

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

### Restoration of Session 17, May 11, 1966

As regards knowledge (*savoir*), it is difficult not to take into account the existence of the knower (*savant*), knower taken here only as the support, the hypothesis of knowledge in general, without necessarily giving it the connotation of scientific. The knower either knows something or he knows nothing. In both cases, he knows that he is a knower.

This remark is simply made to highlight for you this problem which has been prepared for a long time and, I would even say, presentified not simply since I have been teaching, but since I made my first remarks about the fundamentals that analysis reminds us of, and which is centred around the function of narcissism or the mirror stage. Let us say, to go quickly, since we began late, that the status of the subject, in the broadest sense, in the sense not yet clarified, not at all in the sense whose structure I am in the process of trying to circumscribe for you, what is called the subject in general, which means simply, in the case that I have just spoken about, there is knowledge therefore there is a knower.

The fact of knowing that one is a knower cannot but be profoundly enmeshed in the structure of this knowledge. To go straight at things let us say that the teacher (*professeur*), since the teacher has a lot to do with knowledge since he transmits knowledge, he has to cart around a certain quantity of knowledge, which he went looking for either in his experience, or in an accumulation of knowledge that has been done elsewhere and which is called, for example, in one or other domain, philosophy for example, tradition. It is clear that we cannot overlook that the preservation of the particular status of this knower, I evoked the teacher but there are many other statuses, that of the doctor, for example, that the preservation of his status is of a nature to divert, to give a certain direction to what, for him, for his part, will appear to be the general status of his knowledge. The content of this knowledge, the progress of this knowledge, the high point of its expansion cannot but be influenced by the protection necessary for his status as a knowing subject.

This seems to me to be rather obvious if one thinks that we have before us the materialisation made tangible by social consecration of this status which mean that a gentleman is not considered to be a scholar (*savant*) uniquely in the measure that he knows or that he continues to function as a scholar, considerations of productivity come here very far behind those of maintaining a permanent status for the one who has acceded to a scholarly function. This is not unjustified, and on the whole it suits everyone; everyone adjusts to it very well. Everyone has his place; the scholarly knower in designated places, and one does not look too closely to see if his knowerliness, from a certain moment on, is repeating itself, is getting rusty, or has even become a pure semblance of knowerity (*savanterie*).

But as in the case of many social crystallizations, we should not stop simply at what pure social exigencies, what are habitually called group functions and how a certain group takes on a more or less privileged status for reasons which are, when all is said and done, to be traced back to a certain historic origin. There is indeed here something structural which, as the structural often forces us to notice it, goes way beyond a simple inter-relationship of utility.

One may consider that from the point of view of output, there would be an advantage in making the status of the knower less stable. But we have to believe, precisely, that there are in the mirages of the subject, and not in the structure of the subject itself, something which ends up with these stable structures, which necessitates them. If psychoanalysis forces us to put in question again the status of the subject, it is no doubt because it tackles this problem, the problem of *what a subject is, from a different starting place*.

- If, for long years, I was able to show that the introduction of this experience of analysis into a field which can only be mapped out by joining to it a certain putting in question of knowledge in the name of truth,
- if the scansion of this field is to be sought at a more radical point, at a point prior to this encounter, to this encounter of a truth which poses itself and proposes itself as foreign to knowledge, as we have said, ...

...this is introduced first from the angle of demand, which first of all, in a perspective which is subsequently reduced, proposes itself as more primitive, as more archaic, and which makes it necessary to question how there are ordered, in their structure, this demand and something with which it is discordant and which is called desire.

This is how that from this angle, in a certain way in this structural splitting, we have come to put in question the status of the subject, to consider that, far from the subject appearing to us as a pivotal point, a sort of axis around which there would turn whatever may be the rhythms, the pulsation that we might attribute to what turns, around which there might turn, the expansions and the retreats of knowledge.

We cannot consider the drama that is played out, that grounds the essence of the subject as it is given to us in analytic experience, by introducing the angle of desire at the very heart of the function of knowledge, we cannot do it on the foundations of the status of the person which, when all is said and done, is what has dominated up to now the philosophical view which was taken about the relationship of man to what is called the world in the form of a certain knowledge.

The subject appears to us to be fundamentally divided in the sense that to question this subject, at the most radical point, namely, whether or not it knows anything, is Cartesian doubt; we see what

is the essential thing in this experience of the *cogito*, the being of the subject when it is questioned, fleeing, in a way, diverging, in the form of these two ranks of beings which only coincide in an illusory form, the being which finds its certainty by manifesting itself as being at the heart of this questioning, “I think”: thinking that I am, but I am what thinks and to think: I am, is not the same thing as being what thinks.

A point that is not noticed but which takes on its whole weight, its whole value by being crosschecked, in analytic experience, with the fact that the one who is that which thinks, thinks in a way that the one who thinks: “I am”, is not aware of.

This is the subject whom there is charged to represent the one who, directing the analytic experience, and being called the psychoanalyst, sees there being posed again for him what is involved in the question of the knower.

The relationship of the psychoanalyst to the question of his status takes up again here, in the form of a sharpness that has been increased tenfold, the one which has always been posed concerning the status of the one who possesses knowledge, and the problem of the formation of the psychoanalyst is really nothing other than, through a privileged experience, to allow there to come to birth, as I might say, subjects for whom this division of the subject is not simply something that they know but something in which they think.

It is a matter of there coming to birth some people who will know how to discover what they experience in psychoanalytic experience, starting from this position that is maintained that they will never be in the position of failing to recognise that at the moment of knowing, as analysts, they are in a divided position.

Nothing is more difficult than to maintain in a position of being what, undoubtedly, for each one if he deserves the title of analyst, had been, at some moment experienced in the experience.

So there you are.

From the moment that the status of the one who is supposed to know is established in the analytic perspective, there is reborn all the prestige of specular miscognition which cannot but reunify this status of the subject, namely, let drop, elide the other part which is the one that, all the same, ought to be the effect of this unique experience, ought to be the separating effect with respect to the rest of the flock, that some people should not simply know it but should, should at the moment of approaching any experience of the order of their own, should conform to those who at least have a presentiment about what is involved in this divided structure.

It is nothing other than the sense of my teaching to recall this exigency when, undoubtedly, the means of being introduced into it are elsewhere, but that through a structure, I repeat, which goes way beyond its social conditioning, something, whatever the experience may be, from the simple

fact of the functioning in which each one is identified to a certain nameable status, in this case that of being a knower, tends to put into the shadows the essential of the *schize* through which alone, nevertheless, there can be opened up an access to the experience which is at the proper level of this experience. It is as divided subject that the analyst is called on to respond to the demand of the one who enters with him into an experience of subject (*expérience de sujet*).

That is why it is not pure refinement, an ornamental detail, the depiction of a particular sector of our experience which might illustrate, in a way, what must be added in terms of information to what we may be able to know, for example, about the scopic drive, that the last time I was led to develop before you the functions of the notion of perspective.

It is in the measure, on the contrary, that it is a matter for you of illustrating what can sustain by its apparatus, around what the subjectivity of the analyst must take its bearings, and in taking his bearings never forget even when the second vanishing point, as I might say, of his thinking, tends to be forgotten, elided, left to one side, at least because of the strength of some schema, sees himself being reminded that he ought to seek out the place where there functions this other vanishing point at the very moment, in the very place at which he tends to formulate some truth which from its very expression, if he is not careful, will see itself falling into the old unitary schemas of the subject of knowledge and will encourage him, for example, to put in the foreground one or other idea of totality which is, properly speaking, what he ought to most distrust in the synthesis of his experience.

The last time, trying by abbreviated paths to presentify for you what the experience of perspective can contribute to us and teach us, even though I chose these paths to be as practical as I could, no doubt, I had the feeling of not always having succeeded in concentrating, if not all your attention, at least to have always succeeded in compensating it.

For want perhaps of some schema, and, nevertheless, this indeed is what I intended to reject, to pull back from in order to avoid some misunderstanding, nevertheless, I am going to do it today, to summarise it, and to say what, in this experience of perspective, can properly speaking illustrate for us what is involved, namely, the relationship between the division of the subject and what specifies, in analytic experience, the properly visual relationship to the world, namely, a certain *objet-a*.

This *objet-a* that up to now, and in an approximate fashion, one which moreover was not taken up, I distinguished from the field of vision as being the function of the look, how can this be organised in experience, structural experience, in so far as it establishes a certain type of thinking in geometry, in so far as it is made tangible in all functioning of art and especially in painting.

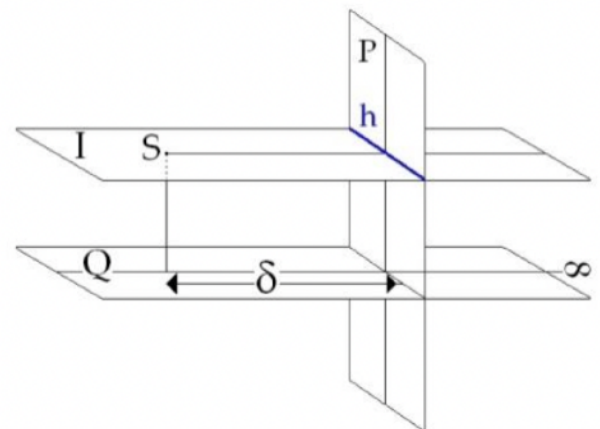
The last time I made, verbally, a construction which is easy to find as such in a work on perspective. This is not the one in question: it was brought me just a few moments ago. It is the work, for example, or rather the collection of articles by Erwin Panofsky on perspective. There is a German edition which comes from somewhere else in which the articles, I see, are grouped differently to this Italian edition. I recalled that, in the relationship which is described as projective which is established between the plane of what one could call the picture and the plane of what, in order to be simple today we will call the ground plane (*le sol perspective*), there are fundamental linear correspondences which are established and which imply elements that are properly speaking non-intuitable and which are, nevertheless, fundamental elements of what one can call projective space or extension.

A coherent geometry, establishing a perfect demonstrative rigour, which has nothing in common with metric geometry, namely, on condition of admitting what is happening in what I call today the perspective ground, to replace a term, I realised, that is more difficult to keep in mind, the one that I used the last time, the correspondence of the lines traced, therefore, on the ground plane (**Q**) to lines traceable on the picture (**P**), imply that a line to infinity on the perspective ground, is translated by the line on the horizon of the picture (**h**).

**This is the first step in any perspective construction.**

I am going to schematise it in the following fashion:  
suppose that ...

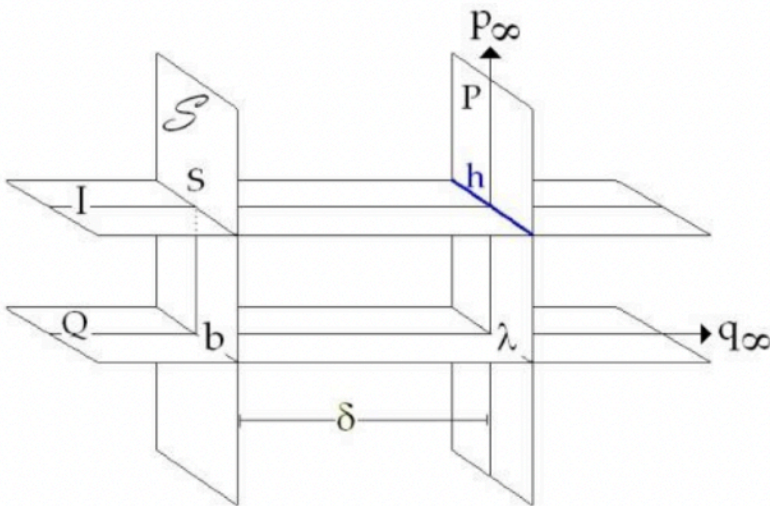
- this is the perspective ground here (**Q**),
- I will leave the picture (**P**) in profile for you,
- I am putting here what I have not yet spoken about: the eye point (**S**) of the subject.



I sufficiently indicated the last time what was involved for you to understand now the sense of the outline that I am going to make. I told you that independently of anything whatsoever that you have to refer yourself to in experience and specifically not the horizon as it is effectively experienced on our globe in so far as it is round, an infinite plane supposes that, from this eye-point, it is at (**I**), posing a plane parallel to the perspective ground, that you should determine the horizon line (**h**) on the picture in accordance with the line where this parallel plane cuts the plane of the picture.

The experience of the picture and of painting tells us that any point whatsoever of this horizon line is such that the lines which come together on it correspond to parallel lines whatever they may be, on the ground plane.

We can therefore choose any point whatsoever of this horizon line as centre of perspective. This is what is, in effect, done in every picture that is subject to the laws of perspective. This point is



properly what, in the picture, does not correspond only, as you see, to the ground to be put in perspective, but to the position of the point **S** and as such, in the figure, represents the eye.

It is in function of the eye of the one who is looking that the horizon is established on a picture plane (**P**).

To this, as I told you the last time, all those who have studied perspective, add what they call **the other eye**, namely, the

impact on perspective of the distance ( $\delta$ ) of this point **S** to the picture plane.

Now, moreover, one ensures that in the usage that one makes of it in any picture whatsoever this distance is arbitrary, it is up to the choice of the one who makes the picture. I mean that it is open to choice within the picture itself.

Does this mean that from the point of view of the structure of the subject,

...in so far as the subject is the subject of the look, that he is the subject of a seen world, this is what interests us,

...does that mean that we can neglect this part of the subject, that it only appears to us in function of an artifice, while the horizon line is structural, the fact that the choice of distance is freely left to my choice, to me who is looking, I can say that what we have here is only an artifice of the artist, that it is from the distance at which I put myself mentally from one or other plane that I choose in the depths of the picture that this is therefore in a way out of date and secondary and not structural. I am saying it is structural *and no one has ever sufficiently noted it up to now*.

This second point, in perspective, is defined from the remark that whatever may be the distance of the provisional subject, of the subject **S**, which is precisely what we have to put in suspense and to see how it enters the picture, that whatever may be the distance of this subject from the picture,

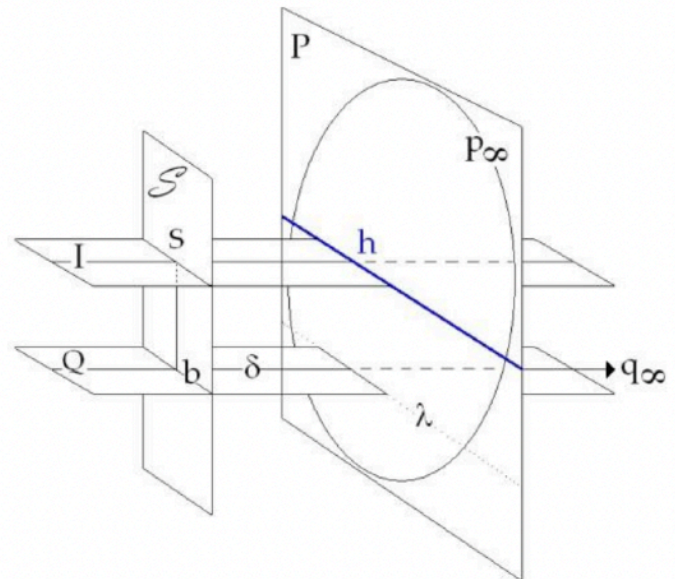
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- there is something which is simply "between him and the picture," which separates him from the picture, and this is not simply something which will be noted from the *metrical value of this distance*,
- that this *distance*, in itself, is inscribed somewhere in the structure and that it is here that we ought to find, not the other eye, as the authors on perspective (in inverted commas) say, but the other subject.

... And this is demonstrated in the way I did it the last time and which, for certain people, was not understood, and which is grounded on the remark that: If we make pass through the point **S** a plane parallel ( $\mathcal{S}$ ), not this time to the ground plane (*plan perspectif*) but to the picture, two things result. First of all, that this urges us to note that there exists a line of intersection of the picture with the plane, a perspective sum (*somme*) whose name is known, which is called, if we are to believe the book by Pankofsky, which is called ..... the fundamental line. I did not call it that the last time and it is this line here.

The plane ( $\mathcal{S}$ ) parallel to the picture which passes through the point (**S**), cuts the plane of the perspective ground in a line (**b**) that is parallel to the first. From the representation of these two lines on the picture, what I called the last time the figure plane, there is going to be deduced what we will call the **second subject point**.

In effect, in the triple relationship **S**, subject point, picture plane (**P**), ground plane (**Q**), we have seen that to the infinite line on the ground plane ( $q_\infty$ ) — I think I sufficiently indicated the last time what this infinite line means — to the infinite line of the ground plane there corresponds the horizon line on the picture plane.

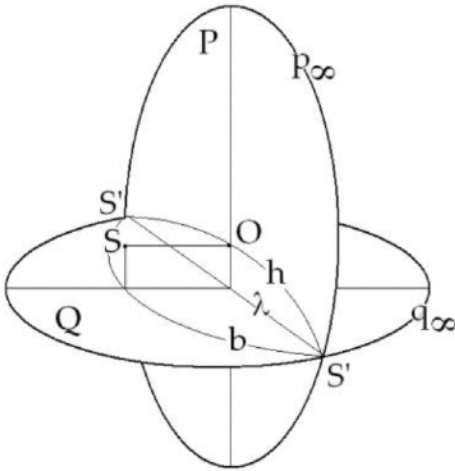


In the same group of three, you can, if you look closely at it, perceive that the line defined here — let us call **it line b**, the one parallel to the fundamental line — has the same function with respect to the infinite line of the picture plane as the horizon in the picture plane ( $p_\infty$ ) has with respect to the infinite line in the ground plane.

It is therefore represented in the figure by this infinite line, of course, in the picture, and on the other hand, as the fundamental line is already in the picture, the other subject–point (**S'**), while the first was defined thus, any point whatsoever on the horizon line, the **other** subject–point (**S'**) can be written as follows: the point of intersection of the infinite line of the picture plane with the fundamental line. You see here that I represented in a way that is only imaged, that is insufficient, the infinite line by a circle since in short, for intuition, it is this line which is always, from all sides at infinity on any plane whatsoever. *Intuitively*, we represent it as a circle but it is not a circle. This is proved by the whole way it is handled and the line by line, point by point correspondences that constitute the essential of this projective geometry.

The apparent double point of encounter that it has with the fundamental line is only pure appearance since it is a line, a line to be considered as a straight line like all the other lines, and that two straight lines could only have a single point of intersection.





These are not things that I am asking you to admit in the name of a construction which is my own. I cannot push open the door of projective geometry for you, and specifically not for those who still have no practice in it. But it is very simple for any one to refer to it and to see that there is nothing to be corrected in what I am putting forward here, namely, that what results from it is that we have two subject points in every structure of a projective world or of a perspective world, two subject points,

- one (O) which is any point whatsoever on the horizon line, on the plane of the figure,
- the other which is at the intersection of another line parallel to the first, which is called the fundamental line ( $\lambda$ ) which expresses a

relationship of the figure plane to the ground plane with the *line to infinity*, in the figure plane ( $p-\infty$ ).

This deserves to be highlighted by the path along which it came, where we have been able to establish it.

But once established along this path, which you will see subsequently does not fail to constitute for us an important trace every time we will have to locate this other subject point, in order to tell you now that if, in the figure plane, we trace out the horizon line ..... which is parallel to this fundamental line, we should deduce from it that the horizon line cuts this infinite line exactly at the same point where the fundamental line cuts it since it is a line which is parallel to the first one.

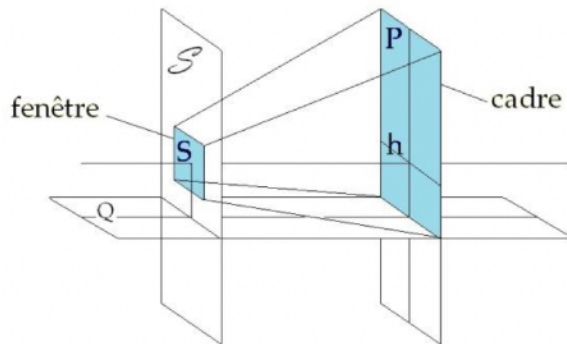
Whence you will see there being greatly simplified the relationship between these two points, one is any point whatsoever on the horizon line, the other is the point at infinity, in the fact that the point at infinity is not just any point whatsoever, that it is a unique point despite the fact that here, it seems to be two.

This will be for us, when it is going to be a question of highlighting the relationship of the subject in phantasy, and specifically the relationship of the subject to the *objet-a*, this will have for us the value of a support, and which will merit your having spent the necessary time, no more, no more than in Descartes' demonstrations, a demonstration once it is grasped is demonstrated, but its rigour and its process must still be maintained. This is what ought to serve us, serve us as a reference every time that we have to operate in terms of the scopic phantasy.

This divided subject is sustained by a common setting (*monture*), the *objet-a* which, in this schema, is to be sought for where? It is to be sought for at a point where of course it falls and vanishes, without that, it would not be the *objet-a*. The *objet-a* is represented here by this something which, precisely, in the figure that I hope to have shown you of it here, with this success of making something tangible out of it for you, the *objet-a* is what supports this joint (?), S, which I imaged here by the world of this parallel plane.



What is elided in it and what, nevertheless, still exists, is what, under more than one form, I already introduced into the structural relationship of the subject to the world; it is the window in the scopic relationship of this subject at the point S from which there begins the whole construction, there appears specified, individualized in this wall, if I can express myself in that way, that is represented by this parallel plane in so far as it is going to determine the second point of the subject in this wall, it is necessary that there should be an opening, a split, a view, a look.



It is this, precisely, that cannot be seen from the initial position of the construction.

We have already seen this function of *the window* being of service to us last year as a surface of what can be written from the very first as function of signifier. Let us call it by the name that it deserves, it is, precisely, in this closed structure which is the one that would allow us to knot together with one another all the different planes that we have just traced out and reproduced, the structure of the projective plane in its

purely topological shape, namely, under *the envelope of the cross-cap*. It is this something holed in this structure which, precisely, allows there to be introduced the irruption on which there is going to depend, on which there is going to depend the production of the division of the subject. Namely, properly speaking, what we call the *objet-a*.

It is in so far as the window, in the relationship of the look to the seen world is always what is elided, that we can represent for ourselves the function of the *objet-a*. The window:

- namely, just as much the slit between the eye lids,
- namely, just as much the entrance of the pupil,
- namely, just as much what constitutes this most primitive of all objects in anything concerned with vision, the camera obscura (*la chambre noire*)

Now this is what I intend to illustrate for you today, to illustrate for you by a work which I told you had been put in the foreground of a recent production by an investigator, whose type of research is certainly not very distant to that of which I have charge here, in the name of analytic experience, even though he does not have the same base, nor the same inspiration, I am speaking about Michel Foucault and this picture by Velázquez which is called *Las Meninas*.

I am now going to have this picture projected before you — close the window — so that we can see in it in a tangible fashion what is allowed by a reading of something which is not at all, in a way, designed to respond to the structure of this picture itself but which, you are going to see, what it is going to allow us — what's happening? This is a slide which has been loaned to me by

the Louvre that I was not able to experiment with earlier and which, really, will give here only the weakest support, but which for those who have seen it, or some photograph of this picture called *Las Meninas*, or simply remember a little bit about it, will serve us as a reference point — you don't have a little pointer, something that would allow me to show things? It's not much but I suppose it's better than nothing.

There you are. So then, perhaps you can, you can see something, a little, the minimum? There at the back, can you see anything?



**X:** As well as earlier. Monsieur Milner tried.

**Lacan:** You know, it's not too bad, is it. Here, you have the figure of the painter. Substitute it right away, so that all the same, you can see clearly that he is there. So, can you focus it?

**X:** That's it, I can't do any better

**Lacan:** All right. Go back to where you were. The painter is in the middle of what he is painting. And what he is painting, you see spread out on this canvas, in a way that we are going to return to. Here, this stroke that you see is the limit, the external edge, touched by light, that is why it emerges, from something which goes from here, very exactly to a point which is found there. You see almost the whole height of the picture which represents to us, you see

here one leg of the easel, a picture seen back-to-front (*à l'envers*).

It is on this canvas. He is working on this picture and the picture is turned round (*retourné*). What do you have to say?

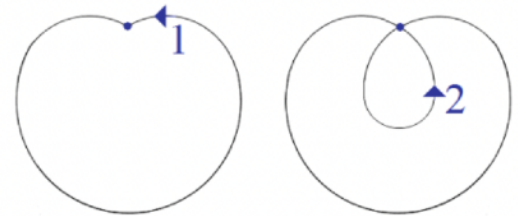
This is the essential plane from which we must start. And what in my opinion Michel Foucault, whom I asked you all to read, in his very remarkable text, has eluded. It is in effect the point around which one has to make turn the whole value, the whole function of this picture.

I would say that this picture is a sort of face down card and we cannot fail to take into account that it is like a face down card, that it takes on its value by belonging to the module and the model of other cards.

This face down card is really constructed there to make you lay down your own. For in effect there was, I cannot fail to mention it, discussion, debate about what is involved in the fact that the painter, Velázquez in this case, is here at a certain distance from the picture, from this picture that is being painted.

The way in which you respond to this question, in which you will lay down your cards, is in effect absolutely essential for the effect of this picture. This implies this dimension that this picture subjugates. Ever since it has existed, it has been the basis, the foundation of all sorts of debates. This subjugation has the closest relationship with what I call this subversion, precisely, of the subject on which I insisted in the whole first part of my discourse today, and it is precisely by being based on it that it takes on its value.

In fact, the relation to the work of art is always marked by this subversion. We seem to have admitted, with the term sublimation, something which, in short, is nothing else. For if we have sufficiently explored the mechanism of the drive to see that what is happening in it is a return journey from the subject to the subject, provided one grasps that the return is not identical to the outward journey and that, precisely, the subject, in conformity with the structure of the Möbius strip, fastens on to itself there after having completed this half-turn which means that, starting from its front, it comes back and is stitched onto its back, in other words, that it is necessary to make two drive circuits for something to be accomplished, which allows us to grasp what is authentically involved in the division of the subject.



This indeed will be shown to us by this picture, whose capturing-value depends on the fact that it is not simply what we always limit ourselves to, precisely because we only do one circuit and that, perhaps, in effect, for the sort of artist we deal with, namely, the ones who consult us, the work of art is for internal use. It helps them to make their own loop (*boucle*).

But when we are dealing with a master like the present one, it is clear that at least what remains from any apprehension with this work is that the one who looks at it is fastened onto it (*y est bouclé*). There is no spectator who simply does anything more than pass in front at all speed and pay his dues to the ritual of the museum, who is not seized by the particularity of this composition, as regards which, all agree in saying that something is happening in front of the picture which makes of it something quite specific, namely, — we express ourselves as we can — that we are caught up into its space.

And people give themselves a headache trying to work out the trick of construction and of the construction of perspective, through which this can be produced.

Starting from there, people go further, people speculate about what is involved in the function of each of the personages and of the groups, and they do not see that all of this is only one and the same question. People proceed generally along this path which is in effect the question which is going to remain at the heart of the problem and which is the one to which at the end I hope to be able to give the response. What is the painter doing? What is he painting?

Which implies, and it is most often because it is the art critic who is involved, the form in which the question is posed: What was he trying to do? Because in short, of course, no one, properly speaking, takes seriously the question: What is he doing?

The picture is there: it is finished and we do not ask ourselves what he is now painting. We ask ourselves: What was he trying to do? Or, more exactly, what idea does he want to give us of what he is in the process of painting? A point where already we obviously see marked out a relationship which, for us, is quite recognisable: what we desire and desire to know is very properly something which is something of the order of what one can call the desire of the other, since we say: What was he trying to do?

It is certainly the wrong position to take up, because we are not in a position to analyse, I would not say the painter, but a picture. It is certain that the painter did what he wanted to do, because it is there before our eyes. And that consequently, this question, in a way, cancels itself out because it is on this hither side of the point at which it is posed, since we pose it, in the name of what he has already done. In other words in the loop-like return of which I spoke earlier, and it is already because of this that the picture introduces us to the dialectic of the subject: there is a circuit already made and we have only to make the other one. Only to do that we must not miss out the first one.

The presence of the picture which occupies all this height and which, from the very fact of this height, encourages us to recognise in it the picture itself, which is presented to us by, this is something I note, in a way, in the margin of our progress which goes along a different path, that this discussion for those who have advanced this thesis that I permit myself to consider to be futile, that it is a different picture that is involved, you will see it later, we will discuss it in more detail, namely, the portrait of the king and of the queen whom you cannot, of course, see on this figure, which is of course quite inadequate, that I brought you, they are here in the background and as you know, I hope, on the whole, is present in a frame which we will have to discuss later as regards its significance, but whose testimony some people take as indicating that the king and the queen are here in front of the picture and it is them that the painter is painting.

This, in my opinion, can be refuted. For the moment, I only want to remark that it is against this background that I tell you that the size of the canvas is already an argument that can be brought that this is not the way things are and that this represented canvas is exactly, represents, the picture that we have here, in so far as it is a canvas supported on a wooden easel whose framework we see here, and that, in other words, we have in this picture the representation of this picture as reality.

Here I can indeed push this little door which means that once again we find in it the crosschecking with my formula which means that the pictorial object is a *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*.

I am not at all saying that the painting is a representation of which the easel, the support, is the representative. If it functions here to make us perceive the truth that is there, it is in the fact that

by putting ourselves into the picture which, a curious thing, is done there for the first time, for there were already things like mirrors in the picture. even numerous ones at this epoch, but the picture in the picture, which is not the play within the play, not at all, is something that was done here it seems for the first time and has scarcely ever been done since except at the level of the point where I picked it out for you, namely in Magritte.

Representation is indeed, in effect, what this figure of the reality of the picture is, but it is there to show us clearly that, at the level of reality and of representation, what is traced out here in the picture and the picture mutually saturate one another. And that this is why it is highlighted for us that, precisely, what constitutes the picture in its essence is not representation, for what is the effect of this picture in the picture: *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. It is precisely all these personages that you see precisely in so far as they are not at all representations but that they are showing off (*en représentation*), that all these personages, whoever they may be, in their status, as they are here effectively in reality, although long dead but they are still there, are personages who are sustained as showing off and with complete conviction, which means, precisely, that none of them represents anything of what they represent. And this is the effect of this something which introduces into the space of the picture, binds them together, crystalizes them in this position of being personages on show, personages of the court.

Starting from there, that Velázquez, the painter, should put himself in the middle of them takes on all its sense. But, of course, this goes much further that this simple touch of what one could call social relativism.

The structure of the picture allows us to go well beyond to the truth, to go beyond, it would have been necessary to start from a question, not from a question but from a completely different movement than this movement of the question, which I told you cancelled itself out from the simple fact of the presence of the work itself, but starting from what the work imposes as we see it here, namely, that the same childhood mouth (*bouche d'enfance*) which is suggested to us by the central character, by this little Infanta who is the second daughter of the royal couple: Philip IV and Dona Marianne of Austria, the little Dona Margherita who was painted fifty times, I would say, by Velázquez, that we should allow ourselves to be guided by this personage who comes, in a way, before us in this space which is for us the question mark as for all of those who have seen this picture, who have spoken about this picture, who have written about this picture, the question mark that it poses us, it is the cries emitted from her mouth, I would say, that it would be well to start from in order to make what I would call the second circuit of the picture and it is the one, it seems to me that is missing in the analysis of the work of which I spoke earlier: "let me see" (*fais voir*) what is behind the canvas as we see it from the back, it is a "let me see" which summons him and that we are more or less ready to pronounce.

Now, from this simple "let me see" may arise what, in effect, starting from there is imposed, that is, what we see, namely, these personages as I qualify them as being essentially personages on show.

But we do not see only that. We see the structure of the painting, its perspective montage. It is here that undoubtedly I regret that we do not have here a support that is sufficient to demonstrate for you these features in all their rigour. Here, the personage that you see framed in a door of light at the back is the very precise point where the lines of perspective come together. It is at a point more or less situated according to the lines that are traced out between the figure of this personage — for there are slight fluctuations of intersection which are produced — and his elbow that there is situated the vanishing point, and it is not by chance if through this vanishing point, it is precisely this personage and a personage who is leaving.

This personage is not someone indifferent. He is also called Velázquez. Nieto instead of being called Diego-Rodriguez. This Nieto is the person who had some say in the vote which allowed Velázquez to accede to the position of Aposentador of the king, namely, something like a chamberlain or grand marshal. He is, in brief, a sort of personage who reduplicates him and this personage, here, is designated to us because of this since we do not see and of whom we say “let me see”, not alone does he see it from where he is, but that he has, as I might say, seen too much, he is leaving. Is there a better means of designating this high-point as regards what opens out as regards the subject in terms of the function of the eye than something which is expressed by a “seen that” (*vu*) that is, in a way, definitive.

Henceforth, the presence of Velázquez himself in this position where you have seen him earlier and the second photo being no better than the first, you have not been able to see what you could see on better reproductions and what a thousand authors who have spoken about it have born witness to, namely, that this personage who is looking, people underline, towards us spectators — God knows the amount of speculation that has gone on about the orientation of the look — this person has precisely the look that is least turned towards the outside.

This is not an analysis that is personal to me. Several authors, the great majority, have pointed it out. The sort of absent, dreamy, aspect turned towards some *disegno interno*, as the Góngorists express it, I mean the whole theory of baroque, mannerist, conceptist theory, anything you like, and of which Góngora is the example, is the flower, *disegno interno*, this something to which there is referred the mannerist discourse and which is, properly, what I call that in this discourse there is no metaphor, that the metaphor enters into it as a real component, this presence of Velázquez in his canvas, his figure bearing in a way the sign and the support that he is here, at once, as a component and as an element of it, this is the structural, represented point through which there is designated to us what may be involved in it, along what path it can happen that there appears in the canvas itself the one who supports it qua looking subject (*sujet regardant*). Well then, it is something quite striking whose value cannot, in my opinion, be mapped out except from what I introduced to you in this topological structure.

Two features are to be highlighted: that this look is looking and with respect to it everyone says, it is us, we the spectator. Why believe so much in ourselves? No doubt it summons us to something since we respond in the way that I told you. But what this look implies, just like the presence of the turned picture in the picture, just like this space which strikes all those who look at the picture

as being in a way unique and singular, is that this picture extends into the dimensions of what I called the window and designates it as such.

This ensures that, in a corner of the picture, through the picture itself, that is in a way turned onto itself in order to be represented in it, there is created this space in front of the picture which we are properly designated as inhabiting as such, this presentifying of the window in the look of the one who has put himself, not by chance, or in any random fashion in the place that he occupies, Velázquez, this is the point of capture and the specific action this picture exercises on us.

There is a crosscheck for this in the picture. I can only regret once more to have to refer you to images, in general, moreover, I must say, in numerous volumes, all rather bad and either too dark or too clear. This picture is not easy to reproduce but it is clear that the distance between the painter and the picture, in the picture where he is represented, is very sufficiently emphasised to show us that he is precisely not within range to reach it and in this there is an intention, namely, that this part of the group, what is here called *Las Meninas*, *Les Ménines*, namely, Dona Margarita with Dona Maria Agostio Sariato who is on her knees before her, are in front of the painter, while the others, even though they seem to be on an analogous plane, in front, are rather behind, and that this question about this space between the painter and the painting is here not alone what is presented but what is presentified to us by this trace that it is enough to designate to recognise that here a transversal line marks something which is not simply a luminous division, a grouping of the canvas, but a veritable furrow of the passage of this phantastical presence of the painter in so far as he is looking.

If I tell you that it is somewhere at the level of the intersection of the fundamental line and the ground plane and at a point in infinity that the look of the subject is going towards, it is indeed also from this point that Velázquez made, in this ghost-like form which specifies this self-portrait among all the others, one of the traits which is distinguished undoubtedly by the style of the painter. He will tell you himself: “Do you believe that I would paint a self-portrait from this drop, from this oil, with this paintbrush.”

You have only to consult the portrait of Innocent X which is in the Palazzo Doria Pamphilj to see that the style is not at all the same.

This ghost of the looking subject entered by this trace which is still tangible there and of which I might say that all the personages bear the vibration, for, in this picture, in which it has become a cliché, a common-place and I have heard it articulated in the mouths, I must say, of not only the most authorised but the most high ranking in the hierarchy of creators.

This picture which we are told is the picture of looks which cross one another and of a sort of inter-vision, as if all the personages were characterised by some relation with one another. If you look at things closely you will see that except for the look of the maid of honour Maria Agostina Sariate who is looking at Dona Magarita, no other look fixes on anything.



All these looks are lost on some invisible point, as one might say, “an angel has passed”, precisely the painter. The other maid of honour who is called Isabelle de Velázquez, is there, in a way, as forbidden, her arms, in a way, spread apart from the trace of this passage.

The idiot, here, the monster Maria Barbola, the dwarf, is looking elsewhere and not at all, as it is said, towards us. As regards the little dwarf, he is occupied here with very precisely doing, with very precisely playing the role that he is made to play qua imitation little boy, he is playing the little brat: he is giving the dog a kick in the behind as if to say to him, in a way: “Are you asleep! You didn’t smell the mouse that has just passed.”

A look, we will be told, if someone still wished to sustain it, but observe that in a picture which is supposed to be a picture about the interplay of looks, there are not in any case, even if we must retain the look of one of the maids of honour, two looks which meet, complicitous looks, intelligent looks, searching looks.

Dona Margarita, the little girl, does not look at the maid servant who is looking at her. All the looks are elsewhere. And, of course, the look at the back of the one who is leaving is nothing more than a look which means: “I am leaving you”, and is far from being pointed at anyone.

Henceforth, what can be meant by the fact that is brought to the centre of the theory of this picture, when it is claimed that what is here in the forefront, at our place, and God knows whether the spectator can take delight in such a support, in such a hypothesis, is the king and the queen who are reflected in the mirror which ought to appear here for you and which is at the back?

To this I would object that the painter, from where he shows himself in this picture, where does he intend that we should put it? One of the hypotheses and one of the ones which seduced most among those put forward, is that, since the painter is there, and this is what he has painted, he must have seen all of this in a mirror, a mirror which is where we are and there we are, transformed into a mirror. This does not lack seduction nor does it fail to involve a certain appeal with respect to all I evoke for you as regards the relativity of the subject to the other, except that when you want, it is around such an experience that I would highlight for you the strict difference there is between a mirror and the window; two terms precisely which structurally have no relationship.

But let us stick to the picture. The painter is supposed to have painted himself having seen the whole scene of people around him in a mirror. I only see one objection to it: it is that nothing indicates to us from the testimony of history — and God knows this is the sort of news that history charges itself with transmitting — nothing indicates to us that Velázquez was left-handed. Now, this indeed is how we ought to see him appearing if we are to take seriously the fact that, in a painting supposedly made with the help of a mirror, he represents himself as he indeed was in effect, namely, holding his paintbrush in his right hand.

This may appear to you to be a very slight reason. It nevertheless remains that, if this is how things are, this theory would be completely incompatible with the presence here of the king and the queen. Either it is a mirror that is here, or it is the king and the queen. If it is the king and the queen, this cannot be the painter, if the painter is elsewhere, if the king and the queen are there, it cannot be the painter who is there, as I suppose he effectively was.

You do not understand, Monsieur Castoriadis?

**Castoriadis:** No

**Lacan:** In the hypothesis that the king and the queen, reflected back there in the mirror, were here to have themselves painted by the painter, since I have eliminated the hypothesis that the painter was there otherwise than through the art of his brush, it is necessary that the painter be either here or elsewhere. The requirement that the painter should be there and not on the other side of a mirror, which would be ourselves, lies in the fact of supposing that the king and queen are in the mirror.

In other words, we cannot put at the same place any two personages whatsoever of this trio which are: a supposed mirror, the king and the queen, or the painter. We are always forced, in order that this should hold up, to put two of them at the same time, and there cannot be two at the same time.

If the king and the queen are there so as to be reflected at the back in the mirror now it is impossible that they should be represented as being there in the mirror, if only because by reason of scale, of the dimensions in which they are seen in the mirror where they are more or less the same scale as the person who is on the point of leaving next to them. Even though given the distance that we are at, they ought to be exactly twice as small. But this is only another additional argument.

If the king and the queen are there in this hypothesis, then, the painter is here and we find ourselves before the position put forward by tellers of anecdotes, by Madam de Motteville, for example, namely, that the king and the queen were here — and what is more they are supposed to be standing — in the process of being, of posing and are supposed to have before them the array of all these people whose natural function, you can see, would be if really at this time Velázquez was in the process of painting something quite different to them and, what is more, something that they do not see because they see all of these personages in a position that surround him.

I put forward, in opposition to this obvious impossibility, that what is the essential in what is indicated by this picture is this function of the window. That the fact that the trace is, in a way, marked by that through which the painter can return to it, is really here what shows us how it is there the empty place. That it is in symmetry to this empty place that there appear those, as I might say, not whose look, but the supposition that they see everything, that they are in this mirror exactly as they might be behind a grill or an un-silvered window pane and after all, at the limit, nothing

prevents us from supposing that it is something of the kind, namely, what is called a connector, connecting with a large room, one of these places of the type of a place for spying, that they are here in effect, that the fact that they see everything is what sustains this world as being on show, that there is here something which in a way gives us the parallel for the “I think, therefore I am” of Descartes; that Velázquez says “I paint, therefore I am”, and I am the one who is leaving you here with what I have done for your eternal interrogation. And I am also in this place from which I can return to the place that I leave you which is really the one where there is realised this effect from the fact that there is a fall (*chute*) and disarray of something which is at the heart of the subject.

The very multiplicity of interpretations, one might even say their embarrassment, their awkwardness is there sufficiently designed to underline it. But at the other point what do we have? This presence of the royal couple, playing exactly the same role as the God of Descartes, namely, that in everything that we see, nothing deceives on the single condition that the omnipresent God, for his part, is deceived by it. And it is there, the presence of these beings that you see in the so confused and singular atmosphere of the mirror. And this mirror is there, in a way, the equivalent of something which is going to vanish at the level of the subject A who is there, as a pendant of this small-(*a*) of the window in the foreground, would this not deserve our dwelling a little more on it?

A painter, about thirty years later, called Luca Giordano<sup>1</sup>, a mannerist precisely in painting and who preserved in history the label of “fa presto” because he went a little quickly, also extraordinarily brilliant, having contemplated at length this image whose history I have not given you as regards its denomination, uttered a word, one of these words, God knows, that one might expect from someone who was at once a mannerist and very intelligent, he said: “It is the theology of painting”.

And of course, it is indeed at this theological level, where the God of Descartes is the support of a whole world that is in the process of being transformed through the intermediary of the subjectival ghost, it is indeed through the intermediary of the royal couple, who appear to us scintillating in this frame at the back, that this term takes on its sense.

But I will not leave you without telling you, for my part, what suggests to me the fact that a painter like Velázquez, how much of the visionary there was in him. For who (41) will speak in connection with him about realism, who for example in connection with *Hilanderas*<sup>2</sup> would dare to say that this is painting of a popular crudeness. It no doubt is, which simply means eternalising the flash that he might have had one day leaving the royal tapestries factory and seeing there the workers in the foreground providing a frame for what was being produced at the back.

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<sup>1</sup> **Luca Giordano**, (born Oct. 18, 1634, Naples—died Jan. 3, 1705, Naples), the most celebrated and prolific Neapolitan painter of the late 17th century.

<sup>2</sup> ***Las Hilanderas***: “The Spinners”) is a painting by Velázquez now in the Museo del Prado, Madrid.



I would ask you simply to consult this painting, which is worth more than what I have shown you there, in order to see the degree to which there can be distant from any realism, and, moreover, there is no realistic painter, undoubtedly, who is not a visionary. And by looking more carefully at what is happening at the back of this scene, in this mirror where these personages appear to us to be twinkling, and for their part undoubtedly distinct from what I called earlier ghostly but really brilliant.

There came to me the following, that in polar opposition to this window in which the painter frames us as in a mirror, he makes there emerge what for us, no doubt, does not come in an indifferent place as regards what happens for us in terms of the relationship of the subject to the *objet-a* — the television screen.



Pope Innocent X