

1. THE CORE OF THE GAZE
Seminar of Jean-François CHABAUD, 1992

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Casting speech out before oneself.

Since the invention of psychoanalysis, a body of discourse has taken shape—originating with Freud—centered on that linguistic experience known as *an analysis*. I was tempted to inflict upon you a series of standardized seminars. A certain kind of seriousness, something efficient—much like the towers of *La Défense*—regarding what might be said to open up the subject that interests me enough to develop gradually; a subject belonging to that zone graphically exemplified by the *Tower of Pisa*, destabilized between heaven and earth.

What constitutes the ambiguity of the Tower of Pisa—the grip of that "*offering-to-view*" which entails a proximity to destruction and ruin (and which we must designate as *i(a)*); that effect of absence regarding what *it* no longer is—what it no longer is (Φ) as it leans down toward the diagonal of an ancient triangle; what creates that ineffable presence of its former verticality, especially in the twilight hour—all this invites us to evoke it *with a new gaze*: a sidelong glance—I ask you to subject your voracious gaze to the dignity of this aphorism by Lin-Tsi: "*The more one seeks, the further away one gets; all searching leads to the opposite result.*" (1)

An approach to the gaze—to the *Core of the gaze*, to the support of the image—here in this fine amphitheater that has housed both the Academy of Surgery and the Royal School of Drawing.

If the gaze is—along with the voice—one of the objects of psychoanalysis that we denote in our algebra by the letter *a* (or *petit a*), then mastery—the kind that ought to tighten the knot of a well-crafted seminar—can in no way ever approach that something, that object, which *supports* the image.

Precisely because of this object—the cause of desire, which language, like a ferret, skirts around—we face an inescapable fact: it is not enough to teach, however successfully, the cardinal features of analytic doxa (though this is undoubtedly part of what is necessary) in order to take into account and give an account of the Freudian Thing—the *incommensurability* of its frozen space. It is not very satisfying for any of us to have—as is well known in Freudian circles—almost nothing to expect on this point from one day to the next.

It is not easy for me to simply toss out words here—or, from a seat that is less wobbly here than elsewhere, to contribute—however haltingly—something by way of introducing a *Lecture* (a "binding-reading"—note that *lier* [to bind] and *lire* [to read] are made of the same letters, as Lacan points out): a *Lecture* of the image.

All this already justifies my "come what may" attitude. Since my references to Freud and Lacan will be frequent and often merely allusive—reading between the lines—you will allow me not to

constantly cite precise sources, assuming them to be known, while leaving it to you to challenge the chaff I might be sowing.

I also wish to mention the echo my words find in you; for it is true that I have postponed—rightly so, I believe—this very day when I expose myself to the risk of leading astray that resonance which touches upon the Real.

Equivocation is the very definition of psychoanalysis; consider how one might brush up against this phenomenon—which can confront you at any moment during an unfortunate encounter with a windowpane that is slightly tinted or darkened by grime (that color found in all masterpieces)—and which, if you aren't careful, presents the image of a room, a street, or the like, superimposed with the reflection of your own face. You stand there, dumbfounded, identifying with that object—with that something oscillating between you and what is seriously called "the world"—like a pendulum swinging back and forth in the reflection (an equivocation that immediately veers toward sex)—an unpleasant answer regarding your absence from the picture.

An unsettling encounter befell Freud in a sleeping-car compartment—an incident he recounts in *The Uncanny*:

I was sitting alone in a sleeping-car compartment when, following a violent jolt, the door leading to the adjoining washroom swung open and an elderly man in a dressing gown and traveling cap entered. I assumed he had taken a wrong turn and entered by mistake. I hastened to set him right, only to realize, utterly taken aback, that the intruder was none other than my own reflection in the connecting door's mirror. And I still recall that this apparition was deeply disagreeable to me... Instead of being frightened by my double, I simply... failed to recognize him.

It is a disquieting tale, akin to passing through the looking-glass—one of those stories passed down by word of mouth across generations, allowing the *mouth speaking from within* to reveal itself. There are countless such stories, nesting *their words snugly within other words* in the shadow of Saussure.

Humming along, *conceiving* as a nursery rhyme—1, 2, 3—one might see [*il est con / se voir*—as Freud certainly did—that upon encountering his Other and *grasping* (*concevoir*, from the Latin *capere*, means to grasp) what he once was—in the mirror of his own reflection, a trapped gaze—this immense man is led not only to confess a sense of displeasure (something anyone can understand) but, above all, to signal to us—with his "I rushed forward," followed by "I found myself utterly dumbfounded"—the very moment he made an impetuous move to shake off that intruder who was none other than himself: his own deathly transformation (a state underscored by the Latin *stupeo*—and by Lacan with *fascinum*).

The author of *Gradiva* preferred works on archaeology to those dealing with psychology—works that, following Lacan, we might call the "Augean stables." Let Freud not hold it against me if I compare his adventure to that of the tiger from the *Villa di Piazza Armerina*, left dumbfounded

during a so-called "mirror hunt" by a glass sphere or an ovoid mirror. This mirror significantly reduced his size, reflecting back the image of a tiger cub. We owe the memory of this tiger—etched in history thanks to Bartoli, much like the "trace of the trace" to which psychoanalysis bears witness—to a fresco on the (now lost) *Tomb of the Nasonii* in Rome. Do we see him rushing—in a variation of this mirror hunt—toward the entrance of a cage sealed by a pane of glass that reflects his own image?

It is the soldiery of the East, that "flower on the shield," far removed from the fury of the arenas where gladiators and wild beasts clashed to the death. These soldiers are simply going about their work—amidst the peaceful passage of days, representing the society of their time, they are positioned beside this mirror-trap, playing a game of dice—almost—like those at the foot of the Cross.

Lacan once wondered, during a lecture in America, about the phonetic equation between *D'EUX* (derived from the Latin *illis*) and the numeral *DEUX* (derived from the Latin *duo*): is the *phoneme*—he asked Roman Jakobson—destined to snare the *équivoque* [the *equivocation*]?—to seize it, that is—or is it merely a coincidence for the French ear?

Mon, ton, son, notre, votre, leurre.

Consider now this slight graphic unease: *des dieux* [gods] and *d'eux* [of them]—graphically, to the *Letter*.



What is the source of this ambiguity? It stems from the fact that the vertical stroke, vertical like the *Leaning Tower of Pisa*, when used correctly, is not positioned properly – it should be *closer* to the letter D, and if it is an i, its stroke is incorrectly extended beyond the upper alignment of the letters. This typographical reminder, that using writing to create ambiguity, can serve to create equivocation.

What supports the image would fit well with this fragment, borrowed from Heraclitus, of my roguery as for its vocabulary when I seize upon his *νυχτιπσοι*, its *prowlers in the night*, its *nocturnal wanderers*, to sniff out the object.

See ancient Asia Minor, the moiré patterns of the Orient, its life force, then, take in one hand *The Interpretation of Dreams* - the Pre-Socratics, you can feel it in Freud, in the other

Heidegger's *Heraclitus*, Burnet's *Dawn of Greek philosophy*, and go see the beautiful *Kore* of the Louvre or the National Museum of Athens who lived under his gaze, let yourself be amazed in Naples, and in Palermo where you will sometimes encounter them by chance on your journey. The object, cause of the desire I evoke from the term of a *prowler*, a *will-o'-the-wisp*, an object *a* that prowls as much by night as by day, it is what excites the gaze, what whets its appetite, puts it in a state of craving, when there is nothing to see, or more precisely, when there is only what we must, and in any case, each have to see.

It is sometimes so dazzling, so dazzling, so obviously there, the *Lantern-bearing Fulgore*, admirably described by Roger Caillois, whom I quote more or less from memory: *the Fulgore, alone among insects, to display, it seems, a face, a false mask, which yesterday was imagined to be a lantern, but which, we must accept, is not luminous, but of which we nevertheless grant a white light of unknown nature*. It prowls the object - this light of unknown nature participates in the *agalmata* in Socrates, a trap for gods just as the work is a trap for the gaze.

We are already, as the expression goes, *without touching it*, if not in the process of grasping it, at least able to brush against its core.

Sometimes in summer, a swarm of tiny flies comes and goes as if in a ballet from one place to another. They dance in place, like mosquitoes, then dart like lightning a few meters away and, after a moment—a mere instant for us—they return to their starting point... Along the arc of their flight, you can observe luminous sparks corresponding to the light clinging to their raised wings; each trail of sparks corresponds to a single midge, and the multitude of points of light is merely an illusion caused by the persistence of vision. You do not see the midge itself, but rather the adornment it creates—unwittingly—as it beats its wings (at a frequency of roughly a thousand beats per second, notes the mathematician behind this Zen-like vision). Curiously, a similar *analogy* exists in the field of high-energy physics regarding the detection of subatomic particles created during collisions in a bubble chamber. *The actual particles are orders of magnitude smaller than the bubbles that leave the tracks, yet by analyzing the thickness and curvature of a track, physicists can identify the particle that generated it—without ever actually SEEING [VOIR] it.*

If you find yourself in the suburbs—where it is impossible not to notice them—you will be suddenly struck, especially at night, and held in suspense by those rectangular pools of color (vibrantly hued to maximize impact): the *attention-grabbing* imagery that the industry plasters onto those structures known as billboards. These *attention-grabbers* rarely appear alone: it is the law of series, of imposed repetition, with each poster forming part of a rhythm—a sequence of beats composing a more or less substantial whole that reconstitutes itself a little further on—quintessences of *sound* and *light*; sound drifting in from the street, and light obliterating all that drabness, literally evaporating the landscape—and those more or less furtive shadows of people going about their business—leaving your gaze immersed in this *rhythm* of blue neon. Do you begin to sense the power to which we are each—scientist or not—continually subjected? A power that—admittedly in an extreme way—makes present the underlying element, the very substrate of the image.

If this advertising *agalma* were to stand alone against an old low wall or near a lamppost—placed there to please the eye—amidst a green space filled with pinkish rhododendrons, on a stretch of turf a gardener had innocently unrolled like a scroll of *papyrus*, you might well—should the whim suddenly seize you—find yourself there one evening, dumbfounded, peeing into a Magritte.

Perhaps you would experience the odd sensation that something doesn't quite fit—doesn't stick anymore, in the literal sense of the word—that the world no longer adheres precisely to the thing that once underpinned it, that established it across the (a)byss of habit.

You stand at that fringe of the dream-field, at that uncertain zone of the fold prior to its creasing—which constitutes the garb of the object *a*, the imaginary of the real, whence a slip—(the meaning of the Latin *lapsus*)—, a slip that will enable you to better gauge the art of the juggler, of the psychoanalyst.

The unconscious dwells in its *Location* of storm and vertigo, yet the *Divine Analytic Comedy* belongs less to the eyelids of Beatrice—which resemble the wings of the butterfly in *The Interpretation of Dreams*—than to the exquisite hours of a quasi-management of the unconscious; an unconscious for which the analyst, bearing the subject's speech, serves as the sponge. This speaks not only to its very juncture with the bedrock of castration—that other name for death—but also to that refusal of jouissance of which it is the waste product, allowing the patient's time—his own sponge—to let it pass.

Beyond the physical presence moving—or even solidifying—within the space of a shadowy room, further than a voice unraveling a persistent phoneme just as one might undo a knot, or underscoring—through its very absence—Freud's *Herr*, the analyst primarily bears the misunderstanding. This misunderstanding can take various forms, one of which is particularly elevated to the dignity of analytic practice—the analyst's daily bread and wine (a "Saint," according to Lacan)—where a key function of this *operator* is to hear properly: to hear the unconscious, the underlying current beneath the *jactance*. In what is cast—like a roll of the dice—into the act of speaking, there is something to be heard: the repressed, the forbidden, resonating within the "lair-for-two."

The analyst cuts—cuts into what the German tongue calls *rum*, that is, space; more precisely, into the *aRIMage* [*anchoring*] of the subject's *lalangue*—recalling Octave Mannoni's remark to Lacan: *if we repeat words, it may be because a certain number of them rhyme with unconscious thought*.

The analyst cuts—blind and himself deluded (for we know he depends on his reading of the analysand)—lifting the discourse *askew*,—away from the shadow masking the Real—, undergoing and grasping the misunderstanding; from this Silenus—partially masked—there sometimes emerges a Sibyl, grimacing forth the truth of things.

The analyst cuts; what he says is a cut, participating in the act of writing—save that he plays on the ambiguity of spelling—interpreting. *Speech*, says Nietzsche, *finds before it seeks*: or as the *trouvère* puts it, "found I am." In interpreting, the analyst exists in a state of what Latin calls *dis-tractio*—signifying division, disunion, loss. Distracted—*dis-trait*—he is not, when the strange voice of the Other unfolds, like *the cutting edge*—says Lacan—*of the oracle's pronouncement*.

If the effects of speech in psychoanalysis can be viewed as a return—from Ithaca to the tac [silence] at times—of a *speech* (a concept the English language still sustains via the word "response," alongside the analyst—divided/de-vised—within the analytic act, possessing an ancient magnificence), one recalls how, in tune with the entomologist brushing or touching its web, the spider may *respond* by appearing the moment a number emerges—like presences best left unevoked.

This effect of *sideration* and *light* of which Freud speaks—manifesting when the unconscious, *sententiam dicere*, makes its opinion known, *indico*, proclaims—reveals that this flash, this gleam, conceals nothing from anyone regarding what it harbors within: for beneath the fact—or equally the *faux*, the burden borne by the *Worker*, that ideal Worker which is the unconscious—it staggers, a *serf*, a slave to that Other who grips it and who knows you—yes, you are *the one*, the one out of tune.

For to *put out of tune* is to destroy a harmony—a specific sound frequency—something the Pythagoreans treated as a numerical matter; it is to set the *parlêtre* at odds with itself. Man—he who speaks of being, such is the laborer of the unconscious—shatters the subject's armed peace in his wretchedness: his *concordat*, in a flash, becomes a discordance for the subject, yet not regarding what drives the game.