

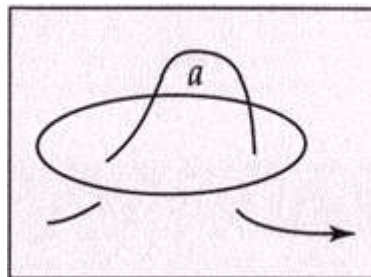
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The Look of Lust and Death in Peeping Tom

Although drive is not perversion, perversion reveals the mechanism of the drive which is also present in neurosis, but not in a clear way. That is why first Freud and then Lacan looked to perversion; Freud in order to seize the grammatical drive, and Lacan its circuit. To accomplish this study, both Freud and Lacan make use of the phenomenology of the voyeur and the exhibitionist whose perversions testify to the drive's satisfaction: the *Schaulust* - the joy of the sight, the pleasure of the gaze, the *jouissance* of the look. Perversion reveals that *Schaulust* is a "showlust" (this could be its translation in English).

In his study of the scopic drive in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," Freud makes use of the dichotomy between the subject and the object, represented by the sexual organ in perversion, in order to apprehend three logical times in the constitution of the drive: 1) oneself looking at a sexual organ; 2) oneself looking at an extraneous object (active scopophilia); 3) an object which is oneself or part of oneself, being looked at by an extraneous person (exhibitionism).¹ The passage from the second logical time to the third logical time is possible because of the vicissitude Freud called "reversion into its opposite." It is formulated as follows: 'A sexual organ being looked at by oneself' (*Sexualgleich von eigener Person beschaut werden*). Lacan, remarking that the object in the strict sense is what the subject is reduced to, proposes to change *werden* to *machen* to get at what is involved in the activity of the drive, which can be formulated by the expression making oneself seen. As a matter of fact, Freud says that all the times of the drive are always present: "The only correct statement to make about scopophilic instinct would be that all the stages of its development, its autoerotic, preliminary stage as well as its final active or passive form, co-exist alongside one another; and the truth of this becomes

obvious if we base our opinion, not on the actions to which the instinct leads, but on the mechanism of its satisfaction" (*S.E.* vol. XIV, p. 130). As is shown in perversion, the drive's satisfaction comprehends those three logical times. At the end of the trajectory the subject vanishes, becoming an object closing over him or herself the circuit of the drive.²



In his *Three Essays on Sexuality* Freud says that *Schaulust* becomes a perversion "(a) if it is restricted exclusively to the genitals, or (b) if it is connected with the overriding of disgust (as in the case of voyeurs or people who look on at excretory functions), or (c) if instead of being preparatory to the normal sexual aim, it supplants it."³ Freud finishes this description of *Schaulust*, saying that exhibitionists "exhibit their own genitals in order to

obtain a reciprocal view of the genitals of the other person" (157). This assertion illustrates that the drive's satisfaction is related to the accomplishment of the whole circuit of the drive: the subject looking at an object and being looked at as an object.

In a footnote added to this article in 1920, Freud remarks that exhibitionism "is also closely dependent on the castration complex: it is a means of constantly insisting upon the integrity of the subject's own (male) genitals and it reiterates his infantile satisfaction at the absence of a penis in those of women." This remark anticipates Freud's elaboration on perversion's position as regards the castration complex: the perverse subject recognizes and disavows woman castration, as becomes evident in fetishism.

The exhibitionist shows his penis to reassure himself of his disavowal of the threat of castration. He shows off not only his penis as real organ, but also his own position as phallus. With this action, this perverse subject shows, at the same time, that he has the phallus and that he is the phallus. One can place the valorization of

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the phallus within the scope of cheating: the pervert cheats the Other, regarding his own castration, by disavowing it. The exhibitionist shows what it is not possible to see: the symbolic phallus which he tries to represent with his penis. The voyeur seeks to see the object as an absence in order to cover the hole in the Other.

Lacan tells us that the gaze can represent the central lack which manifests itself in the castration phenomenon. Actually, we find the gaze and castration related to one another in Freud's myth of Medusa's head in his article bearing this title.⁴ Medusa's head has snakes instead of hair and the perception of her look is deadly, petrifying to the spectator. Athena, the virgin goddess, carries Medusa's head on her warrior's shield in order to annihilate her opponents. Freud associates decapitation and castration in a symbolic equivalence between the terror inspired by Medusa's head and a woman's sexual organs covered with hair, supposing that the same terror takes hold of the child when he sees a woman's sexual organ. The retroactive effect of this is what Freud calls the menace of castration. The vision of the Medusa's head leaves the spectator rigid with terror, petrifies him. Freud sees this petrification as equivalent to the erection of the penis. This Gorgon myth illustrates two aspects present in the visual domain - horror and pleasure - the horror of castration and the pleasure existing in the scopic register: it expresses *jouis-sance* of the Showlust, *Schaulust*.

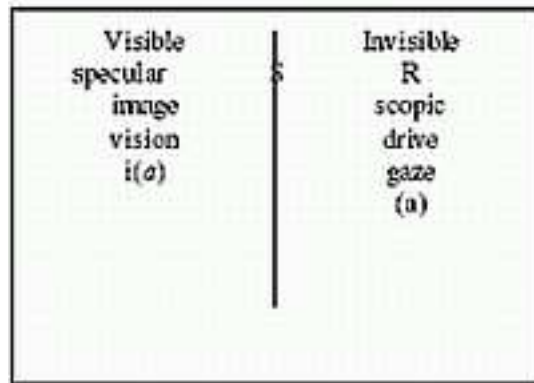
In his book *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty points to something on perception and on the gaze that will become a central point in Lacan's theory of the visual field: the preexistence of a gaze in the world's show.⁵ In the show presented to us by the surrounding world, there is a gaze staring at us. According to Merleau-Ponty, the visible depends on the eye of the seer. This is a Platonic perspective because Merleau-Ponty imagines an absolute being that is "all-seeing," an imaginary being at the place of an eternal gaze. According to Lacan, as a matter of fact, such a being doesn't exist. What exists is a splitting between vision and the gaze. There is a look which is not apprehensible. It is invisible, a gaze which is erased from our regular world. It is exactly in this splitting that the drive manifests itself on the scopic level, whereas according to Merleau-Ponty, there is an universal "all-seer." Lacan proposes the preexistence of a *donner-à-voir*, a "given to be seen" or a "being seen" in relationship to seeing. In other words, the drive indicates

that the subject is seen. There is a gaze which aims at the subject, but it is a gaze which is excluded from the field of the vision. This splitting gives us the distinction between what belongs to the

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Imaginary order (I) and, on the other hand, what belongs to the order of the Real (R) where the drive manifests itself.

What we see, our perceptual world, belongs to the imaginary (that is structured by the Symbolic order [S]). Our visual world is a world of images, whose geometry is given by the mirror. The mirror's state is the prototype of the imaginary order with its simultaneous constitution of the ego and the image of the other; the "same" as me. The specular is not the same register as the scopic, however, which is the register of the drive and its object: the gaze as object (*a*). We can make a scheme of these two registers.



In the regular order of things, the vision of the image covers the gaze as object (*a*), the object of the scopic drive:
 $i(a)$.

a
 But in the perversion of *Schaulust*, the subject tries to make vision and the gaze coincide, as we shall see in the case of voyeurism. The voyeur chooses his victims on the supposition that she has something that will lend itself to the spectacle. But it is a stolen spectacle. He hides in order not to be seen seeing her in a public toilet, for instance. The voyeur is always indiscreet. In the first moment, it is important that the victim not perceive that she has been looked at. But in a second moment, because of a noise of something betraying the presence of the voyeur, the prey notices him and the gaze returns to the voyeur who is caught redhanded in the act. This second moment points to the closing of the circuit of the scopic drive over the subject of perversion. The phenomenology of this act of the perverse subject reveals his position as an object in his fantasy. He is the object of the gaze; he is in fact reduced to this gaze. It also reveals his attempt to bring about his partner's castration, in so far as this partner represents the Other. To force his division it is necessary that the voyeur's partner not consent to arousing surprise, shock, clash, disgust, fright or fear. This action

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corresponds to the paradigmatic formula proposed by Lacan in writing down Sade's fantasy: $a \diamond \S$.⁶

The neurotic, in his so-called perverted act, is always a divided subject, subject of desire, reducing the Other to an object, as we can see in the matheme of the neurotics' fantasy: $\S \diamond a$. The neurotic does not try to be seen, but when caught in the "act," one sees the desire, less to provoke division in the victim, than to be punished and satisfy his or her feeling of guilt because of the transgression. Neurotics do look at pornographic pictures or watch strip-tease and peep-shows with the consent of the actor. In his seminar *D'un autre d l'Autre (From an other to the Other)*, Lacan points to a distinction between the castration of the Other and the object a .⁷ When *jouissance* is evacuated from the locus of the Other, the hole left behind is different from the object a .

Regarding the relationship of the pervert and his partner, we might say that he does not have any regard for the Other. Rather, Lacan shows the pervert as an instrument of the Other's *jouissance*. He devotes himself to covering the hole of the Other - this hole left over by the loss of *jouissance*. The pervert sees that the Other does not know how to get *jouissance*. So, he presents himself as someone who will enable the Other to get it by trying to restore the object a to him or her. The perverse subject's two modalities of restoring the object a to the Other are as follows:

1) By making a fetish. To do so he can make use of language, as in the Freudian example in his article *Fetischismus* where "a young man had exalted a certain sort of 'shine on the nose' in to a fetishistic precondition."⁸ By a translanguistic homophony - *der Glanz auf der Nase* - the subject introduces the gaze (glance) as a lost object in the Other represented by the body of the partner putting a shine (*Glanz* in German) upon his nose. 2) By himself being an object, as in voyeurism where the subject is the gaze. This modality of restoring the object to the Other points identification in the direction of perversion. The subject is identified to an object, and not to a signifier as in neurosis:

S1 .

§

The matheme for identification in perversion, according to Jacques-Alain Miller, can be written as follows:

a .

§

The perversion of the *Schaulust* both illustrates and is the paradigm of this modality of restoring the object to the Other. Herein the subject is represented by the object.

Peeping Tom is the name of an English character in the legend of Lady Godiva, patroness of Coventry. In 1040, Leofric, Earl of Mercia and Lord of Coventry, imposed certain demands on his tenants, demands which his Lady begged him to remove. He said he would do so if she would ride naked through the town. Lady Godiva did so and the Earl faithfully kept his promise. The legend is recorded by Roger of Wendover [Matthew

Paris] (d.1236) in his *Flores Historiarum* and was adapted by Rapin in his *History of England* (1723-1727) into the story commonly known.⁹ An addition from the time of Charles II asserts that everyone stayed indoors at the time. But a certain tailor peeped through his window to see the lady passing and was struck blind as a consequence. He has been called "Peeping Tom" ever since. From 1768 on, the ride has been annually commemorated at Coventry by a procession in which the central feature is "Lady Godiva."

In *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, one can read that Lady Godiva's annual ride was suppressed by the Puritans. But after the fall of the Puritan Commonwealth in 1658 she appeared again in history, naked as before on her white horse, and so she remained until 1826 when a new wave of Puritanism finally dictated that she must be clothed. In Sigmund Freud's words "Legend tells how all the town's inhabitants hid behind their shutter windows, so as to make easier the lady's task of riding naked through the streets in broad daylight, and how only one man - a tailor - who peeped through the shutter at her naked beauty was struck blind as a consequence."¹⁰ In varying accounts of this legend we notice how desire is connected with interdiction, and how satisfaction of the drive means transgression of the interdiction. The price for this *jouissance*, this *Schaulust*, is blindness. The drive turning around Lady Godiva returns just as a boomerang does, striking the subject blind. The shining beauty of Lady Godiva, like a strong glare, blinded the tailor. One may well ask who is the seer and who is the seen in this story? It is difficult to say because the subject vanishes in front of the object. He is the gaze, as his symptom - being blind - manifests.

Peeping Tom is also the name of Michael Powel's film which created a scandal in England in 1960. It was said that his film should be censored.¹¹ Censorship is exactly the first example given by Freud to explain the mechanism of repressing unconscious ideas

that appear as the blanks in the texts published in the Prussian press after the revolutionary period. In Lacan's formula, censorship corresponds to a statement such as: "I don't want to know anything about it." On the scopic level, we could say of such neurotic repression: "I don't want to see anything about it." In the subject's structural position one hears: "I can't see the look," as the tailor of Lady Godiva's legend shows with his symptom. Mark Lewis, who is Michael Powel's Peeping Tom, shows that the perverse position is the opposite: he does everything to catch the gaze. Mark not only wants to see the gaze which represents him, he tries to capture it with his camera in order to fix, freeze, and eternalize it.

Mark Lewis is a very peculiar Peeping Tom, not like the classical voyeur who peeps in toilets or hidden places to seize the look at the moment of surprise or panic when the victim discovers him. As a professional photographer and cameraman, Mark Lewis uses his job to film the dying moment of the women he kills. He films the face and expression of his victim at the exact moment he is killing her with his camera's tripod, which has a sharpened knife pointed at her throat. Then, he pulls a mirror out of the camera so that the terrified woman can see her dying look, which serves to increase her panic even more. In this extremely sophisticated way, Lewis reproduces the Imaginary couple

of the mirror stage (the victim and her image reflected in the mirror).¹² But instead of jubilation he lengthens the terror in order to seize the gaze as object (*a*).

Mark Lewis acts as he does because he "knows" in a way that this ungraspable look is death's look, a Medusa's look, the same look that is revealed by the anamorphosis of the skull in Holbein's picture *The Ambassadors*.¹³ So he goes as far as death in order to make vision coincide with the look which it is not possible to see. Mark attempts to take this impossible picture of someone being looked at by his own eyes - like Oedipus after having torn out his eyes - as a moment in which the woman is already dead because she cannot escape from it. But she is also still alive. The gimmick of adding the mirror at the dying moment is the answer to the question formulated by one of his victims: "What can frighten me to death?" The only answer is fear, one's own fear.

As spectators, we know that fear is a master signifier (S_1) for Mark which comes from the Other. His father was a biologist who dedicated his life to the study of fear, and analyzing human reactions to fear. At the end of the film, a psychiatrist who is called in to help with the investigation of the crime gives Mark the diagnosis of scopophilia. A psychogenic explanation had been

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given in the beginning of the film when Mark shows Helen, his neighbor, the film his father made of him when he was a little boy. This film scene within the film has the same function as the play scene in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. According to Lacan, this particular play scene makes the fictitious structure of the truth present and serves as an orientation to his action (Seminar VI, March 11th 1959).¹⁴ For Hamlet, "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King." Paraphrasing Shakespeare, we can say that to Mark Lewis, "The film's the thing / Wherein I'll [he will] catch the gaze of the human being." Mark tries to catch the look of Helen, who is terrified by what she sees in the film made by Mark's father. Mark watches Helen watching the film of his father, watching him. And the spectator is watching all of it. The result is an infinity of the gaze: the gaze of the gaze of the gaze of the. . . .

Mark's father's film is not presented as a fiction, but as a documentary. This aspect can hide what it really is: the revelation of his unconscious fantasy, which can be formulated as follows: a child being looked at, which can be translated into a child is being tortured by his father's look. As a matter of fact, this film shows the little boy as the main object of his father's interest, curiosity, research and experiments. His father, interested in the study of human reactions to fear, frightened his son in many ways and filmed his reactions. There is a scene of the father's film within Michael Powell's film where we can see little Mark sleeping. Suddenly, we notice a spotlight glaring on the boy's face, until he wakes up blinded by the intense glare. The spectator knows it is his father's flashlight, representing the Other's gaze. The father who never shows up, but whose look is always there, is featured as sadistic in the sense that he tries to grasp the anxiety of the subject. And with this purpose as his goal, he spares no means. He puts a lizard in his son's bed in order to film his reactions. Another scene which is very significant is one where the little boy is sitting on a fence gazing at a couple of lovers kissing. Suddenly the couple turns around and discovers little Mark, who is immediately ashamed of his act.

The camera is always there, held by the great Other who enjoys and has no mercy, no concern for anything in the order of pathos. This Other who admits no affection at all says: "Wipe your tears and don't cry silly boy," in a voice off. This situation illustrates the perverse position of Mark Lewis: he is an instrument of the Other's *jouissance*.¹⁵

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In Marks' adult life, his father's camera is no longer upon him all the time. Nevertheless he does what he has to do as a duty: serve the *jouissance* of the Other as a super-ego command from which he cannot escape. The Other watches him all the time, everywhere. The only thing that can stop him is jail. He evades this at least twice. Helen, his neighbor, is not able to stop him, despite her hysterical vocation of saving him from unhappiness. Love, Helen's love, tries to accomplish this operation of limiting *jouissance*. But in fact it doesn't succeed even though the movie "Sex, Lies, and Videotape" tries to make us believe in this possibility Helen's mother, the blind woman who sees beyond the world of appearances, thinks she is strong enough to stop him in his race to *jouissance* and advises him to speak to someone about his perversion of killing women in order to catch their look. She knows that talking is a way of reining in *jouissance* through limits imposed by the Symbolic order.

Mark's case is urgent. He does in fact try to speak. But when the psychiatrist says that psychoanalysis takes time, he gives up. He goes further in his task and introduces another look into his acts. He takes Helen as witness of his tastes. At the end of the film, when policemen are climbing into his home studio, he has the choice of going to prison. But he prefers to abandon himself completely to the command dictated by *jouissance*. He kills himself, gazing at his dreadful dying look in the mirror, just as he murdered his victims, closing the circuit of the scopic drive over himself. For ever.

Mark Lewis fulfills his father's version of *jouissance*: his *père-version*.

Endnotes

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