

Seminar XIII: The Object of Psychoanalysis (1965–1966)

Restoration of Session 18, May 18, 1966



GREEN / AUDOUARD / LACAN

I would like to salute the presence among us of Michel Foucault who does me the great honour of coming to this seminar. As for myself I rejoice, for it is less a matter for me of giving myself over, before him, to my usual exercises than to try to show him what constitutes the principal goal of our meetings, namely, a goal of formation which implies several things, among ourselves, first of all that things should not be these things of two sides, yours and mine, and immediately located at the same level, otherwise what use would it be? It would be a fiction of teaching.

It is indeed for this reason that, for the last three of our meetings, I was led to return to the same plane, on several occasions, through a sort of effort of reciprocal accommodation. I think that already, between the second last time and the last time, a step was taken and I hope that another one will be taken today. In a word, I will return today again to this quite admirable support that is given to us by *Las Meninas*, not that they were brought into the forefront as the principle object, of course, — we are not here at the Ecole du Louvre — but because it seemed to us that there was illustrated there in a particularly remarkable fashion, certain facts that I had tried to highlight and to which I will return again for anyone who has not sufficiently followed me. We are dealing here obviously with things that are not all that usual.

The usual use of teaching, whether it is university or secondary, by which you have been formed, being of course to have put between you and what constitutes, for example, the really essential form of modern geometry, remains not simply unknown by you but particularly opaque, and, of course, I was able to see the effect of this when I tried to bring you some of it by these figures, very simple and exemplary figures when I tried to bring you something that showed its dimension to you.

At this point *Las Meninas* presented themselves, as often happens. One really has to marvel, one is wrong to marvel, things come to you like a ring on the finger, we are not alone in working in the same field. What Monsieur Foucault had written in his first chapter was immediately noted by some of my listeners, I must say before me, as constituting a particularly relevant point of intersection between two fields of research. And it is indeed in this way that it must be seen, and I would say all the more so when one applies oneself to re-reading this astonishing first chapter, which I hope that those who are here noticed was taken up a little further on in the book, at the key point, at the turning point, at the one where there is made the junction between this mode, this constitutive mode, as one might say, of relationships between words and things as it is established in a field which begins with the maturation of the sixteenth century to culminate at this particularly exemplary and particularly well articulated point in his book which is that of the thinking of the eighteenth.

At the moment of arriving at what constitutes its goal, in his perspective, at the point that he has led us to, the birth of another articulation, the one which is born in the nineteenth century, the one which already allows him to introduce us both to the function and the profoundly ambiguous and problematic character of what are called the human sciences, here Monsieur Michel Foucault stops and takes up his picture, *Las Meninas*, again around the personage in connection with whom we ourselves left our discourse suspended the last time, namely, the function of the king in the picture. You will see that this is what is going to allow us today, if we have the time, if things are set up as I hope, to establish for me the junction between what has been brought forward by contributing this precision that projective geometry may allow us to put into what one can call the subjectivity of vision, to make the junction between this and what I already contributed a long time ago under the theme of the narcissism of the mirror.

The mirror is present in this picture in an enigmatic form, so enigmatic that the last time I was able to end humorously by saying that, after all, for want of knowing what to make of it, we might see there what appears to be, in a surprising fashion, in effect, something which singularly resembles our television screen. But this is obviously a witticism. But you are going to see today, if we have the time, I repeat, that this relationship between the picture and the mirror, what one and the other not alone illustrate for us or represent for us, but truly represent as a structure of representation, this is what I hope to be able to introduce today.

But I do not want to do it without having had here some testimony of the questions which may have been posed after my earlier discourses. I asked Green who, moreover, since we are in a closed seminar, offered himself spontaneously, in a way, to bring me this reply by bringing it to me from outside this circle. I am therefore going to give him the floor. I believe that Audouard, I do not know if he is here, is also willing to bring us some elements of interrogation, and immediately afterwards I will try in replying to them, perhaps, I hope, lead Monsieur Foucault to make a few remarks. In any case, I will certainly not fail to call on him.

Good. I give you the floor, Green.

My voice is a little tired today. I am not sure that in this room, whose acoustics are as bad as its cleanliness, today at least, I am not sure whether I can be clearly heard at the back. Yes? Anyway it would not be a bad thing if you were to move in a body and come a little closer. I would feel surer.

Dr Green: In fact, what Lacan asked me, was essentially to give him the opportunity to start again on the development that he had begun the last time. And it was starting from certain remarks that I myself made at the time of his commentary, that I had taken the liberty of writing to him.

These remarks related essentially to the conditions of projection which were very directly linked to Lacan's commentary and to his own place, preoccupied as he was by the commentary, and to what he could not perceive from the point at which he was. The conditions of this projection having been, as you know, very poor, and the lack of sufficient darkness considerably misrepresented the picture and, in particular, certain details of this picture became totally invisible. It was in particular the case for what concerned ...

Lacan: Green, this is not a criticism, we are going to project it again today. Today it will work. I do not think that it was the lack of the darkness, even though darkness is very precious to us, this is not what was in question.

This is not what was at stake. I think that it was the fact that the bulb was, I do not know why, badly regulated or prepared for some other use.

In short, my slide [*cliché*] the last time, I cursed the École du Louvre. I was wrong and I went to apologise. My slide was not only very adequate but, as you are going to see, excellent. It was therefore a matter of the bulb. Naturally, you have to lower these curtains if we want to have the projection. So do it quickly. You are very kind. There you are. Thank you.

So then, on you go, Gloria. Put on *Las Meninas*.

Green: In fact what was effaced on that occasion was the person of Velázquez himself, the painter, and the couple.... Today, one can see it better, but the last time, precisely, what was effaced was the personage of the painter and this couple, this couple which appeared to be totally effaced.

I questioned myself about this effacing and I asked myself whether, instead of considering it as a simple inadequacy, we might not consider that this effacement itself signified something, like one of these productions of the unconscious, like a bungled action, like forgetting, and whether there was not here a key, a key which strangely unites the painter and this couple who found themselves in the penumbra, who seemed, moreover, to be uninterested in the scene and to be whispering together.

And it was starting from this reflection that I asked myself whether there was not here something to be explored in connection with this effacing, and the effacing of the trace in the picture, where the planes of light are distinguished in a very precise fashion, by Lacan as well as by Foucault with, notably, the plane of light at the back, of the other Velázquez, the Velázquez at the back, and the plane of light which comes to him from the window.

It is therefore in this between-the-two, in this between the two lights that, perhaps, there would be something to be explored as regards the meaning of this picture. [Now we can perhaps put on the lights again if you do not mind.]

These, then, are two remarks that I had made to Lacan in writing without thinking at all that they had any other goal than that of re-launching his reflections. And then, I took up Foucault's text, this very remarkable chapter, and noted there a certain number of points of convergence with what I have just told you, and particularly what he himself says about the painter, he says:

“His dark torso and bright face are half-way between the visible and the invisible”.

On the other hand, Foucault seems to me to have been very silent about the couple that I have been speaking about. He alludes, moreover, he speaks about the courtesan who is there and he does not speak at all about the feminine character who, from appearances, seems to be a religious, from what one can see.

Here I must say that the reproduction in Foucault's book does not allow her to be seen at all, while the reproduction that Lacan has pin-pointed here, allows one to think that there are strong reasons that she is a religious.

And I re-discovered, obviously in Foucault's text, a certain number of systematic oppositions which illuminate the structure of the picture. Some of these oppositions have already been highlighted and particularly, for example, there is the opposition of the mirror, the mirror as support for an opposition between the model and the spectator, the mirror as an opposition to the picture and to the canvas, and, in particular, as regard this canvas, a formulation by Foucault which reminds us, I believe, a good deal, about the barrier of repression. "It prevents there ever been located or definitively established the relationship between the looks."

This kind of impossibility conferred on the situation of the canvas, being back-to-front, namely, what is inscribed on it, makes us think, for our part, that there is here an altogether essential relationship.

But above all, as regards Lacan's reflections on perspective, what appeared to me to be interesting, is not to rediscover other oppositions, there are such and I forget some of them, of course, but above all to try to comprehend the succession of different planes from the back towards the surface, precisely in Lacan's perspective on perspective.

Well then, it is certainly not indifferent, I believe, that one can rediscover there at least four planes. Four planes which are, successively, the plane of the other Velázquez, the one at the back, the plane of the couple, the plane of the painter, and the plane constituted by the Infanta and her handmaidens, the idiot, the fool and the dog who are in front of Velázquez. They are in front of Velázquez and I think that one can divide this group itself into two sub-groups: the group constituted by the Infanta where Foucault sees one of the two centres of the picture, the other being the mirror — and I believe that this is obviously very important — and the other sub-group constituted by the animal and the monsters¹, namely, the idiot and the fool Nicolasito Percusato (*sic.*: Pertusato) with the dog.

I believe that this division on the style of from the back to the front, with these two groups may make us think, and there, perhaps, I am advancing a little — but it is uniquely to provide matter for your commentaries and your criticisms — as something which makes of this picture, of course, a picture about representation, the representation of classical representation, as you were saying, but also, perhaps, of representation as creation and, finally, as this antinomy of creation with, on the left-hand side, with this individual, absolutely, who in the relationship of the Infanta to her two parents who are behind, represents creation in the most successful, the happiest, human form and, on the contrary, deported to the other side on the side of the window, as opposed to that of the canvas, these failures of creation, these marks of castration that are represented by the idiot and the fool. So that that then, this couple in the penumbra, would have a singular value with respect to the other couple reflected in the mirror, which is that of the king and the queen.

¹ The figures at the right corner of *Las Meninas* are both dwarfs, the woman an achondroplastic (disproportionate) dwarf, the man a Seckel-syndrome or Russell-Silver syndrome dwarf. Only the former is prone to suffer mental disability, but in general dwarfism is associated with the role of the fool in European and other royal courts, which is an art rather than a mental limitation. Green, a trained physician, should have been familiar with both kinds of dwarfism.

This duality probably being too directed, at that moment onto the problem of creation, in so far as, precisely, it is what Velázquez is in the process of painting, and where we find this duality, probably, between what he is painting and the picture that we are looking at.

I believe that it is in opposition to these planes and these perspectives and, probably, the fact that it is not by chance, something I did not know, that the personage at the back, and Foucault writes in connection with this personage at the back, whom I did not know was called Velázquez, and of whom one can say that he is the other Velázquez, he says of him, in a phrase that really struck me: “Perhaps he is going to enter the room? Perhaps he is confining himself to spying on what is happening inside, content to surprise without being observed.”

Well then, I believe, precisely, that this person because of his situation, is precisely in a position to observe, and he observes what? Obviously everything that is taking place in front of him while Velázquez, for his part, is absolutely not in a position to observe this couple in the penumbra and can only look at what is in front of him, namely, the two sub-groups that I have just spoken about.

I do not want to be much longer in order to give the floor to Lacan but I believe that we cannot but see the degree to which in all of this and in the relationship of the window to the picture that Lacan speaks about, well then, I believe that the fascination-effect produced by this picture, and I think that this is what is most important for us, that this picture produces a fascination-effect, is directly related to the phantasy in which we are caught up and, perhaps, that precisely there is here some relationship with these few remarks that I was making about creation, in other words the primal scene.

Dr Lacan: Good. We can thank Green for his intervention and also, God knows, this does not seem very nice, his brevity. But we lost a lot of time at the beginning of this session, I would ask Audouard if he wishes, to make an intervention which I have no doubt will have the same qualities.

Monsieur Audouard²: Precisely, it seemed to me that in a seminar like this one, speakers ought not to be limited to those who have understood, the most brilliant pupils, but that those who have not understood, and that those who have not understood, should be able to say so.

So I would like to say to Monsieur Lacan and to yourselves, apologising in advance for the rather graceless nature of this intervention, that what I would like to express is above all what I have not understood in the presentation that Monsieur Lacan gave us, about the topology that Monsieur Lacan has made for us, in part in the encounter of the ground plane and the figure plane.

First of all, there are many ways of not understanding. There is one way which is to go out of the seminar saying: “I understood nothing at all. Did you understand anything?” “Me neither” says the other. And one remains with that. And then, there is another way which for once I have adopted which is to put myself in front of a sheet of paper and try to make my own little graph, my own little schema.

² *Cahiers pour l'Analyse and Contemporary French Thought: Xavier Audouard (1924–2004):* A practicing psychoanalyst for more than fifty years, Audouard was an early associate of Jacques Lacan's who was noted for his special interest in the relation between psychoanalysis and Hegelian dialectics. A Jesuit from 1943, Audouard left the religious order and entered into analysis with Lacan from 1958 to 1962 and from 1965 to 1969. <http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/names/audouard.html>

Not without some trouble. It was especially this morning because this morning Monsieur Lacan telephoned me to tell me that I might perhaps have something to say. So then I rushed to construct something so that it is really like that, impromptu.

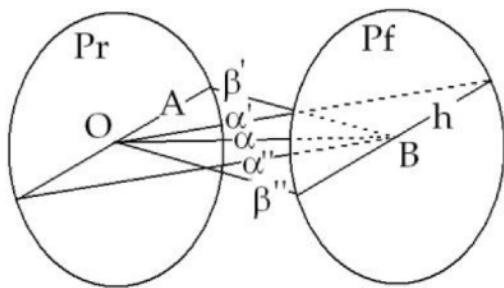
Only I am a little uncomfortable because I would like to have put my little graph somewhere and I see that this would mean destroying the organisation of the session and

Lacan: The paper is there for that. Use that.

Audouard: Thank you very much. So then, what I am going to do, I am simply going to tell you the way in which I saw myself obliged to express things to myself, and I would ask Monsieur Lacan to tell me where I went wrong

Lacan: On you go, my friend, on you go.

Audouard: This will allow us to see better. Good. I am going to image with a **circular plane** this **plane of the look** (Pr) in which my eye is caught, the plane of the look in which my eye is caught, therefore, that my eye cannot see.

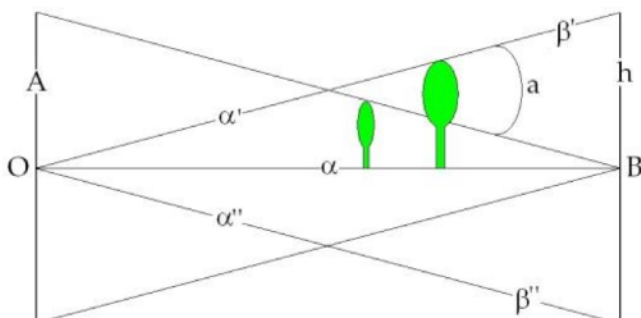


Here, there is going to be an **infinite line** (α) which is going to lead to the **horizon** (h). Here (A), there is going to be the projective repetition of **this line** (h) which will not only be the projective repetition of this line as if it were a matter of metrical geometry, but which is going to be the possibility, for a metrical geometry, that each one of its points, of course, parallel to **this line** (α) is going to be projected onto it and constitute a parallel line, but in reality, for my eye situated **here** (O) in the field of the look, **each one of these lines** (α' , α'') is therefore no longer parallel, and will come

to constitute a **point** (B), like this, in the perspective offered to my eye.

Good. It is also certain that the **infinite line** (α) which is traced from the field of the look to the **horizon**, will itself be, in one way or another, and it is here that, perhaps, my position is a little bit uncertain, in one way or another projected onto this line (h) and therefore, when all is said and done, onto this **point** (B). Every point of **this line** (α) and every point of **this line** (A) will in the final analysis be projected onto this **point** (B).

Here I have the **figure plane** (Pf), namely, what offers itself to me, which offers itself to my look when I look: my field, my field in which the plane that I, for my part, cannot see, namely the



ground plane, the plane of the look in which my eye is caught up, in one way or another, is going to be projected. To such a degree and so well that, as Monsieur Lacan has often pointed out to us, *I am seen just as much as I see* (*je suis vu autant que je vois*).

Namely, that the **lines** (α' , α'') which come

here to rejoin the plane of the look or this fundamental line that Monsieur Lacan spoke to us about, at this figure plane, will moreover be invertible, as I might say, like **this** (β' , β''), by an exactly inverted projection. So that, if I consider that the look-plane is projected onto the figure plane, the look-plane sends me back something which came from the figure plane, there will be at each intermediary point between the plane of the look and the infinite line, the vanishing point, the point at the horizon, there would be at every point of this space, a difference between perspective, if I consider it as vectorialised as it were like this or vectorialised like that, namely, that for example a tree that would have this dimension in this vector, will have that dimension in that vector.

Therefore, there would be here a **separation** (*écart*, **a**), something not seen which is there only to express that at each point of this plane there is also a separation of each point with respect to itself, namely, that this space is not homogeneous and that each point is displaced with regard to itself in a separation that is not seen, not visible, which nevertheless comes strangely to constitute each one of these points that my eye perceives in the perspective plane. Each one of these things, seen in the perspective-plane being sent back by the figure plane, in so far as in this figure plane, the plane of the look is projected; each one of these separations can be called (a) and this (a) is constitutive of the separation that each point of the look-plane takes on with regard to itself.

An absolute non-homogeneity of this plane is thus uncovered, and each object is uncovered as being able to have a certain distance with respect to itself, a certain difference with respect to itself. And I am struck that in what Green told us, if one considers in effect this sort of intersection of the illuminations of the plane, the figures that he speaks to us about are situated, as it were, at an intersection, to rejoin, in a way, to rejoin what is crossed over here like that. And that, in effect, there is perhaps, one can also say, in the illumination of the faces as compared to the bodies, something which goes further and which could, by way of simple illustration, I am not claiming to do any more, which could indicate to us this little difference, precisely, that the object takes with respect to itself when one opposes (*mets en regard*), it is the moment to say it, the plane of the look and the plane of the figure. This is the way in which I expressed things to myself, and I will leave it to Monsieur Lacan to tell me whether I am completely mistaken or whether I misunderstood a part of what he told us the other day.

Dr Lacan: Thank you very much, Audouard.

There we are. It is really an interesting construction because it is exemplary. I find it difficult to believe that there was not mixed up in it for you the desire to reconcile a first schema that I had given when I was speaking about the scopoc drive, two years ago, with what I brought you the last and the second last time.

This schema, as you have produced it, and which corresponds to neither one nor the other of these two statements of mine, has all sorts of characteristics, the principal one of which is to want to image, at least this is what I think, if I am not mistaken myself about what you meant, in short, a certain reciprocity between the representation that you have called the figure, and what is produced in the plane of the look from which you began.

I think, indeed, in effect, that it is a kind of strictly reciprocal representation that is involved in which there is marked, as one might say, the permanent vertigo of inter-subjectivity. And with

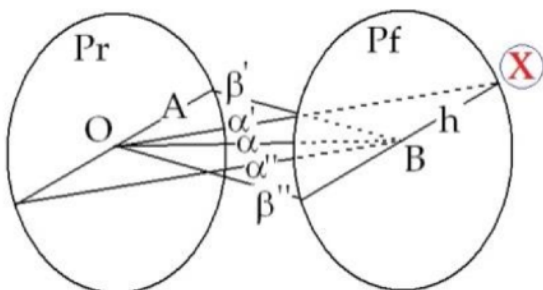
this you introduce, in a way that would deserve to be criticised in detail, something or other that I do not want, with which I do not want to burden myself with. From which something would result through which the object, it is indeed an object that is in question since you have supposed a little tree, which would draw in a way, I am going a little quickly but, which would draw all its relief, from the non-coincidence of two perspectives that they grasp, which, in effect, ought to be more or less sustainable in the way in which you have posed things.

And, moreover, I believe that at the end it is not for nothing that you present us, in the plane of the look, with two points separated from one another and which come here, curiously, without my knowing if it is your intention, but in a striking fashion, evoke binocular vision. In short, you appear, with this schema, to be completely prisoner of something undoubtedly confused, and which takes on its prestige from overlapping rather well what properly optical physiology tries to explore.

Now, — naturally I am going very quickly, it would be worth discussing this in detail with you, but then I think that the seminar today cannot be considered as remaining in the axis of what we have to say — in short, it is easy to locate here the defects of your construction with respect to what I have contributed, the fact that you have started from something which, let us say, you call the plane of the seeing subject or the **plane of the look** (*regard*), that you should have started from there is an error that is altogether tangible and extremely determining for the embarrassment that the rest of your attempt to cover what I said left you in. This will only give me an opportunity to express it once more.

To start from there by saying that this, whose horizontal line you drew without specifying immediately what it was, and, moreover, this is something that we remain embarrassed by, because what this line is determined by, what it is determined by is this plane that I called the first time the support plane, and that I subsequently called more simply and to give an image, the ground, the ground plane. You do not specify it but, on the contrary, suppose that anything whatsoever on this plane, on this plane of the look, can go and project itself onto this something that you introduced first and which is the horizon line. This is really to miss, really the essential of what was contributed by the construction that I showed you the last day in a second phase, after having first of all expressed it in a fashion, after all, which could be simply translated by letters or by numbers on the board.

Nothing on the **plane of the look**, Pr, if we have defined it as I defined it, namely, as parallel to the figure plane or again to the picture, is that not so, nothing, very precisely, can be projected there onto the picture in a way that is representable by you, since this is going, in effect, to be projected there, since everything is projected there, but this is going to be projected there in accordance, not with the **horizon line** (h) but the line at infinity of the picture.



This **point here** (X), therefore — I am going to do it in red to distinguish it from your marks — this point there, then, is the point at the infinity of the picture plane. Are you with me? This is easy to conceive of because, if we re-establish things as they ought to be, namely, I am drawing the sphere — would you please

get me some other sheets of paper, Gloria, because it will really be too confusing.

In the meantime, I am, all the same, going to try to say why all of this is of interest to us because, after all, for someone like Foucault who has not been present at our previous conversations, this may appear to be a little bit outside the limits of the blue-print, it must be said.

But after all, this may be an opportunity for me, this may be the opportunity, to specify what is in question. We are psychoanalysts. What do we deal with? A drive which is called the scopic drive (*pulsion scopique*). This drive, if the drive is something constructed as Freud has inscribed it for us, and if we try, following what Freud inscribed about the drive, that it is not an instinct, but a *montage*, a *montage* between realities of an essentially heterogeneous level, like those which are called the pressure, the *Drang*, something that we can inscribe as being the orifice of the body where this *Drang*, as I might say, finds its support and from which it draws, in a way that is only conceivable in a strictly topological fashion, its constancy: this constancy of the *Drang* can only be developed by supposing that it emanates from a surface and the fact that it is supported on a constant edge, finally assures, as one might say, the vectorial constancy of the *Drang*.

From something subsequently which is a return movement, every drive includes in a way in itself, something which is, not its reciprocal, but its return to its base. It is starting from something that we can conceive, at the limit, and in a way, I would say, that is not metaphorical, but fundamentally inscribed in existence, namely a circuit (*tour*), it describes a circuit, it goes around something, and it is this something that I call the *objet-a*.

This is perfectly illustrated, in a constant fashion, in analytic practice, by the fact that the object-a, in the measure that it is for us the most accessible, that it is literally circumscribed by analytic experience, is on the one hand what we call the breast, and we call it that in sufficiently numerous contexts for its ambiguity, its problematic character, to leap to the eye of everyone.

That the breast is an *objet a*, all sorts of things are designed to show that it is not a matter here of this something carnal which is what is at stake when we speak about the breast, it is not simply this something that the nursing squashes his nose against, it is something which in order to be defined, if it must fulfill the functions and, moreover, represent the possibilities of equivalence that it manifests in analytic practice, it is something which must be defined in a completely different way.

I am not going to put the emphasis here on the function, which also presents the same problems, that is constituted by, however you may call it, by this *scybalum*, waste, excrement, here we have something which is, in a way, quite clear and well circumscribed.

Now, once we pass into the register of the scopic drive (*pulsion optique*), which is precisely the one that in this article, this article on which I am basing myself — not simply because it is Freud's sacred article — because it is a supreme article in which, for him, there is expressed precisely some necessity which is along the path of this topological specification that I am striving to give.

If in this article, he particularly highlights this outward and return function in the scopic drive, this implies that we ought to try to circumscribe this *objet a* which is called the look. So then, it is the structure of the scopic subject that is involved and not of the field of vision. Immediately, we

see there that there is a field in which the subject is implicated in an outstanding fashion. Because for us — when I say us, I am saying you and I, Michel Foucault — who interest ourselves in the relationship between words and things because, when all is said and done, there is nothing in analysis but that, we also immediately clearly see that this scopical subject is involved in an outstanding way in the function of the sign.

It is a matter, therefore, of something which already introduces a completely different dimension to the dimension that we could qualify as physics, in the elementary sense of the word, which represents the visual field in itself.

At this point, if we do something which, I do not know whether you would accept the title, it is for you to tell me, if we try to construct, on some precise point or from some angle something called the history of subjectivity, it is a title that you would accept, not as a sub-title, because I believe there already is one, but as a sub-sub-title, and that we might define as a field, as you have done in the *Birth of the Clinic*, or for the history of madness, or a historical field as in your, it is quite clear that the function of the sign appears there as this essential thing, this essential function that you give yourself in such an analysis.

I have not the time, thanks to these delays that we have had, perhaps to raise point by point all the terms in your first chapter, not at all that I would have anything to object to but, quite the contrary, which seemed to me literally to converge towards the sort of analysis that I am doing.

You end up with the conclusion that this picture is, in a way, the representation of the world of representations, as you consider that it is what the infinite system, I would say, of reciprocal application which constitutes the characteristic of a certain moment of thought. You are not completely against what I am saying here? You agree. Thank you. Because that proves that I have understood properly.

It is certain that nothing is more instructive for us about the satisfaction that its *éclat* gives us, than such a controversy. I do not in any way believe that I am bringing forward an objection in saying that, in the final analysis, it is only with a didactic end in view, namely, to pose for ourselves the problems that are imposed by a certain limitation in the reference system which is, in effect, important that such a grasp of what, let us say, thinking was during the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, is proposed to us.

How can we proceed differently if we even wish to begin to suspect from what angle problems are proposed to us. Nothing is more illuminating than to see, to be able to grasp in what, I can say the word, a different perspective there can be proposed in a different context, even if only to avoid errors in reading, I would even say more, simply to allow the reading when we are not naturally disposed to it, of authors like those whose way of working you put forward in such a dazzling fashion, like Cuvier for example. I am not speaking, of course, of everything that you also contributed in the register of the economy of the epoch and also of its linguistics.

I put this question to you: do you believe or do you not believe that, when all is said and done, whatever may be the outline, the testimony, that we may have about the lines on which the thinking of an epoch took its assurance, there was always posed to the speaking being, when I say posed, I mean that he was in and that, because of this fact, we cannot avoid speaking about

thinking, that exactly the same structural problems were posed in the same way for them as for us.

I mean that this is not simply a kind of metaphysical presupposition and even, to say it more precisely, a Heideggerian one, namely, that the question of the essence of the truth was always posed in the same way. And that people refused it in a certain number of different ways. This is the whole difference, but all the same, we can put our finger on its presence. I mean not simply like Heidegger by going back to extra-ancient Greek antiquity, but in a direct fashion.

In the sequence of chapters that you give: speaking, exchanging, representing. I must say, moreover, that in this respect to see them summarised in the table of contents is something gripping. It seems to me that the fact that you did not make figure there the word counting is a rather remarkable thing.

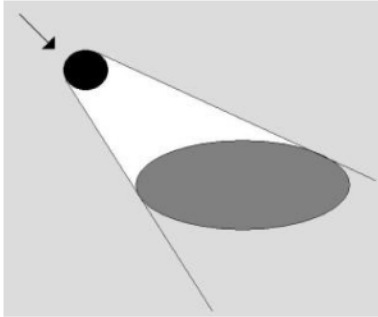
And when I say counting of course I am not speaking just about arithmetic nor about “*bowling*”. I mean that you have seen that, at the very heart of the thinking of the seventeenth century, something which certainly has remained unrecognised, and which has even been booed, you know as well as I who I am going to speak about, namely, the one who received the cooked apples, who had pulled back from things, and who, nevertheless, remains indicated, for the best people, as having shone with the most brilliant *éclat*, in other words Georges (*sic.*: “Girard”) Desargues (1591–1661), is to mark something which escapes, it seems to me, from what I would call the trait of inconsistency of the reciprocal mode of representations in the different fields that you describe to us in order to give an account of the seventeenth and of the eighteenth centuries.

In other words, Velázquez’ picture is not the representation of, I would say, all the modes of representation, it is, in accordance with a term which of course is only going to be there as a dessert, which is the term on which I insist when I borrow it from Freud, namely, the representative of representation.

What does that mean? We have just made, I mean had, a striking testimony — I apologise, Audouard — of the difficulty in getting across the specificity of what I tried to introduce, for example, at one time not too long ago, namely, for two of our meetings.

When what is at stake is the scopic field, the scopic field, it has served for a long time in this relationship to the essence of truth. Heidegger is there to recall it for us, in this work that I can hardly conceive why it was not the first to be translated, as *Wesen* not as *Wesen der Wahrheit*, but of Plato’s *Lehre* [?] on the truth, a work which is not only not translated but, what is more, is unfindable, is there to remind us the degree to which in the first information, it is absolutely clear, manifest, as regards this subject of the truth, that Plato made use of what I would call this scopic world.

He made a use of it, as usual, that was much more astute and wily than one might imagine for, when all is said and done, all the material is there, as I recently recalled, the hole, the darkness, the cave, this thing which is so capital, namely, the entrance, what I am going to call later the window and then, behind, the world that I would call the solar world.



It is indeed the entire presence of all the paraphernalia which allows Heidegger to make such a dazzling use of it which, at least you, Michel Foucault, here, you know, because I think that you have read it, and since this work is unfindable there must be few people here who have read it up to now, but I already spoke about it a little all the same, namely, to make Plato say much more than he ordinarily says, and to show, in any case, the fundamental value of a certain number of movements of the subject which are very exactly something which, as he underlines, links the truth to a certain formation, a certain *paideia*, namely, to these movements

that we know well, in any case those who follow my teaching know well, the value of the signifier, a movement of turning and of returning, the movement of the one who turns round and who must maintain himself in this turning around (*renversement*).

It nevertheless remains that subsequent times show us the confusion that such a debate can lend itself to, if we are not able to isolate severely in this field of the scopic world, the difference between structures.

And, of course, it is to go about it in a summary way, for example, to make in it one of these oppositions, an opposition from which I am going to begin.

The apologue, the fable of Plato, as it is usually received, only implies something which is a point of radiation of light, an object that he calls the true object, something that is in the shadow. That the prisoners in the cave see only shadows, this is usually all that is taken from this teaching. I earlier marked the degree to which Heidegger managed to get more out of it by showing what, in effect, is involved.

Nevertheless, this way of starting from this centrality of light towards something which is going to become not simply this structure that it is, namely, the object and its shadow, but a sort of degradation of reality which is going to introduce in a way at the very heart of everything that appears, of everything that is *scheinen*, to take up again what is in Heidegger's text, a sort of mythology which is precisely the one on which there reposes the very idea of the idea which is the idea of good, the one where there is, where there is found the very intensity of reality, of consistency, and from which, in a way, there emanate all the envelopes which will be no more, when all is said and done, than expanding envelopes of illusions, of representations always of representation, it is here moreover precisely, if you will allow me to remind you, I do not know after all if you remember clearly that on January 19th, I illustrated here by making Madame Parisot, here present, give a commentary on two texts by Dante: the only two in which he spoke about **the mirror of Narcissus**. Now, what our experience, the analytic experience, brings us is centered on the phenomenon of the screen. Far from the inaugural foundation of the dimension of analysis being something where at some point the primitiveness of light, by itself, makes there emerge everything that is darkness in the form of what exists, we have first of all to deal with this problematic relationship which is represented by the screen.

This screen is not simply what hides the real, it surely is that, but, at the same time, it indicates it. What structures carry this frame of the screen in a way that strictly integrates it into the existence of the subject, this is the turning point starting from which we have, if we want to account for the

least terms that intervene in our experience as connoted by the term scopic, and here, of course, we are not only dealing with screen memories,

- We are dealing with something which is called phantasy:
- We have to deal with this term that Freud calls not a representation but a representative of representation.
- We have to deal with several series of terms, and we have to know whether or not they are synonyms.

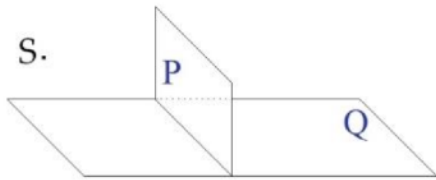
This is the reason that we perceive that this scopic world that is in question is not simply to be thought in terms of the magic lantern, that it is to be thought out in a structure which, happily, is given to us. It is given to us, I must say, that it is present all the same throughout the centuries; it is present in the whole measure that one or other person has missed it.

There is a certain **Pappus' theorem** which is found in a surprising fashion to be exactly inscribed in the theorems of Pascal and of Brianchon, those on the rectilinearity of the colinearity of the meeting points of a certain hexagon in so far as this hexagon is inscribed in a conic. Pappus had found a particular case of it which is very exactly the one where this hexagon is not inscribed in what we usually call a conic but simply in two straight lines crossing one another, which was, I must say, up to an epoch which was that of Kepler, people had not noticed that two lines which crossed one another constitute a conic. This indeed is the reason why **Pappus** did not generalise his invention. But that one is able to make a series of punctuations which prove that at every epoch, this thing which is called projective geometry was not unrecognised, is already sufficient to assure us that there was present a certain mode of relationship to the scopic world, and I am going to try to say now, and in the haste that we are always in for working, what its structuring effects are.

What are we looking for? If we want to account for the possibility of a relationship, let us say, to the real — I am not saying to the world — which is such that when it is established, there is manifested in it the structure of phantasy, we ought in this case to have something which connotes for us the presence of the *object-a*, of the *object-a* in so far as it is the setting (*monture*) of an effect, not alone, I do not have to say that we know well, precisely, we do not know it. We have to give an account of this first, given, effect, from which we start in analysis, which is the division of the subject, namely, that in the whole measure, I know that you are fully aware of it, that you maintain the distinction between the *cogito* and the unthought (*impensé*), for us there is no unthought. The novelty for psychoanalysis, is where you designate, I am speaking at a certain point of your development, the unthought in its relationship to the *cogito*; where there is this unthought, it thinks (*ça pense*), and this is the fundamental relationship which, moreover, you know very well is problematic since you subsequently indicate, when you speak about psychoanalysis, that it is in this that psychoanalysis radically puts in question everything that belongs to the human sciences. I am not deforming what you say? What?

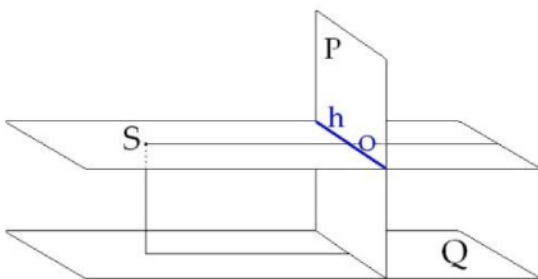
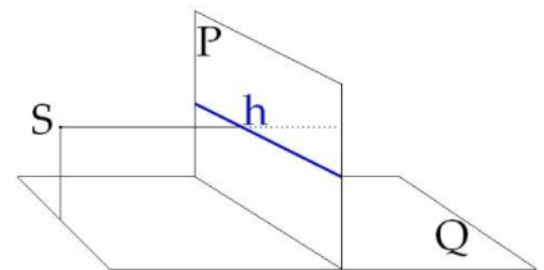
Michel Foucault: You are reforming.

Lacan: Of course. And what is more, naturally, in more than one way, which would require more breakthroughs and stages. Now, what is involved is a geometry which allows us, not simply to be a



representation, in a figure plane of what is on a ground, but that there is inscribed in it this third term, which is called the subject, and which is necessary for its construction. It is very precisely why I made the construction that I am forced to make which, moreover, has nothing original about it, which is simply borrowed from the most common books on perspective,

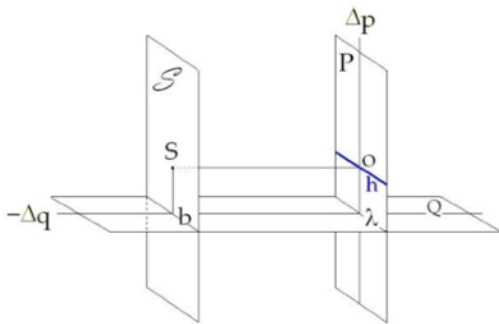
provided they are illuminated by Desargues' geometry and by all the developments that it made, moreover, in the nineteenth century, but precisely Desargues is here to highlight that in the heart of this seventeenth century, already, this whole geometry that he perfectly well grasped, this fundamental existence, for example, of a principle like the principle of duality which does not mean essentially by itself that geometrical objects are referred to an operation of symbolic equivalence, well then, with the help simply of the most simple usage of the goal-posts (*montants*) of perspective we find that, in so far as it is necessary to distinguish this subject point (S), this figure plane (P), this ground plane (Q) — naturally I am forced to represent them by something, you must understand that all of these extend to infinity of course — well then, something is locatable in a double fashion which inscribes the subject in this figure plane which, because of this fact, is not simply an envelope, a detached illusion, as one might say, of what it is a matter of representing, but in itself constitutes a structure which is the representative of the representation.



I mean that the **horizon line (h)**, in so far as it is directly determined by this point that must not be called the eye point, but the subject point, the subject point, in parenthesis, as one might say, I mean the subject necessary for the construction, and which is not the subject, since the subject is engaged in the adventure of the figure and it is necessary that there should be produced there something which, at the same time indicates that he is somewhere at a point, necessarily, but that his other point, even though it is necessary that it

should be present, should, in a way, be **elided**. This is what we obtain in remarking, I recall — I lack the time to re-do the proof in such an articulated fashion — that if this horizon line is determined simply by a parallel, a parallel plane which passes through the subject point, a plane parallel to the ground plane, everyone knows this, but that this type of horizon, moreover, in the establishment of some perspective or other, implies the choice of a point (O) on this horizon line, and that if everyone knows that, it is what is called the vanishing point and that, therefore, the first presence of the subject point in the figure plane is any point whatsoever on the horizon line, let us say, any point whatsoever, I again underline, in principle there should be one. When there are several of them, it is when it happens that painters give themselves some license, when there are several, it is for particular ends. Just as we have several ego ideals or ego's ideals — you can say both — it is for certain ends.

But that there is, but that is of course one of the necessities of perspective, all of those who are the founders of it, namely, Alberti and Pellérin, otherwise known as VIATOR, but also Albert Dürer, what he calls the other eye, I repeat, this lends itself to confusion for in no case is it a question of binocular vision, perspective has nothing to do with what one sees and relief, contrary to what is imagined, perspective is the mode, at a certain time, at a certain epoch, as you might say, by which the painter as subject puts himself into the picture, exactly as the painters of the epoch that is wrongly called primitive put themselves in the picture as donors. In the world of which the picture was supposed to be the representative, at the time of these so-called primitives, the painter was in his place in the picture.

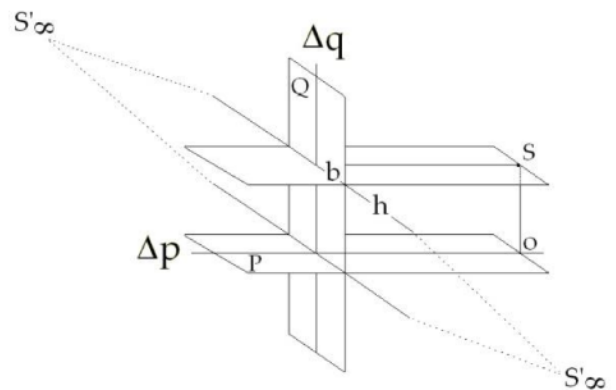


At the time of Velázquez, he gives the impression of putting himself into it, but you only have to look at him to see — you have underlined it very clearly — the point to which he is in it in a state of absence. He is in it at a certain point that I precisely describe in the fact that one touches the trace of the point from which it comes, from this point for you, for you alone, for I have already said enough for the others, this point that I have not up to the present qualified, which is the other point of presence, the other subject point in the field of the picture, which is this point which is determined, not in the way you were told earlier, but in

taking into account precisely the fact that there is a point and a single parallel to the plane of the picture which can in no way be inscribed in the picture. And this indeed is what makes leap to our eyes the degree to which the first presence of the point S on the line at the horizon in the form of any point whatsoever is problematic.

This, any point whatsoever, in its form as a point of indifference, is indeed precisely something of a nature to suspend us around what one could call its primacy.

On the contrary, in taking into account the fact that this **line** (b) that we determine as the line of intersection of the **plane** (S) which passes through the point S supposed at the beginning, the intersection with the ground plane, that this line on the **figure plane has a translation** (Δp) that is easy to grasp, because it is enough simply to invert (*renverser*), which appeared to us to be quite natural to admit as regards the relationship of the **horizon** (h) with the **infinite line** (Δq) on the ground plane here in the other arrangement.



It appears immediately that this (b), if you wish, constitutes a horizon line with respect to which the line to infinity of the figure plane (Δp) will play the inverse function and that, henceforth, it is at the intersection of the **fundamental line** (λ — not shown?), namely, of the point where the picture cuts the figure plane, at the intersection of this fundamental line with this **line to infinity** (b), namely, at a point at infinity, that there is placed the **second pole** (S') of the subject.

It is from this pole that Velázquez returns after having split his little group and the line of cleavage which marks there by its passage, you agree, in a way by what forms his model group, sufficiently indicates to us that it is from somewhere, outside the picture, that it has arisen here.

This, I regret, makes me take things from the most abstract and theoretical point. And time is passing. I can therefore not take things today to the point that I would have wished to take them. Nevertheless, the very form of what was brought to me earlier as an interrogation required me to put it in the forefront.

Nevertheless, if some of you can still make the sacrifice of a few minutes after this 2 o'clock time, I am going all the same to pass, namely, taking things at the level of what I must say is the fascinating description that you have given of *Las Meninas*, to show you the concrete interest that these considerations take on, on the very plane of description.

It is clear that, from all time, the critics as well as the spectators have been absolutely fascinated, disturbed by this picture. The day that someone — I do not want to tell you his name even though I have all the literature here — made the discovery that this little king and queen that are seen at the back were extraordinary, that this surely was the key to the affair, everyone acclaimed him as if it were really extraordinary, intelligent, to have seen this which is obviously, which is displayed where it can fascinate, not in the foreground, because it is at the back, but after all it is impossible not to see it.

In any case people progressed from heroic discoveries to other discoveries that were sensational in different ways, but there is only one thing that people have not quite explained, it is the degree to which this thing, if it were only that — cuckoo, the king and queen are in the picture — would be enough to give the thing its interest.

In the light, as one might say, because we are not working here on the *photopique* plane, we are not dealing with colour, I reserve it for next year, if next year in fact exists, we are working in the scotopic field in effect, in the penumbra, like here.

What is important, interesting, is what happens between this ritual S point for it only serves for the construction, all that is important for us here is what is in the figure, but all the same it plays its role, it is what happens between this point here in the interval between him and the screen. Now, if there is something that this picture imposes on us, it is thanks to an artifice which is the one, moreover, from which — I compliment you on this — you began, namely, that the first thing you said is that in the picture there is a picture, and I think you do not doubt any more than I do that this picture in the picture is the picture itself, the one that we see. Even though, perhaps, on this point you may lend yourself to perpetuating the interpretation that the picture is the picture on which he is making the portrait of the king and the queen. Can you imagine, he would have taken the same picture of three metres and eighteen centimetres with the same frame to make just the king and the queen, these two little idiots there at the back.

Now, it is precisely from the presence of this picture, which is the only representation in the picture, this representation saturates in a way the picture *qua* reality. But the picture is something else since, I will not prove it to you today, I hope that you will come back next week because, I

think that one can say something about this picture which goes beyond this remark which is truly inaugural, namely, what this picture really is.

I stressed enough the last time the difficulties represented by all the interpretations that have been given of it, but obviously we must start from the idea that what is hidden from us and whose function you so well assert, of something which is hidden, of a card turned upside down to force you to bring down yours. [Translation different from Gallagher's]

And God knows that, in effect, the critics have not failed to lay down their cards and say a series of extravagant things, not that much though. It was enough to bring them together to end up, all the same, by knowing why their extravagances, one of which one is, for example, that the painter is painting in front of a mirror which is supposed to be where we are. It is an elegant solution, unfortunately, it goes completely against this story of the king and the queen who are at the back because in that case, it would also be necessary for them to be at the place of the mirror. You have to choose.

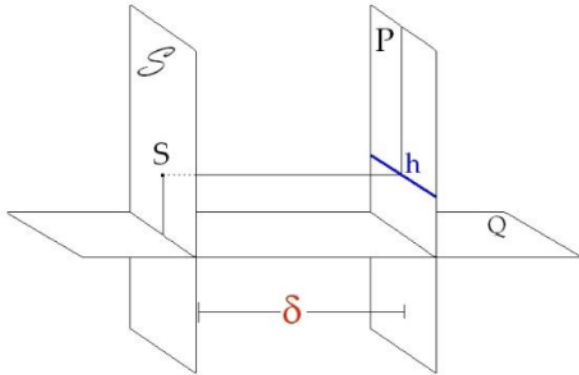
In short, all sorts of difficulties present themselves, if simply we can maintain that the picture is in the picture as a representation of the love object. Now, this problematic of the distance between the point S and the plane of the picture is properly at the base of the captivating effect of the work.

It is in the measure that it is not a work with a usual perspective, it is a kind of mad attempt which, moreover, is not limited to Velázquez, thank God I know enough painters and, in particular, the one whom I am going to show you something of, like that, to give you a little treat, at the end of this presentation in which I regret that I am always forced to return to the same planes which are too arid, a painter, one of whose works I am going to show you here, as I leave you, one that you can all go to see, moreover, where it is on display, that it is indeed the problem of the painter, and this, consult my first dialectics on this when I introduced the scopic drive, namely, that the picture is a trap for the look, that it is a matter of trapping the one who is there in front and what better way of trapping him than to extend the field of limits of the picture, of the perspective, to the level of what is there at the level of this point S, and what I am calling, properly speaking, what always vanishes, which is the element of fall (*chute*), the only fall in this representation, where this representative of the representation which is the picture in itself, is this *object-a*, and the *object-a* is what we can never grasp and especially not in the mirror, for the reason that it is the window that we ourselves constitute by simply opening our eyes. This effort of the picture to catch this vanishing plane which is properly what we have contributed, all of us, loafers that we are, there at the exhibition, believing that nothing is happening to us when we are in front of a picture, we are caught like a fly in glue; we lower our look as one lowers one's pants, and for the painter it is a matter, as I might say, of making us enter into the picture.

It is precisely because there is this interval between this high canvas represented from behind, and something which puts forward the frame of the picture, that we are ill at ease. It is a properly structural and strictly scopic interpretation. If you come back to hear me the next time, I will tell you why this is the way it is, for in truth I remain here today strictly within the limits of the analysis of the structure, of the structure as you have done, of the structure of what one sees on the picture.

You have introduced nothing into it of the dialogue, as I might say, of the dialogue that it suggests between what and what? Do not believe that I am going to engage in reciprocity, like **Audouard**, namely, that we are asked for our part to dialogue with Velázquez. I sufficiently said for a long time that the **relationships of the subject to the Other are not reciprocal**, for me not to fall into this trap today.

Who speaks in front (*en avant*)? Who interrogates? Who is it, rather, who cries and begs and asks Velázquez: “Let me see” (*fais voir*): this is the point from which one must begin, I indicated it to



you the last time, in order to know in fact who is, what is there, in the picture? And that this interval, this interval between the two planes, the picture plane and the plane of the point S, that this interval (∂) *cet intervalle entre les deux plans, le plan du tableau et le plan du point S*, which cuts the ground plane into two parallels and by that which in Desargues’ vocabulary is called the axle (*essieu*) For, what is more, as a way of making himself more unpopular, a vocabulary which was not the same as that of everyone else.

In the axle of the earth what is happening? Certainly not what we will say today and that the picture is made to make us sense this interval, is what is doubly

indicated in our relationship to being nabbed by this picture on the one hand, and in the fact that in the picture Velázquez is manifestly so much there in order to mark for us the importance of this distance, that he is not, notice, you must have noticed it but you did not say it — he is not within range, even with his elongated brush, of being able to touch the picture.

Naturally, people say he stood back to see better. Yes. Of course. But after all, the fact that obviously he is not within reach of the picture is here the capital point, in short, that the two key points of this picture are not simply the one who for his part is also escaping towards a window, towards a gap, towards the outside, posed there as if in parallel to the gap in front, and on the other hand Velázquez whose knowledge, what he tells us there is the essential point. I will make him speak in order to end, not to end because I still want you to see Balthus’ picture all the same, to say things in a Lacanian language since I speak in his place, why not? In reply to “Let me see”:

“You do not see me from where I am looking at you”
(tu ne me vois pas d’où je te regarde).

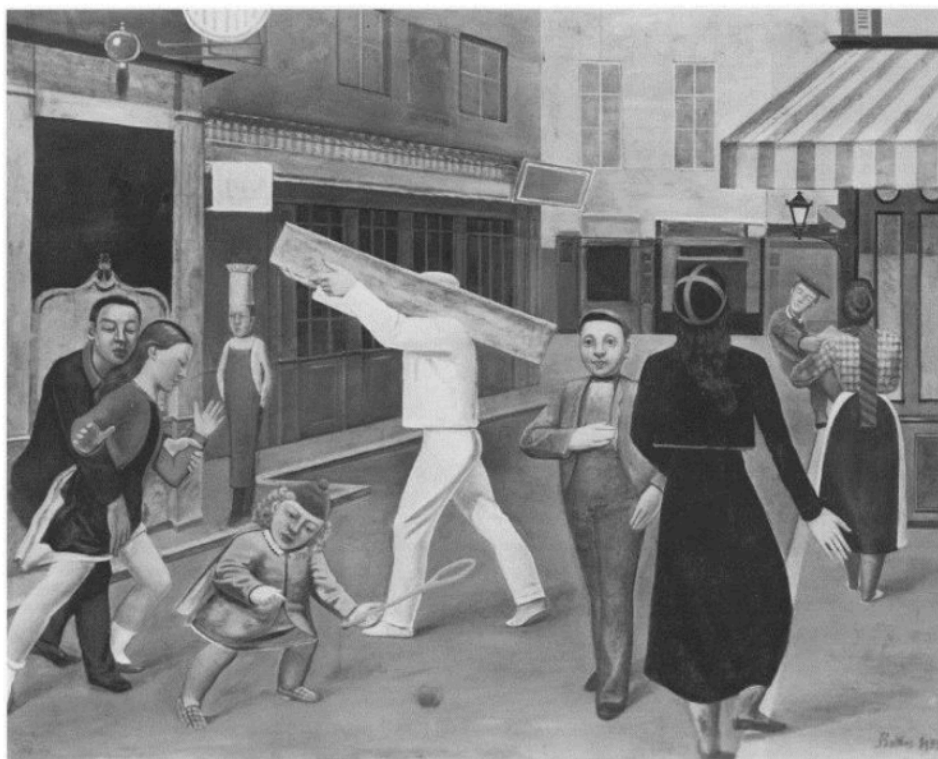
It is a fundamental formula to make explicit what interests us in every relationship of looking, it is a matter of the scopic drive and very precisely in exhibitionism as well in voyeurism, but we are not here to see whether, in the picture, people are tickled nor whether something is happening.

We are here to see how this picture inscribes for us the perspective of the relationships of the look in what is called phantasy is so far as it is constitutive. There is great ambiguity about this word phantasy. Unconscious phantasy, all right, that is an object. First of all it is an object in which we always lose one of the three pieces that are in it, namely, two subjects and one (*a*). Because do not

believe that I have the illusion that I am going to bring you the unconscious phantasy as an object. Without that, the drive of the phantasy would spring up elsewhere. But what is disturbing, is that every time people speak about unconscious phantasy, they also speak implicitly about the phantasy of seeing it. Namely, that the hope, from the fact that people are chasing it, and this introduces a lot of confusion into the matter. I, for the moment, I am trying to give you, properly speaking, what is called a frame (*bati*), and a frame which is not a metaphor, because unconscious phantasy depends on a frame, and it is this frame that I do not despair, not only of making familiar to those who listen to me but of making it get under their skin. This is my goal and this is an absolutely risky exercise which, for some people, appears to be derisory, that I am pursuing here, and that you only hear distant echos of.



I am now going to pass around among you, thanks to Gloria, Monsieur Balthus' image. There is a Balthus exhibition on at the moment. It is at the Pavillon de Marsan, I am giving you this information for free. For a modest sum, you can all go and admire this painting.



Well then, it is a little homework that I am giving to some people. I am giving them the whole vacation for it. Let us see. Look at this picture. I hope to get some reproductions of it but it is not very easy. I owe this one to Madam Henriette Gomez who happened, it was moreover for her astonishing, who found that she had it in her filing index. There you are, there is a slight difference in the picture that you will see, you see, contrary to what happens in Velázquez because obviously there are questions of epoch.

Here, in this picture, people are being tickled a little and to ensure the tranquillity of the present owner this hand has been slightly raised by the author.

I showed it to him again last evening, I must say that he told me that, all the same, it was very much better composed like that. He was sorry for having made a concession that he thought he ought to, it was a sort of counter-concession. He said :

“After all, perhaps I am doing that to annoy people, so why not drop it”,

... but it is not true. He had put it there because it ought to be there. In any case, all the other things which are there ought also to be there and, when all is said and done, when I saw this picture, I had seen it once previously and I no longer remembered it, but when I saw it this time, in this context, you will attribute this to what I do not know, to my lucidity or to my delusion, you have to decide, I said: “That is *Las Meninas*”. Why is this picture *Las Meninas*? This is the little piece of holiday homework then that I am leaving to the best of you.

NOTES

Cormac Gallagher’s translation has been amended in places where the French text seem to warrant a clearer version. Gallagher’s misspelling of Velázquez has been corrected throughout. Illustrations have been inserted from the French edition, derived from *L’objet de la psychanalyse*, a stenographic version in the format of the PDF, and the site ELP; and *L’objet de la psychanalyse*, a critical edition by Michel Roussan. Every attempt has been made to provide lettered references to elements of the diagrams.

Lacan believed that Girard Desargues’ first name was “George.”

Lacan mentions Pappus of Alexandria (ca. 300 c.e.) in several places. Pappus is regarded as the founder of projective geometry, not Euler in his treatment of the Bridges of Königsberg Problem, as is often cited in Lacanian literature. It is clear from the diagrams that projective geometry, although it dispenses with measures of distances and angles, is not the same as Affine Geometry, which is Euclidean without angles and distances.

Despite the clear references to Desargues and Pappus, secondary literary is mute, almost compulsively, about these historically established developers of projective geometry. Lacan and others, however, were aware and were not ambiguous in citing these founders as authoritative.

Don Kunze
Boalsburg, Pennsylvania
March 16, 2023

