

[From *Tableau* ("Painting")]

G rard Wajcman

Translated by Jack Stone

For psychoanalysis, topology is not a metaphor.¹ We must depart from this point, confusing at first, in speaking seriously of painting. It is the point with which Lacan himself starts the lesson of May 4, 1966, of his seminar, which that year concerned. *The Object of Psychoanalysis*—an unpublished seminar, which is to say, unreadable twice over. This seminar leads by way of painting to a construction (no less than the construction of a world, which is quite different than a vision of the world) that I believe will be worth our trouble.

To Show

I will not take it in a bad way if one envisages what follows as a simple paraphrase. I have my reasons. First, if the modesty of my ambition is justified by the greatness of the discourse paraphrased, then I shall gain some from its aura, apart from any personal motive that would remain of puffing myself up, if I should truly seem to you the type for whom paraphrasing Lacan would be a simple thing.² Next, a paraphrase indeed appears necessary in order to find one's bearings in a lesson whose inventive, luminous upsurge that creates its immense interest does not always progress in a rectilinear fashion but meanders from a nodal elaboration regarding the function Lacan gives to painting, to the picture precisely: let us add, [to the picture as conceived] in analytic discourse. (I say this to short-circuit from the start, a debate that is not appropriate here on applied psychoanalysis.) Finally, it is because the first virtue, the elementary effect of the paraphrase, or its first function, if it means "a phrase along side," is, before even saying or resaying something, to designate what it paraphrases: a doubling, certainly, but not a simple one, for in doubling, it silently makes a gesture of showing.

Now, here, the showing (*monstration*) is important. For what does topology show? Structure. It is not a metaphor for

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structure, because "this structure, it is it."³ Topology is the real of structure, insofar as it cannot be said. What cannot be said—or seen—is shown. Lacanian topology is a tacit showing of structure.⁴

To Situate

"It is a question for us," writes Lacan, "of situating our topology—of situating ourselves as analysts, as acting in it."⁵ *Situate* is an eminently Lacanian verb, inasmuch as, if all of his teaching consists of the project of orienting psychoanalysts, this project is shown to be absolutely homogeneous with the structure it seeks to transmit, because what

constitutes its initial given is the designation of a place, the place of the Other, vis-à-vis which the subject must orient him- or herself. All this teaching is done in this place and it places—the place (*lieu*) of the Other being a common place (*lieu commun*), it places the (*place*) the subject. That Lacan became a topologist is in the order of Lacan the toponymist, Lacan the topographer. It is even in the order of the unconscious itself that was topologized by Lacan because it is topological. One could say that Lacan always sustained his discourse by a *psychoanalysis situs* and placed psychoanalysis in space. A constant recourse to graphic representation bears witness to this: it shows representations that are so many spatializations of a structure that is itself spatial.

That one can consider the three Lacanian "dimensions" of the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary as defining three spaces would make it permissible to distribute the ensemble of Lacan's graphic representations according to this trifunctionality: the *graph*, which inscribes *places*, responds to symbolic space (the point prevails here); the *schemas* figure imaginary space by stratifying the *planes* of the image (here, the surface prevails); as for real space, its representation supposes that one promote alongside the graphs or schemas the notion of a *picture*, which itself presents *sites* (which one could define as pure real places while stressing the pictorial origin of the term). (The graphic representation of the Borromean knot would then be a picture.) Thus, one could call a graph that which is meant to be read, a schema, that which lets itself be seen, and a picture,

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that which shows. Always supposing a knotting of the three in each case, inasmuch as one must admit that a writing is susceptible of showing (the blankness or white between the lines), in which respect it would be a picture—the schema, susceptible of being read, its graph side, or the picture, of being seen—it returns in this way to the schema, and so on.

The graph writes what can be said. The schema represents what can be seen. The picture separates itself from them: what can neither be said nor seen shows something.

To Represent

Topology, then is not a metaphor. This could be understood simply: It does not represent the subject. It is neither signified nor figured. It presents the structure of the subject, the site at which the subject emerges, as effect. Topology presents what Lacan names "the foundations (*fundaments*) of its position": neither said nor seen—the subject combines itself there.

If for Lacan, topology ranks as a *matheme* of analysis, if the *matheme* aims at resolving the question of a transmission without loss of the analytic discourse, this transmission, then, takes on the status of an act, a mute one: to show without saying a word. Psychoanalysis would thus be overtaken by painting: an art of silence aiming at the real—that is, what is impossible to say shows itself.

Thus, one is led to mark a visual structure of topology, precisely this structure that Lacan constructed in his 1964 seminar on *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, as a split between the gaze and vision, which is to say, a visual structure torn from the visible.⁶ What topology shows, one does not see—such as Carpaccio's "Saint

Etienne" in the Louvre, pointing his finger toward a patch of the sky that is outside the field of the picture, a pure real.

The Foundation

"We must now come to what I have called the visual structure of this topological world, that on which the entire installation of the subject is founded," Lacan said on May 4, 1966. "Visual structure" of the topological world, as Lacan puts

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it in this seminar, is useful for underlining a sort of reversal, as least as to our point of departure in relation to the seminar of 1964 where it would be, rather, a question of constructing the topological structure of the visual world. Lacan gave such a structure then based on the model of the finger of a glove turned inside out (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 there from where I see you; what I look at is never what I want to see. There from where I see, I am not; there where I am, I do not see; I see, therefore, that I am looked at, etc.). Thus, it is by topology that Lacan in 1966 returns to visual structure, while, formerly, it was visual structure that led him to a topology. This indicates at least one consequence we can anticipate. For if topology shows, exploration of visual structure and recourse to the picture will then have an aim: to construct the matheme of showing.

To this aim, a factor is attached that must be underlined. As we shall see, it is this: if Lacan makes of the picture a window in which the object comes to be lodged, a frame that shows it, this structure—in being that of the visual world and supposing as its center the object in question, that is, the gaze—is not only that of the visual world, and, furthermore, it is not only the gaze that is involved. In other words, if the picture is constructed by Lacan as the matheme of visual structure, that is to say, what transmits it, if it is a matheme of the showing of the object, it is the object itself that is at issue, declinable in its four currencies; that of the breast, the turd, the voice, the gaze—the gaze is included here, of course, but with a singularity in this series, a privileged status, because it is the matrix of the three others. Thus, one could say that, when the breast, the turd, or the voice show themselves, they do so as a function of the gaze. To explore visual structure will be, then, a matter of accounting for the relationship of subject to object insofar as it shows itself; this is called the fantasy. The picture, in addition to the object, thus proves itself to be also the framework of a question central to analytic discourse. In this respect, for Lacan, painting, when he speaks of it, is not applied psychoanalysis. It is pure psychoanalysis.

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The Elementary

Let us return now to where we were: a visual structure of the topological world founds the subject. Lacan is seeking the foundations of the subject. That, without a doubt, could constitute the heading beneath which the integrality of his teaching would be

ranked. It applies itself, however, with a particular appropriateness to the lesson of May 4, 1966. For beyond the meanderings of a profuse elaboration, of a continued upsurge, Lacan followed a path of surprising originality. He, in fact, drew on three distinct threads, beginning with three references: Descartes, cave painting, and quattrocetro perspective. One might emphasize that these three references have a point in common: Each aims for a point of origin, a time of emergence—of the classical subject, the speaking being, and modern space: three "births" in all. One knows that this has hardly any historical value for Lacan but that in the first moments of time, it is the elementary that is aimed at. Moreover, we might consider that each of these three threads leads back to an element that must be held to as the foundation of each of the dimensions, the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real, respectively. Thus the Cartesian thread leads to the body, the thread of the wall paintings to the logical matrix of the signifier, and the thread of perspective to a hole—the chosen recess of the object. There is another way to present the issue of the three threads Lacan follows here. It is to consider that each hole implied a different structure supposed for the subject: geometrical in the first case, logical in the second, and topological in the third. I hope one sees what this is all about.

It is possible that, under too much pressure to make you depart as quickly as you can from the three furrows perceived in this lesson, seemingly an overworked field, I have only succeeded in your eyes in making this field a dense forest—full of riches, you might think, but quite impenetrable. However, it is not necessary that this forest hide the tree of simplicity Lacan is trying to grow. For all these references, diverse as they are in nature, are only brought together to answer one question: What is there exactly of the subject, in this place necessitated by the constitution of the objective world? The subject is defined

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by its relationship to the world. This is the naive question—in the sense of "native"—that is posed. Lacan will offer three possible answers. If certain difficulties come to light, if a little complexity is in order, if Lacan takes some trouble—and if we do the same in following him—it is, overall, only due to his exasperating care for saying "what there is 'exactly.'" And no one can blame him for this rigor.

Screen

Let there be two terms, then: the world and the subject. How does the subject accede to a representation of the world? By the senses, beginning with sight. This necessitates posing, or interposing, a third term: the screen. Let it be what supports everything of the world that presents itself for the subject. The screen is an elementary term: elementary but complex, or ambiguous. For if its function is to support, even before presenting whatever it hides, it is then constructed on two opposing ideas—it presents and it hides. One would thus have trouble speaking of the "concept" of the screen (if concept means "what one can grasp"). If the screen is elementary, it is because it is a support: support of the image, of the letter, of the object (if one can speak in this last case of a support). In these three cases, the status of the screen can be stated in different ways: as support of the image, it is the surface, as essential to what an image is;

as support of the letter, it is the blank background of the page, the empty background on which the letter emerges, and which arises itself from the inscription—the letter shows the background, makes it ex-sist; as support of the object, it is first the support of a hole where the object is situated—as the edge of the one, it gives its frame to the other.

Inversely, to the three elements it supports, one can make three modes of the screen's presence correspond: as support of the image, of what is seen, it is hidden by the image—thus, revealing that the image veils the screen as that which hides, it veils the veil; as support of the letter, it is shown as what hides an empty opacity; as support of the object, it shows what it hides—it is holed.

In that way, then, one could say that the three threads I have indicated, beginning with the three references made by

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Lacan, establish themselves definitely as the exploration of the three statuses or three modes of the screen. In the movie *The World, the Subject, and the Screen*, a Lacanian film, if the subject of the film is the subject–barred ($\$$)—if the action is situated in the world of objects, it is surely the screen that takes the starring role; Lacan makes the screen a movie star.

Nonetheless, we must not lose sight of one thing: The screen is also an object in the world—let us not be in too much of a hurry therefore to relate the three terms of the movie to the Lacanian trifunctionality. If, however, the screen distinguishes itself from other objects, it is because it is the material on which the world is deposited; the world is drawn on its surface, the signifier inscribed itself there, the object itself pierces it, in painting itself there. Support of the image, the signifier, or of the object, the screen is, in a sense, the world itself, envisaged according to the fact that it be seen (it is its own surface): insofar as it is written (although the writing will never be able to write the world completely, to reabsorb it, all in all, into the written [*écrit*], into the surface on which it is written; also, this impossible, this real, shows. It does not stop showing the world), and as a real presence (the world that is shown, not represented, is the world that represents itself *itself*).

Surface

In his seminar of May 4, 1966, Lacan said, "The foundation of the surface is at the base of all we call the organization of form, constellation" (*L'objet de la psychoanalyse*). The world, the visible world, is a world of images. That the surface be the principle of the image is what leads us to conceive of visible space as a superposition of parallel planes; the visible world is a layering of space, *feuilleté* (as in pastry). I would say scanned space, a thickness of planes. Henceforth, so that such a *feuilletage*, or stacking of millithin leaflike planes on one another, an object can be delimited, we must pose a subject "that unifies the configuration" (*L'objet de la psychoanalyse*). Question: Is it on a surface, the surface that is the retina of the eye on which the image is going to form itself—the image as form—that we can grasp the unifying principle? It is this

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question that makes an appeal to Descartes, to the distinction between extended matter and that of thought. One preliminary remark must be made: what Descartes produces his theory from in the *Treatise on the World*,⁷ following the twelfth "Rule for the Direction of the Spirit," is an opposition in which the major upheaval introduced by the artistic conceptions of the Renaissance, two centuries earlier, will have consisted. This is to say that, in breaking with the Middle Ages, painters, such as Erwin Panofsky writing in *Idea*, would uproot the object from the interior world of the subjective representation to situate it in the exterior world.⁸ We can date this form Cennino Cennini's *Trattato della pittura* (between 1350 and 1400), which, for the first time, counseled the painter to place himself—in painting a mountain—before a model.⁹ Thus, the separation of the subject from the object was posed, bringing about the establishment between the two of a *distance* that the next perspective would materialize. We can therefore say that, in a sense, painting "anticipated" Descartes.

Let it remain that the opposition of thought and extended matter consists of a paradox because for Descartes, the area—that is to say, space as homogeneous—is to be conceived of at the same time as *partes extra partes*, which Lacan translates as follows: "Chaque point est identique à tous les autres tout en étant différent" (Each point is identical to all the others, while at the same time being different) (*L'objet de la psychanalyse*). This renders space unthinkable. Lacan, it seems to me, raises the difficulty by reformulating the Cartesian hypothesis on extended matter thusly: "Toutes ses parties se valent" (All its parts are as good as each other). By the notion of value, he thus introduces the operation, which is no longer one of an aporetic imaginary identity (a *semblable* or similar that would not be not-similar) but that of an equality, which supposes measure. By measure, what is different can be identical in having the same value. (This constitutes the foundation of metrical geometry.) This is of considerable consequence: Descartes's extended matter (or scope of space) and thoughts are not separable but coherent. For, henceforth, he admits that thought cannot unify space, for a good reason: Space as such cannot be

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thought outside of thought; thought does not introduce measure into space, supposedly conceived of as separated—it is constitutive of space. Also, says Lacan, thought cannot explore space since it is that which builds it. There is no space that is not measurable.

Endnotes

¹ From *La part de l'Œil*, no. 2, Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles, 1987 (Dossier: "Pensée des Sciences, Pensée des arts Plastiques"). pp. 147-67; pp. 147-51. Translated by Jack Stone; translation edited by Ellie Ragland. The present text is a revision of a lecture given in Brussels, June 22, 1985, at the invitation of *L'Ecole de la Cause freudienne* of Belgium

² Cf. Jacques Lacan, "L'Étourdit," *Scilicet* 4 (1973): 5-52.

³ The status of Lacanian topology crosses paths here, as Jean Claude Milner indicates in "sur l'image" (Internet, www.mle.asso.fr/banquet), with two propositions from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: "7. That about which one cannot speak, one must remain silent" and "6.522. There is surely an inexpressible. This shows itself . . ." (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961], p.151).

⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, p. 151.

⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre XIII: L'objet de la psychanalyse*, 1966-1967, unpublished seminar, May 4, 1966; hereafter cited in text as *L'objet de la psychanalyse*.

⁶ Jacques Lacan *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 1964, ed. Jacques Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981); see especially chapters 6 and 7, pp. 77, 80-81.

⁷ René Descartes, *Le Monde de M. Descartes ou le traité de la lumière, et des autres principaux objets des sens* (Paris, 1664).

⁸ Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968).

⁹ Cennino Cennini, *A Treatise on Painting [Trattato della pittura]* (London, 1844).