The Topological Dimension of Lacanian Optics

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Familiar receptions of Lacan's theory of the gaze in American and British film theory have merged the gaze, taken as the active, conscious agent of seeing, with the eye. And the male gaze is the subject. This gaze is said to castrate and, thereby, subjugate the female, making her an object, not a subject (Laura Mulvey).[1] Other critics have conflated Lacan's theory of the gaze with his mirror-stage essay of 1949,[2] viewing the lack of wholeness in the image as a Freudian reductiontist biologism wherein psychic function is dictated by organ reality. Luce Irigaray, for example, argues in *The Speculum of the Other Woman* that the mirror stage is a matter of a girl's literally identifying herself in a mirror as lacking the male organ.[3] Lacan's mirror-stage argument is better summed up in the words of Hal Foster who uses topology—the logic of place—to better describe "the negotiation of distance between the fledgling ego and its image, between the infant and its mother."[4] ("Postmodernism in *Parallax*," quoted in *October* 63 [Winter 1993], p. 13).

At one level, the stakes in Lacanian psychoanalytic praxis and teaching are the necessity of imposing this distance between "self" and "other" in order that one not become psychotic (cf. *Seminar* III: *The Psychoses* (1955-1956)).[5] To be "social" means to be lacking in order to be able to reach out to the other/Other, thus, placing oneself in the discourse "which make[s] a social link" (cf. *Seminar* XX: *Encore*, ch. 2, pp. 16-17).[6] That the mirror-stage infant veers away from narcissistic Oneness with the mother to the symbolic order of Otherness occurs by her turning to the social in "the name of the father"—i.e., in the name of a third term, be it the mother's brother," a river god, "the outsider" of some primitive tribe, or some other real father, thus breaking the magnetic bond of identificatory oneness between the mother and infant.

Foster in "Postmodernism in *Parallax*" questions Derrida and Foucault as to their potential for undoing political projects that would necessitate mirror-stage distancing of

oneself from unsalutary others in larger political games than that of the baby-mother dyad. "Is it too obvious to say that Derridean deconstruction is pledged to the very undoing of such oppositions…that Foucauldean methodology is founded in the very refusal of such foundations?" (Foster, p. 15). In *Seminar* IV: *The Relation of the Object* (1956-1957), Lacan explained that "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience" has the effect of dividing the infant away from its mother.[7] The infant thinks it is one with the mother in the mirror image, but sees the mother holding it. She, then, is a third term, dividing the infant's illusion that two are one.

This experience is repeated in the infant's efforts to distinguish its sexual specificity from within a sexual binary. The little boy sees that the little girl has no penis. He *realizes* he can lose this partial object of his own imaginary body—a logical whole or imaginary consistency—if there is another who does not have it. She *believes* she can have this organ in varying forms. As an imaginary organ shed in childhood, or it can be replaced by a baby doll, by a can of urine stored away in a urinary competition with her brothers, by a career, and so on. Lacan calls this *representation* of having an organ, the phallus which, he tells us in "The Signification of the Phallus" (1958), "is a signifier…whose function…lifts the veil…[insofar as the signifier is]

intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified, in that the signifier conditions them by its presence as a signifier."[8] That is, its presence signifies difference as itself an effect. Now the signified, in this chapter, is the gaze that takes sexual difference as a mystery to be deciphered, unveiled. For children, right away, difference becomes not only a third thing—a split between the biological sexes—but an abstraction to interpret. I would go so far as to call this initially perceived difference the kernel of (dialectical) thinking, of relating signifier to a signifier. Indeed, psychotics foreclose this difference, identifying organs as real things, not as imaginarily represented parts, just as they experience words as real things, not as metaphorical imaginaries referring to something else.

Nor is Lacan's gaze a visual gaze or text that "sees" and, thus, can reeducate the "look." The gaze is not a conscious subject agency that instructs the "looking (seeing) other" as a phenomenological object, as Kaja Silverman argues in *The Threshold of the Visible World*.[9] Silverman's theory seems to come from a reading of Lacan in which the "look" would be an equivalent of an unconscious linguistic construct. She takes such a view from Lacan's statements such as: "The unconscious is the sum of the effects of the world on a subject at the level where the subject constitutes itself from the effects of the signifier."[10] What is missing here in Silverman is any elaboration of Lacan's arguments on the drive, jouissance, and desire of formalizable constructs created by the signifier. Indeed, these effects constitute the system of fantasy and libido that condition that gaze and control the system of representations whose words and images somehow make it seem more solid, more scientific, and more accessible to critique than the drive/jouissance system.

Lacan's gaze, he maintains in *Seminar* XI in chapter 8, "The Line and the Light," can be understood insofar as geometrical optics invert perspective in painting such that "the secret of a picture" catches the viewer in its trap, "capture[s] the subject [in] an obvious relation with desire which, nevertheless, remains enigmatic. Lacan argues in *Seminar* XIII (1965-1966)[11] that desire is caught and fixed in the real of a picture. It *monstrates* or shows the real as that which is, but cannot be said. Thus, the dimension of deceptiveness of perception accompanies the gaze insofar as the picture entraps the viewer. This dimension, Lacan adds, has been present in arguments presented from Plato to Kant. In the well-known chapter 8 of *Seminar* XI, Lacan argues that the deceptive trick played in perception is the opening of a gap between appearance and being which concerns the irradiation of not being able to see an image or object at a point where the light is too bright. To argue this thesis, he uses the famous sardine can example from his own youth. On a fishing trip with Breton fishermen who are being put out of business by the new industry of canning sardines, the Breton fisherman Petit Jean points to a can floating in the

waves. The light is breaking apart on the interplay of water, sun, and metal; the literal object—the-can—overflows the image and gives rise to an enigmatic dimension that separates the gaze from the eye; vision from perception.

That this example has not truly served those trying to understand Lacan's theory of the gaze and its relation to objects in the world is not surprising if one takes this example in the perspective of an analogy, even though that was not Lacan's position at the time. Two years

later, when one reads Lacan's arguments regarding what a "picture" is in *Seminar* XIII: *On the object of Psychoanalysis* (1965-1966), he clarifies that his is not an analogical/geometrical presentation of the relation between the gaze and the object. Rather, his is a topological perspective that places the object—not the vision of the subject—in a place of priority. In consequence, one no longer need think in terms of a split between vision (seeing), and what vision sees (objects). Insofar as the gaze is one of the objects-cause-of-desire that "moves" by the dynamics similar to the ones Freud first attributed to the drives—indeed Lacan calls the gaze a partial drive, a scopic one--, Lacan's new perspective argues thus: For psychoanalysis, topology—the study of the transformation of objects in space that change shape while still retaining the same properties—is not a metaphor, but confirms the presence of the real in the base scopic field that shows the subject its place in the Other: Topology is an active showing of the real of (Borromean) structure. The representation of the space of the real promotes the notion of a picture which presents sites or points one might (or must) occupy in a social signifying chain. These are real places, not metaphorical constructs to be donned or cast aside at will or whim. And they appear whether spoken about or not. That is, what cannot be said or seen is tacitly shown.

Based on *Seminar* XIII, one can reread the sardine can episode, as well as other texts where the gaze plays a central role, now grasping that one will never understand the relation of subject to object in terms of an inverted perspective (as in anamorphosis). In *Seminar* XI, Lacan spoke phenomenologically, using vision at its limit point of being blinded by light, to

try to explain the gaze. Two years later, he argued that one must start with the object that causes one to see something outside the field of the literal picture. This is reminiscent of one of Lacan's reformulations of Freud's depiction of the unconscious: "There from where it looks at me, I do not see; there where I see, it does not look at me. . . . You never look at me from where I see you." In this new context, a real picture—of any story or film—is a window in which the object (*a*) is lodged by a frame or structure that shows it as a singularity of the scopic, invocatory, oral, or anal fields of the drive. Indeed such objects have already constituted or "founded" the subject of desire. The object, in turn, is made up of unary traits (S_1) that are identificatory in only one dimension, and, whose properties are, thus, a non-dialectical absolution of the object (*a*)—cause of desire and goal of the drives.

The object shown in the sardine can episode is not the can, but the real death laying siege to Petit Jean and his ilk. This fact occasions the fisherman's aggressive laughter at young Lacan. He seems to be in their actual picture—a daily fishing trip—but is really only in the picture as a imaginary backdrop against which to portray to them the grimmer face of their real. Young Jacques Lacan was not really in their picture. He was visiting, going back to Paris. He already has distance, difference. He is there for them as an ego ideal of an Other symbolic, thereby throwing into stark relief the mirror image identifications by which they maintain their own bonds. By 1964, Lacan had understood why they had laughed. He was not in their picture. He was outside it, in a different signifying chain; he was but a stain.

From this perspective, the gaze in chapter 8 (*S.* XI) exemplifies a point of darkness beyond light, referring to a real which does not make of the stain or spot undecideables, an equivalent of Freud's screen memories beyond which one cannot see or think. Nor does this real correlate the point of blackness with the irradiation that makes the object opaque, enigmatic,

ambiguous, binarily oppositional. Such readings are based on Lacan's early emphasis on the imaginary order. Neither the stain nor the screen are part of this later teaching

that offers the key to understanding the difference between the subject and the object by this logic: The object (*a*) is a metaphor for the unary traits of jouissance it drops from the invocatory field, from the scopic field, from the oral field, from the anal field—shedding these traits like so many feathers that bring pieces of the real into language, vision, and perspective. Once this Lacan is acknowledged, one grasps the differential topology he brought to bear on his later work where he showed that the space in play is not the space of the "screen," or the place of the unfathomable real of an impossible "spot" or "stain." It is not the place, for example, in the Mobieus strip "where everything is looking at me at the level of the point of light" (*S*. XI, p. 95). Rather, it is the point where the Moebius strip (8) has the shape of the gaze, where the edge and surface are continuous contiguities that overlap in a twist, thus transforming outside and inside into one another by unary traits of subject identification that anchor themselves to an actual hole, while also creating the hole they surround.[12] The secret of the picture is hidden, in the cusp of the Moebian twist, in the point of an Moebian overlap which places all the players in the Petit Jean drama on the surface of the figure eight; walking around it, under it, through it: These "narrative" (or visual) movements of passage approximate the dynamic structure of the drive. But the drive at stake is not the scopic one in any benign function. It is the scopic malevolence of the fisherman, looking via the "screen" of young Lacan, into the void that faces them as the fishing industry is overtaken by the canning one. Lacan called this gaze the one whose larger dimensions in the scopic field of perspective hold all the other drives in its cusp.

Insofar as we are born into the gaze, it is proximate to the void. Indeed, any encounter with it is an encounter with the void, with the "death head" whose correlates are lack and loss. When ideals drop away in the scopic field, this drive separates itself from *being*, showing the dark *angst* of the void at the center of being, meaning, and body. Although the movements of the Petit Jean drama may approximate Aristotle's "movement" (*S*. XX, ch. 5), or the dynamics Freud sought to fathom with the four characteristics of movement he attributed to the

drive:—repression, sublimation, turning back on the self, reversal into its opposite—both Aristotle and Freud failed to account for what causes the drive in the first place. Lacan showed the drive as being born out of the dialectical interplay of loss and desire.

In *Seminar* V: *Formations of the Unconscious* (1957-1958),[13] Lacan stressed that we are born into the gaze. From the start of life we are gazed at. As others gaze at us, fondly, jealously, with aspirations, and so on, we begin to be named and to have our desires constructed by the Other—by what the Other has and lacks, as well. Indeed, so inclusive is the gaze, that Lacan defined it in *Seminar* XI as consciousness; as "seeing onself being seen." Becoming aware that one is looked at by others, constitutes the gaze in its dual function of judgment and idealization. Thus, in *Seminar* V, Lacan placed the Ideal ego—one's particular subjectivity--, at the base of his graph of desire. The Ideal ego interfaces with lack—I (A) $—the ego, thus, joining unconscious fantasy.

Yet, the lacking subject ($) is not lack as emptiness, but lack as the pure real of desire. Lacan defines lack in *Seminar* V as there being no subject, no signifier which founds it (p. 189). Insofar as the first symbolizations are constituted in a *Fort! Da!* kind of rhythm between the parents and begin to make of the baby a subject, a desired object, we can say that all we know about the infant as subject is that demands emanate from it. Yet these demands are formed as a constellation of (object) desires. Lacan, proposed that the child starts out as an *assujet* "because she experiences and feels, first, profoundly subjected to the caprices on which she depends, even when the caprice is articulated" (*S*. V, p. 189). As these primordial demands pass through the signifying treasury of language and are filtered through the mother's conscious and unconscious desire (p. 191), the infant is led to seek the desire of [being] desired. This includes all one's efforts to escape unloving, idealizing, judgmental gazes which gave Little Hans, for example, his anxiety and phobia regarding horses (p. 193).

In *Seminar* XI (1964), Lacan argues that there is no benign gaze, only the Other/others as desiring, expecting, judging,

waiting. Early on, the gaze has performed its castrating function of creating an ego, which Lacan called a metonymic object. Moreover, the ego is a sexual object, symmetrical for both sexes. That is, the subject is desired or not as an object tethered to the subjectivity of the Other/others; not to the sexual difference itself (*S*. XI, p. 199). The message sent by the Other/others is the desire that makes of the object a barred subject,--a place of ennunciation of "self" as dialectically desiring or desired. The subject is an inverted mirror reflection of the Other and the Ideal ego which serves as a primordial unconscious formation that lets its shadow be cast in what the "I" says and projects in the ego ideals chosen in relationships.

But beyond the mother's desire—taken as a primordial form of the gaze—what does one find? If the child's desire is to be the object of the mother's desire—satisfying her gaze, thus winning her love—we can say that the Ideal ego is the child as he or she was desired (*S*. V, p. 257). The mother's desire, thus, constructs the equation desire = fantasy. One fantasizes in relation to lost and (re)-found objects—breast, faeces, voice, gaze—and desires the return of certain jouissance traits to fill the lack-in-being. This dialectic places the fantasy ($ <> a) partially in the imaginary lineage of the ego. Thus, fantasy is narcissistic. But beyond the maternal level of desire, one finds the signifier for the name of the father whose language, law, and conventions structure a turning away from the magnetic pull of maternal desire and drives. Lacan writes this in the *che vuoi*? graph as the drive **seeking** to fill up loss [S(Ø)] at the level of the demand for enjoyment: S (Ø) ≅ $ <> O.

That the drives have already been structured in the relation of symbolic desire to fantasy, and ego to ego ideal, sets up the response a subject will give to the social gaze in its efforts to be given a place in the social order (*S*. V, p. 392). It is in this sense that Lacan places the father beyond the mother. Culture comes after nurture in most models; but not in Lacan's. This is another way of saying what Lacan meant by speaking of the signifier of the Father's Name as that which constructs reality as a set of symbolic desires, concerning where one places oneself

in the real of the drive: to be seen (scopic), heard (invocatory), nurtured (oral), controlled or controlling (anal).

Another way Lacan states this is to say that the capital phi-(Φ)—is itself a signified: "The phallus is this particular signifier which, in the body of signifiers, is specialized to designate the ensemble of the effects of the signifier, as such, on the signified" (*S*. V, p. 393); on the demands of culture, in other words. Indeed, the demands of culture might well be another name for the gaze of society as demanding and commanding. That is, beyond desire, one finds drives enunciated by the Other's language, but referring to the object *a*.

In "Painting," Gérard Wajcman argues that topology is not a metaphor for psychoanalysis. Referring to Lacan's Seminar of May 4, 1966 from his *Seminar* XIII; Wajcman makes us see the value of Thomas Kuhn's picture of science as revolutionary; not evolutionary.[14] In the replacement of an old paradigm by a new one, one finds revolutionary science. Lacan's teaching does nothing less. He argues that he is doing a "topologerie"—beyond geometry—and that it has never been done. Joining desire and language by drive, he argues that the scope of thought is reducible to the body. That is, thought only thinks in the limit of the space of the body (Wajcman, p. 152). Indeed, topology, for Lacan, might be called an equivalent of the gaze. It does not seek, it finds. It does not quest. It shows by redoubling the subject silently. Psychoanalysis *situs* becomes psychoanalysis in space and in three dimensions. Indeed, time as desire is introduced into topology by the real of the word in its unary dimension. The word evokes loss, thus giving rise to the structure of desire/lack. At a second level, that of writing, time becomes history; dead letters lack the quality of the "act" pronounced by the word which includes the real, desire, and jouissance in its fabric.

Topology shows structure, then,— the real of structure which cannot speak itself. Topology situates the subject in a place of the Other, toward which the subject is supposed to orient itself. Lacan's whole teaching concerns one's place in the Other—a common site—and the place of the subject. One can see why the place of the subject would be so important, given

that the subject qua essence does not exist. A body is given a place in the irrealized fields of the gaze or the voice, as well as in the signifiers that represent it. The common place in the Other might be thought of as the cultural dimension—a place where egos can collect and identify with some unifying trait in the group and in a leader. Imaginary place—or space—is marked by the schemas which figure the surface by stratifying the planes of the image. Symbolic space is shown by the graph which responds to the places (the points) inscribed there (Wajcman, *CEJL* p. 143). The knotting of the three orders constitutes Borromean structure—as structure Lacan called a picture of the sites of the real, as well as structure itself.

Topology, then, is not a metaphor. Not an allegory. It does not represent the subject. It does not even unravel the subject of the drives and desire, as does the object *a*. Topology presents "the foundations of the subject's position," the subject combining itself in the Borromean unit (*CEJL*, p. 144). If the structure of topology is, then, visual, one confronts a split between the gaze and vision in the sense that a visual structure is torn from the visible (*S*. XI, pp. 77, 80-81). Indeed, visual structure first led Lacan to topology. The sardine can in Petit Jean points to an optics beyond that of the interplay of language, laughter, light, and being. Later, topology will take Lacan back to this picture and enable him to construct the matheme of showing (*CEJL*, p. 144). The picture is the matheme of visual structure, transmitting what can

only be shown, not said. Descartes failed to finally separate thought from body, leading Lacan to link Descartes's *res extensa*; cave wall paintings which give a logical matrix of the signifier; and the unary trait which creates perspective by threading an identificatory mark to a hole, the chosen recess of the object (p. 145). One can, thus, drop the concept of the screen, except insofar as it serves as a surface onto which to inscribe something, the surface, for example of the body which is skin and apertures. Thus, the screen is merely thrown into relief as an *imagined* support of the image, while the page does the same for the letter. The image veils the screen while the letter shows that the screen hides a hole.

In *Seminar* XIII, Lacan said of the gaze: "The foundation of the surface is at the base of all we call the organization of form, constellation" (p. 147). This is a far cry from a gender divide of a male desiring subject inflicting his unwanted attentions on a female desired object. We all desire from the erogeneous identifications of our bodies, from the objects of desire built up into meaning constellations because primordial "objects" are constantly lost. Yet, this area between desire and drive seems evanescent because one erroneously thinks the organ caused the desire and will satisfy the drive. But the object between the wish and "the thing" is a mere semblance of what satisfies the drive. In *Seminar* XX, the object as a semblance dwells between the symbolic and the real. The thing gazed at is never the "real" thing, only the "thing" designated by a given symbolic order as its ideal. The image of Marilyn Monroe, for example, is the image of a sex goddess of her day. To look at her was not to fix the "look" on an object, denigrated by desire—male or female. It was to look upon the falseness of the image. What the image of Marilyn showed was the picture of sexuality desired in that historical Other's moment. (Cf. ch. VIII, "Knowledge and Truth", p. 90). While the scopic drive is constructed as a symbolic order convention, and in individual imaginary preferences, in the real it is a jouissance constellation of certain traces written in one's unconscious that knows—*connaît*—the language of the libido.

The object *a* residing between the desirer and the desire is Lacan's way of saying that space and thought can be said to be homogeneous—as Descartes more or less deduced with his thinking part (mind) and the extended part (body). This is so, Wajcman says, because both thought and body are geo-metric. That is, both can be quantified or measured. Thought is counted up as ideas, words, and concepts, while the body extends itself into space by its desires, fantasies, appetites, and modes of jouissance. Although any measure of the body as an image that has been "significantized" (given meaning) produces an imaginarized signifier, one learns something new about the "imagination" from Lacan: That an image is significantized in the space of the body—with its parts and erogenous

openings—means that imagination is limited, not infinite. Even the greatest fantasies will always come down to the terms of the image of the body. Let us think for a moment about *1984*.[15] It culminates in Big Brother's torturing the bodies of Julia and Winston; Julia's and Winston's joining the Party to enjoy the "bodily" comforts that political compliance and money will bring them; and, finally, their seeing each other and no longer desiring each other because each has grown cynical, jaded, and overweight.

The subject, in this view, is not opposed to the world of objects. Rather, the world of objects is enveloped in the clothing of a body—a sack of skin—which unifies them, just as the signifier orients the body in space. The gaze is embodied in a quattrocentric perspective, then, not a binary one, as Mulvey, Silverman, Irigaray, and others have proposed. One is both the desiring subject of a lack and the object of a potential fulfillment, plus two other terms: the gap itself and the distance to be covered between desire and satisfaction. This gives us nothing less than a new view of perspective which will always be overstepped by a metrical geometry. That is, Euclidean space can not contain its "objects" because subject and object are not simple binaries, but are radically separate—the one wanting/lacking and the other an empty promise of repeated moments of reminiscence. Put another way, Silverman's ideas would lead us to a coherence theory of the subject and object, rather than to a theory of disunity. While subject and object may well co-exist, they reside in different places and on different planes.

Lacan called Descartes' "extended body" the statement of an impasse, as was Plato's ideal form. In his logic of perspective Lacan proposed three terms to explain how one figure is inscribed on the surface of another. His theory implies that there will not be resemblance or equality between two figures—the evil patriarch and his innocent victim—but equivalence. Three terms make up an equivalence relation, those being three modes by which one figure relates to another: resemblance by reflection (the mirror), equality by measure, and equivalence by transformation. The technical terms for those three are catoptrique, geometric, and topologic. Another

way to say this is that perspective means different surfaces—imaginary, symbolic, real, and symptomal—while the object a merely indicates a point of enigma and opacity between a subject and its objects. In 1964, Lacan linked symbolic structure to the scopic field. In 1966, he read the work of Leroi-Gourhan on cave paintings. Gourhan had been perplexed by why there would be paintings of the lives of individuals in the dark deep interior of the caves that never saw the light of day. Lacan's answer was that the paintings of the depths had to resemble the paintings at the entrance in order that the cave dwellers believe that they were always who they were—in order that a visible logic govern their thoughts in the deepest moments of darkness. What a subject represents to him or herself represents him or her in reference to what he or she does not see. And Lacan made of these paintings a psychoanalytic matheme. He called them a writing before writing whose main property was to make a "letter" or visual representation that would add up to a system of marks. These marks are not, however, signifiers, but unary traits of "meaningness" (*significance*). From the second a mark is made to represent a subject, a couple exists-the mark and the background upon which it is made; a unary trait of an edge and its hole. A mark on a blank page represents a subject for the depth of the page in a matrix of one and zero whose structure is of the real. Put another way, the mark shows the depth.

To return to the example of the sardine can, Lacan existed on the fisherman's screen—in their picture—as a mark whose only function was to illuminate the depth of the real picture, the truth of the story of those who would not be able to see themselves in the real were there not an "exceptional" element present to create the discontinuity that breaks up the imaginary illusion that depth and surface are one–are unified. Lacan called this a real structure of the signifier; not in the materiality of the letter, but of the material of which the letter is made. Before the letter, a trait or point comes before the saying of it, or the marking down of it. Now this does not mean

that Lacan is making an analogy between the world of Nature and that of culture. He is saying that culture makes what it will

of nature, of the things that are already there. The way he puts it is to say that realism in art is profoundly metonymic, that it designates something other than what it presents to us (Wacjman {Fr text}, p. 153).[16] The male subject who whistles at a female object is (de)monstrating to us—not necessarily that she is desirable, but—that he can desire, that he is not impotent, that he can fight his own castration.

While my example does not pretend to address the conventional codes of acceptable or unacceptable behavior in a given cultural context, I am saying that a behavior demonstrates first—monstrates (in the real)—something other than what it looks like it is saying or showing. What is in question here is not what the "letter" says, but what it *presents*. In *"L'étourdit* (1975), Lacan says one forgets what is said ("shown") behind what is heard (seen).[17] In "Agency of the Letter"[18] he spoke of language as signifying something other than what it says. When the real of structure—the picture—is at stake, the "letter" does not signify (produce meaning): It designates an impossible to see. I'd even place the "Dream of the Burning Child" recounted by Freud, and retold by Lacan, within this logic. The father dreams that his son is standing before him with his bandages on fire, burning horribly and asking: "Father, can't you see I'm burning?" The father must have known—unconsciously—when he left the boy's bedside, himself deeply worn by fatigue and heartbreak, that the candle had burned low and that the old man watching was dozing off as well. I would suggest that the father left the room in order not to see his son's death; to sleep elsewhere. But he knew when he heard the candlestick fall over that his son's body had caught fire. He knew in a lightening flash moment of associations that not only had he lost his son's life, he was losing the image of his body as well. This was what the dream horror image of his son showed—a picture in the real. This is what Wajcman calls a moment of the *écrit* piercing the word, the signifier, detaching itself from the voice. The "showing" becomes the unsayable, the paradoxical impossible letting itself be seen. One might add that much literature depends on just such a device, all the way from the unbearable image of Antigone's death scene to the

postmodern discomfort with the real and contemporary literary preoccupation with parody, irony, and distance. What more perfect genres to represent the most barbaric century in Western history? Two World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, the Holocaust, Iraq, and so on?

Insofar as there is such a thing as the object as real which only shows itself when the signifier fails to name something, and insofar as the image also remains indecipherable, one is not only in the presence of an optic that is anterior to physiology, but also in the presence of that which structures the visible, rather than the visible simply structuring itself. If the signifier only functions as a mortification of the object, an alienation that causes an emptying of the real of the object by separation, one has passed from geometry to topology. Points have converged randomly in identificatory combinatories, of which one will later "read" only the isolate, the absolute unary trait—not a dialectic between a word and a thing. Once one is in that dialectic, one has proceeded to an imaginary interaction with falseness where alienation (the symbolic) gives names to appearance. In his Seminar, *Le moment de conclure: livre* XXV (1978-1979),[19]

Lacan argues that geometry is woven of fantasies of couples that one calls science. Between Descartes's "extended part"—the body—and the fantasy, one actually traverses the distance of the fantasies of sexuality, thereby encountering myriad lacks of rapport (Dec. 20, 1977).

If there is no sexual rapport of oneness between man and woman—, only one's own Other as partner, there is at least the link of metaphor to fantasy. That is, the subject is divided in two points—the one where he/she sees the point of flight—and the other where he/she is seen—the point of distance—from which a picture shows. To construct the object's perspective there must be one eye in the picture and "another eye" looking. What interested Lacan was not the geometrical space that perspectivists measured, but that *distance* itself is required, that a subject must be held at a distance from an object to see it. The first viewpoint is that of the subject of vision, a point of flight. As for the real object, it can only be found in the hole. If one thinks of the hole as a window—indeed, window defining

fantasy quite well here—as that which shows itself or hides itself, the picture both hides and reveals. The screen against which Lacan painted himself in the sardine can narrative is not a concept or image, we may conclude, but a topological object which shows itself in the relation of $ to (*a*)" (Wajcman Fr text, pp. 166-167). Lacan was both the desired object of the Other's gaze and that which illuminated the lacking *a* in their story. He both opened up and unveiled the lack in the picture, while occasioning the hiding of the (death) object by the denial of laughter.

Endnotes

[1] Laura Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema," (1975) *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: MacMillan, 1989) pp. 14-26.

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