the doubling of its reason, in the doubling of the signifier which produces signification in the imaginary, and which institutes the *objet a* in language as the lack of the subject, the self-negation of the subject in reason, and its self-alienation in its language. As soon as the subject speaks, it desires, and as soon as the subject desires it does not know itself, and its *méconnaissance* is sustained by its desire. As soon as a signifier represents the subject to another signifier, the subject is alienated from itself in its desire. “Alienation is linked in an essential way to the function of the dyad of signifiers” (p. 236).

As soon as the alienation is accomplished in the singular representation of the subject by a signifier to another signifier, the subject is eliminated from any further signification, which becomes self-enclosed and inaccessible to the subject. The subject cannot access that by which it is constituted. “If we wish to grasp where the function of the subject resides in this signifying articulation, we must operate with two, because it is only with two that he can be cornered in alienation. As soon as there are three, the sliding becomes circular.” The alienation is accomplished with the binary signifier, as “the signifier is that which represents the subject for the other signifier.” The bi-

nary signifier is also the mechanism of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* of the dream. The representation which takes the place of the representation is the signifier which takes the place of the signifier, which represents the subject to it. The subject is elided in the dream in the same way, as the *Unterdrückung* of the binary signifier. The subject is thus self-alienated from its desire in the dream as well, in its aphanisis, which is a product of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, as the elision of the subject is the product of the binary signifier in conscious discourse, in which the mechanisms of the unconscious, metaphor and metonymy, determine the subject unknown to itself.

For Lacan it is in the representation of the subject by a signifier to another signifier, in the structure of the binary signifier, that is located the One, or the real. “We know of no other basis by which the One may have been introduced into the world if not by the signifier as such, that is, the signifier insofar as we learn to separate it from its meaning effects,” explained Lacan in *Seminar XX (On Feminine Sexuality)*.¹¹ It is in *Seminar XX* that Lacan focused his attention on the One and on the real. As the binary signifier introduces the *objet a* into language, it is that by which non-existence is instituted into existence, in the mechanism of desire sustained by language. In the Pythagorean tetractys in classical philosophy, the dyad or the binary signifier, the first multiplication of figures, ascend from the inner and absolute, non-existence, in the process of assimilation, that is, changing into a form that is a body, or can be identified with a body, as described by Athanasius Kircher in *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae (The Great Art of Light and Shadow)* in the seventeenth century.¹²

Plato conceived the universe as being constructed in a geometrical progression from point to line to surface to solid, the point being the One and the line being the dyad as the connection between two points. According to Nicolas Cusanus in *De coniecturis (On conjecture)*, the most basic element in the unfolding of reason is numbers.¹³ Numbers are the first images formed in the mind as a similitude of reason; numbers are thus a form of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, a representation which takes the place of a representation. Mathematical symbols are seen as similitudes of material things, which must be combined in pairs, as similitudes, in order to create signification. Numerical divisions are also seen as similitudes of divisions in substance from the monad, or the ineffable principle of desire, the *objet a*. Reason is composed of the differentiation of those things which pre-exist reason undifferentiated in the One.

According to Proclus in the *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, mathematics “occupies the middle ground between the partless realities—simple, incomposite, and indivisible—and divisible things characterized by every variety of composition and differentiation” (3).¹⁴ It is the mathematical construct of the dyad as the binary signifier which introduces the *objet a* into the signifying structure, and it is the mathematical construct beginning with the triad which objectifies the subject as lack in the perpetual *glissement* of signification. Proclus explained that it is the “discursiveness of [mathematical] procedure, its dealing with its subjects as extended, and its setting up of different prior principles for different objects” that distinguishes mathematics from the One. It is the introduction of the abstract complex of signifiers in thought (the signified, the prior principles), through which, in relation to the signifiers in language, the *glissement* of signification, the unconscious is introduced into conscious discourse as an absence, in the retroactive anticipation of the subject as represented by the signifiers at the *point de capiton*, that the *objet a* determines the process of signification. The relation between the One and the mathematical dyad in Platonism or neoplatonism can be seen to be analogous to the relation between the One and signification for Lacan, in the representation of signification as an algorithm, the establishment of mathematics as the first principles of linguistic formations in reason.

The mathematical/linguistic mechanism in signification, which is the function of desire in the maintenance of the ego, reveals the One, or the real, in the gap between signifiers, in the trace or index: “for desire merely leads us to aim at the gap (*faille*) where it can be demonstrated that the One is based only on (*tenir de*) the essence of the signifier” (*Seminar XX*, p. 5), as Lacan explained. It is signification which reveals that which cannot be signified, and the desire of the subject which reveals the non-existence of the subject. Desire is the mechanism of its own non-existence, as it is perpetuated by the illusion of object identification in the imaginary ego, and the illusion of the consciousness of the subject in language, in the symbolic order.

There is also a gap between the One and existence, between the *objet a* and reason in language, which is the *méconnaissance* of the subject, the inability of the subject to know its own lack in relation to its discourse, which is the discourse of the Other. The One in the *Parmenides* is predicated on such a gap; it is necessitated by the Other, by the unconscious, because it is that which is inaccessible to conscious thought of itself. The One of Plato suggests the unconscious, as “this requirement of the One, as the *Parmenides*

strangely already allowed us to predict, stems from the Other” (p. 10), as Lacan wrote. The philosopher of the One is Plotinus, the first philosopher of the unconscious. The One is that which cannot be signified, and that which cannot be explained in relation to signification, even in relation to the unconscious, that by which it is necessitated. The One is the equivalent of the “indeterminate ‘a’ (*un*),” a signifier, which is a “lure that we don’t know how to make function in relation to the signifier so that it collectivizes the signified.” The One is that which escapes both the philosopher and the psychoanalyst, the singular signifier prior to signification as the simulacrum of the *objet a*, the source of the play of reflections which constitutes existence.

It is impossible to establish a relation between cause and effect; the signifier can only have a relation to the second signifier in the binary relation, and there is a gap between the two signifiers in that relation, as in the relation between the numbers one and two, in which is found the trace of further signification, for example one plus two equals three. One and two alone constitute no signification, no intersection of the imaginary and symbolic. They correspond to the object identification of the imaginary ego as the subject enters into language. One and two alone constitute the gap between one and two, between the One and signification, in which is found the *objet a*, which causes signification as compensation for its lack. The *object a* constitutes the inaccessibility of the One to signification, as the One is inaccessible to the multiple for Plotinus, and thus the inaccessibility of the Other. The signifier, as constituted by the *objet a*, as the mechanism of the lack, is the inaccessibility of the Other. The *objet a* is essential to the functioning of language, and essential to the impossibility of representation.

The interconnected structures of the imaginary, symbolic, and real of Lacan which describe the psyche in language, separate yet interconnected in a “Borromean knot,” can also be found in perception, which is a function of language, or reason. Consciousness is given by perception, by the subject seeing itself in the mirror in the imaginary, and by the subject being seen by the other in the symbolic. The perception of the symbolic is the imaginary perception absorbed into language, into apperception, in the dialectic of the imaginary and symbolic, as manifest in desire. Hegel defined perception, or “picture-thinking” (*Vorstellung*), as the “synthetic combination of sensuous immediacy and its universality or thought” (*Phenomenology of Spirit* §764), the imaginary and symbolic. Matter, the particular, or the one in self-differentiation, can only participate in the universal, in thought, through perception, according to Hegel. It is through perception that spirit becomes self-

conscious, and subjective spirit is differentiated in objective spirit, in the “consciousness of passing into otherness” (§767). Through perception, the world is created as otherness, in the otherness of reason to itself.

The universal principles of the One are differentiated into particulars in the “dissolution of their simple universality and the parting asunder of them into their own particularity” (§774), through the mechanism of desire in the *objet a*. The principle of the One is retained in all particularity, as the trace, as it were, of the *objet a*, and the One is recognized by the subject in the particular when the subject “has consciousness and distinguishes itself as ‘other’, or as world, from itself.” The self-alienation of reason in consciousness, the divided subject, is predicated on the relation of the subject as differentiation in reason to itself as reason itself, or consciousness. Thus consciousness maintains the illusion of the presence of the subject to itself as other to its own differentiation in reason. For Hegel the subject must become other to itself before it can recognize itself as mind; the One can only be predicated in differentiation, reason, that which is other to it. The *objet a* of Lacan is the point at which the subject becomes alienated from itself, as the juncture between the symbolic and the real. The *objet a* is the lack which moves the subject from point to point in the signifying structure.

In the perception of Lacan, in the relation between the subject and the world which is constituted by perception and “ordered in the figures of representation,” perception can be compared to reason as a succession of particulars in differentiation driven by desire in the *objet a*, in which the subject is only present as lack. As in language there is a hole between signifiers, a gap which is the *objet a*, in perception “something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it,” as in the trace in *différance*; “that is what we call the gaze,” as described by Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (p. 73). The gaze is the *objet a* of perception, as perception can be defined as the discourse of the Other, as the unconscious. The unconscious is present as an absence in perception in the same way that the unconscious is present as an absence in language in reason. The gaze is the function of perception.

Perception is a product of consciousness, the self-sustaining illusion of the ego in its existence to itself, thus everything in perception is pre-inscribed by the ego, by consciousness. Everything in perception is given by consciousness as “the pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen” (p. 74), in the same way that signification in language cannot exceed consciousness, that the unconscious is present only in absence. The *objet a* in perception is

defined by Lacan as the “stain,” that which occurs in the gaze, the holes in perception. “We will then realize that the function of the stain and of the gaze is both that which governs the gaze most secretly,” as the *objet a* governs the lacunae in language and the subject, “and that which always escapes from the grasp of that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness,” which is perception, as the *objet a* escapes conscious discourse. In perception, consciousness enacts the play of mirror reflections of signification, as objects participate in the universal in Hegelian terms, as particulars in the process of differentiation, as in the play of differences in *différance*, or the *glissement* of the signifier in *signifiance*.

Self-consciousness in perception, the doubling of reason and its recognition of its otherness to itself, is the “*seeing oneself seeing oneself*,” the continual reaffirmation of consciousness by the ego in the signification of perception. Such reaffirmation represses the *objet a*, the lack in the subject which is the cause of its desire, which is the function of the gaze, the lacuna, to reveal. In the theory of perception, it is possible to conceive of an alternative to perception, whereas in the theory of language it is not possible to conceive of an alternative to conscious discourse in communication, because, while perception is structured by language, or signification, it has no communicative intent, as in the dream. The unconscious can be revealed in means outside of perception in the same way that it can be revealed in the composition of dreams outside of conscious experience, as shown by Freud, as dreams are as well shown to be structured by language, the discourse of the Other, which is the unconscious, which can be seen in perception as well.

The gaze shows itself in the dream, in the absence of the subject, and in the absence of the organization of the imaginary space of the dream by the subject in perception. Dream space and dream images are structured differently than in perception. In perception, the image of the subject, the gestalt, orthopedic, self-reflected body image formulated in the mirror stage is the orienting point for the construction of perception by the subject, as the imaginary ego in object orientation in language. As a vanishing point in perspective construction, everything in perception is oriented to the subject and organized in accordance—spatial recession, hierarchies of scale, vertical and horizontal differentiations, as a grid placed on the world, as if there were a grid on the luminous embroidered veil in Plato’s *Republic*. The structuring of what is seen in perception is given by the structuring of language, when the imaginary experience is transformed into a mechanism for the ordering of the psyche, when the fragmentary and dispersed quality of what is seen in expe-

rience is re-constituted in relation to the subject, the imaginary ego, and re-ordered to correspond to the symbolic in language.

When the subject identifies itself, the illusion of the consciousness of the subject is preserved, in the subject “*seeing itself seeing itself*” in the words of Lacan, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (p. 82), as it would in perspective construction. The consciousness of the subject preserves the separation between it and the world around it; it preserves the subject/object relation, and the mechanisms of consciousness and reason which sustain the *méconnaissance* and division of the subject. The subject in constructed perception is given by the *cogito* of the subject, and results in the flocculation of the subject, the freezing of the subject as the representation of a signifier in language, and the punctiform object in space. The obverse of the subject/object relation in Lacanian psychoanalysis is found in the gaze, which overturns the consciousness of the subject in perception.

The dialectical process of ascending to intelligibles, the virtual, and descending into particulars, the real, is the process of analysis and synthesis, the combination of discursive and dialectic reason in the dianoetic, as described by Proclus in the *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*. Cusanus described the dianoetic process, in *De coniecturis*, as a *coincidentia oppositorum* in which the process of reason toward the intelligible, the sign of the real in the symbolic, is a process of folding or *complicato*, or implication, which is represented by the folding of polygonal figures towards a circle in which they are inscribed, the increasing multiplication of lines folded on points approaching the One, or the real, that which is ineffable, outside of reason.

The folding suggests the possibility of self-differentiation, or self-similarity, as opposed to the dialectical abstraction of the figure/ground, subject/object relation, which results in the subject being absorbed into perception, absorbed into the world, without the barrier of the geometries of perception in vision, as given by reason, imprisoning the subject, as in the subject of Georges Bataille, imprisoned in the “degrading chains of logic,” as described in “The Pineal Eye,” in response to which it is necessary for the subject to seek a “new laceration within a lacerated nature.” For the subject of Bataille, “it is no longer the leveling phraseology coming to him from the understanding that can help him: he can no longer recognize himself in the degrading chains of logic, but he recognizes himself, instead—not only with rage but in an ecstatic torment—in the virulence of his own phantasms,”¹⁵ in fantasy sustained by desire, in the interaction of the imaginary and symbolic.

Human life, for Bataille, can only begin with the deficit of the closed systems of reason, the deficit of geometral perception, and of the ego of the subject. "In the course of the ecstatic vision...the object is finally unveiled as *catastrophe* in a chaos of light and shadow, neither as God nor as nothingness, but as the object that love, incapable of liberating itself except outside of itself, demands in order to let out the scream of lacerated existence" (*Visions of Excess*, p. 134). The chaos of light and shadow can only be given in relation to reason, to the reasonable conceptions which define the function of reason in human life. The void is neither God nor nothingness, but the real, or the One, as given by reason itself. The chaos of light and shadow is the *objet a*, that which is missing in reason, and is found in the gaze, that which is missing in perception. The lacuna in perception, is an "opening that leads into a universe where perhaps there is no composition either of form or of being," in the words of Bataille, "where it seems that death rolls from world to world" (p. 253), where death in abstraction, in the crystallization of the subject in reason, is alleviated.

In dreams, the particular quality of the image is that it does not correspond to the perception of the subject inserted into language, although linguistic structures are seen to compose the dream. The symbolic is present in the dream, in the latent content in the dream, the dream thought, as revealed by Freud, and the imaginary ego is present in the dream, as images in the dream are products of the object identification of the subject, and there is a transformative process between the latent and manifest content of the dream, as Freud has shown, between the symbolic and imaginary, as it were. The difference between the dream and waking perception seems to be that the interaction between the symbolic and imaginary which constitutes the subject in conscious perception is missing in the experience of the dream.

As dream images are the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, the representation which takes the place of the mnemonic residue, the connection between the symbolic and imaginary is lost between the mnemonic residue and the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*. The imaginary is not subsumed into and repressed by the symbolic as it is in conscious perception; the dream represents more of an equal partnership, given the lack of requirement for communication and relation with the other in the dream. Conscious perception is always in reference to the relation with the other, the object identification of the imaginary ego which is only a fragment or a residue absorbed into the symbolic, as the subject is inserted into the Other. The dream image is a product of the relation between the subject and the Other, but the structuring of the relation between

the subject and the other in relation to the Other, the imaginary in relation to the symbolic, is not present in the dream.

The subject is not present in the dream as it is not present in language, only as an absence, a “sliding away,” as described by Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (p. 75), and the gaze is present in the dream as the lacuna in signification and the disjunction between the imaginary and symbolic. The presence of the gaze is manifest in the dream, as described by Lacan, in “the absence of horizon, the enclosure, of that which is contemplated in the waking state,” which are products of perception, the interaction of the imaginary and symbolic, “and, also, the character of emergence, of contrast, of stain, of its images, the intensification of their colors....” The images in the dream present themselves differently from images in perception, not connected to the object identifications of the imaginary, sensible forms. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud described dream images as competing in intensity and superimposition (p. 359), and color impressions are given hallucinatory clarity in relation to the mnemonic residues (p. 586),¹⁶ as the imaginary is absorbed into the symbolic.

In Freud’s *On Dreams*, dreams were described as “disconnected fragments of visual images.”¹⁷ Dream images do not appear in relation to the insertion by the subject of itself into the field; they are independent of the interaction between a representation of the subject and the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, though the object identifications of the subject are present in the dream. The position of the subject in the dream then, for Lacan, “is profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does not see where it is leading, he follows,” as described in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (p. 75). The dream is not a product of perception, organized in relation to the subject. Seeing in perception is impossible in the dream. The subject will never “be able to apprehend himself in the dream in the way in which, in the Cartesian *cogito*, he apprehends himself as thought.” The relation between the imaginary ego and the symbolic order which places the subject as a reference point, in relation to the other, in the constructed perception of the Other, does not exist in the dream, and as a result the gaze is revealed, the lacuna in the field of perception which contains the absence of the subject in the symbolic and the lack of the subject in the imaginary, which is the stain, or the *objet a*, which is elided in perception, as it is based on the *cogito*, as the unconscious is elided in signification. In that the *cogito* is given by the illusion of consciousness, the subject is the consciousness of

perception, but the subject cannot be the consciousness of the dream, in the disjunction between the imaginary and symbolic.

In the 1924 essay “Perspective as Symbolic Form,” Erwin Panofsky proposed an alternative to the constructed space of perception in waking thought, in its perspective or geometrical organization, which he called “psychophysiological space,”¹⁸ as an evocation of the possibility of dream space in conscious representation. The space of perception was characterized by Panofsky as “infinite, unchanging and homogeneous,” and a “systematic abstraction.” The *cogito* applies an unchanging structure to space in perception in consciousness, oriented to the subject; the space is infinite because it is metaphysical, based in the dialectic of the imaginary and symbolic. In perspective space, for example, space is organized according to a vanishing point, which is the point of the infinite recession of space. This is why, in Renaissance perspective theory, the vanishing point was seen as the representation of the One. The point, as established in Euclid’s *Elements of Geometry*, is that which has no parts. It is the closest thing in matter to the One, that which precedes all differentiation in reason. As the universe is constructed in the metaphysics of Plato from point to line to surface to solid, so the construction of space in perception contains the same metaphysic, the possibility of that which is other than finite, other than the differentiated particulars of reason, that which is universal in mind, in the *cogito*.

Proclus, in the *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid’s Elements*, described the One as that which “exists prior to the Many and produces plurality by offering its appearances to the many instances,” (50) in the trace, as it were, and even in the supplement. The One “is formed from particulars by reflection and has existence as an after-effect” (51); the possibility of the One is necessitated by reason, as the possibility of the infinite is necessitated by perception. The homogeneity of perceived space, as described by Panofsky, is given by the self-enclosed homogeneity of language as a signifying system. All elements of language must relate to all other elements in order for language to function as signification. If the holes or gaps, lacunae or scotomata, caused by the unconscious in language, were present to the speaking subject, the language could not function. If the gaze were present in perception, perception could not function as a conscious mechanism of reason. The homogeneity of the perspective space of the Renaissance is given by the cause and effect relation between the point, line, plane, and solid. In the *De coniecturis*, Cusanus described the progression as the establishment of unity in perception, based on the unity of the One. “The progression from the sim-

plest unity is seen as a progression from the simplest point, to line, to surface, and to body. The unity of the line is found in the surface and the body” (p. 37). Homogeneity is necessary in the functioning of perception as a conceptual construct, a systematic abstraction.

As the structure of space in perception is “infinite, unchanging and homogeneous” for Panofsky, it is “quite unlike the structure of psychophysiological space,” as described in *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (p. 30), a space which is conceived as corresponding to dream space. “Exact perspectival construction is a systematic abstraction from the structure of this psychophysiological space.” Psychophysiological space is seen as more of a *Tastraum*, a haptic space of immediate sensations, preserving the imaginary object identification. Such a concept is suggested in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* of Ernst Cassirer, or Ernst Mach’s treatise of 1914, *The Analysis of Sensations and the Relation of the Physical to the Psychical*. The intention of psychophysiological space is “no longer to represent depth intervals ‘extensively’ by means of foreshortenings,” and “to create an illusion ‘intensively’ by playing color surfaces off against each other” (*Perspective as Symbolic Form*, p. 154).

This quality can be seen explicitly in Cubist paintings, in a reintroduction of the metaphysic, or a displacement of it, in psychophysiological space as described by Panofsky, and in the color patches of Paul Cézanne. Cézanne recorded his perception of nature as a kind of psychophysiological space. He wrote that “to read nature is to see her, underneath the veil of interpretation, as colored *taches* [patches] following one another according to a law of harmony. The large colored areas [*teintes*] can thus be analyzed into modulations. Painting is recording colored sensations.”¹⁹ The veil of interpretation of Cézanne is perception, but the law of harmony and the analysis of modulations are functions of what would be that veil of interpretation; Cézanne’s psychophysiological space thus incorporates the dialectic of the imaginary and symbolic which is not present in dream space itself. The *taches* of Cézanne nevertheless introduce an element of the *Tastraum* which is absent from perspective construction, which are the “depth intervals” of experienced space.

The geometrical and homogeneous space of perspective construction, according to Panofsky, “negates the differences between front and back, between right and left, between bodies and intervening space (‘empty’ space), so that the sum of all the parts of space and all its contents are absorbed into a single ‘quantum continuum’” (*Perspective as Symbolic Form*, p. 31), a

homogeneity of unity and continuity, as in language in reason. Cézanne saw the dialectic of reason and sense experience, intelligible forms and sensible forms, in the tradition of Plotinus, where intellect is prior to sense experience, and sense experience modifies intellect in reason, as spirit is modified in reason for Hegel. Thus for Cézanne, the colored *tache* was seen to have a transcendental quality, evoking intellect as other than reason or sense experience, and suggesting the infinite, in the same manner as the vanishing point of perspective construction. Joachim Gasquet in *Conversations with Cézanne* recorded Cézanne as saying, “I would like to paint space and time and make them become forms of the sensibility of colors, since I sometimes imagine that colors are like great noumenal entities, living ideas, creatures of pure reason.”²⁰ Color is thus, for Cézanne, “the place where our brain meets the universe” (p. 113).

Psychophysiological space is also manifest in the conception of space of Roger Caillois in *The Necessity of the Mind*, which is also a place where the brain meets the universe, or the necessity of the mind corresponds to the necessity of the universe. “Fusing perfectly with the necessity of the universe,” Caillois wrote in 1933, “the mind’s necessity would at the same time be absorbed in it.”²¹ Space was seen by Caillois as that which can be occupied by multiple representations, as in a mirror and what is behind it, in contrast to the homogeneity of perspective space, and more than one object can also be apprehended in the same location. The visual space of Caillois is the product of the interaction of perception and imagination, imagination being composed of the same mnemonic residues as in the dream and the hallucination. Perception is seen as a combination of the perception given by consciousness and the production of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* given by unconscious processes. Perception gives a virtual image to which the imagination opposes a real content, the imaginary content of the unconscious. “Imagination is often defined as virtual perception,” given by the mnemonic residues in the mind, and “perception as a real imagination,” structured by the discourse of the Other, the unconscious. In the interaction of perception and imagination, the homogenous and unchanging space of constructed perception gives way to sporadic fluctuation and variance.

In the article “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” space was seen by Caillois as a “double dihedral changing at every moment in size and position.”²² The dihedral is the oscillating intersection of horizontal and vertical planes; vertical planes are the action of the perceiving subject and perceived object in space, while horizontal planes are the action of the ground under

the subject and the representation of the ground under the subject. The perception of Caillois entails the interaction of the imaginary and symbolic, but the residues of imaginary object identification, the sensible forms, are allowed more of a presence within the symbolic in the association of the subject to the Other.

The perceiving subject in the psychophysiological space of Caillois is no longer the vanishing point in a model of vision as perspective construction, and no longer the origin of coordinates in a horizontal plane. In the theory of perception of Leon Battista Alberti in the Renaissance, for example, the eye of the subject was seen as the vertex of a pyramid formed by rays of light which define the forms which are perceived. In *De pictura*, in 1435, the “base of the pyramid is the surface seen, and the sides are the visual rays we said are called extrinsic. The vertex of the pyramid resides within the eye, where the angles of the quantities in the various triangles meet together” (I.7).²³ The subject in psychophysiological space is thus “dispossessed of its privilege and literally no longer knows where to place itself” (*October 31*, p. 28), according to Caillois.

The perpetual fluctuation of the double dihedral of psychophysiological space can be seen as the perpetual play of differences in *différance* or *signifiance*, the play of absences and presences which dislocate the subject from what is signified, as in psychophysiological space. Such a space is thus seen as a constitution of human knowledge, where certainty and invariance are impossible in a fluctuating world where there is “no appreciable difference between the known and the unknown,” as described in *The Necessity of the Mind* (p. 87) by Caillois, suggesting the laceration of the signifying structure of Bataille, the laceration of the lacerated nature. In the dissolution of the subject in space, distinctions are dissolved “between the real and the imaginary, between waking and sleeping, between ignorance and knowledge” (*October 31*, p. 17), as described in “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia.”

There is no appreciable difference between the conscious and the unconscious; as phenomenally perceived images fluctuate in the *Taetraum*, the conscious and the unconscious fluctuate. In the interaction of the conscious and unconscious, the dominance of the symbolic is overcome, and the limitations of language. The self-identity of the subject for Caillois is limited by the “abstraction, generality, and permanence of the meaning of words,” as described in *The Necessity of the Mind* (p. 4); identity is found instead in “the mobile nature of the realities of a consciousness” which intersects with the unconscious, and in the “growing multiplicity of perceptions and sensations.”

Identity is found in a “lyrical language, which is experienced directly through dreams....”

The structure of Caillois’ psychophysiological space can be seen in Lacan’s conception of the picture and the gaze, which consists of vacillation, discontinuity, the interruption of conscious perception by the unconscious, and the elision of the subject. The vacillation is the manifestation of desire in signification, and the gaze is the point of failure of the subject in the *objet a*, the inaccessible object of desire, but which is imperceptible in conscious perception. The gaze plays the same role as the vanishing point in perspective construction, as the bar between the signifier and the signified, between symbolic and imaginary, in the moment of the *point de capiton* in the retroactive anticipation of the subject in signification, plays the same role as the *arché* in language, as does the trace. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, “in so far as the gaze, *qua objet a*, may come to symbolize this central lack expressed in the phenomenon of castration,” loss of ego, “and in so far as it is an *objet a* reduced, of its nature, to a punctiform, evanescent function, it leaves the subject in ignorance as to what there is beyond the appearance,” in the inaccessibility of the unconscious, “an ignorance so characteristic of all progress in thought that occurs in the way constituted by philosophical research” (p. 77), in the metaphysic. But psychoanalysis is “neither a *Weltanschauung*,” an ideology or philosophy of life, “nor a philosophy that claims to provide the key to the universe. It is governed by a particular aim, which is historically defined by the elaboration of the notion of the subject. It poses this notion in a new way, by leading the subject back to his signifying dependence.” Psychoanalysis is then the philosophy of the subject, or more specifically, the philosophy of the subject in language.

When the subject sees itself seeing itself, in consciousness, the perception of the subject cannot be absorbed into the field of perception as in the psychophysiological space of Caillois. The presence of the subject through perception, as given by the *cogito*, the self-certainty of the presence of the subject, results in the flocculation of the subject, the reduction of the subject to the punctiform object of the vanishing point, and thus the annihilation of the subject, as the subject is elided in signification in language. As the subject is the punctiform object in perception, it is as the *objet a* as a punctiform object in the gaze, as the One; consciousness is linked to desire as the inverse of desire, that which both is sustained by desire and which conceals desire. So it is that “consciousness, in its illusion of *seeing itself seeing itself*, finds

its basis in the inside-out structure of the gaze” (p. 82), as a product of the desire which it seeks to repress.

The *objet a* is given by the fragmentation which occurs in the subject in the mirror stage, in the incompatibility between the variability of sense experience and the imaginary ego of gestalt object identification, which produces the impossible object of desire in the subject, as it is translated into the demand of the Other in language, in the symbolic order. As a result, 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*.” The *objet a* is the lost identity of the subject in relation to itself, in its self-alienation in both the imaginary and the symbolic orders.

As the gaze is the inverse of consciousness, the fantasy or imagination of the subject depends on the gaze in its vacillation in the same way that consciousness is sustained by the ego. The subject attempts to identify with the gaze in perception, with its own lack, as it attempts to identify with the vanishing point in perspective construction, which is both the re-affirmation of its consciousness and the re-affirmation of its own lack in relation to what is beyond appearance. Like the vanishing point, the gaze is inapprehensible, as the unconscious is inapprehensible, but, “from the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, the point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his own failure,” the point at which the consciousness of the subject cannot exceed itself, which is reinforced by the interruption of the unconscious.

The gaze can only be experienced in consciousness as *méconnaissance*, in the inaccessibility of the unconscious to conscious thought. The gaze, as it is revealed in the dream, and as it might be represented in conscious perceptual experience, is not accessible to conscious thought, and can only be known as an absence, as the subject itself, which identifies itself with the gaze. For this reason the subject seeks to “symbolize his own vanishing and punctiform bar (*trait*) in the illusion of consciousness *seeing oneself see oneself*, in which the gaze is elided,” as in the doubling of reason in the self-consciousness of Hegel. The subject is elided both in the gaze, in the presence of the gaze, and in the consciousness in which the gaze is elided, because the experience of perception for Lacan cannot entail other than the interaction of the imaginary and symbolic in the fragmentation of the subject.

The gaze appears to the subject that is “sustaining himself in a function of desire” (p. 85) in perception, as given by consciousness in signification. The subject recognizes its lack in the gaze, but only as it is given by signification. The gaze is that which escapes perception as a function of desire in consciousness through signification, that which forces the subject out of that perception, for example in anamorphosis or *trompe l’oeil* in representation, which can only be products of representation, thus products of conscious mechanisms which, after a moment of shock when the subject realizes that it does not exist, only serve to reinforce the existence of the subject in the consciousness which is sustained by desire in signification. As soon as the gaze is sought, it disappears. “In any picture, it is precisely in seeking the gaze in each of its points that you will see it disappear” (p. 89). The gaze in the dream, as a product of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, is again not an impediment to the identity of the subject as it is formed in the perception-consciousness system.

In the same way that the speaking subject in the symbolic order is created and manipulated by language, represented by a signifier to another signifier, so the viewing subject is created and manipulated by perception. Lacan proposed that the “geometral dimension enables us to glimpse how the subject who concerns us is caught, manipulated, captured, in the field of vision” (p. 92) by perception. That which is perceived is always a trap, always a labyrinth, created by geometral relations, the line, the plane, the solid. The only point in the geometral construction of what is perceived which can suggest what is beyond appearance, as the gaze cannot do that, is the point of light. “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” where “the essence of the relation between appearance and being, which the philosopher, conquering the field of vision, so easily masters” (p. 94), lies.

Friedrich Schelling, in *The Philosophy of Art (Die Philosophie der Kunst, 1859)*,²⁴ described light as that which cannot be integrated into body. When the body strives toward participation in light, light becomes color (§84), which is matter mixed with light, or what Schelling called the real mixed in with the ideal, which is existence outside of matter, or intellect. Light could be described as the presence of the One, the absolute, in matter. It contains no particular, no differentiation, thus none of the qualities of either matter or reason, yet without light, neither matter nor thought would be possible; it is thus as the One, as described in Schelling’s *Bruno, or On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things* (260)²⁵ in 1802. Particulars are made visible to

perception and participate in the universal, in thought, by the reflected light of the absolute. The refraction and diffusion of light in perception exceeds the geometral construct of perception, and suggests that which is other than appearance.

Light suggests that the subject for Lacan is something other than the punctiform object in the geometral construct of perspective or perception. There is something in the subject which is other to the picture. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, the “picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am not in the picture” (p. 96). There is something in the subject, as given by light, which is something other than constructed perception. “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.” There is something outside of conscious experience in perception, outside the signifying construction of perception, in the relation between the subject and the world, which is suggested to the subject by light.

The gaze corresponds to the location of the picture, of the constructed perception, outside of the subject, although it is given by the consciousness of the subject. The gaze is the gap in perception, the lacuna or scotoma, which situates it outside of consciousness. In between the gaze, outside conscious perception, and the construct of conscious perception, is the “screen,” which mediates between the two. The screen is something other than geometral or optical space, and it is opaque, it cannot be traversed, as the bar in language cannot be traversed between signification and what is outside of signification, or what is elided by signification, but which makes signification possible, that is, the subject. The gaze is a “play of light and opacity,” because it is the dialectic of the universal and particular, the symbolic and the imaginary. It is that which, in the field of light, seduces the subject toward that which is other to it, in its self-negation, but which prevents the subject from access to what is other to it, the unconscious.

Light prevents the subject from being the screen; the subject cannot go outside itself, outside its identity in signification, in perception. That which is other to the subject must always be exterior to the subject, reaffirming its self-identity in consciousness, its subjective spirit undifferentiated in reason, in Hegelian terms, or the light within it, its interiority. If the subject were the screen in a field of vision which is pure light, it would dissolve into light;

light would dissipate uncontrollably into matter, and matter would be dissolved into its iridescence, the shifting changes of colors resulting from the insertion of light into matter. As a result, “the point of gaze always participates in the ambiguity of the jewel.” Light is present in the jewel only as reflection, as differentiation, although it cannot be distinguished from the facets of the jewel. Light flickers in the jewel as it flickers in the space of perception as the possibility of what is other to perception, but it is always reflected, and never reveals its source.

Even in fire, the source of light is not the fire. According to Schelling in the *Bruno* (278), the light of the sun is not light itself, but the manifestation of light in the sensible world. Light is the “eternal idea of all corporeal things,” but it is only present in matter as reflection, as the One, which is inaccessible. As light for Lacan prevents the subject from being the screen, the subject is the screen in the picture, that which mediates between consciousness and what is outside of consciousness, in the constructed perception. As the screen in consciousness, the subject prevents itself from access to the unconscious, from access to its own identity. “This is the relation of the subject with the domain of vision,” as described in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (p. 97). The unconscious is revealed to the subject by the gaze, and what is other than consciousness is revealed to the subject by light, but the subject can only be grasped and solicited, tempted, by what is other to it, in the limitations given by perception and language, discursive reason.

The subject is the picture (the field of vision) in relation to the gaze as the subject is that which the signifier represents to another signifier in signification. The gaze determines the subject in what is visible, as the subject is solicited by it. The subject enters light in perception through the gaze, through that which is other to geometral perception, and it is through the gaze that light is embodied in the intersection of the ideal and real, in Schelling’s terms, or the intersection of the symbolic and imaginary. As in signification, the metaphysic is displaced from the dialectic between appearance and what is beyond appearance to the symbolic and the imaginary, the splitting in the subject, which is revealed in the gaze, the lacuna or scotoma in perception. “Indeed, there is something whose absence can always be observed in a picture,” in the field of vision, “which is not the case in perception” (p. 108), in self-enclosed signification and imaginary identification.

The absence is the subject, as it is in language, which is elided in the geometral perception, which is separated from the picture by the screen, that which mediates between conscious perception and what is exterior to con-

scious perception, which is the opacity of the conscious reason of the subject. What is represented in perception is not the picture, not the field of vision itself. In *trompe-l'oeil*, the subject is taken outside of the certainty of its representation to itself in perception, at that moment that it recognizes that what is being perceived is not what is being represented. The *trompe l'oeil* does not reveal to the subject what is beyond its appearance, the idea or intelligible form, but rather the disjunction within the subject between the imaginary and symbolic, that the subject is not given to itself by its perception in consciousness in the imaginary, and that it is only grasped and solicited by that perception, and represented by it, in the field of vision, as the subject is represented to itself in language, in the symbolic.

The void at the center of being, around which desire circulates, corresponds to the in-between space of perception in the field of vision, the gaze. In the *Monadology* (15) of Leibniz, the in-between space is the space of desire, of the *objet a*, which brings about the sequence of perceptions but can never attain a percept completely, thus always containing a lack, through which partially constructed percepts interact to construct a representation. In Freudian terminology, the gaze is “the primordial void around which the drive circulates, the lack that assumes positive existence in the shapeless form of the thing (the Freudian *das Ding*, the impossible-unattainable substance of enjoyment),” of the self-identity of the subject, as described by Slavoj Žižek in *Looking Awry*.²⁶ Žižek wrote that “all culture is ultimately nothing but a compromise formation, a reaction to some terrifying, radically inhuman dimension proper to the human condition itself” (p. 37).

The One was described by Schelling in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* in 1799 as an “unchanging identity, which can never attain to consciousness and merely radiates back from the product,” which “is for the producer precisely what destiny is for the agent, namely a dark unknown force which supplies the element of completedness or objectivity to the piecework of freedom....”²⁷ The One, like the real, is the unchanging identity and completedness which is unavailable to consciousness in perception, resulting from the *méconnaissance* caused by the illusion of unchanging identity and completedness in consciousness, as the gaze is both that which reaffirms the subject in perception and that which prevents the subject from identifying itself in the field of vision. The completedness or objectivity which is provided to the piecework of freedom, the particulars of matter, by the One, is seen as a stable flux of energy by Schelling, the source of which is light, which is transformed from the stable universal to the unstable partic-

ular. In *The Philosophy of Art* of Schelling, “matter, viewed according to its corporeal appearance rather than in itself, is not substance but rather merely *accidens* (form) with which the essence or the universal within light,” the principle of the monad of Leibniz, “is juxtaposed” (§11). The appearance of matter, the form (*eidos*) of matter, is accidental, arbitrary, subject to variability, in relation to principle, the substance of which is light, which is the cause of perception, and which is inaccessible to consciousness, as the One.

Sensible forms in perception, the accidents in matter, are a deception, according to Plato, a misrepresentation of the world in vision as given by the *méconnaissance* of the intellect of the subject. In the *Republic* (597), the sensible form is a “shadowy thing compared to reality,”²⁸ a reflection off a surface in the play of reflections of representation, the play of simulacra for which there is no *archê*, given by the otherness of the subject to itself in perception. The world as given by perception is as Lacan’s description of the gap between perception and consciousness in which the subject is situated, as the screen in the gaze, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. The optical model “represents a number of layers, permeable to something analogous to light whose refraction changes from layer to layer” (p. 45). The world as given by perception is the perpetual play of reflections and refractions off surfaces in a kaleidoscopic display of self-deception, in the ambiguity, the accidental and arbitrary play of light, in the jewel, recalling the play of differences between signifiers in *différance*.

The *méconnaissance* of the subject, its inner division, is the source of its desire to identify itself in the sensible world, resulting from the fragmentation and alienating gestalt identity of the mirror stage. According to Schelling, as the divided subject strives for a body, its reason, in the symbolic, or ideal, “remains ideal, yet such that it leaves the other side behind and thus does not appear as something absolutely ideal, but rather merely as something relatively ideal that possesses the real outside of itself—standing over against it” (*The Philosophy of Art*, §73). In the dialectic of the imaginary and symbolic, matter can only appear in perception as something which is outside of reason which is given by reason itself, in perception, in a compromised form. In perception, reason always inhabits form as that which is other to itself, as in the picture-thinking of Hegel.

The self-identity of the subject though is not in matter or appearance, but in perception, and in the division of the subject, perception becomes exterior to that which is perceived. The division and disjunction results in desire, the desire of the subject to find itself in its own labyrinth of deception and

méconnaissance. According to Hegel, in *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, “self-estrangement is the source of the need for philosophy...” (p. 89),²⁹ the source of the desire for self-identity, for the understanding of thought, which is, as established in Schelling, Hegel, Freud, and Lacan, impossible, but which is that labyrinth in which the subject finds itself.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of Hegel, in that “supersensible being,” the ideal, as light, comes about through appearance, as a mediating factor, appearance itself cannot be said to be of the sensuous world (§147). Perception is not sense-knowledge; it is a product of the dialectic of the universal and particular through consciousness, from which reason arises. The universal is an outcome of the flux of appearance (§149); it contains within itself a negation, from which results the dialectic. “This difference is expressed in the law which is the stable image of unstable image,” the particular in the universal, the sensible world in perception. The supersensible world of the universal is an “inert realm of laws” beyond the perceived world, which only exhibits laws in “incessant change,” in the Heraclitean flux. The realm of laws of the universal is not entirely manifest in appearance, but only inconsistently, given the state of flux and particularity, as “with every change of circumstance the law has a different actuality.” The absolute, the One, unfolds toward existence in three stages—spirit, being-for-self as the other of spirit, and being-for-self as self-consciousness in the other (§770). Being-for-self as the other of spirit is an externalization, objective spirit, which is signification in language, the solidification of the subject as represented by a signifier in the symbolic in Lacanian terms. Being-for-self, according to Hegel, “when uttered, leaves behind, externalized and emptied, him who uttered it, but which is as immediately heard, and only this hearing of its own self is the existence of the Word,” the representation of the subject by a signifier to another signifier in the symbolic, and the representation of the subject in the object in perception.

The externalization of mind, the One, as other, and the self-consciousness of mind as other, in language, is picture-thinking (*Vorstellung*), according to Hegel, or perception, given by reason in signification (language). The externalization is self-consciousness degrading the content of its spirit through misunderstanding, or *méconnaissance*, “into a historical pictorial idea” (§771). Only the external element is retained, and the intelligible vanishes, undetectable in consciousness. Reason is set against itself in the misrepresentation to itself in perception. When the object in the sensible world is per-

ceived, it comes into being in relation to the perceiving subject as the unfolding of the universal from the particular. The object is perceived as containing both the universal and particular, that is, in consciousness, the object is both itself and itself as perceived by the subject, and its coming into being for the subject is a process of the differentiation of the universal from the particular, as perceived by the subject in self-consciousness.

The object perceived, as a particular, becomes a catalyst in the dialectical process of reason toward understanding in the illusion of self-consciousness. The perceived object is transformed through perception from non-being to being, from the particular to the universal, as given by consciousness. The existence of the object as a particular, sensible form in the imaginary, is negated, and thus being, as a quality of the universal, contains negation within it. Being is not possible without non-being, as the universal is not possible without the particular, and perception is not possible without the object perceived, though the object only exists as given by perception. The negation of being is contained in the differentiation of the object of perception, in the multiple permutations of the object given by perception, as in the specular display of reflections in the optical field of Lacan. The multiple permutations of the object can only be related to each other in the principle of the universal, the symbolic, which is independent of them. The multiple particulars of the flux of appearance only participate in the universal through perception; in the suspension of perception, in the gaze, the multiple particulars—shapes, shadows, reflections, refractions, trajectories—become self-determinate entities, embodying the universal within themselves, light or the absolute, independent of perception.

The ground of non-being appears as being, in the self-alienation of reason from being, that which presupposes it. Appearance is non-being, a surface show, unstable and ephemeral, given by the transformation of the particular into its opposite, “mediated by the movement of appearance” (§143) in consciousness, as described by Hegel. Consciousness sees itself, its processes, in the negative dialectic of appearance. The negation of being becomes being in reason as self-differentiation. The “objective vanishing appearance” given by perception becomes the being-for-self, objective spirit, of consciousness in the negative dialectic. The self-differentiation of the absolute, the One, and the self-alienation of reason from being, that which is other to it, becomes the being of reason in relation to the absolute, non-being as being. The negation of being, the self-negation of reason, confirms being be-

yond appearance, as light is revealed through the gaze, beyond the mechanisms of perception and reason in consciousness, discursive reason.

Thus in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “above the vanishing present world there opens up a permanent beyond” (§144), which is the light of perception. The beyond is that which is other than consciousness, other than that which is given by the illusion of consciousness, as suggested by either philosophy or psychoanalysis. The One as beyond consciousness was described by Pseudo-Dionysius in the negative theology of neoplatonism as “the highest peak of mystic inspiration, eminently unknown yet exceedingly luminous, where the pure, absolute and unchanging mysteries of theology are veiled in the dazzling obscurity of the secret silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible splendor surpassing all beauty,”³⁰ in the realm of the real, of the pure light of perception, that which cannot be accessed by philosophy or psychoanalysis.

As reason returns to itself from that which is other to itself in the dialectic, according to Hegel in the *Philosophy of Mind* (§381),³¹ it discovers itself as simultaneously “absolute negativity” and “infinite self-affirmation,” as in the consciousness of Lacan. Reason is the perpetual self-affirmation of absolute negativity, non-being, the perpetuation of the externality of language in objective spirit in the void of being which language creates. The consummation of the dialectic in reason is the absolute, which is itself absolute negativity, as in the *via negativa* of Pseudo-Dionysius. The absolute is seen as the synthesis of the subjective and objective, mind and matter, symbolic and imaginary, which is impossible in reason, and which suggests the identification of Caillois between the mind and the universe in psychophysiological space, which is a product of the synthesis of perception and imagination and the conscious and unconscious, where imagination is virtual perception and perception is real imagination.

The synthesis of the subjective and objective was suggested by Plotinus in an inner vision, given only by pure light, in which the subject will “be no longer the seer, but, as that place has made him, the seen” (*Enneads* V.8.11),³² as the subject of Lacan becomes the stain in the picture. When the subject of Plotinus is able to see the pure light of perception, that which is beyond appearance, Plotinus advises the subject that “when you perceive that you have grown to this, you are now become very vision” (I.6.9). The consciousness of the subject is transcended in the synthesis of the subjective and objective, universal and particular. The unity of the One as manifest in the

subject transcends the image as a mechanism of transferal, and the One is understood as pure light, beyond sensible form, “that only veritable Light which is not measured by space,” pure interiority.

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, in the relation between the subject and the sensible world which is constituted by perception and “ordered in the figures of representation” (p. 73), the sensible forms, perception can be compared to discursive reason, conscious thought, as a succession of particulars in differentiation. As in language, there is a gap between signifiers, the signifier being the sensible form, so that in perception “something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it,” which is the intelligible form, and “that is what we call the gaze.” The intelligible form, like the unconscious in psychoanalysis, is present as an absence in perception in vision.

The gaze is the function of perception as intellection, as opposed to optical sensation. Perception in Lacanian psychoanalysis is a product of consciousness and discursive reason, the self-sustaining illusion of the identity between the subject and the sensible object in vision, the identity between the sensible form and the intelligible form. Everything in perception is given by consciousness as “the pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen” (p. 74), the preexistence of the sensible object to the perception of the sensible object, as the sensible form and the intelligible form. Self-consciousness in perception, the Hegelian doubling of reason and its recognition of its otherness to itself, is the “seeing oneself seeing oneself,” according to Lacan, the continual reaffirmation of consciousness in the discursive signification of perception. Such reaffirmation represses the gap between the sensible and intelligible form.

According to Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is not a representation of a representation, or a representative representative (*le représentant représentatif*), but “that which takes place of the representation (*le tenant-lieu de la représentation*)” (p. 60), between perception and consciousness, or between the sensible and intelligible form, the gap in which the subject is constituted. The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is located in the “schema of the original mechanisms of alienation in that first signifying coupling” (p. 218), in the signifying chain. In other words, the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is a product of language, language as formed in discursive reason, conscious thought, which entails the coalescence of the intelligible form, the intelligible idea, and the sensible form, the *phantasma* or *eidos* of the sensible object in the imaginary. This

constitutes a mechanism of alienation because it requires the doubling of reason in consciousness, where reason must be other to itself in order to perform the operation of the coupling of the sensible and intelligible form.

As the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is absorbed into the signifying chain in language, it is transferred to identification with the other, the sensible object, by the subject, in the imaginary, the self-identification of the subject with the image or sensible form. The imaginary identification is supported by inaccessible signifying chains, intelligibles, in the symbolic, which correspond to the signifying chains in language. The signifying chain revealed in the structure of the unconscious, in the dream for example, corresponds to the signifying chain in conscious discourse, as a *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. A relation is established between conscious discourse and the repressed discourse of the unconscious as revealed in the dream, and thus the psychoanalyst is able to see how the repressed discourse of the unconscious plays a role in the language of the subject, through the relation between the sensible form (the object in perception, the imaginary ego identity of the subject, as image), and the intelligible form, the symbolic identity of the subject in language, as idea. If language is a metaphor for the intelligible, then unconscious discourse is a metaphor, for the same supplement to the lack of *Ansichsein*, being-in-itself, created by the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, that which take the place of the representations, which are created by the imaginary ego image identification in the conscious subject. The elided subject is not accessible to conscious discourse, but is present in the unconscious in the imaginary ego identifications of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, and can be said to be present as absence in conscious discourse in identifications with the sensible form, as absorbed in language.

This essay developed and rewritten from sections of *Architecture and Psychoanalysis*, New York: Peter Lang, 2006, without the references to architecture, and with revisions and corrections.

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold Vincent Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

² Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Walter Hamilton (London: Penguin Books, 1973).

³ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1977).

⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits, A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977).

⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Hamlet*, quoted in Mark Bracher, *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change: A Psychoanalytic Cultural Criticism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 41.

⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953–54*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), p. 283.

⁷ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Letters to de Volder*, quoted in C. D. Broad, *Leibniz, An Introduction* (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 94.

⁸ Anna Teresa Tymieniecka, *Leibniz' Cosmological Synthesis* (Netherlands: Royal VanGorcum, 1964), p. 65.

⁹ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics, Correspondence with Arnauld and Monadology* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1918), p. 252.

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), p. 185.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore 1972–1973, On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), p. 50.

¹² Athanasius Kircher, *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae* (Roma: Sumtibus Hernanni Schens, 1645), p. 89.

¹³ Nicolai de Cusa, *De coniecturis* (Hamburgi: In Aedibus Felicis Meiner, 1972), p. 15.

¹⁴ Proclus, *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

¹⁵ Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 80.

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965).

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *On Dreams*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1952), p. 40.

¹⁸ Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 30.

¹⁹ Quoted in John Gage, *Colour and Culture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 210.

²⁰ Michael Doran, ed., *Conversations with Cézanne* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 124.

²¹ Roger Caillois, *The Necessity of the Mind* (Venice, CA: The Lapis Press, 1990), p. 114.

- ²² Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," in *October 31* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), p. 28.
- ²³ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture*, trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972).
- ²⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art (Die Philosophie der Kunst, 1859)*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).
- ²⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Bruno, or On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things, 1802*, trans. Michael G. Vater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).
- ²⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry, An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 83.
- ²⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), p. 222.
- ²⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1955).
- ²⁹ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978).
- ³⁰ Translated in Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1992), p. 9.
- ³¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind, Being Part Three of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).
- ³² Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Penguin Books, 1991).