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Joan Copjec

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# The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan

JOAN COPJEC

Through his appearance in *Television*, Lacan parodies the image of himself —of his teaching—that we have, to a large extent, received and accepted. Standing alone behind his desk, hands now supporting him as he leans assertively forward, now thrown upward in some emphatic gesture, Lacan stares directly out at us, as he speaks in a voice that none would call smooth of “quelque chose, n’est-ce pas?” This “quelque chose” is, of course, never made specific, never revealed, and so it comes to stand for a fact or a system of facts that is known, but not by us. This image recalls the one presented to Tabard by the principal in Vigo’s *Zero for Conduct*. It is the product of the childish, paranoid notion that all our private thoughts and actions are spied on by and visible within a public world represented by parental figures. In appearing to us, then, by means of the “mass media,”<sup>1</sup> Lacan seems to confirm what we may call our “televisual” fear—that we are perfectly, completely visible to a gaze that observes us from afar (*tele* meaning both “distant” and [from *telos*] “complete”).<sup>2</sup> That this proffered image is parodic, however, is almost surely to be missed, so strong are our misperceptions of Lacan. And, so, the significance of the words with which he opens his address and by which he immediately calls attention to his self-parody—“I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there’s no way to say it all. Saying the whole truth is materially impossible: words fail. Yet it’s through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real.”<sup>3</sup>—the significance of these words may also be missed, as they have been generally in our theories of representation, the most sophisticated example of which is film theory.

Let me first, in a kind of establishing shot, summarize what I take to be the

1. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London, The Hogarth Press, 1977, p. 274), Lacan speaks of the “phantasies” of the “mass media,” as he very quickly suggests a critique of the familiar notion of “the society of the spectacle.” This notion is replaced in Lacan by what might be called “the society of (formed from) the nonspecularizable.”

2. *Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon*, 1906; all translations of ancient Greek terms are from this source.

3. Jacques Lacan, *Television*, trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, *October*, no. 40 (Spring 1987), p. 7.

central misconception of film theory: believing itself to be following Lacan, it conceives the screen as mirror;<sup>4</sup> in doing so, however, it operates in ignorance of, and at the expense of, Lacan's more radical insight, whereby the mirror is conceived as screen.

*The Screen as Mirror*

This misconception is at the base of film theory's formulation of two concepts—the apparatus and the gaze—and of their interrelation. One of the clearest and most succinct descriptions of this interrelation—and I must state here that it is *because* of its clarity, because of the way it responsibly and explicitly articulates assumptions endemic to film theory, that I cite this description, not to impugn it or its authors particularly—is provided by the editors of *Re-vision*, a collection of essays by feminists on film. Although its focus is the special situation of the female spectator, the description outlines the general relations among the terms *gaze*, *apparatus*, and *subject* as they are stated by film theory. After quoting a passage from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* in which Bentham's architectural plan for the panopticon is laid out, the *Re-vision* editors make the following claim:

the dissociation of the see/being seen dyad [which the panoptic arrangement of the central tower and annular arrangement ensures] and the sense of permanent visibility seem perfectly to describe the condition not only of the inmate in Bentham's prison but of the woman as well. For defined in terms of her visibility, she carries her own Panopticon with her wherever she goes, her self-image a function of her being for another. . . . The subjectivity assigned to femininity within patriarchal systems is inevitably bound up with the structure of the look and the localization of the eye as authority.<sup>5</sup>

The panoptic gaze defines *perfectly* the situation of the woman under patriarchy: that is, it is the very image of the structure which obliges the woman to monitor herself with a patriarchal eye. This structure thereby guarantees that even her innermost desire will always be not a transgression, but rather an implantation of the law, that even the "process of theorizing her own untenable situation" can only reflect back to her "as in a mirror," her subjugation to the gaze.

4. Mary Ann Doane points out that it is our very fascination with the model of the screen as mirror that has made it resistant to the kinds of theoretical objections which she herself makes. See Mary Ann Doane, "Misrecognition and Identity," *Ciné-Tracts*, no. 11 (Fall 1980), p. 28.

5. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams, eds., *Re-vision*, Los Angeles, American Film Institute, 1984, p. 14. The introduction to this very useful collection of essays also attempts to detail some of the historical shifts in feminist theories of representation; I am only attempting to argue the need for one more shift, this time away from the panoptic model of cinema.

The panoptic gaze defines, then, the *perfect*, i.e., the total, visibility of the woman under patriarchy, of any subject under any social order, which is to say, of any subject at all. For the very condition and substance of the subject's subjectivity is his or her subjectivization by the law of the society which produces that subject. One only becomes visible—not only to others, but also to oneself—through (by seeing through) the categories constructed by a specific, historically defined society. These categories of visibility are categories of knowledge.

The perfection of vision and knowledge can only be procured at the expense of invisibility and nonknowledge. According to the logic of the panoptic apparatus, these last do not and (in an important sense) cannot exist. One might summarize this logic—thereby revealing it to be more questionable than it is normally taken to be—by stating it thus: since all knowledge (or visibility) is produced by society (that is, all that it is possible to know comes not from reality, but from socially constructed categories of implementable thought), since *all* knowledge is produced, *only* knowledge (or visibility) is produced, or *all* that is produced is knowledge (visible). This is too glaring a nonsequitor—the *then* clauses are too obviously not necessary consequences of the *if* clause—for it ever to be storable as such. And yet this lack of logical consequence is precisely what must be at work and what must go unobserved in the founding of the seeing/being seen dyad which figures the comprehension of the subject by the laws that rule over its construction.

Here—one can already imagine the defensive protestations: I have overstated my argument—there *is* a measure of indetermination available even to the panoptic argument. This indetermination is provided for by the fact that the subject is constructed not by one monolithic discourse but by a multitude of different discourses. What cannot be determined in advance are the articulations that may result from the chance encounter—sometimes on the site of the subject—of these various discourses. A subject of a legal discourse may find itself in conflict with itself as a subject of a religious discourse. The negotiation of this conflict may produce a solution that was anticipated by neither of the contributing discourses. Some film theorists have underlined this part of Foucault's work in an attempt to locate possible sources of resistance to institutional forms of power, to clear a space for a feminist cinema, for example.<sup>6</sup> I would argue, however, that this simple atomization and multiplication of subject positions and this *partes extra partes* description of conflict does not lead to a radical undermining of knowledge or power. Not only is it the case that at each stage what is *produced* is conceived in Foucauldian theory to be a *determinate* thing or position, but, in addition, knowledge and power are conceived of as the over-all effect of the *relations among* the various conflicting positions and discourses. Differences do not threaten panoptic power; they feed it.

6. See, especially, Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987.

The Lacanian argument is quite different. It states that that which is produced by a signifying system can never be determinate. Conflict in this case does not result from the clash between two different positions, but from the fact that no position defines a resolute identity. Nonknowledge or invisibility is not registered as the wavering and negotiations between two certainties, two meanings or positions, but as the undermining of every certainty, the incompleteness of every meaning and position.<sup>7</sup> Incapable of articulating this more radical understanding of nonknowledge, the panoptic argument is ultimately *resistant to resistance*, unable to conceive of a discourse that would refuse rather than refuel power.

My purpose here is not simply to point out the crucial differences between Foucault's theory and Lacan's, but also to attempt to explain how the two theories have failed to be perceived *as* different. How a psychoanalytically informed film theory came to see itself as expressible in Foucauldian terms, despite the fact that these very terms aimed at dispensing with psychoanalysis as a method of explanation. In Foucault's work the techniques of disciplinary power (of the construction of the subject) are conceived as capable of "materially penetrat[ing] the body in depth without depending even on the mediation of the subject's own representations. If power takes hold on the body, this isn't through its having first to be interiorized in people's consciousness."<sup>8</sup> For Foucault, the conscious and the unconscious are categories constructed by psychoanalysis and other discourses (philosophy, literature, law, etc.): like other socially constructed categories, they provide a means of rendering the subject visible, governable, trackable. They are categories through which the modern subject is apprehended and apprehends itself, *rather than* (as psychoanalysis maintains) processes of apprehension; they are not processes which engage or are engaged by social discourses (film texts, for example). What the *Re-vision* editors force us to confront is the fact that in film theory these radical differences have largely gone unnoticed or have been nearly annulled. Thus, though the gaze is conceived as a metapsychological concept central to the description of the subject's psychic engagement with the cinematic apparatus, the concept, as we shall see, is formulated in a way that makes any psychic engagement redundant.

My argument is that film theory performed a kind of "Foucauldization" of Lacanian theory; an early misreading of Lacan turned him into a "spendthrift" Foucault — one who wasted a bit too much theoretical energy on such notions as

7. In "What Is a Question," F.S. Cohen makes this important distinction clearly: "Indetermination or doubt is not, as is often maintained, a wavering between different certainties, but the grasping of an incomplete form" (*The Monist*, no. 38 [1929], p. 354, fn. 4).

8. Michel Foucault, in Colin Gordon, ed., *Power/Knowledge*, New York, Pantheon, p. 186. The interview with Lucette Finas in which this statement occurs was also published in Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton, eds., *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy*, Sydney, Feral Publications, 1979. The statement is quoted and emphasized in Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain's excellent book, *Michel Foucault*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1984, p. 244.

the antithetical meaning of words or the repression instituted by parental interdiction. It is the perceived frugality of Foucault (whereby every disavowal is seen to be essentially an avowal of what is being denied), every bit as much as the recent and widely proclaimed interest in history, that has guaranteed Foucault's ascendancy over Lacan in the academy.

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It was through the concept of the apparatus—the economic, technical, ideological institution—of cinema that the break between contemporary film theory and its past was effected.<sup>9</sup> This break meant that cinematic representation was considered to be not a clear or distorted reflection of a prior and external reality, but one among many social discourses that helped to construct reality and the spectatorial subject. As is well-known, the concept of the apparatus was not original to film theory, but was imported from epistemological studies of science. The actual term *dispositif* (“apparatus”) used in film theory is borrowed from Gaston Bachelard, who employed it to counter the reigning philosophy of phenomenology. Bachelard proposed instead the study of “phenomeno-*technology*,” believing that phenomena are not given to us directly by an independent reality, but are, rather, constructed (cf. the Greek *technē*, “produced by a regular method of making, rather than found in nature”) by a range of practices and techniques that define the field of historical truth. The objects of science are materializable concepts, not natural phenomena.

Even though it borrows his term and the concept it names, film theory does not locate its beginnings in the work of Bachelard, but rather in that of one of his students, Louis Althusser.<sup>10</sup> (This history is by now relatively familiar, but since a number of significant points have been overlooked or misinterpreted, it is necessary to retrace some of the details.) Althusser was judged to have advanced and corrected the theory of Bachelard in a way that foregrounded the *subject* of science. Now, although he had argued that the scientific subject was formed in

9. Although some might claim that it was the introduction of the linguistic model into film studies that initiated the break, it can be more accurately argued that the break was precipitated by a shift in the linguistic model itself—from an exclusive emphasis on the relation between signifiers to an emphasis on the relation between signifiers and the subject, their signifying effect. That is, it was not until the *rhetorical* aspect of language was made visible—by means of the concept of the apparatus—that the field of film studies was definitively reformed. I am arguing, however, that, once this shift was made, some of the lessons introduced by semiology were, unfortunately, forgotten.

To define a *break* (rather than a continuity) between what is often referred to as “two stages,” or the first and second semiology, is analogous to defining a break between Freud's first and second concepts of transference. It was only with the second, the privileging of the analyst/analysand relationship, that psychoanalysis (properly speaking) was begun. Biography rather than theory is the source of the demand for the continuity of these concepts.

10. The best discussion of the relationship between Bachelard and Althusser can be found in Etienne Balibar, “From Bachelard to Althusser: The Concept of ‘Epistemological Break,’” *Economy and Society*, vol. 5, no. 4 (November 1976), pp. 385–411.

and by the field of science, Bachelard had also maintained that the subject was never *fully* formed in this way. One of the reasons for this merely partial success, he theorized, was an obstacle that impeded the subject's development; this obstacle he called the imaginary. But the problem with this imaginary, as Althusser later pointed out, was that it was itself largely untheorized and was thus (that is, almost by default) accepted by Bachelard as a *given*, as external and prior to rather than as an *effect* of historical determinations. The scientific subject was split, then, between two modes of thought: one governed by historically determined scientific forms, the other by forms that were eternal, spontaneous, and almost purely mythical.<sup>11</sup>

Althusser rethought the category of the imaginary, making it a part of the process of the historical construction of the subject. The imaginary came to name a process necessary for — rather than an impediment to — the ideological founding of the subject: the imaginary provided the form of the subject's lived relation to society. Through this relation, the subject was brought to accept as its own, to recognize itself in, the representations of the social order.

This last statement of Althusser's position is important for our concerns here because it is also a statement of the basic position of film theory as it was developed in the '70s, in France and in England, by Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz, Jean-Louis Comolli, and by the journal *Screen*. In sum: the screen is a mirror. The representations produced by the institution cinema, the images presented on the screen, are accepted by the subject as its own.<sup>12</sup> There is, admittedly, an ambiguity in the notion of the subject's "own image"; it can refer either to an image *of* the subject or an image *belonging to* the subject. Both references are intended by film theory. Whether that which is represented is specularized as an image of the subject's own body or as the subject's image of someone or something else, what remains crucial is the attribution to the image of what Lacan (not film theory, which has never, it seems to me, adequately accounted for the ambiguity) calls "that belong to me aspect so reminiscent of property."<sup>13</sup> It is this aspect that allows the subject to see in any representation

11. This notion of the scientist discontinuous with him- or herself can be given a precise image, the alchemical image of the Melusines: creatures composed partially of inferior, fossil-like forms that reach back into the distant past (the imaginary) and partially of superior, energetic (scientific) activity. In *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, Beacon, 1969, p. 109), Bachelard, whose notion of the unconscious is more Jungian than Freudian, refers to this image from Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy*.

12. The one reservation Metz has to the otherwise operative analogy between mirror and screen is that at the cinema, "the spectator is absent from the screen: contrary to the child in the mirror" (Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 48). Jacqueline Rose clarified the error implied in this reservation by pointing out that "the phenomenon of transitivism demonstrates that the subject's mirror identification can be with another child," that one always locates *one's own image in another* and thus the imaginary identification does not depend on a literal mirror ("The Imaginary," in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, London, Verso, 1986, p. 196). What is most often forgotten, however, is the corollary of this fact: one always locates *the other in one's own image*. The effect of *this* fact on the constitution of the subject is Lacan's fundamental concern.

13. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 81.

not only a reflection of itself, but a reflection of itself as master of all it surveys. The imaginary relation produces the subject as master of the image. This insight led to film theory's reconception of film's characteristic "impression of reality."<sup>14</sup> No longer conceived as dependent upon a relation of verisimilitude between the image and the real referent, this impression was henceforth attributed to a relation of adequation between the image and the spectator. In other words, the impression of reality results from the fact that the subject takes the image as a full and sufficient representation of itself and its world; the subject is satisfied that it has been adequately reflected on the screen. The "reality effect" and the "subject effect" both name the same constructed impression: that the image makes the subject fully visible to itself.

The imaginary relation is defined as literally a relation of *recognition*. The subject reconceptualized as its own concepts already constructed by the Other. Sometimes the reconstruction of representation is thought to take place secondarily rather than directly, after there has been a primary recognition of the subject as a "pure act of perception." This is Metz's scenario.<sup>15</sup> The subject first recognizes itself by identifying with the gaze and then recognizes the images on the screen. Now, *what* exactly is the gaze, in this context? Why does it emerge in this way from the theory of the apparatus? What does it add—or subtract—from Bachelard's theory, where it does not figure as a term?<sup>16</sup> All these questions will have to be confronted more fully in due course; for now we must begin with the observation that this ideal point can be nothing but *the signified of the image*, the point from which the image *makes sense* to the subject. In taking up its position at this point, the subject sees itself as *supplying* the image with sense. Regardless of whether one or two stages are posited, the gaze is always the point from which identification is conceived by film theory to take place. And because the gaze is always conceptualized as an analogue of that geometrical point of Renaissance perspective at which the picture becomes fully, undistortedly visible, the gaze always retains within film theory the sense of being that point at which sense and being coincide. The subject comes into being by identifying with the image's signified. Sense *founds* the subject—that is the ultimate point of the film theoretical concept of the gaze.

14. It was Jean-Louis Baudry who first formulated this definition of the impression of reality. See his second apparatus essay, "The Apparatus," in *Camera Obscura*, no. 1 (Fall 1976), especially pp. 118–119.

15. Metz's two-stage scenario is critiqued by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith in "A Note on History/Discourse," in *Edinburgh '76*, pp. 26–32; and by Mary Ann Doane in "Misrecognition and Identity."

16. I have elsewhere referred to the gaze as "metempsychotic": although it is a concept abhorrent to feminist reason, the target of constant theoretical sallies, the gaze continues to reemerge, to be reincorporated, as an assumption of one film analysis after another. The argument I am making is that it is because we have not properly determined what the gaze is, whence it has emerged, that we have been unable to eliminate it. It is generally argued that the gaze is dependent on psychoanalytic structures of voyeurism and fetishism, presumed to be male. I am claiming instead that the gaze arises out of *linguistic* assumptions and that these assumptions, in turn, shape (and appear to be naturalized by) the psychoanalytic concepts.



The imaginary relation is not, however, merely a relation of knowledge, of sense and recognition; it is also a relation of love guaranteed by knowledge. The image seems not only perfectly to represent the subject, it seems also to be an image of the subject's perfection. An unexceptional definition of narcissism appears to support this relation: the subject falls in love with its own image as the image of its ideal self. *Except* for the fact that narcissism becomes in this account the structure that facilitates the *harmonious* relation between self and social order (since the subject is made to snuggle happily into the space carved out for it), whereas, in the psychoanalytic account, the subject's narcissistic relation to the self is seen to *conflict with and disrupt* other social relations. I am attempting to pinpoint here no minor point of disagreement between psychoanalysis and the panoptic argument: the opposition between the unbinding force of narcissism and the binding force of social relations is one of the defining tenets of psychoanalysis.<sup>17</sup> It is nevertheless true that Freud himself often ran into difficulty trying to maintain the distinction and that many, from Jung on, have found it easier to merge the two forces into a libidinal monism. But easier is not better; to disregard the distinction is not only to destroy psychoanalysis but also to court determinism.

Why is the representation of the relation of the subject to the social necessarily an imaginary one? This question, posed by Paul Hirst,<sup>18</sup> should have launched a serious critique of film theory. That it did not is attributable, in part, to the fact that the question was perceived to be fundamentally a question about the content of the concept of the imaginary. With only a slightly different emphasis, the question can be seen to ask how the imaginary came to bear, almost exclusively, the burden of the construction of the subject—despite the fact that we always speak of the “symbolic” construction of the subject. One way of answering this is to note that in much contemporary theory the symbolic is itself structured like the imaginary, like Althusser's version of the imaginary. And thus Hirst's criticisms are aimed at our conception of the symbolic construction of the subject, in general. That this is so is made explicit once again by the frugality of Foucault, who exposes to us not only the content, but also the emptiness of some of our concepts. For he successfully demonstrates that the conception of the symbolic on which he (and, implicitly, others) relies makes the imaginary unnecessary. In a move similar to the one that refigured ideology as a positive force of the production rather than falsification of reality, Foucault rethinks symbolic law as a *purely positive* force of the production rather than repression of the subject and its desires. Offering his argument—that the law constructs desire—as a

17. Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen's extremely interesting book, *The Freudian Subject* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1988), grapples with this *necessary* distinction in its final section—with results very different from Lacan's.

18. Paul Hirst, “Althusser's Theory of Ideology,” *Economy and Society*, vol. 5, no. 4 (November 1976), pp. 385–411.

*critique* of psychoanalysis, Foucault refuses to acknowledge that psychoanalysis has itself never argued any differently.

What is the difference, then, between Foucault's and psychoanalysis's version of the law/desire relation? Simply this: Foucault conceives desire not only as an *effect*, but also as a *realization* of the law, while *psychoanalysis teaches us that this conflation of effect and realization is an error*. To say that the law is only positive, that it does not forbid desire, but rather incites it, causes it to flourish by requiring us to contemplate it, confess it, watch for its various manifestations, is to end up saying simply that the law causes us to *have* a desire—for incest, let us say. While rejecting his moralism, this position recreates the error of the psychiatrist in one of Mel Brooks's routines. In a fit of revulsion, this psychiatrist throws a patient out of his office because she reported having a dream in which she "was kissing her father!" The feeling of disgust is the humorous result of the psychiatrist's failure to differentiate the enunciative position of the dreaming patient from the stated position of the dreamed one. The elision of the difference between these positions—enunciation and statement—causes desire to be thought as realization in two ways. First, desire is conceived as an actual state resulting from a possibility allowed by law. Second, if desire is something one simply and positively has, nothing can prevent its realization except a purely external force. The destiny of desire is realization, unless it is prohibited by some external force.

Psychoanalysis denies the preposterous proposition that society is founded on desire—the desire for incest, let us say once again. Surely, it argues, it is the *repression* of this desire which is crucial. The law does not construct a subject who simply and unequivocally has a desire, but one who *rejects* its desire, one who wants not to desire it. The subject is thus split from its desire, and desire itself is conceived as something—precisely—unrealized; it does not actualize what the law makes possible. Nor is desire committed to realization, barring any external hinderance. For the internal dialectic which makes the being of the subject dependent on the negation of its desire turns the construction of desire into a self-hindering process.

Foucault's definition of the law as positive and nonrepressive implies that the law is both (1) unconditional—that it *must* be obeyed, since only that which it allows can come into existence; *being is*, by definition, *obedience*—and (2) unconditioned—since nothing, i.e., no desire, precedes the law; there is no cause of the law and we must not therefore seek behind the law for its reasons. Law does not exist in order to repress desire.

Now, not only have these claims for the law been made before, they have also been previously contested.<sup>19</sup> For these are precisely the claims of moral

19. Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, in "The Law of Psychoanalysis" (*Diacritics* [Summer 1985], pp. 26–36), discusses Freud's argument with Kant in *Totem and Taboo*. This article relies, it appears, on Lacan's work in *L'éthique de la psychanalyse*, (Paris, Seuil, 1986) and the unpublished seminar on

conscience which Freud examines in *Totem and Taboo*. There Freud reduces these claims to what he takes to be their absurd consequences: "If we were to admit the claims thus asserted by our conscience [that desire conforms to or always falls within the law], it would follow, on the one hand, that prohibition would be superfluous and, on the other, the fact of conscience would remain unexplained."<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, prohibition would be superfluous. Foucault agrees: once the law is conceived as primarily positive, as producing the phenomena it scrutinizes, the concept of a negative, repressive law can be viewed as an excess—of psychoanalysis. On the other hand, the fact of conscience would remain unexplained. That is, there is no longer any reason for conscience to exist; it *should*, like prohibition, be superfluous. What becomes suddenly *inexplicable* is the very *experience* of conscience—which is not only the subjective experience of the compulsion to obey, but also the experience of guilt, of the remorse that follows transgression—once we have accepted the *claims* of conscience that the law cannot fail to impose itself and cannot be caused. Foucault agrees once again: the experience of conscience and the interiorization of the law through representations is made superfluous by his theory of law.

Again: the claims of conscience are used to refute the experience of conscience. This paradox located by Freud will, of course, not appear as such to those who do not ascribe the claims *to* conscience. And yet something of the paradox *is* manifest in Foucault's description of panoptic power and film theory's description of the relation between the apparatus and the gaze. In both cases the model of self-surveillance implicitly recalls the psychoanalytic model of moral conscience even as the resemblance is being disavowed. The image of self-surveillance, self-correction, is both required to construct the subject and made redundant by the fact that the subject thus constructed is, by definition, absolutely upright, completely correct. The inevitability and completeness of its success renders the orthopedic gesture of surveillance unnecessary. The subject is and can only be inculpable. The relation between apparatus and gaze creates only the mirage of psychoanalysis. There is, in fact, no psychoanalytic subject in sight.

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anxiety; see especially the session of December 12, 1962, where Lacan defines obsession as that which covers over the desire in the Other with the Other's demand. This remark relates obsessional neurosis to a certain (Kantian) concept of moral consciousness.

20. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James and Alix Strachey, London, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953–1974, vol. 13, pp. 69–70.

Orthopsychism<sup>21</sup>

How, then, to derive a properly psychoanalytic—that is, a split—subject from the premise that the subject is the effect rather than the cause of the social order? Before turning, finally, to Lacan’s solution, it will be necessary to pause to review one extraordinary chapter from Bachelard—chapter IV of *Le rationalisme appliqué*, titled “La surveillance intellectuelle de soi”—where we will find some arguments that have been overlooked in more recent theorizations of the apparatus.<sup>22</sup>

Although Bachelard pioneered the theory of the institutional construction of the field of science, he also (as we have already said) persistently argued that the protocols of science never fully saturated nor provided the content of this field. The obstacle of the imaginary is only *one* of the reasons given for this. Besides this purely negative resistance *to* the scientific, there is also a positive condition *of* the scientific itself that prevented such a reduction from taking place. Both these reasons together guarantee that the concepts of science are never mere realizations of possibilities historically allowed, and scientific thought is never simply habit, the regulated retracing of possible paths already laid out in advance.

To say that the scientific subject is constructed by the institution of science, Bachelard would reason, is to say that it is always thereby obliged to survey itself, its own thinking, not subjectively, not through a process of introspection to which the subject has privileged access, but *objectively*, from the position of the scientific institution. So far this *orthopsychic* relation may seem no different from the panoptic relation we have been so intent on dislodging. But there *is* a difference: the orthopsychic relation (unlike the panoptic one) assumes that it is just this objective survey that allows thought to become (not wholly visible, but) *secret*; it allows thought to remain *hidden*, even under the most intense scrutiny. Let us make clear that Bachelard is not attempting to argue that there is an original, private self that happens to find in objectivity a means (among others) of concealing itself. He is arguing, rather, that the very possibility of concealment is only raised by the subject’s objective relation to itself. For it is the very act of

21. In order to dissociate his concept of science from that of idealism, conventionalism, and formalism, Bachelard formulated the concept of “applied rationalism”: a scientific concept must integrate within itself the conditions of its realization. (It is on the basis of this injunction that Heisenberg could dismiss as illegitimate any talk of an electron’s location that could not also propose an experimental method of locating it.) And in order to dissociate his concept of science from that of the positivists, empiricists, and realists, Bachelard formulated the concept of “technical materialism”: the instruments and the protocols of scientific experiments must be theoretically formulated. The system of checks and balances according to which these two imperatives operate is what Bachelard normally means by *orthopsychism*. He extends the notion in *Le rationalisme appliqué*, however, to include the formation of the scientific subject.

22. Gaston Bachelard, *Le rationalisme appliqué*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1949, pp. 65–81.

surveillance—which makes clear the fact that the subject is external to itself, exists in a relation of “extimacy” (Lacan’s word) with itself—that causes the subject to appear to itself as culpable, as guilty of hiding something. The objective relation to the self, Bachelard informs us, necessarily raises the insidious question that Nietzsche formulated thus: “To everything which a man allows to become visible, one is able to demand: what does he wish to hide?” It does not matter that this “man” is oneself. The ineradicable suspicion of dissimulation raised by the objective relation guarantees that thought will never become totally coincident with the forms of the institution. Thought will be split, rather, between belief in what the institution makes manifest, and suspicion about what it is keeping secret. All objective representations, its very own thought, will be taken by the subject not as true representations of itself or the world, but as fictions: no “impression of reality” will adhere to them. The subject will appear, even to itself, to be no more than an *hypothesis of being*. Belief in the reality of representations will be suspended, projected beyond the representations themselves. And the “impression of reality” will henceforth consist in the “mass of objections to constituted reason,” Bachelard says here; and elsewhere: in the conviction that “what is real but hidden has more content than what is given and obvious.”<sup>23</sup>

The suspicion of dissimulation offers the subject a kind of reprieve from the dictates of law, the social superego. These dictates are perceived as hypotheses that must be tested rather than imperatives that must be automatically and unconditionally obeyed. The subject is not only judged by and subjected to social laws; it also judges them by subjecting them to intellectual scrutiny. Self-surveillance, then, conduces to self-correction; one thought or representation always advances another as the former’s judge.

The chapter ends up celebrating a kind of euphoria of free thought. As a result of its orthopsychic relation to itself, i.e., before an image which it *doubts*, the scientific subject is jubilant. Not because its image, its world, its thought reflects its own perfection, but because the subject is thus allowed to imagine that they are all *perfectable*. It is this sense of the perfectibility of things that liberates thought from the totally determining constraints of the social order. Thought is conceived to police, and not merely to be policed by the social/scientific order, and the paranoia of the “Cassandra complex” (Bachelard’s designation for the childish belief that everything is already known in advance, by one’s parents, say) is thereby dispelled.

Curiously, the charge of guilt that is lodged, we were told, by the structure of surveillance, has been dropped somewhere along the way. It is now claimed, on the contrary, that surveillance enables thought to be “morally sincere.” As it turns out, then, it is the very *experience* of moral conscience, the very feeling of guilt, that absolves thought of the *charge* of guilt. How has this absolution been

23. Gaston Bachelard, *The New Scientific Spirit*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1984, p. 32.

secured? By the separation of the act of thinking from the thoughts that it thinks. So that though the thoughts may be guilty, the act of thinking remains innocent. And the subject remains whole, its intentions clear. This is the only way we can understand the apparent contradictions of this chapter. Throughout his work Bachelard maintains that “duplicity is *maladroit* in its address”—i.e., that they err who assume they cannot be duped, that no one is spared from deception. As a result, no thought can ever be perfectly penetrable. Yet, in this chapter he simultaneously maintains that the subject can and must penetrate its own act of thinking.

This scenario of surveillance — of the “joy of surveillance” — is consciously delineated in relation to Freud’s notion of moral conscience. But Bachelard opposes his notion to the “pessimism” of that of Freud, who, of course, sees moral conscience as cruel and punishing. In Bachelard, surveillance, in seeming to offer the subject a pardon, is construed as primarily a positive or benign force. Bachelard, then, too, like Foucault and film theory, recalls and yet disavows the psychoanalytic model of moral conscience — however differently. Bachelard’s orthopsychism, which is informed in the end by a psychologistic argument, cannot really be accepted by film theory as an alternative to panopticonism. Although Bachelard argues that a certain invisibility shelters the subject from what we might call “the gaze” of the institutional apparatus, the subject is nevertheless characterized by an exact legibility on another level. The Bachelardian subject may not locate *in its image* a full and upright being that it jubilantly (but wrongly) takes itself to be, but this subject does locate, *in the process of scrutinizing* this image, the joyous prospect of righting itself. Film theory’s correct subject is here replaced by a self-correcting one.

Yet this detour through orthopsychism has not led only to a dead end. What we have forcibly been led to consider is the question of deception, of the suspicion of deception that must *necessarily* be raised if we are to understand the cinematic apparatus as a *signifying* apparatus, which places the subject in an external relationship to itself. Once the permanent possibility of deception is admitted (rather than disregarded, as it is by the theory of the panoptic apparatus), the concept of the gaze undergoes a radical change. For, where in the panoptic apparatus the gaze marks the subject’s *visibility*, in Lacan’s theory it marks the subject’s *culpability*. The gaze stands watch over the *inculpation* — the faulting and splitting — of the subject by the apparatus.

### *The Mirror as Screen*

Film theory introduced the subject into its study, and thereby incorporated Lacanian psychoanalysis, primarily by means of “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the ‘I.’” It is to this essay that theorists made reference as they formulated their arguments about the subject’s narcissistic relation to the film

and about that relationship's dependence on "the gaze." While it is true that the mirror phase essay does describe the child's narcissistic relation to its mirror image, it is *not* in this essay but in Seminar XI that Lacan himself formulates *his* concept of the gaze. Here, particularly in those sessions collected under the heading "Of the Gaze as *Object Petit a*," Lacan *reformulates* his earlier mirror phase essay and paints a picture very different from the one painted by film theory.

Lacan tells his tale of the relation of the subject to its world in the form of a humorously recondite story about a sardine can. The story is told as a kind of mock Hegelian epic, a send-up of the broadly expansive Hegelian epic form by a deliberately "little story" that takes place in a "small boat" in a "small port" and includes a single named character, Petit-Jean. The entire overt plot consists in the sighting of a "small can." A truly short story of the object small *a*; the proof and sole guarantee of that alterity of the Other which Hegel's sweeping tale, in overlooking, denies.

The story sets Hegelian themes adrift and awash in a sea of bathos. A young (Hegelian) intellectual, identifying himself with the slaving class, embarks on a journey that he expects will pit him in struggle against the raw forces of a pitiless nature. But, alas, the day turns out to be undramatically sunny and fine, and the anticipated event, the meeting and match with the Master, never comes about. It is narratively replaced by what we can accurately describe as a "nonevent," the spotting of the shiny, mirrorlike sardine can—and an attack of anxiety. In the end, however, bathos gives way to tragedy, as we realize that in this little slice-of-life drama there is no sublation of consumption, no transcendence, only the slow dying away, through consumption, of the individual members of the slaving class. The mocking is not merely gentle, but carries in its wake this abrupt statement of consequence; something quite serious is at stake here. If we are to rewrite the tragic ending of this political tale, something will have to be retheorized.

What is it? Plainly, ultimately, it is "I"—the I that takes shape in this revised version of the mirror stage. As if to underline the fact that it is the I, and the narcissistic relation through which it is constructed, that is the point of the discussion, Lacan tells a personal story. It is he, in fact, who is the first-person of the narrative; this portrait of the analyst as a young man is his own. The cameo role in Seminar XI prepares us, then, for the starring role Lacan plays as the narcissistic "televanalyst" in *Television*. "What is at stake in both cases," Lacan says in *Television* about his performance both there and in his seminars, in general, "is a gaze: a gaze to which, in neither case, do I address myself, but in the name of which I speak."<sup>24</sup> What is he saying here about the relation between the I and the gaze?

24. Lacan, *Television*, p. 7.

The gaze is that which “determines” the I in the visible; it is “the instrument through which . . . [the] I [is] *photo-graphed*.”<sup>25</sup> This might be taken to confirm the coincidence of the Foucauldian and Lacanian positions, to indicate that, in both, the gaze determines the complete *visibility* of the I, the mapping of the I on a perceptual grid. Hence the disciplinary monitoring of the subject. But this coincidence can only be produced by a precipitous, “snapshot” reading of Lacan, one that fails to notice the hyphen that splits the term *photo-graph* into *photo*—“light”—and *graph*—among other things, a fragment of the Lacanian phrase “graph of desire”—as it splits the subject that it describes.

*Photo.* One thing is certain: light does not enter these seminars in a straight line, through the laws of optics. Because, as he says, the geometric laws of the propagation of light map space only, and *not* vision, Lacan does not theorize the visual field in terms of these laws. Thus, the legitimate construction *cannot* figure for him—as it *does* for film theory—the relation of the spectator to the screen. And these seminars cannot be used, as they are used by film theory, to support the argument that the cinematic apparatus, in direct line with the camera obscura, by recreating the space and ideology of Renaissance perspective, produces a centered and transcendent subject.<sup>26</sup>

This argument is critiqued in the seminars on the gaze as Lacan makes clear why the speaking subject *cannot* ever be totally trapped in the imaginary. Lacan claims, rather, that “I am not simply that punctiform being located at the geometral point from which the perspective is grasped.”<sup>27</sup> Now, film theory, of course, has always claimed that the cinematic apparatus functions *ideologically* to produce a subject that *misrecognizes* itself as source and center of the represented world. But although this claim might seem to imply agreement with Lacan, to suggest, too, that the subject is *not* the punctiform being that Renaissance perspective would have us believe it is, film theory’s notion of misrecognition turns out to be different from Lacan’s in important ways. Despite the fact that the term *misrecognition* implies an error on the subject’s part, a failure properly to recognize its true relation to the visible world, the process by which the subject is installed in its position of misrecognition operates without the hint of failure.

25. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 106.

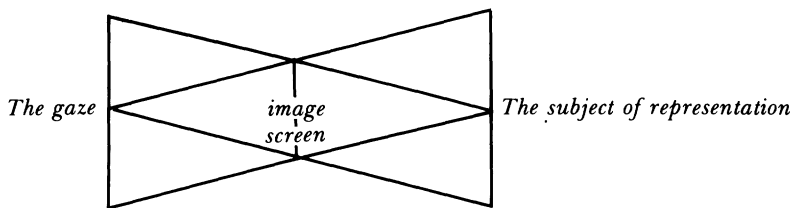
26. See, especially, Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus” (first published in *Cinéthique*, nos. 7–8 [1970] and, in English, in *Film Quarterly*, no. 28 [Winter 1974–75]), and Jean-Louis Comolli, “Technique and Ideology: Camera, Perspective, Depth of Field” (first published in *Cahiers du cinéma*, nos. 229, 230, 231, and 233 [1970–71] and, in English, by the British Film Institute). This historical continuity has been taken for granted by film theory generally. For a history of the *noncontinuity* between Renaissance techniques of observation and our own, see Jonathan Crary, “Techniques of the Observer,” *October*, no. 45 (Summer 1987). In this essay, Crary differentiates the camera obscura from the physiological models of vision that succeeded it. Lacan, in his seminars on the gaze, refers to both these models as they are represented by the science of optics and the philosophy of phenomenology. He exhibits them as two “ways of being wrong about this function of the subject in the domain of the spectacle.”

27. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 96.



The subject unerringly assumes the position perspective bids it to take. Erased from the process of construction, the negative force of error emerges later as a charge directed at the subject. But from where does it come? Film theory has only described the construction of this position of misrecognition. Though it implies that there is another *actual*, nonpunctiform position, film theory has never been able to describe the *construction* of this position.

In Lacan's description, misrecognition retains its negative force in the process of construction. As a result the process is no longer conceived as a purely positive one, but rather one with an internal dialectic. Lacan does not take the single triangle that geometrical perspective draws as an accurate description of its own operation. Instead he *redesigns* this operation by means of *two interpenetrating triangles*. Thus he represents both the way the science of optics figures the emission of light *and* the way its straight lines become refracted, diffused (the way they acquire the "ambiguity of a jewel") once we take into account the way the signifier itself interferes in this figuring. The second triangle cuts through the first, marking the elision or negation that is part of the process of construction. The second triangle diagrams the subject's mistaken belief that there is something behind the space set out by the first. It is this mistaken belief (this misrecognition) that causes the subject to *disbelieve* even those representations shaped according to the scientific laws of optics. The Lacanian subject, who doubts the accuracy of even its most "scientific" representations, is submitted to a *superegoic* law that is radically different from the optical laws to which the film theoretical subject is submitted.



*Graph.* Semiotics, not optics, is the science that clarifies for us the structure of the visual domain. Because it alone is capable of lending things sense, the signifier alone makes vision possible. There is and can be no brute vision, no vision totally devoid of sense. Painting, drawing, all forms of picture-making, then, are fundamentally graphic arts. And because signifiers are material, that is, because they are opaque rather than translucent, because they refer to other signifiers rather than directly to a signified, the field of vision is neither clear nor easily traversable. It is instead ambiguous and treacherous, full of traps. Lacan's Seminar XI refers constantly, but ambiguously, to these traps. When Lacan says that the subject is trapped in the imaginary, he means that the subject can

imagine nothing outside it; the imaginary cannot itself provide the means that would allow the subject to transcend it. When he says, on the other hand, that a painting, or any other representation, is a “trap for the gaze,” he means that the representation *attracts* the gaze, induces us to imagine a gaze outside—and observing—the field of representation. It is this second sense of trapping, whereby representation appears to generate its own beyond (to generate, we might say, recalling Lacan’s diagram, the *second* triangle, which the science of optics neglects to consider) that prevents the subject from ever being trapped in the imaginary. Where the film theoretical position has tended to trap the subject in representation (an idealist failing), to conceive of language as constructing the prison walls of the subject’s being, Lacan argues that the subject sees these walls as *trompe l’oeil* and is thus constructed by something beyond them.

For, beyond everything that is displayed to the subject, the question is asked: what is being concealed from me? What in this graphic space does not show, does not stop *not* writing itself? This point at which something appears to be *invisible*, this point at which something appears to be missing from representation, some meaning left unrevealed, is the point of the Lacanian gaze. It marks the *absence* of a signified; it is an *unoccupiable* point, the point at which the subject disappears. The image, the visual field, then takes on a terrifying alterity that prohibits the subject from seeing itself in the representation. That “belong to me aspect” is suddenly drained from representation, as the mirror assumes the function of a screen.

Lacan is certainly *not* offering an agnostic description of the way the real object is cut off from the subject’s view by language, of the way the real object escapes capture in the network of signifiers. His is not the idealist position of either Plato or Kant, who split the object between its real being and its semblance. Lacan argues, rather, that beyond the signifying network, beyond the visual field, there is, in fact, nothing at all.<sup>28</sup> The veil of representation actually conceals nothing. Yet the fact that representation *seems* to hide, to put a screen of aborescent signifiers in front of something hidden beneath, is not treated by Lacan as a simple error which the subject can undo; nor is this deceptiveness of language treated as something which undoes the subject, deconstructs its identity by menacing its boundaries. Rather, language’s opacity is taken as the very *cause* of the subject’s being, its desire. The fact that it is materially impossible to say the whole truth—that truth always backs away from language, that words always fall short of their goal—*founds* the subject. Contrary to the idealist position that makes *form* the cause of being, Lacan locates the cause of being in the *informe*: the unformed (that which has no signified, no significant shape in the visual field); the inquiry (the question posed to representation’s presumed reticence). The

28. The questions Moustapha Safouan poses to Lacan during Seminar XI (*The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 103) force him to be quite clear on this point: “Beyond appearance there is nothing in itself, there is the gaze.”

subject is the effect of the impossibility of seeing what is lacking in the representation, what the subject, therefore, wants to see. Desire, in other words, the desire of representation, institutes the subject in the visible field.

It should be clear by now how different this description is from that offered by film theory. In film theory the subject identifies with the gaze as the signified of the image and comes into existence as the realization of a possibility. In Lacan, the subject identifies with the gaze as the signifier of the lack that causes the image to languish. The subject comes into existence, then, through a desire which is still considered to be the *effect* of the law, but not its *realization*. Desire cannot be a realization because it fulfills no possibility and has no content; it is, rather, occasioned by impossibility, the impossibility of the subject's ever coinciding with the real being from which representation cuts it off.

Narcissism, too, takes on a different meaning in Lacan, one more in accord with Freud's own. Since something always appears to be missing from any representation, narcissism *cannot* consist in finding satisfaction in one's own visual image. It must, rather, consist in the belief that one's own being exceeds the imperfections of its image. Narcissism, then, seeks the self beyond the self-image, with which the subject constantly finds fault and in which it constantly fails to recognize itself. What one loves in one's image is something *more* than the image ("in you more than you").<sup>29</sup> Thus is narcissism the source of the malevolence with which the subject regards its image, the aggressivity it unleashes on all its own representations.<sup>30</sup> And thus does the subject come into being as a transgression of, rather than in conformity to, the law. It is not the law, but the fault in the law — the desire that the law cannot ultimately conceal — that is assumed by the subject as its own. The subject, in taking up the burden of the law's guilt, goes beyond the law.

Much of this definition of narcissism I take to be compacted in Lacan's otherwise totally enigmatic sentences: "The effect of mimicry is camouflage in the strictly technical sense. It is not a question of harmonizing with the back-

29. This is the title given to the last session of the seminar published as *The Four Fundamental Concepts*. Although the "you" of the title refers to the analyst, it can refer just as easily to the ideal image in the mirror.

30. Jacqueline Rose's "Paranoia and the Film System" (*Screen*, vol. 17, no. 4 [Winter 1976–77]) is a forceful critique (directed specifically at Raymond Bellour's analyses of Hitchcock, but also at a range of film theoretical assumptions) of that notion of the cinema that sees it as a successful resolution of conflict and a refusal of difference. Rose reminds us that cinema, as "technique of the imaginary" (Metz), necessarily unleashes a conflict, an aggressivity, that is irresolvable. While I am, for the most part, in agreement with her important argument, I am claiming here that Rose is wrong to make this aggressivity dependent on the shot/counter-shot structure of the film (the reversibility of the look), or to define aggressivity as the result of the imaginary relation. The gaze is threatening not because it presents the reverse (the mirror) image of the subject, but because it does not. The gaze deprives the subject of the possibility of ever becoming a fully observable being. Lacan himself says that aggressivity is not a matter of transitive retaliation: "The phenomenon of aggressivity isn't to be explained on the level of imaginary identification" (in *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, New York and London, Norton, 1978, p. 22).

ground, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled—exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare.”<sup>31</sup> The effect of representation (“mimicry,” in an older, idealist vocabulary) is not a subject who will harmonize with, or adapt to, its environment (the subject’s narcissistic relation to the representation that constructs it does not place it in happy accord with the reality that the apparatus constructs for it). The effect of representation is, instead, the suspicion that some reality is being camouflaged, that we are being deceived as to the exact nature of some thing-in-itself that lies behind representation. In response to such a representation, against such a background of deception, the subject’s own being breaks up between its unconscious being and its conscious semblance. At war both with its world and with itself, the subject becomes guilty of the very deceit it suspects. This can hardly, however, be called mimicry, in the old sense, since nothing is being mimed.

In sum, the conflictual nature of Lacan’s culpable subject sets it worlds apart from the stable subject of film theory. But neither does the Lacanian subject resemble that of Bachelard. For while, in Bachelard, orthopsychism—in providing an opportunity for the correction of thought’s imperfections—allows the subject to wander from its moorings, constantly to drift from one position to another, in Lacan “orthopsychism”—one wishes to retain the term in order to indicate the subject’s fundamental dependence on the faults it finds in representation and in itself—grounds the subject. The desire that it precipitates *transfixes* the subject, albeit in a conflictual place, so that all the subject’s visions and revisions, all its fantasies, merely circumnavigate the absence that anchors the subject and impedes its progress.<sup>32</sup> It is this desire that must be reconstructed if the subject is to be changed.

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31. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 99.

32. In “Another Lacan” (*Lacan Study Notes*, vol. 1, no. 3), Jacques-Alain Miller is concerned to underline the clinical dimension of Lacan’s work, particularly his concept of “the pass.” The difference between the “deconstructionist” and the Lacanian notion of fantasy is, thus, also made clear.