

**Marc Strauss**  
***A Peeping Tom's Gaze***

The Picture, Certainly, Is In My Eye. But I Am Not In The Picture.  
Jacques Lacan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. [96].

It's an undisputed fact that few people are totally indifferent to naked women. Furthermore, as President Schreber judiciously remarked, there is no symmetry between the two sexes whatsoever!

If men are moved by women's bodies, women are also moved by them, having only a slight penchant for the spectacle of naked manhood - especially if this condition is not transcended as it might be in a work of art, say, Michelangelo's David, but focused on the genital nature of this manhood. From this focal point a flourishing industry has been born: newspapers, magazines, peepshows. There are, in fact, a whole range of products from the discreet sensual novel, to "stroke books" and hard-core pornography of the most raw and vulgar kind.

Some people enjoy these shows or magazines from time to time. Others search them out with a lesser or greater degree of enthusiasm, and choose them in terms of their own specific requirements. Still others find spectacular entertainment in that which was never destined for the public eye. They search compulsively, almost frantically, acrobatically even, to catch an act that was never meant to be. These people are generally called voyeurs or "peeping toms," for they call attention to themselves by hunting down the object of their passion which is off the beaten track, outside agreed or authorized situations. One should add that there's a phenomenal range of possible satisfaction for voyeurs.

We must, however, point out, as Freud does in "The Three Essays on Sexuality," that there is a difference between those for whom

this one form of pleasure amongst others (a kind of foreplay) and those for whom it is the only means to achieve fulfillment or pleasure. Now, I propose to question the nature of a peeping tom's pleasure - as related by one of my patients. I will try to show that this is not a case of repressed exhibitionism, but a case of neurosis firmly based on the denial of castration.

This patient, a young man in his early thirties, may be characterized thus: besides having satisfactory sex with his wife and mistress, he is engaged in a feverish and compulsive quest for an image. He has no precise idea of what this image is. Let us say, rather, that he recognizes it when he chances upon it. With this in mind, he haunts sex shops to browse through magazines and attend live strip shows. These kinds of scenes each must come close, more or less, to the ideal image he has never quite attained. In this image, there must be a woman with a gaping sex organ penetrated by as large and preposterous an object as possible. He is then transported by an exquisite vibration of his being which feels something like a "renewed acquaintance." Then he masturbates.

Consider the following detail. He does not have such a photo in his wallet, nor a collection of such photos he could look at when he feels like it. Once he finds an image and uses it up, as it were, the quest for another unknown image which might captivate and fascinate him begins anew. These factors lead me to believe that this image is not a fetish.

He first encountered this particular object when he was a teenager, browsing through magazines that he had discovered in his father's study. On the initial photo - paradigmatic rather than referential - he saw a man's foot penetrating a vagina. But his relationship to this image, his quest for it, however important that may be for his fantasy life, does not dominate his everyday activities. He only hunts for this image in his rare moments of solitary idleness, when he's sure of not being recognized. Before saying anything else about this image and the fantasy it produces, let us consider this subject's life which, however singular it may be, is far from spectacular. On the contrary, he characterizes it by adjectives like "dull," "dreary," "dismal." These words stand out against a backcloth of suffering and difficulties in living, working, attaining pleasure and even in sleeping.

As the only child of the mistress of a married man, a rich inventive industrialist who was head of his own family, he was barely recognised by his father. He found him-self living with substitute parents who were poor but loving; his memories pleas-

ant but colorless. At high-school age he was a subdued boarder and a poor scholar who had a few friends with whom he would listen to music late into the night, avoiding conversations about women and sex. Dirt was his main feature or detail; he thought he was dirty. He refused to wash, wore dirty clothes, roamed the high school. He was a loner, somewhat rejected, conveying the very image of a disturbingly premature decrepitude.

He felt a murky satisfaction in smelling worn clothes, his own or those of others. From time to time on weekends, he went to his father's house. Having lost his wife, the father then lived with his mistress, the patient's mother. He neither married this woman, nor did he give his name to either her or her illegitimate son.

During these weekends my patient led the life of an upper middle class, well-to-do young man; well dressed and well behaved, but silent and lonely during these visits. When confronted with his father he was humble and submissive, petrified and speechless, while feeling the vague rumblings of rebellion that find no more expression than the desperate expectation of some sign of attention - attention he knew he'd refuse were it to be offered.

One day his father surprised him with a strange gift, a guitar. Since his father was cold and stern, he was perplexed. This gift allowed him the idea that part of his father was concealed, but sensitive. At this time he discovered the photograph.

Nonetheless, he disappointed his father's expectations by breaking with the family tradition of a long prestigious line of engineers. Instead, he became a kind of social worker, specializing in handicapped children. Within this professional framework he met all the people of importance to him: his wife, three little girls, a mistress, a colleague, a young boy and psychoanalysis. Meanwhile, his father had died. The children from the father's first marriage took his mother to court to deprive her of her inheritance. The young man signed a paper attesting to the fact that he was giving up any claims to his inheritance.

His wife was kind, helpful, discreet, subdued and far less beautiful than his mother. They had children that he took care of assiduously in the name of the great principles of psychoanalysis, but joylessly, nonetheless. His work took up all his time both at his job and at home, where he preferred to devote himself to the harassing task of writing a thesis of several hundred pages on child psychosis rather than play on all fours with his kids on the rug.

He never forgot a particular young girl he had met at a place where he was training, where he also met his wife-to-be. This

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fifteen-year-old handicapped girl used to masturbate all the time with no inhibitions whatsoever, looking provocatively straight into the eyes of the male nurses. They enjoyed the spectacle in an atmosphere of generalized and authorized perversion, he said. This child brings another to his mind, a paraplegic whom the nurses had to strike in order to force feed her. Shortly after this period of training, the "peeping tom" learnt of her death. To this day, he remains convinced that she was killed by the male nurses. During his next period of practical training, he met another little girl who was so moving in her mute expression of suffering that he decided to adopt her, with due permission from his wife and the authorities. At home he very soon began to beat her. Afraid of the uncontrollable violence within himself, he sought analysis.

A few years later, having become a child therapist, he had an affair with one of his colleagues, a beautiful and docile woman who was not an intellectual companion, but with whom he had satisfactory sex. He also found a female psychiatrist with whom he had an intellectual relationship based on mutual esteem. During this same period he had left his own analyst for whom he was full of scorn and resentment, describing him as mawkish and complacent.

At this time, he heard me speak in public on child psychosis and singled me out for what he took to be a ring of truth in my words. Having made an appointment, he complained that my apartment building was too plush and grand, the apartment too luxurious. He immediately tried to convince himself that he was out of place at my place. His first words were to say that, having heard me, he thought I was the guy for him to knock out.

That the process of his analysis has been going on for years allows me to share this material with you. These selected elements allow us to glimpse a knot of the neurotic problem we can, without difficulty, call obsessional. In this man's relationship with his father and other figures of authority, we see that mixture of submissive and paralyzing idealization that can hardly eclipse a hatred whose depth he hesitates to plumb, and in whose service analytic knowledge becomes a weapon he uses in the relationship with his adoptive daughter. This frightens him for it is the decisive element in his "sheltering" from transference, so to speak.

Both at work and in money problems, the cleavage between idealization and debasement of the feminine object is present, along with compulsive traits. He is always on the point of going broke, and other people are always trying to rip him off. Beyond his

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obsessional attitude to money, we find a particular attitude toward dirt, along with a certain horror of sexuality.

As to his sexual fantasies, the particular image evoked at the beginning - of a large preposterous object in a woman's vagina suggests by its very volume something wide and violently forced upon. We find this same violence in his memories of the two young handicapped girls; memories of sex and death, found in other fantasies as well. His fantasies are always derived from that precise image and imply the use of force - either forcing the will of the victim or forcing her body for sexual reasons, refusing the all too adequate usual body entries. When all is said and done, is there one single means of penetration that is adequate and natural for human beings in sexual relationships and that is not identifiable with the instinctive act of procreation?

What Freud teaches us is that we need a signifying apparatus language and the castration of the mother by the father - so that what is automatic in the animal kingdom should take place, though not without difficulties or even failures, among humans. Castration is doubtlessly present in our patient's fantasies, present in a specific constellation as to its *modus operandi* and its significance. In classical analytic terms, we could say that his castration is of the "anal-sadistic" domain. Sadism, of course, reminds one of the selfish and lustful father - the father to whom the patient's mother is totally devoted. As to the anal significance of this castration, it expresses the value of a precious gift of a part of his body, mixed in with the most drastic degradation. This anal significance of what the mother lacks, which is at the same time the hole in the Other, places a phallic mark on the object of demand that issues from that Other.

In this demand, a system of mirrors - what is asked for and what is given - constantly overlap without ever balancing out. That which the mother lacks is put into an anal image (imagined as image), so that his desire covers or dissimulates or hides his sense of castration. This movement in itself implies a recognition of castration.

The advantage of this psychic operation is, of course, his hope, always pushed into the future, of fulfilling desire by adjusting his response to the demand once and for all. His desire is to come to terms with the castration of the Other, thus his own, in order to achieve an ideal image of the ego and to control and thereby cancel out the notion of loss.

If Lacan emphasized the anal object as the object image of the Other's request in the dialectics of demand and desire, it was

precisely to draw attention to the narcissistic fantasies these dialectics subtend. The narcissistic fantasies allow the subject not to recognize his own castration; that is to say, the laws forbidding incest laid down by the father. In Freudian terms, the father does not give his all. If castration functions, he forbids access to the mother.

Our case is an example of a father who does not give much, not even a name. And all that is not given belongs to the domain of castration and will be active in the mask of complaints and reproaches relating to unfair traumas and frustrations.

As you know, Lacan went beyond the use of interpersonal dialectics that are active in terms of the object, objects of demand; that is the demand for love. In the series of objects *petit a* he put forward, not only objects of demand - oral and anal - but also objects of desire - scopic and vocal. In this case of obsessional neurosis, for example, an addition to the aggressive aspect of his neurosis is the "anal sadistic" element. What we should bear in mind is the very particular nature of the patient's fantasy in which the gaze has a central function.

He does not, in fact, have just any aggressive fantasy, not even a varied collection of them. At most he has a series, that all derive from one crucial point: that is, the spectacle of facing a hole in a woman's body. What women lack, what mothers are deprived of by the paternal operation, is not the penis, but the phallus. This lack of the phallus has a sexual significance for the subject in terms of the body. The mother is deprived of the phallus. This means that she desires a desire he cannot satisfy, even if he were the object-image of a demand. This is what we have seen previously. Lacan wrote in the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*:

In my reference to the unconscious, I am dealing with the relation to the organ. It is not a question of the relation to sexuality, or even to the sex, if it is possible to give any

specific reference to this term. It is a question rather of the relation to the phallus, in as much as it is lacking in the real that might be attained in the sexual goal. [102] In his extremism, this subject, with his "brinkmanship" (be it in his professional field, or his relationship to the truth and to the body), illustrates very well this "furiously intense" will to reach the "real" beyond the representation of the image in what sex aims at.

We could put it this way. He wants to see the eye, the luminous point, the eye that can only meet the gaze: the enclosed field which is undifferentiated and in which the flaw in the whole field of

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representation is most concealed. It is precisely in this context that the eye has the value of object *a*, a symbol of that which is lacking, a symbol of the phallus. For the eye is lacking in the gaze. This initial loss, which is the cause of object *a*, leads one subject's desire to maintain itself in a phantasy that is also an enticing decoy, a false hope of filling that which lacks by sex. But its value as phallus is clearly indicated in the preposterous feature; the object he must see as introduced into the vagina.

What our patient tries to see but can never quite see, is the mother's phallus; all the more a phallus insofar as the object is neither in its place, nor adequate. But, in this, he is not perverse, for he does not know once and for all what the mother's phallus is. The point beyond the field of representation is breaking and fragmenting him: it divides him, yet at the same time organizes him. We can attribute to it what Lacan called *jouissance réelle*. The eye is there to *subtend* a plus *de jouir*, a "surplus of *jouissance*" that remains and sustains the narcissistic and sexual fantasies of the subject.

The analytic work brings about two types of reversal. In terms of the object of the demand we have seen how the reality of the subject's story is organized and crystallized around his refusal of castration, and his narcissism. In terms of the object of desire, we observe how it is from an asexual point that the signification and the sexual satisfaction of this subject is constituted, through the network of signifiers provided by the father and this father's system of symbolization.

It is in this double movement that psychoanalysis defines its radical difference from corrective or behaviorist therapies and achieves the Freudian imperative of "*Wo es war soll ich werden*" (Where the id was the subject shall be) [qtd Lacan 1981, 44]. *This subjectivation is forced*. By that I mean one must go beyond the level or plane of identification and, therefore, of representation. This both corresponds, in terms of structure, to the forced call for truth of the subject's symptom, and necessarily takes into account his particular life story.

In this case, as you can see, the foot in the vagina is both a figuration or representation of the mother as father's sexual object. And it is the figuration of the trampling under foot of Symbolic law by the father in the name of pleasure or *jouissance*; that is, in his refusal of his own division, a division that only appeared to our subject via a small, but capital, event; the gift of the guitar. The subject's answer to that gift was the elaboration of the fantasy to hide or block out the unrepresentable. And this is his answer to

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what is "real" in his asexual pleasure. For him this is achieved scopically.

To conclude, it is my considered opinion that we are not dealing with a pervert here or a repressed exhibitionist. Rather, in this element of voyeurism that questions us, the subject shows us how the fantasy articulates the "real" of *jouissance* with the Symbolic order to constitute reality, the sexual reality of the subject's unconscious.

### **Works Cited**

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