

A Subjectless Architecture

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A key theme in Lacanian psychoanalysis is the disappearance of the subject, through aphanisis. Aphanisis was a term used in psychoanalysis to refer to the fading of the sexual desire of the subject. Since Jacques Lacan set desire within the realm of language, for him aphanisis meant the fading of the subject beneath the signifier, as the signifier defines a subject to another signifier, and the signifier takes precedence in the formation of the unconscious. “There is no subject without, somewhere, aphanisis of the subject, and it is in this alienation, in this fundamental division, that the dialectic of the subject is established,” Lacan wrote in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (221).¹ Related to aphanisis and the disappearance of the subject in Lacan’s thought are the real, the *objet a*, the fading of the subject in language, the fading of the subject in perception, and the gaze. Other topics related to the fading of the subject are the dream space of Sigmund Freud, the psychophysiological space of Erwin Panofsky, the heterogeneous space of Georges Bataille, the psychasthenia of Roger Caillois, and the Stendhal Syndrome. The purpose of this essay is to consider these concepts in relation to architecture, in order to consider the possibility of a subjectless architecture.

The Real and the *Objet a*

The third category of the psyche in Lacanian psychoanalysis, after the imaginary, or conscious ego, and the symbolic, or the unconscious, is the real (*réel*), which is neither imaginary nor symbolic in conscious or unconscious thought, and which is inaccessible to psychoanalysis itself. The real is not reality in either a conceptual or phenomenological sense, which is the symbolic and the imaginary: it is only proposed as an algebraic concept, as it cannot be conceived. It exists as an absence in the symbolic order (language), as the unconscious exists as an absence in conscious thought. Non-presence can be seen in the real of Lacan, and the gaze, in the dialectic between the imaginary and the symbolic. The real of Lacan is exterior to the symbolic, and cannot be represented by the symbolic, and yet the real has an effect on the symbolic, as the unconscious has an effect on conscious thought. The real is the inability of the signifier in language to relate to the signified, the impossibility of meaning in language, and the impossibility of the subject. In every attempt that the subject makes to represent itself in language or perception, according to Lacan, something is missed, or left behind. That something is the *objet a* (*autre*, other) in the register of the real, the register which exists outside of signification. The *objet a* is a remainder (*un reste*) or a piece of waste (*un déchet*). It is that which is represented by the other as an object of desire. The *objet a* in the real exceeds that which is rationalizable, that which can be given by the mechanisms of language and reason.

The *objet a* is the incompleteness of the subject in language and perception, and that which causes its desire in signification for completion. The real is a product of the dialectic of the imaginary and symbolic; it is a product of the failure of the self-definition and self-identity of the human subject,

and its impossibility. As that which the symbolic order is not, the real precedes the symbolic order, but as the symbolic order unfolds the real is taken into it, as an absence or as an other, in the becoming absent of presence. The real is thus both prior to the symbolic, to the mechanisms of thought, and anterior to it; it is both the product of thought and that which is exterior to thought. The real is both presupposed and posed by the symbolic.

Desire for Lacan, as it is manifest in the mechanisms of language, is the attempt to attain or understand that which is missing from the being of the subject, which is the *objet a*. The *objet a* is that around which desire circulates, that upon which fantasy is constructed, and that which is the product of *méconnaissance* or misknowing. It is that which is excluded by signification in language, that of which the subject is deprived as it is solidified into a signifier in language. The elided subject in signification, and the divided subject in language, are the result of that which the subject can no longer be in rational discourse, in the symbolic and the Other, the unconscious. The *objet a* is present in “the existence of everything that the ego neglects, scotomizes, misconstrues in the sensations that make it react to reality, everything that it ignores, exhausts, and binds in the significations that it receives from language,” as Lacan described in “Aggressivity and Psychoanalysis” (*Écrits, A Selection*, 22).² It is the residue of the illusion of consciousness, the mirage of objectification in the perception-consciousness system as conceived by Freud. It is that which cannot be represented by the signifier, those causes and forces which determine the subject, in the unconscious, to which the subject has no access. The *objet a* represents the inability of the subject to know itself in thought or in consciousness. The Lacanian subject can only say to itself that it is impossible to recognize myself in conscious thought; the unconscious is where I am not, and the conscious is where I cannot be myself. The *objet a* is thus the absent presence of the subject, the object of the subject’s desire, which becomes the other, in imaginary ego object identification and reflection.

The desire of the Other of Lacan, the desire of the subject in language, is transferred to the desire of the other; the other is objectified by the subject to compensate for its lack, the *objet a*. The *objet a* is the residue of the dialectic between the imaginary and the symbolic, the conflict between the identity of the subject as it is defined by its imaginary ego in object identification and the identity of the subject as it is defined by the symbolic order, in its insertion into the Other, and the demands that the Other makes of the subject in relation to its phenomenal and imaginary experience. The demands of the symbolic are manifest in the unconscious as the discourse of the Other, to which the subject does not have access in itself, but which constitute the unknowable foundation of the conscious activities and thoughts of the subject. As the subject enters into the symbolic, into the signifying chain of language, the body of the subject is fragmented, and the experience of the body is divided in the gestalt ego identification resulting from the mirror stage; the *objet a* is that experience of the unified body of the subject which is rendered impossible by language. This can be seen in the *Poupée* of Hans Bellmer, where the fragmentation of the body is also a product of mechanized warfare (Figure 1).

The *objet a* of Lacan, the body repressed by language, is the tropic, metonymic representation of the mythological totality of being that is lost by the subject when it is elided in the signifying chain, in its representations to itself of its imaginary ideal ego and the symbolic order in language. The *objet a* is the lack which is the cause of desire, the lack of being in existence. An object becomes an object of desire, as described by Lacan, “when it takes the place,” metonymically, as it is

differentiated in language, “of what by its very nature remains concealed from the subject ...” (“Hamlet,” 28),³ which is that which is repressed by language, or abstraction. The subject seeks the *objet a* in fantasy, in wish-fulfillment, as a result of the failure of all of its identificatory characteristics, as defined by psychoanalysis, to define it to itself; neither the lost phenomenological experience, the imaginary ego in object identification, the vestiges of the figural, nor the symbolic order in language, signification, can compensate for the *objet a*, which is what the subject lacks in all of its self-definitions. The lack in the subject results in a conflict between instinct and social convention (Figure 2).

As a result of the division of the subject in the imaginary and symbolic orders, and the formation of the object of desire as the displacement or compensation for the lack of the subject, the subject “cannot fail to recognize that what he desires presents itself to him as what he does not want, the form assumed by the negation in which the *méconnaissance* of which he himself is unaware is inserted in a very strange way,” which is “a *méconnaissance* by which he transfers the permanence of his desire to an ego that is nevertheless intermittent, and, inversely, protects himself from his desire by attributing to it these very intermittences” (*Écrits, A Selection*, 312–313), as described in “The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious.” The object of desire is the stand-in for the *objet a*, which is concealed from the subject in its *méconnaissance* in the unconscious, in the Other, in the dialectic of interiority and the Other. The subject knows that the object that it desires is not what it desires, but it does not know why, because the desire is reinforced by the imaginary ego in the identification of the subject in the body and image of the other, as well as by the symbolic order in the identification of the subject in relation to language and society, the historical and cultural, both of which assert themselves to the subject, in temporal and periodic intervals, as given by language, in order to reconfirm the existence of the subject as a desiring subject, although the cause of the desire, and the object of the desire, the *objet a*, are inaccessible to the subject.

Fantasy, the wish-fulfillment caused by the *objet a*, is represented by Lacan by the algorithm $\$ \diamond o$, which is the desire (\diamond) of the elided subject ($\$$) for the *objet a*, the *plus-de jouir*, what is inaccessible to desire or wish-fulfillment. Fantasy is the promise to the subject of that which is unattainable in its existence in being, and it protects the subject from that abyss within itself. The condition of the object of the fantasy, the *objet a*, is “the moment of a ‘fading’ or eclipse of the subject that is closely bound up with the *Spaltung* or splitting that it suffers from its subordination to the signifier” (313). As soon as the subject enters into language, the attainment of the *objet a* is impossible. The subject is split between the imaginary and symbolic, the figural and the formal; the object identification of the imaginary ego provides the subject with the stand-in object of its desire, in the illusion of consciousness in the ego, and the symbolic order robs the subject of the stand-in object of its desire in the fragmentation of the body. A splitting in architecture can mimic the splitting or fragmentation of the subject, as in the work of Gordon Matta-Clark (Figure 3).

The symbolic is resistant to the absorption of imaginary ego identifications, which survive as vestiges in dreams. Imaginary object identifications create an unconscious which “is made of what the subject essentially fails to recognize in his structuring image, in the image of his ego—namely, those captivations by imaginary fixations which are unassimilable to the symbolic development of his history,” as Lacan described in *Seminar I (Freud’s Papers on Technique)*,⁴ which are the interiority of the subject, the subjective spirit. The inability of the symbolic to absorb the imaginary

results in the dialectic, the divided subject, and the *méconnaissance* of the subject. As the subject is unable to identify itself in the imaginary object identifications which remain alien to the symbolic constitution of the subject, the object or the other becomes exterior to the subject, as the particular in the differentiation of reason, and becomes the stand-in for the displaced *objet a* of the subject, which is nowhere to be found in language. Desire negates itself in the doubling of itself in language just as thought does. Desire for Lacan is caught in the dialectic of the imaginary and symbolic and rendered impossible, as the subject is rendered impossible. The object which stands in for the *objet a*, the lack in the subject, might be a fetish object or a collector's object, money, commercial products in advertising, sexual fantasies, identification with the Other in patriotism or racism, or displacements of the subject or the other in the Other in the form of culturally conditioned desires, such as style, fashion, music, architectural forms, a certain profession or activity, etc. In advertising, commercial products are often represented as that which is unattainable, for example Coca-Cola as the real thing, as pointed out by Slavoj Žižek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. The subject does not desire Coca-Cola; the subject desires the *objet a*, that which it lacks, which is the real thing, in the domain of the real, that which is inaccessible.

The Fading of the Subject in Language

The Lacanian subject desires as soon as it enters into language. Desire is not present in phenomenal experience prior to the mirror stage. Desire is the product of the “murder of the thing” (*Écrits, A Selection*, 104) by the symbol in language, which instigates the lack experienced by the subject. The desire of the subject is thus “the desire of the Other” (264), and it is also the desire of the other, in the dialectic of the symbolic and imaginary. This can be seen in the desire of the dream, which is not a conscious desire, not regulated by the conscious ego. The dream enacts its own desire, which is the desire of the Other in the unconscious. In the same way, the conscious subject is the subject of the desire of the Other in language, rather than its originating agent. Consciousness is a construct of desire in the Other, which uses consciousness in its own regulation and concealment from the subject. In that the object of desire is a substitute for the *objet a*, the lack of the subject, the object is external to the desire of the subject. Desire is sustained by the subject and not by the object. The subject is an apparatus of absence in which the *objet a* is constituted. “This apparatus is something lacunary, and it is in the lacuna that the subject establishes the function of a certain object, *qua* lost object,” Lacan explained in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (185). The object of desire is a fill-in for the lacuna in the subject, for the hole in the signifying chain which represents the subject. The desire of the subject is supported by fantasy. “The fantasy is the support of desire; it is not the object that is the support of desire. The subject sustains himself as desiring in relation to an ever more complex signifying ensemble.” As desire is the desire of the Other, desire is socially engendered, through the language of the symbolic.

The subject does not want what it desires, but desires what it thinks it is supposed to desire as a speaking subject, in order to sustain itself in language. Thus “the object of desire, in the usual sense, is either a fantasy that is in reality the support of desire” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 186), the reaffirming by the ego of the subject that it is desiring what it is supposed to desire, “or a lure,” the deception of the subject by its ego that the object is what it is supposed to desire. The desire of the subject is divided in metonymy, which re-affirms the subject

as that which is represented in language, and at the same time eliminates the subject from that representation. Desire is both reaffirmed and negated by language, because desire is constructed by language, by the discourse of the Other, which is the unconscious. The subject is only partially existent in the Other, and thus only partially existent in its own desire, which is inaccessible to it, as is the unconscious. The desire of the Other is that which links the signifiers in a signifying chain, and that which results in the elimination of the subject. The subject of Lacan is alienated from itself in signification; it is alienated from its own desire in language, by language. The subject is self-alienated in the doubling of its reason, in the doubling of the signifier which produces signification in the imaginary, and which institutes the *objet a* in language as the lack of the subject, the self-negation of the subject in reason, and its self-alienation in its language. As soon as the subject speaks, it desires, and as soon as the subject desires it does not know itself, and its *méconnaissance* is sustained by its desire. As soon as a signifier represents the subject to another signifier, the subject is alienated from itself in its desire. “Alienation is linked in an essential way to the function of the dyad of signifiers” (236).

As soon as the alienation is accomplished in the singular representation of the subject by a signifier to another signifier, the subject is eliminated from any further signification, which becomes self-enclosed and inaccessible to the subject. The subject cannot access that by which it is constituted. “If we wish to grasp where the function of the subject resides in this signifying articulation, we must operate with two, because it is only with two that he can be cornered in alienation. As soon as there are three, the sliding becomes circular.” The alienation is accomplished with the binary signifier, as “the signifier is that which represents the subject for the other signifier.” The binary signifier is also the mechanism of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* of the dream. The representation which takes the place of the representation is the signifier which takes the place of the signifier, which represents the subject to it. The subject is elided in the dream in the same way, as the *Unterdrückung* of the binary signifier. The subject is thus self-alienated from its desire in the dream as well, in its aphanisis, which is a product of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, as the elision of the subject is the product of the binary signifier in conscious discourse, in which the mechanisms of the unconscious, metaphor and metonymy, determine the subject unknown to itself.

For Lacan it is in the representation of the subject by a signifier to another signifier, in the structure of the binary signifier, that is located the One, or the real. “We know of no other basis by which the One may have been introduced into the world if not by the signifier as such, that is, the signifier insofar as we learn to separate it from its meaning effects,” explained Lacan in *Seminar XX (On Feminine Sexuality)*.⁵ It is in *Seminar XX* that Lacan focused his attention on the One and on the real. As the binary signifier introduces the *objet a* into language, it is that by which non-existence is instituted into existence, in the mechanism of desire sustained by language. The mathematical/linguistic mechanism in signification, which is the function of desire in the maintenance of the ego, reveals the One, or the real, in the gap between signifiers, in the trace or index: “for desire merely leads us to aim at the gap (*faille*) where it can be demonstrated that the One is based only on (*tenir de*) the essence of the signifier” (*Seminar XX*, 5), as Lacan explained. It is signification which reveals that which cannot be signified, and the desire of the subject which reveals the non-existence of the subject. Desire is the mechanism of its own non-existence, as it is perpetuated by the illusion of object identification in the imaginary ego, and the illusion of the consciousness of the subject in language, in the symbolic order.

It is impossible to establish a relation between cause and effect; the signifier can only have a relation to the second signifier in the binary relation, and there is a gap between the two signifiers in that relation, as in the relation between the numbers one and two, in which is found the trace of further signification, for example one plus two equals three. One and two alone constitute no signification, no intersection of the imaginary and symbolic. They correspond to the object identification of the imaginary ego as the subject enters into language. One and two alone constitute the gap between one and two, between the One and signification, in which is found the *objet a*, which causes signification as compensation for its lack. The *objet a* constitutes the inaccessibility of the One to signification, and thus the inaccessibility of the Other. The signifier, as constituted by the *objet a*, as the mechanism of the lack, is the inaccessibility of the Other. The *objet a* is essential to the functioning of language.

The Fading of the Subject in Perception

In the perception of Lacan, in the relation between the subject and the world which is constituted by perception and “ordered in the figures of representation,” perception can be compared to reason as a succession of particulars in differentiation driven by desire in the *objet a*, in which the subject is only present as lack. As in language there is a hole between signifiers, a gap which is the *objet a*, in perception “something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it,” as in the trace in *différance* in Deconstruction; “that is what we call the gaze,” as described by Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (73). The gaze is the *objet a* of perception, as perception can be defined as the discourse of the Other, as the unconscious. The unconscious is present as an absence in perception in the same way that the unconscious is present as an absence in language in reason. The gaze is the function of perception.

Perception is a product of consciousness, the self-sustaining illusion of the ego in its existence to itself, thus everything in perception is pre-inscribed by the ego, by consciousness. Everything in perception is given by consciousness as “the pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen” (74), in the same way that signification in language cannot exceed consciousness, that the unconscious is present only in absence. The *objet a* in perception is defined by Lacan as the “stain,” that which occurs in the gaze, the holes in perception. “We will then realize that the function of the stain and of the gaze is both that which governs the gaze most secretly,” as the *objet a* governs the lacunae in language and the subject, “and that which always escapes from the grasp of that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness,” which is perception, as the *objet a* escapes conscious discourse. In perception, consciousness enacts the play of mirror reflections of signification, as particulars in the process of differentiation, as in the play of differences toward the deferral of meaning in *différance*, or the *glissement* of the signifier in *signifiance*.

Self-consciousness in perception, the doubling of reason and its recognition of its otherness to itself, is the “*seeing oneself seeing oneself*” (82), the continual reaffirmation of consciousness by the ego in the signification of perception. Such reaffirmation represses the *objet a*, the lack in the subject which is the cause of its desire, which is the function of the gaze, the lacuna, to reveal. In the theory of perception, it is possible to conceive of an alternative to perception, whereas in the theory of language it is not possible to conceive of an alternative to conscious discourse in communication, because, while perception is structured by language, or signification, it has no

communicative intent, as in the dream. The unconscious can be revealed in means outside of perception in the same way that it can be revealed in the composition of dreams outside of conscious experience, as shown by Freud, as dreams are as well shown to be structured by language, the discourse of the Other, which is the unconscious, which can be seen in perception as well.

The gaze shows itself in the dream, in the absence of the subject, and in the absence of the organization of the imaginary space of the dream by the subject in perception. Dream space and dream images are structured differently than in perception. In perception, the image of the subject, the gestalt, orthopedic, self-reflected body image formulated in the mirror stage, is the orienting point for the construction of perception by the subject, as the imaginary ego in object orientation in language. As a vanishing point in perspective construction, everything in perception is oriented to the subject and organized in accordance—spatial recession, hierarchies of scale, vertical and horizontal differentiations, as a grid placed on the world. The structuring of what is seen in perception is given by the structuring of language, when the imaginary experience is transformed into a mechanism for the ordering of the psyche, when the fragmentary and dispersed quality of what is seen in experience is re-constituted in relation to the subject, the imaginary ego, and reordered to correspond to the symbolic in language.

When the subject identifies itself, the illusion of the consciousness of the subject is preserved, in the subject “*seeing itself seeing itself*” in the words of Lacan, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (82), as it would in perspective construction. The consciousness of the subject preserves the separation between it and the world around it; it preserves the subject/object relation, and the mechanisms of consciousness and reason which sustain the *méconnaissance* and division of the subject. The subject in constructed perception is given by the *cogito* of the subject, and results in the flocculation of the subject, the freezing of the subject as the representation of a signifier in language, and the punctiform object in space. The obverse of the subject/object relation in Lacanian psychoanalysis is found in the gaze, which overturns the consciousness of the subject in perception.

Dream Space

In dreams, the particular quality of the image is that it does not correspond to the perception of the subject inserted into language, although linguistic structures are seen to compose the dream. The symbolic is present in the dream, in the latent content in the dream, the dream thought, as revealed by Freud, and the imaginary ego is present in the dream, as images in the dream are products of the object identification of the subject, and there is a transformative process between the latent and manifest content of the dream, as Freud showed, between the symbolic and imaginary, as it were. The difference between the dream and waking perception seems to be that the interaction between the symbolic and imaginary which constitutes the subject in conscious perception is missing in the experience of the dream. As dream images are the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, the representation which takes the place of the mnemonic residue, the connection between the symbolic and imaginary is lost between the mnemonic residue and the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*. The imaginary is not subsumed into and repressed by the symbolic as it is in conscious perception; the dream represents more of an equal partnership, given the lack of requirement for communication and relation with the other in the dream. Conscious perception is always in reference to the relation with the other, the object identification of the imaginary ego which is only a fragment or a residue absorbed into

the symbolic, as the subject is inserted into the Other. The dream image is a product of the relation between the subject and the Other, but the structuring of the relation between the subject and the other in relation to the Other, the imaginary in relation to the symbolic, is not present in the dream.

The subject is not present in the dream as it is not present in language, only as an absence, a “sliding away,” as described by Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (75), and the gaze is present in the dream as the lacuna in signification and the disjunction between the imaginary and symbolic. The presence of the gaze is manifest in the dream, as described by Lacan, in “the absence of horizon, the enclosure, of that which is contemplated in the waking state,” which are products of perception, the interaction of the imaginary and symbolic, “and, also, the character of emergence, of contrast, of stain, of its images, the intensification of their colors ...”. The images in the dream present themselves differently from images in perception, not connected to the object identifications of the imaginary, sensible forms. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud described dream images as competing in intensity and superimposition (359), and color impressions are given hallucinatory clarity in relation to the mnemonic residues (586),⁶ as seen in the *Dutch Interior* by Joan Miró (Figure 4).

In Freud’s *On Dreams*, dreams are described as “disconnected fragments of visual images” (40).⁷ Dream images do not appear in relation to the insertion by the subject of itself into the field; they are independent of the interaction between a representation of the subject and the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, though the object identifications of the subject are present in the dream. The position of the subject in the dream then, for Lacan, “is profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does not see where it is leading, he follows,” as described in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (75). The dream is not a product of perception, organized in relation to the subject. Seeing in perception is impossible in the dream. The subject will never “be able to apprehend himself in the dream in the way in which, in the Cartesian *cogito*, he apprehends himself as thought.” The relation between the imaginary ego and the symbolic order which places the subject as a reference point, in relation to the other, in the constructed perception of the Other, does not exist in the dream, and as a result the gaze is revealed, the lacuna in the field of perception which contains the absence of the subject in the symbolic and the lack of the subject in the imaginary, which is the stain, or the *objet a*, which is elided in perception, as it is based on the *cogito*, as the unconscious is elided in signification. In that the *cogito* is given by the illusion of consciousness, the subject is the consciousness of perception, but the subject cannot be the consciousness of the dream, in the disjunction between the imaginary and symbolic.

The set design for *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* is the scenic realization of German expressionistic painting in the early twentieth century. The scenery was designed by Hermann Warm, Walter Röhrig, and Walter Reimann, affiliated with the Berlin Sturm Group. It enacts a conflict between tyranny and chaos, reflecting the political and social situation in Germany. The set design is chaotic and disorienting in that there is no overriding rational sense of order. Walls of buildings are skewed and competing, disrupting a sense of continuity (Figure 5). There are no right angles, no orthographic relationships, but all the architecture is represented in straight lines, while nature is represented in curvilinear forms (Figure 6), exaggerating the contrast between the human and the organic or natural. The skewed walls and crooked windows and doors, twisted and distorted, illogically placed, interact with shadows cast at all angles on both interior and exterior, as well as painted shadows, creating a multiply diffused and fragmented play of light and form, as

in a dream, whose sharp edges and incongruent spaces create a sensation of anxiety and defense. The curvilinear and arabesque forms of the natural elements are unnaturally abstracted and exaggerated, intersecting geometry with organic growth in order to inspire terror in the subject as well, in the uncanny mix of the symbolic and the real. The distortions of both architectural and natural elements are inspired by the unconscious, given the distortions of dream elements, and the tyrannical effect that the unconscious has on the conscious mind. The architectural structure of the unconscious is a structure of distortion, as well as fragmentation and diffusion. Freud has shown that dreams are distorted, and Lacan has shown that the unconscious is based in *méconnaissance*, in error and omission, in the rupture between the signifying structure and the real, *das Ding*, and the organic body. Distortion of architectural elements, enacting a dialectic between the reaffirming logic of the signifying structure and the trauma and enigma of the real, enact the *objet a*, the mediation between the symbolic and real.

The play of shadows, real and pictorial, the skewed walls, and the conflation and intermixing of flat surfaces with the illusion of depth, efface all rules of perspective, as in dream construction, wherein disconnected fragments of visual images are superimposed and competing between each other, as described by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900. Multiple viewpoints efface the punctiform subject, the origin of a single viewpoint, as the subject as the origin of the viewpoint is effaced in the dream. Part of the effect of the terror created is the denial of the viewing subject, as the viewing subject is absent from Freudian dream construction in the unconscious. The expressive disposition of the shapes reflects the structure of the phantasmagoric rather than rational thought, the pre-cognitive formation of hallucinations based on wish-fulfillment. The primitive sensation is the hallucinatory satisfaction of need, a phantasmagoria in which wish fulfillment is displaced, according to Freud. The phantasmagoria is the succession of optical phenomena with no signifying or referential element, not subjected to the signifying structure. Within the framework of thought, it is impossible to enact anything without a signifying aspect; if a signification did not exist initially, it would be assigned, according to Georges Bataille.

The theatrical, stylized, artificial scenery of *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* is imagination as virtual perception, a subject-less perception that is abstracted and crystallized, enacting death in life and allowing the signifier to proliferate beyond the signified. The distorted and angular shapes and the deranged compositions of the scenery reflect the tensions and contradictions of an agitated and ruptured state of mind, reflecting the cultural climate. Combined with the continually changing point of view provided in film, the experience of the environment enacts an expression of inner life and an agitated unconscious. The film is an outward projection of psychological events, not only in the drama but in the scenery, as the movement of the camera multiplies the heterogeneity of the flux of perceptions. Movement through the *mise-en-scène* of perceptions enacts unconscious fermentation in the interaction of perception and consciousness, and what is between them, the Lacanian gaze, sliding from stage to stage, from surface to surface. The Lacanian gaze is the psychologically conditioned visual image, as enacted in *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*. The image captures and masters the subject through the play of light and opacity, causing it to vacillate in the realm of the inapprehensible, disorganizing the field of perception, disturbing the being of the subject sustaining himself in a function of desire.

Eroticism in *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* is manifest in the aggressiveness of the forms, in their active distortion and disruption and their threatening, uncanny nature. The forms of *Caligari*

challenge formal restrictions and expectations about the built environment; they challenge feelings of balance and resolution, and they challenge any feeling of security of being human in the world, any security in the existence of the subject. Anxiety created in the subject is itself erotic. As Freud described in *The Problem of Anxiety*, “in repression anxiety is created out of the libidinal cathexis of instinctual impulses.”⁸ “The psychology of the neuroses has taught us that, if wishful impulses are repressed, their libido is transformed into anxiety,”⁹ Freud explained in *Totem and Taboo*. Creative forms transgress the structure of signification and repressed impulses. The forms are erotic because they arouse a recognition and defense of lack in the subject, and because they evoke the death instinct. The death instinct is “at work in every living creature and is striving to bring it to ruin and reduce life to its original condition of inanimate matter,”¹⁰ in the words of Donald Abel, as in entropy. Wilhelm Worringer, in relating abstraction to the death instinct in *Abstraction and Empathy*, explained that “the morphological law of inorganic nature still echoes like a dim memory in our human organism ... every differentiation of organized matter, every development of its most primitive form, is accompanied by a tension, by a longing to revert to this most primitive form.”¹¹ Geometric form and abstract law and necessity, the signifying structure, are the life-denying inorganic, the morphological law of crystalline-inorganic matter.

Freud explained in *On Creativity and the Unconscious*, “It is not possible for the claims of the sexual instinct to be reconciled with the demands of culture ... the lack of satisfaction accompanying culture is the necessary consequence of certain peculiarities developed by the sexual instinct under the pressure of culture.”¹² Freud pointed out that transgression and violence in relation to taboo have a sanguine effect on the being of the individual in society. It is an element of the erotic and the process of the negation of the subject, as constituted by contradictory forms of matter. The transgressive element of the erotic, as well as the ego, are transferred from the subject to society in political violence and artistic creativity. The ego is transferred in social structures, and the erotic, in the incompatibility of the sexual instinct and society, is transferred in anxiety. The Freudian uncanny is found in the loss of distinction between the symbolic and reality. The uncanny is found in *das Ding*, where the negation of the symbolic accesses the real, in the connection between presence and absence, the symbolic and phantasmagoric, the familiar and fantastic. Phantasmagoric forms, fragmentations and deformations, enact the chaotic, amplified in dialectical movement in *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*.

Psychophysiological Space

In the 1924 essay “Perspective as Symbolic Form,” Erwin Panofsky proposed an alternative to the constructed space of perception in waking thought, in its perspective or geometrical organization, which he called “psychophysiological space,”¹³ as an evocation of the possibility of dream space in conscious representation. The space of perception was characterized by Panofsky as “infinite, unchanging and homogeneous,” and a “systematic abstraction.” The *cogito* applies an unchanging structure to space in perception in consciousness, oriented to the subject; the space is infinite because it is metaphysical, based in the dialectic of the imaginary and symbolic. In perspective space, for example, space is organized according to a vanishing point, which is the point of the infinite recession of space. The homogeneity of perceived space, as described by Panofsky, is given by the self-enclosed homogeneity of language as a signifying system. All elements of language

must relate to all other elements in order for language to function as signification. If the holes or gaps, lacunae or scotomata, caused by the unconscious in language, were present to the speaking subject, the language could not function. If the gaze were present in perception, perception could not function as a conscious mechanism of reason.

As the structure of space in perception is “infinite, unchanging and homogeneous” for Panofsky, it is “quite unlike the structure of psychophysiological space,” as described in *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (30), a space which is conceived as corresponding to dream space. “Exact perspectival construction is a systematic abstraction from the structure of this psychophysiological space.” Psychophysiological space is seen as more of a *Tastraum*, a haptic space of immediate sensations, preserving the imaginary object identification. Such a concept is suggested in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* of Ernst Cassirer, or Ernst Mach’s treatise of 1914, *The Analysis of Sensations and the Relation of the Physical to the Psychical*. The intention of psychophysiological space is “no longer to represent depth intervals ‘extensively’ by means of foreshortenings,” and “to create an illusion ‘intensively’ by playing color surfaces off against each other” (*Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 154).

This quality can be seen explicitly in Cubist paintings (Figure 7), in a reintroduction of the metaphysic, or a displacement of it, in psychophysiological space as described by Panofsky, and in the color patches of Paul Cézanne (Figure 8). Cézanne recorded his perception of nature as a kind of psychophysiological space. He wrote that “to read nature is to see her, underneath the veil of interpretation, as colored *taches* [patches] following one another according to a law of harmony. The large colored areas [*teintes*] can thus be analyzed into modulations. Painting is recording colored sensations.”¹⁴ The veil of interpretation of Cézanne is perception, but the law of harmony and the analysis of modulations are functions of what would be that veil of interpretation; Cézanne’s psychophysiological space thus incorporates the dialectic of the imaginary and symbolic which is not present in dream space itself. The *taches* of Cézanne nevertheless introduce an element of the *Tastraum* which is absent from perspective construction, which are the “depth intervals” of experienced space.

The geometrical and homogeneous space of perspective construction, according to Panofsky, “negates the differences between front and back, between right and left, between bodies and intervening space (‘empty’ space), so that the sum of all the parts of space and all its contents are absorbed into a single ‘quantum continuum’” (*Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 31), a homogeneity of unity and continuity, as in language in reason. Cézanne saw the dialectic of reason and sense experience, intelligible forms and sensible forms, where intellect is prior to sense experience, and sense experience modifies intellect in reason. Thus for Cézanne, the colored *tache* was seen to have a transcendental quality, evoking intellect as other than reason or sense experience, and suggesting the infinite, in the same manner as the vanishing point of perspective construction. Joachim Gasquet in *Conversations with Cézanne* recorded Cézanne as saying, “I would like to paint space and time and make them become forms of the sensibility of colors, since I sometimes imagine that colors are like great noumenal entities, living ideas, creatures of pure reason.”¹⁵ Color is thus, for Cézanne, “the place where our brain meets the universe” (113).

Dream space according to Freud is non-egoistic, pictorial, given to fluctuation and transparency, or the simultaneous perception of different spatial locations, involving transformational processes, the interweaving of reciprocal relations, a physical unfolding

continuum, and condensation, intensification and fragmentation—both rational and irrational. The unconscious is structured in the same manner as conscious thought and “dreams are nothing other than a particular form of thinking,” as described in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (542, n. 2). While in dreams the subjective activity of the mind appears in an objective form, it is the subjective activity, a product of the ego, which is responsible for the apparently irrational nature of dream compositions. “Imagination in dreams is without the power of conceptual speech. It is obliged to paint what it has to say pictorially” (116). The unconscious revealed in dreams is the locus of the productive capability of the structuring of experience not limited to direct representation. It is in the latent dream-thoughts which structure a dream, rather than in the manifest content of a dream, though, that the logical structure of the dream is to be found. Logical relations between thoughts are “given a disguised representation in certain formal characteristics of dreams” (545), according to Freud. Meaning is to be discovered by tracing the relationships and transformations between latent dream thoughts and manifest content which are interwoven in a series of reciprocal relations, rather than each dream thought being represented singularly. Elements in dreams can even be represented as their opposites, as there is no positive-negative distinction in dream thoughts. A notable characteristic of the relation between dream thoughts and manifest content is dream condensation, which operates by the construction of collective and composite figures, including neologisms and multiple determinations, which involve the element of displacement in the transference of the dream thought to the dream content. “In the process of condensation, every psychical interconnection is transformed into an intensification of its ideational content” (634). Condensation is a product of drive, or wish-fulfillment. Cathexis, the concentration of psychic energy, is the intensification of psychical interconnections through the process of condensation or drive. The composition of dreams is a dynamic process involving an interplay of forces, many of which are latent.

Heterogeneous Space

Georges Bataille insisted on a transgression of geometrical space and the signifying structure of thought, a replacement of the homogeneous with the heterogeneous. He conceived physical and bodily means of transgressing the limitations of orthogonal thought. Bataille’s conception of the subject involves a psychasthenic dissolving of the distinction between subject and environment, figure and ground, a loss of the gestalt identity, and the impossibility of certainty in the “difference between a sculpted object and fog,”¹⁶ as described in *Inner Experience*. Psychasthenia entails the psycho-somatic negation of the subject. The subject is negated in the “passage from discontinuity to the continuity of being,”¹⁷ in the words of Jean-Louis Baudry. The subject dissolves at the point where it reaches its limit of discontinuity in a continuous universe. As the subject of Bataille attempts to transgress into continuity, as it imagines the universe, it is ruptured by the continuity, the homogeneity. The subject dissolves in the passage from the symbolic to the real, as it is only constituted by the symbolic; as such, the postulation of the subject entails its negation. Transgression, thus negation, is found in eroticism and in the dissociation of forms in katharsis and ecstasy. In eroticism, bodies interpenetrate and dissolve into the environment, as in psychasthenia. The sense of the state of the individual being is violated. The erotic results from the tension between the body and civilization and blurs the distinction. Transgression is the result of the discontinuity

between a primordial biological identity hidden in the unconscious, inaccessible through the signifying structure, and the social and visual manifestations of that structure. The subject is the result of differentiated and contradictory forms of matter, postulated in the complexity of the mechanisms that constitute it, at the intersection of social production and reproduction conditioned by taboo and transgression.

Bataille found the signifying structure of language in “degrading chains of logic,”¹⁸ as he described it in “The Pineal Eye” (*Visions of Excess*, 80), the manifestation of the unconscious in abstract causal necessity. “Acts undertaken with some rational end are only servile responses to a necessity,” as described in “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” (*Visions of Excess*, 231). Bataille sought a human psyche exterior to the signifying structure. The human being is imprisoned by that structure, resulting in *méconnaissance* and a divided subject in Lacanian terms. It is necessary to in turn transgress the structure, to create “a new laceration within a lacerated nature” (“The Pineal Eye,” *Visions of Excess*, 80). Phenomenal transformation replaces the archetypal structure of knowledge, as Bataille explained in “The Notion of Expenditure” that “human life cannot in any way be limited to the closed systems assigned to it by reasonable conceptions” (*Visions of Excess*, 128). The alternative to an existence based in servile necessity and degrading chains of logic is an existence based in ecstatic torment and the virulence of phantasms. Bataille sought, in a rigorous way, the introduction of an intellectual series without laws into the world of legitimate thought. Non-rational, unrestrained thought is inserted into the structure of logical, orthographic thought. For Bataille, human existence contains the non-rational, acted out in sacrifice and excess in the expenditure of passion and energy. As stated in “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice,” “Acts undertaken in the pursuit of seductive images of chance are the only ones that respond to the need to live like a flame. For it is human to burn and consume oneself to the point of suicide ... it is, on the contrary, inhuman to abandon life to a chain of useful acts” (*Visions of Excess*, 231). The non-rational corresponds to the pursuit of seductive images, images which evoke what is beyond human, beyond the subject, especially within the human itself, requiring the transgression of one’s own nature. In psychological terms, the psyche of the subject contains within itself its own negation, or alienation from its own being, as it is given by a signifying structure. Psychasthenia negates the subject as a distinction from its environment.

Heterogeneous space in psychasthenia suggests the possibility of self-differentiation, or self-similarity, as opposed to the dialectical abstraction of the figure/ground, subject/object relation, which results in the subject being absorbed into perception, absorbed into the world, without the barrier of the geometries of perception in vision, as given by reason, imprisoning the subject, as in the subject of Georges Bataille, imprisoned in the “degrading chains of logic,” as described in “The Pineal Eye.” For the subject of Bataille, “it is no longer the leveling phraseology coming to him from the understanding that can help him: he can no longer recognize himself in the degrading chains of logic, but he recognizes himself, instead—not only with rage but in an ecstatic torment—in the virulence of his own phantasms” (*Visions of Excess*, 80) in fantasy sustained by desire, in the interaction of the imaginary and symbolic. Human life, for Bataille, can only begin with the deficit of the closed systems of reason, the deficit of geometrical perception, and of the ego of the subject. In “Sacrifices,” “In the course of the ecstatic vision ... the object is finally unveiled as *catastrophe* in a chaos of light and shadow, neither as God nor as nothingness, but as the object that love, incapable of liberating itself except outside of itself, demands in order to let out the scream of

lacerated existence” (*Visions of Excess*, 134). The chaos of light and shadow can only be given in relation to reason, to the reasonable conceptions which define the function of reason in human life. The void is the real, as given by reason itself. The chaos of light and shadow is the *objet a*, that which is missing in reason, and is found in the gaze, that which is missing in perception. The lacuna in perception, is an “opening that leads into a universe where perhaps there is no composition either of form or of being,” in the words of Bataille in “The College of Sociology,” “where it seems that death rolls from world to world” (*Visions of Excess*, 253).

Frederick Kiesler advocated a combining of all arts and disciplines into one expression, eliminating boundaries and categories, seeking to transcend limits and overcome the homogeneous, eliminating the subject. He desired to go beyond the boundaries of the finite, to represent the infinite in finite form, to break the prison of the architectural frame, and the prison house of language. In an article called “Pseudo-Functionalism in Modern Architecture” in 1949, Kiesler expressed that:

functionalism is determinism and therefore stillborn ... the standardization of routine activity. Functionalism relieves the architect of responsibility to his concept. He mechanizes in terms of the current inherited conception of the practical, and little more; only simplifying and rendering ascetic what is already traditional. He does violence to the freedom and self-realization of the basic functions of living man.¹⁹

The technician and the engineer are slave to progress and practical necessity. Kiesler’s *Endless House* (Figure 9) was to inspire exuberance rather than subservience to the mechanics of life, in spatial formations free from the techniques of manufacture. According to Bataille in “The Notion of Expenditure,” human life cannot be defined by closed systems and reasonable conceptions. In *Inside the Endless House*, Kiesler described the *Endless House* as “a correlative power to encourage the search for everything behind the merely functional needs of everyday living” (308).²⁰

According to Kiesler, artforms should be extended in space beyond their normal limits, in transgression and dissolution, as well as process. As he explained in *Inside the Endless House*, “The traditional art object can no longer be seen as an isolated unit, but must be considered within the context of changes in time and space, moving physically and perceived visually in all directions of environment” (151). In 1935, Roger Caillois defined space as a double dihedral changing at every moment in size and position. Space is experienced in both perception and representation, no longer a unified or homogeneous condition, as in a gestalt picture field, or in perspectival construction. In Caillois’ psychophysiological space, the horizon line, the subject, and perspectival construction are absent, as in Freudian dream space, as described in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and in Kiesler’s *Endless House*. Perspectival construction is no longer projected onto actual space by the constructed logic of the viewer in the signifying structure of logocentric thought. The subject is rather absorbed into the space in a psychasthenic state of a lack of self-identification in the picture field, as in dream construction, and the experience of the *Endless House*, where there are no clear boundaries or points of bearing. The subject is absorbed into space as the unconscious is absorbed into the universe, as would be Kiesler’s intention. As he explained, “The environment becomes equally as important as the object, if not more so, because the object breathes into the surrounding and also inhales the realities of the environment, no matter in what space, close or wide apart, open air or indoor” (573). As the subject is dislodged and assimilated, space is experienced in a variety of perceptual and cognitive dimensions, and the body is experienced as no longer orthopedic and

whole, in a fixed location, but as dispersed and in process, as a temporal experience, both inside and outside.

Kiesler sought to transcend signifying structures and orthographic boundaries to find an art which expresses a continuity between human beings, the earth and the universe, beyond the *cogito* of the subject. The *Endless House*, for example, is an organism growing from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, in a relation between the human psyche and the cosmos. The continuum is the anecdote to the signifying structure. In *Inside the Endless House*, Kiesler explained, “We become aware that our independence is only a state of mind and that this state of mind, if it is not to die or to be driven into a psychotic realm, must draw its life forces from the energies of the universe ... always relying on its continuity” (153).

Psychasthenia

Psychophysiological space and heterogeneous are also manifest in the conception of space of Roger Caillois in *The Necessity of the Mind*, which is also a place where the brain meets the universe, or the necessity of the mind corresponds to the necessity of the universe. “Fusing perfectly with the necessity of the universe,” Caillois wrote in 1933, “the mind’s necessity would at the same time be absorbed in it” (114).²¹ Space was seen by Caillois as that which can be occupied by multiple representations, as in a mirror and what is behind it, in contrast to the homogeneity of perspective space, and more than one object can also be apprehended in the same location. The visual space of Caillois is the product of the interaction of perception and imagination, imagination being composed of the same mnemonic residues as in the dream and the hallucination. Perception is seen as a combination of the perception given by consciousness and the production of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* given by unconscious processes. Perception gives a virtual image to which the imagination opposes a real content, the imaginary content of the unconscious. “Imagination is often defined as virtual perception,” given by the mnemonic residues in the mind, and “perception as a real imagination,” structured by the discourse of the Other, the unconscious. In the interaction of perception and imagination, the homogenous and unchanging space of constructed perception gives way to sporadic fluctuation and variance.

In the article “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” space was seen by Caillois as a “double dihedral changing at every moment in size and position” (*October 31*, 28).²² The dihedral is the oscillating intersection of horizontal and vertical planes; vertical planes are the action of the perceiving subject and perceived object in space, while horizontal planes are the action of the ground under the subject and the representation of the ground under the subject. The perception of Caillois entails the interaction of the imaginary and symbolic, but the residues of imaginary object identification, the sensible forms, are allowed more of a presence within the symbolic in the association of the subject to the Other. The perceiving subject in the psychophysiological space of Caillois is no longer the vanishing point in a model of vision as perspective construction, and no longer the origin of coordinates in a horizontal plane. The subject in psychophysiological space is thus “dispossessed of its privilege and literally no longer knows where to place itself” (*October 31*, 28), according to Caillois. The perpetual fluctuation of the double dihedral of psychophysiological space can be seen as the perpetual play of differences in *différance* or *signifiance*, the play of absences and presences which dislocate the subject from what is signified, as in

psychophysiological space. Such a space is thus seen as a constitution of human knowledge, where certainty and invariance are impossible in a fluctuating world where there is “no appreciable difference between the known and the unknown,” as described in *The Necessity of the Mind* (87) by Caillois, suggesting the laceration of the signifying structure of Bataille, the laceration of the lacerated nature. In the dissolution of the subject in space, distinctions are dissolved “between the real and the imaginary, between waking and sleeping, between ignorance and knowledge” (*October 31*, 17), as described in “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia.”

There is no appreciable difference between the conscious and the unconscious; as phenomenally perceived images fluctuate in the *Taetraum*, the conscious and the unconscious fluctuate. In the interaction of the conscious and unconscious, the dominance of the symbolic is overcome, and the limitations of language. The self-identity of the subject for Caillois is limited by the “abstraction, generality, and permanence of the meaning of words,” as described in *The Necessity of the Mind* (4); identity is found instead in “the mobile nature of the realities of a consciousness” which intersects with the unconscious, and in the “growing multiplicity of perceptions and sensations.” Identity is found in a “lyrical language, which is experienced directly through dreams ...”.

The structure of Caillois’ psychophysiological space can be seen in Lacan’s conception of the picture and the gaze, which consists of vacillation, discontinuity, the interruption of conscious perception by the unconscious, and the elision of the subject. The vacillation is the manifestation of desire in signification, and the gaze is the point of failure of the subject in the *objet a*, the inaccessible object of desire, but which is imperceptible in conscious perception. The gaze plays the same role as the vanishing point in perspective construction, as the bar between the signifier and the signified, between symbolic and imaginary, in the moment of the *point de capiton* in the retroactive anticipation of the subject in signification; it plays the same role as the *archê* in language, as does the trace. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, “in so far as the gaze, *qua objet a*, may come to symbolize this central lack expressed in the phenomenon of castration,” loss of ego, “and in so far as it is an *objet a* reduced, of its nature, to a punctiform, evanescent function, it leaves the subject in ignorance as to what there is beyond the appearance,” in the inaccessibility of the unconscious, “an ignorance so characteristic of all progress in thought that occurs in the way constituted by philosophical research” (77). But psychoanalysis is “neither a *Weltanschauung*,” an ideology or philosophy of life, “nor a philosophy that claims to provide the key to the universe. It is governed by a particular aim, which is historically defined by the elaboration of the notion of the subject. It poses this notion in a new way, by leading the subject back to his signifying dependence.” Psychoanalysis is then the philosophy of the subject, or more specifically, the philosophy of the subject in language.

When the subject sees itself seeing itself, in consciousness, the perception of the subject cannot be absorbed into the field of perception as in the psychophysiological space of Caillois. The presence of the subject through perception, as given by the *cogito*, the self-certainty of the presence of the subject, results in the flocculation of the subject, the reduction of the subject to the punctiform object of the vanishing point, and thus the annihilation of the subject, as the subject is elided in signification in language. As the subject is the punctiform object in perception, it is as the *objet a* as a punctiform object in the gaze, as the One; consciousness is linked to desire as the inverse of desire, that which both is sustained by desire and which conceals desire. So it is that “consciousness,

in its illusion of *seeing itself seeing itself*, finds its basis in the inside-out structure of the gaze” (82), as a product of the desire which it seeks to repress.

In Roger Caillois’s *The Necessity of the Mind* in 1933, the main quality of space is that it can be simultaneously occupied by different representations, as in a mirror and what is behind it, and the same form can have different representations. Perception gives a virtual image to which the imagination opposes a real content. Mental construction plays a role in the simultaneous apprehension of two objects in the same location, so that the real spatial construction is known through conceptual formulation and unconscious mental processes. Real objects perceived are often constructed the same way as dream images, as “imagination is often defined as a virtual perception, and perception as a real imagination” (113), according to Caillois. In that perception is real imagination, it is the product of unconscious construction, while the imagination reconstructs certain aspects of perception. Freud showed that perspectival construction and the presence of the subject are absent from dream space; they do not exist in actual space because they are not reconstituted by the unconscious. They are projected onto actual space by the constructed logic of the viewer, and are absent from the psychophysiological space of Caillois and Lacan. Perspectival construction imposes invariance onto a fluctuating world; implicit in perspectival construction for Caillois is language as its signifying logic, distorting the perception of space.

In *The Necessity of the Mind*, Roger Caillois explained that all knowledge is derived from spatial perception. Such perception is an immediate, a priori experience, an unconscious hallucination. In the ideal space as object of perception, “several images can occupy the same place at the same time” (113). Spatial perception consists of visible and virtual images. Virtual images correspond to the imagination. The ideal space is a psychophysiological space—hallucinatory, the space of dreams—in that interior functions correspond to exterior functions. As in Freudian dream construction, representations are condensed simultaneously through the use of the unconscious, represented by a mirror. The sharing of space of the real and virtual image in a mirror is a noumenal transparency, rather than phenomenal, as the image is virtual. It is mentally constructed. The relation of the unconscious to external reality is enacted, in the superimposition of real space and psychological space; the noumenal and actual coincide in the phenomenal. In 1938, a similar spatial analysis appeared in an anthology of Gestalt psychology, in an article called “On Transparency” written by Wilhelm Fuchs. According to Fuchs, the simultaneous perception of two objects, one behind the other in visual space, is a mental construction of visual surfaces from fractional sections. The result of the mental construction is a phenomenal visual space as opposed to real space.²³

In each description of perception, mental construction plays a role in the simultaneous apprehension of two objects in the same location; in both cases, the reality of the spatial construction is only knowable through conceptual formulation—that two objects exist one behind the other, that space continues to recede on the other side of a mirror, and that fragments observed in a transparent object are images of an object further away. Spatial perception is the product of unconscious mental processes. Perceived objects are constructed in the same way as dream images, in assemblages of simultaneity and coincidence. It was Caillois’ intention to demonstrate that imagination is often defined as a virtual perception, and perception as a real imagination. In that perception is a real imagination, it is the product of unconscious construction; in that imagination is a virtual perception, it is based on perception. Perspectival construction, the horizon line, and the subject are absent from Freudian dream space. Those elements do not exist in perceived space,

since they are not reconstituted by the unconscious. They are projected onto actual space by the constructed logic of the viewer. They are absent from the psychophysiological space of Roger Caillois and Georges Bataille.

Caillois saw the same continuous fluctuation of phenomenal transparency in human knowledge. Certainty and invariance are impossible in a fluctuating world where there is “no appreciable difference between the known and the unknown” (87), as he described in *The Necessity of the Mind*. Perspectival construction constitutes the imposition of invariance in a fluctuating world. As phenomenally perceived images fluctuate, so do consciousness and unconsciousness. The known and unknown fluctuate and dissolve into each other. Opposites coincide to transcend the boundaries of thought. In Freudian dream construction, dreams represent themselves by their wishful contraries, so that there is no distinction between positive and negative in dream-thoughts. If unconscious mental construction is implicit in the perception of actual space, and consciousness is defined as a mirror reflecting the outside world, then for Caillois the mind is a microcosm of the exterior world. The necessity of the mind coincides with the necessity of the universe. “Fusing perfectly with the necessity of the universe, the mind’s necessity would at the same time be absorbed in it” (114). Exterior and interior are fused together and opposites dissolve. In the thought of Sigmund Freud the reality of the unconscious was the same unknown as the reality of the physical world.

As opposites dissolve and interior and exterior fuse, according to Caillois there is one barrier to the proper functioning of the unconscious in relation to the exterior world—the logic of language. The “abstraction, generality, and permanence of the meaning of words” (4) prevents proximity to an absolute identity of the subject. Identity is found instead in the “mobile nature of the realities of a consciousness,” and in a “growing multiplicity of perceptions and sensations.” Identity is achieved by a “lyrical language, which is experienced directly through dreams and reflexively through madness.” The effect of lyrical mechanisms depends on the lack of influence on the subject of the signification of conventional language, a barrier between interior and exterior. Language distorts the perception of space, as in the signifying logic of perspectival construction. Lyrical mechanisms express the inexhaustible complexity of the unconscious and external reality; the conventional use of words in terms of established definitions is discarded in favor of the dissolution of meaning in a pre-established signifying structure as representing an “ideal and abstract common denominator.” The dissolution of the signifying structure of the subject would manifest itself in psychasthenia.

In “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” Caillois conceived of the dissolution of the subject in space. The dissolution begins with the questioning of the distinction between interior and exterior, as the mind’s necessity coincides with that of the universe, in fluctuation rather than separation. Distinctions in general are dissolved, “between the real and the imaginary, between waking and sleeping, between ignorance and knowledge” (*October 31*, 17). Boundaries dissolve between physical forms, as in photographs by Man Ray, such as *Anatomies* (Figure 10) in 1930. Mimicry, the ability of an animal or insect to resemble its surroundings or another species, is an “incantation fixed at its culminating point and having caught the sorcerer in his own trap” (27), dissolving the distinction between subject and space.

The Gaze

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, the *objet a*, according to Lacan, is given by the fragmentation which occurs in the subject in the mirror stage, in the incompatibility between the variability of sense experience and the imaginary ego of gestalt object identification, which produces the impossible object of desire in the subject, as it is translated into the demand of the Other in language, in the symbolic order. As a result, the “interest the subject takes in his own split is bound up with that which determines it—namely, a privileged object, which has emerged from some primal separation, from some self-mutilation induced by the very approach of the real, whose name, in our algebra, is the *objet a*” (82). The *objet a* is the lost identity of the subject in relation to itself, in its self-alienation in both the imaginary and the symbolic orders. As the gaze is the inverse of consciousness, the fantasy or imagination of the subject depends on the gaze in its vacillation in the same way that consciousness is sustained by the ego. The subject attempts to identify with the gaze in perception, with its own lack, as it attempts to identify with the vanishing point in perspective construction, which is both the re-affirmation of its consciousness and the re-affirmation of its own lack in relation to what is beyond appearance. Like the vanishing point, the gaze is inapprehensible, as the unconscious is inapprehensible, but, “from the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, the point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his own failure” (82), the point at which the consciousness of the subject cannot exceed itself, which is reinforced by the interruption of the unconscious.

The gaze can only be experienced in consciousness as *méconnaissance*, in the inaccessibility of the unconscious to conscious thought. The gaze, as it is revealed in the dream, and as it might be represented in conscious perceptual experience, is not accessible to conscious thought, and can only be known as an absence, as the subject itself, which identifies itself with the gaze. For this reason the subject seeks to “symbolize his own vanishing and punctiform bar (*trait*) in the illusion of consciousness *seeing oneself see oneself*, in which the gaze is elided” (82). The subject is elided both in the gaze, in the presence of the gaze, and in the consciousness in which the gaze is elided, because the experience of perception for Lacan cannot entail other than the interaction of the imaginary and symbolic in the fragmentation of the subject. The gaze appears to the subject that is “sustaining himself in a function of desire” (85) in perception, as given by consciousness in signification. The subject recognizes its lack in the gaze, but only as it is given by signification. The gaze is that which escapes perception as a function of desire in consciousness through signification, that which forces the subject out of that perception, for example in anamorphosis or *trompe l’oeil* in representation, which can only be products of representation, thus products of conscious mechanisms which, after a moment of shock when the subject realizes that it does not exist, only serve to reinforce the existence of the subject in the consciousness which is sustained by desire in signification. As soon as the gaze is sought, it disappears. “In any picture, it is precisely in seeking the gaze in each of its points that you will see it disappear” (89). The gaze in the dream, as a product of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, is again not an impediment to the identity of the subject as it is formed in the perception-consciousness system.

In the same way that the speaking subject in the symbolic order is created and manipulated by language, represented by a signifier to another signifier, so the viewing subject is created and

manipulated by perception. Lacan proposed that the “geometral dimension enables us to glimpse how the subject who concerns us is caught, manipulated, captured, in the field of vision” (92) by perception. That which is perceived is always a trap, always a labyrinth, created by geometral relations, the line, the plane, the solid. The only point in the geometral construction of what is perceived which can suggest what is beyond appearance, as the gaze cannot do that, is the point of light. “It is not in the straight line, but in the point of light—the point of irradiation, the play of light, fire, the source from which reflections pour forth” where “the essence of the relation between appearance and being, which the philosopher, conquering the field of vision, so easily masters” (94), lies. Light suggests that the subject for Lacan is something other than the punctiform object in the geometral construct of perspective or perception. There is something in the subject which is other to the picture. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, the “picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am not in the picture” (96). There is something in the subject, as given by light, which is something other than constructed perception. “This is something that introduces what was elided in the geometral relation—the depth of field, with all its ambiguity and variability, which is in no way mastered by me. It is rather it that grasps me, solicits me at every moment, and makes of the landscape something other than a landscape, something other than what I have called the picture” (96). There is something outside of conscious experience in perception, outside the signifying construction of perception, in the relation between the subject and the world, which is suggested to the subject by light.

The gaze corresponds to the location of the picture, of the constructed perception, outside of the subject, although it is given by the consciousness of the subject. The gaze is the gap in perception, the lacuna or scotoma, which situates it outside of consciousness. In between the gaze, outside conscious perception, and the construct of conscious perception, is the “screen,” which mediates between the two. The screen is something other than geometral or optical space, and it is opaque, it cannot be traversed, as the bar in language cannot be traversed between signification and what is outside of signification, or what is elided by signification, but which makes signification possible, that is, the subject. The gaze is a play of light and opacity, because it is the dialectic of the universal and particular, the symbolic and the imaginary. It is that which, in the field of light, seduces the subject toward that which is other to it, in its self-negation, but which prevents the subject from access to what is other to it, the unconscious.

Light prevents the subject from being the screen; the subject cannot go outside itself, outside its identity in signification, in perception. That which is other to the subject must always be exterior to the subject, reaffirming its self-identity in consciousness, or the light within it, its interiority. If the subject were the screen in a field of vision which is pure light, it would dissolve into light; light would dissipate uncontrollably into matter, and matter would be dissolved into its iridescence, the shifting changes of colors resulting from the insertion of light into matter. As a result, “the point of gaze always participates in the ambiguity of the jewel” (96). Light is present in the jewel only as reflection, as differentiation, although it cannot be distinguished from the facets of the jewel. Light flickers in the jewel as it flickers in the space of perception as the possibility of what is other to perception, but it is always reflected, and never reveals its source. It is the diffusion and refraction of light in non-geometral space. The gaze is not spatial but luminous; spatial coordination and geometric abstractions are mechanisms to negotiate the realm of light more than space.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud described the light of dreams as infinitely fragmented and continually moving: “here the luminous dust in the darkened field of vision has taken on a fantastic shape, and the numerous specks of which it consists are incorporated into the dream as an equal number of separate images; and these, on account of their mobility, are regarded as moving objects” (64). Movement in dreams is connected to movement in perception. “The changing, perpetually shifting character of the excitation of the idioretinal light corresponds precisely to the constantly moving succession of images shown us by our dreams” (p. 67). Rosalind Krauss described the gleams of light in the luminous dispersal in photographs by Cindy Sherman as signifiers of the formless (Figure 11). As in the gaze, the light is a scattered light disrupting the gestalt separation of subject and field, so that the subject is absorbed into the field of vision.

As light for Lacan prevents the subject from being the screen, the subject is the screen in the picture, that which mediates between consciousness and what is outside of consciousness, in the constructed perception. As the screen in consciousness, the subject prevents itself from access to the unconscious, from access to its own identity. “This is the relation of the subject with the domain of vision,” as described in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (97). The unconscious is revealed to the subject by the gaze, and what is other than consciousness is revealed to the subject by light, but the subject can only be grasped and solicited, tempted, by what is other to it, in the limitations given by perception and language, discursive reason. The subject is the picture (the field of vision) in relation to the gaze as the subject is that which the signifier represents to another signifier in signification. The gaze determines the subject in what is visible, as the subject is solicited by it. The subject enters light in perception through the gaze, through that which is other to geometral perception, and it is through the gaze that light is embodied in the intersection of the symbolic and imaginary. As in signification, the metaphysic is displaced from the dialectic between appearance and what is beyond appearance to the symbolic and the imaginary, the splitting in the subject, which is revealed in the gaze, the lacuna or scotoma in perception. “Indeed, there is something whose absence can always be observed in a picture,” in the field of vision, “which is not the case in perception” (108), in self-enclosed signification and imaginary identification.

The absence is the subject, as it is in language, which is elided in the geometral perception, which is separated from the picture by the screen, that which mediates between conscious perception and what is exterior to conscious perception, which is the opacity of the conscious reason of the subject. What is represented in perception is not the picture, not the field of vision itself. In *trompe-l’oeil*, the subject is taken outside of the certainty of its representation to itself in perception, at that moment that it recognizes that what is being perceived is not what is being represented. The *trompe l’oeil* does not reveal to the subject what is beyond its appearance, but rather the disjunction within the subject between the imaginary and symbolic, that the subject is not given to itself by its perception in consciousness in the imaginary, and that it is only grasped and solicited by that perception, and represented by it, in the field of vision, as the subject is represented to itself in language, in the symbolic.

In Freudian terminology, the gaze is “the primordial void around which the drive circulates, the lack that assumes positive existence in the shapeless form of the thing (the Freudian *das Ding*, the impossible-unattainable substance of enjoyment),” of the self-identity of the subject, as described by Slavoj Žižek in *Looking Awry* (83).²⁴ Žižek wrote that “all culture is ultimately nothing but a compromise formation, a reaction to some terrifying, radically inhuman dimension proper to the

human condition itself” (37). The world as given by perception is as Lacan’s description of the gap between perception and consciousness in which the subject is situated, as the screen in the gaze, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. The optical model “represents a number of layers, permeable to something analogous to light whose refraction changes from layer to layer” (45). The world as given by perception is the perpetual play of reflections and refractions off surfaces in a kaleidoscopic display of self-deception, in the ambiguity, the accidental and arbitrary play of light, in the jewel, recalling the play of differences between signifiers in *différance*.

The *méconnaissance* of the subject, its inner division, is the source of its desire to identify itself in the sensible world, resulting from the fragmentation and alienating gestalt identity of the mirror stage. In the dialectic of the imaginary and symbolic, matter can only appear in perception as something which is outside of reason which is given by reason itself, in perception, in a compromised form. In perception, reason always inhabits form as that which is other to itself. The self-identity of the subject though is not in matter or appearance, but in perception, and in the division of the subject, perception becomes exterior to that which is perceived. The division and disjunction results in desire, the desire of the subject to find itself in its own labyrinth of deception and *méconnaissance*. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, in the relation between the subject and the sensible world which is constituted by perception and “ordered in the figures of representation” (73), the sensible forms, perception can be compared to discursive reason, conscious thought, as a succession of particulars in differentiation. As in language, there is a gap between signifiers, the signifier being the sensible form, so that in perception “something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it,” and “that is what we call the gaze” (73). The unconscious in psychoanalysis is present as an absence in perception in vision.

The gaze is the function of perception as intellection, as opposed to optical sensation. Perception in Lacanian psychoanalysis is a product of consciousness and discursive reason, the self-sustaining illusion of the identity between the subject and the sensible object in vision, the identity between the sensible form and the intelligible form. Everything in perception is given by consciousness as “the pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen” (74), the preexistence of the sensible object to the perception of the sensible object, as the sensible form and the intelligible form. Self-consciousness in perception, the Hegelian doubling of reason and its recognition of its otherness to itself, is the “seeing oneself seeing oneself” (82), according to Lacan, the continual reaffirmation of consciousness in the discursive signification of perception.

The Stendhal Syndrome

The art object is the *objet a*, the unattainable object of desire sought in the Other, the gap in the symbolic, the leftover when the symbolic enters the real. Beauty is an idea in the mind projected onto a physical object, a product of the Other, the unconscious. The Stendhal Syndrome, when someone faints in the presence of great beauty, is a product of the subject coming face to face with the real, with its own non-existence, the impossibility of its desire and representation. The real is sublime, beyond what can be put into words, beyond what can be measured or calculated, evoking sensations such as delight, awe and longing, or fear, terror and horror. According to Giambattista Vico, writing in Naples in 1725, the sublime marks a break between the known and unknown; it is

knowledge broken. The expanse of the fountains at the Reggia di Caserta outside Naples, laid out by Luigi Vanvitelli in the 1770s, evokes the sublime (Figure 12). There are sculptural ensembles of Diana and Actaeon and Venus and Adonis, evoking mythologies at the basis of constructed knowledge and perception. One semester while I was teaching in Rome we took a field trip to Caserta and a student disappeared at the end of the fountains there, at the vanishing point from the palace, the limen between human and nature. We saw him again two days later in Rome.

The depth of field, elided in the geometral relation, grasps and solicits the subject. The gaze acts as a screen, outside the geometral and optical space, a fourth wall, the point of view of the perceiving subject. The gaze is the *objet a* in the field of vision, the substitute for the unattainable object of desire. The screen, the fourth wall, as in the palace at Caserta, is an absence in the picture, the place of the elision of the subject of the geometral plane. The geometral plane disappears at the vanishing point, as does the constructed perception of the elided subject. As the subject enters the geometral plane, he or she comes face to face with the real, the *objet a*, the gaze, what is absent from conscious experience, the unconscious. The conscious perceiving subject disappears into the sublime. As the perceived world that was constructed by the subject disappears, or the veil has been lifted, the subject disappears along with it. Through the gaze, the *objet a*, the real, dream space, psychophysiological space, heterogeneous space, and psychasthenia, the subject fades, or disappears altogether, revealing a world which cannot be known beyond the limits of the thinking and perceiving subject.

¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981).

² Jacques Lacan, *Écrits, A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977).

³ Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet," ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. James Hubert, in *Yale French Studies, No. 55/56: Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, 11–52 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 28.

⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953–54*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 283.

⁵ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore 1972–1973, On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 50.

⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965).

⁷ Sigmund Freud, *On Dreams*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1952).

⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Problem of Anxiety*, trans. Henry Alden Bunker (New York: Psychoanalytic Quarterly Press, 1936), 41.

⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. James Strachey (New York: WW Norton, 1962), 69.

¹⁰ Donald C. Abel, *Freud on Instinct and Morality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 45.

¹¹ Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy, A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. Michael Bullock (New York: Meridian, 1948), 34.

¹² Sigmund Freud, *On Creativity and the Unconscious*, ed. Benjamin Nelson (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 186.

¹³ Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 30.

¹⁴ Quoted in John Gage, *Colour and Culture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 210.

¹⁵ Michael Doran, ed., *Conversations with Cézanne* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 124.

¹⁶ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Stuart Kendall (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 55.

¹⁷ Jean-Louis Baudry, “Bataille and Science: Introduction to Inner Experience,” in Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, ed., *On Bataille, Critical Essays* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 277.

¹⁸ Georges Bataille, “The Pineal Eye,” in *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

¹⁹ Yehuda Safran, ed., *Frederick Kiesler 1890–1965* (London: Architectural Association, 1989), n. p.

²⁰ Frederick Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964).

²¹ Roger Caillois, *The Necessity of the Mind*, trans. Michael Syrotinski (Venice, CA: The Lapis Press, 1990).

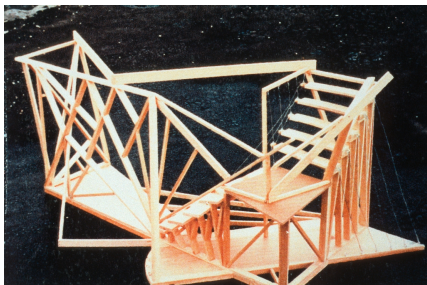
²² Roger Caillois, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” trans. John Shepley, in *October 31* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984).

²³ Wilhelm Fuchs, “On Transparency,” in W. D. Ellis, ed., *A Source Book of Gestalt Psychology* (London, 1938), 89.

²⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry, An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).



1. Hans Bellmer, *Poupée*



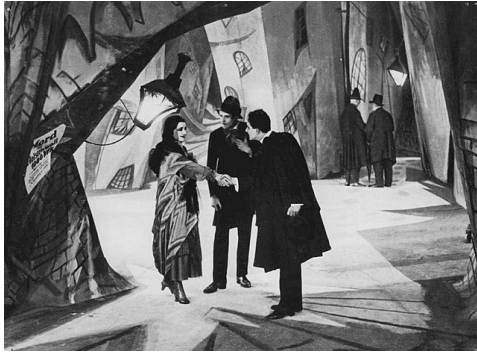
2. Project by John Hendrix



3. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Splitting*



4. Joan Miró, *Dutch Interior*



5. *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*



6. *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*



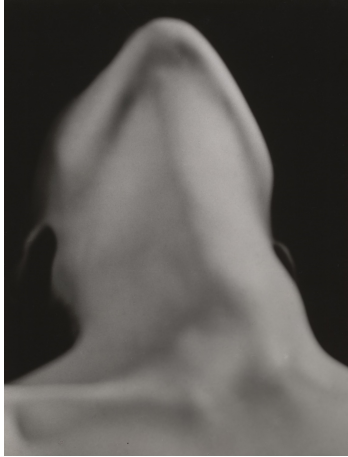
7. Pablo Picasso, *Ma Jolie*



8. Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*



9. Frederick Kiesler, *Endless House*



10. Man Ray, *Anatomies*



11. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #169*



12. Reggia di Caserta

