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## Diagrams of Desire: Psychoanalysis in Architecture

John Shannon Hendrix

A paper presented at the online symposium on “The Role of the Unconscious in the Architectural Imagination,” for the Institute for Psychoanalytic Studies in Architecture, 2022.

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 describes in “Aggressivity and Psychoanalysis” (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 22).<sup>1</sup> 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 “‘either 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).<sup>2</sup> 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, 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. 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 primordial phenomenological experience, the Imaginary ego in object identification, the vestiges of the figural, nor the Symbolic 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 Imaginary and Symbolic, 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 by Lacan 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 ego, both the Imaginary ego in the identification of the subject in the body and image of the other, and in the Symbolic 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, 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 jouir*, 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 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 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” (*Seminar I*, p. 283),<sup>3</sup> which are the interiority of the subject. 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 sub-

ject, 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.”<sup>24</sup> 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. “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, in the Symbolic, consciousness is only present as a continuity in the illusion created by the ego.

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 primordial Imaginary 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, according to Lacan. The desire of the subject is thus “the desire of the Other” (p. 264), and it is also the desire of the other person, 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” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 185).<sup>5</sup> 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 ensemble.” 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” (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, 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, 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 binary 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.

The mathematical/linguistic mechanism in signification, which is the function of desire in the maintenance of the ego, reveals 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),<sup>6</sup> as Lacan explains. 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.

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 corre-

spond to the object identification of the Imaginary ego prior to the entry of the subject 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 *objet a* constitutes the inaccessibility of the Real to signification. 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 vision, which is a function of language, or reason. Consciousness is given by vision, by the subject seeing itself in the mirror in the Imaginary, and by the subject being seen by the other in the Symbolic. The vision of the primordial Imaginary is prior to perception, prior to the intersection of vision and language. The vision of the Symbolic is the Imaginary vision absorbed into language, into perception, 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* 764),<sup>7</sup> 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.

Universal principles 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 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. 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 in vision of Lacan, in the relation between the subject and the world which is constituted by vision and “ordered in the figures of representation,” perception can be compared to reason as a succession of par-



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” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 73). The Gaze is the *objet a* of vision, as vision can be defined as the discourse of the Other, as the unconscious. The unconscious is present as an absence in perception in vision in the same way that the unconscious is present as an absence in language in reason. The Gaze is the function of perception in vision, as opposed to vision itself, or optical sensation.

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” in vision, that which occurs in the Gaze, the holes in vision. “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, 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 vision, it is possible to conceive of an alternative to perception in vision, 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 of vision 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 vision 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 vision 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 *imago* of the primordial Imaginary experience is transformed into a mechanism for the ordering of the psyche, when the fragmentary and dispersed quality of what is seen in experience prior to the mirror stage is reconstituted in relation to the subject, the Imaginary ego, and reordered to correspond to the Symbolic in language.

As the subject is elided from vision, as the distinctions between subject and object and exterior and interior are dissolved, so are the distinctions “between the real and the imaginary, between waking and sleeping, between ignorance and knowledge,” as described by Roger Caillois in “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia” (*October* 31, p. 17),<sup>8</sup> in which the necessity of mind is fused with the necessity of the universe. 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 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 which is only a fragment or a residue absorbed into the Symbolic, as the subject is inserted into the Other, the network of language and relations. 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 (*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. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud describes 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).<sup>9</sup>

In *On Dreams*, dreams are described as “disconnected fragments of visual images” (p. 40).<sup>10</sup> 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” (*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 and the Symbolic 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 perspectival or geometrical organization, which he called “psychophysiological space” (*Perspective as Symbolic Form*, p. 30),<sup>11</sup> 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.

As the structure of space in perception is “infinite, unchanging and homogeneous” for Panofsky, it is “quite unlike the structure of psychophysiological space” (*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 *Taetraum*, a haptic space of immediate sensations, preserving the primordial Imaginary experience prior to language. 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).

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 writes in 1933, “the mind’s necessity would at the same time be absorbed in it” (p. 114).<sup>12</sup> Space is 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. Vision 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 is seen by Caillois as a “double dihedral changing at every moment in size and position” (*October* 31, p. 28). 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 perceiving subject of Caillois is no longer seen as a fixed point in relation to what is perceived, but constantly moving and changing, as are the objects which are perceived, and the ground on which the perception takes place. The oscillation is the instability of interiority, in the absence of the Symbolic in the Imaginary. The perception of Caillois entails the interaction of the Imaginary and Symbolic, but the residues of Imaginary object identification are allowed more of a presence within the Symbolic in the suspension of the Symbolic, the association of the subject to the Other.

The subject of Caillois in psychophysiological space is thus “dispossessed of its privilege and literally no longer knows where to place itself” (*October* 31, p. 28). 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” (p. 87), as described in *The Necessity of the Mind*, 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” (*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 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, in the moment of the *point de capiton* in the retroactive anticipation of the subject in signification, plays the same role as the *archê* 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).

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.”

When the subject sees itself seeing itself, in consciousness, the perception of the subject cannot be absorbed into vision as in the psychophysiological space of Caillois. The presence of the subject in vision 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; 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 primordial 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. 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.

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 vision, 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 ob-

ject, 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 visual 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 vision for Lacan cannot entail other than the interaction of the Imaginary and Symbolic in the primordial fragmentation of the subject.

The Gaze appears to the subject that is “sustaining himself in a function of desire” (p. 85) in vision, 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 *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, 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, the Symbolic, is created and manipulated by language, represented by a signifier to another signifier, so the viewing subject is created and manipulated by perception. Lacan proposes 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 it has been seen that 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.

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 vision, 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, 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 vision as the possibility of what is other to perception, but it is always reflected, and never reveals its source.

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” (*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.

The subject is the picture (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 the visible, as the subject is solicited by it. The subject enters light in vision 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 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 vision. “Indeed, there is something whose absence can always be observed in a picture,” vision, “which is not the case in perception” (p. 108), according to Lacan, in self-enclosed signification. 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 Žižek in *Looking Awry* (p. 83).<sup>13</sup>

1. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits, A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977).
2. 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.
3. 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).
4. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Letters to de Volder*, quoted in C. D. Broad, *Leibniz, An Introduction* (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 94.
5. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981).
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8. Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," in *October 31* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).
9. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965).
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11. Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).
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13. Slavov Žižek, *Looking Awry, An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).