

Deciphering the Gaze in Lacan's 'Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*'

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The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's most thoroughgoing exploration of vision takes place in his *Seminar XI*,¹ in a sequence of four seminars originally delivered in 1964, published in French in 1973, and collectively entitled, in its later English translation, 'Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*.' The four seminars are difficult, if not impossible, to make sense of. Martin Jay, for example, describes the claim that the gaze is the object *a* as a 'cryptic assertion,' and concludes his explication of that assertion by stating that 'it is impossible to summarize Lacan's complicated dialectic of the eye and the gaze in any simple formula.'² Michel Thévoz, who takes Lacan's first seminar on the gaze as the primary point of reference for *Le Miroir infidèle*, does so without denying 'certain difficulties of reading' and 'with all the reservations demanded by the complexity of Lacanian thought.'³ The interpretative difficulty posed by Lacan's discourse on the gaze has not prevented it from becoming a major focus of interest in film studies, leading Dylan Evans to remark that 'Much of so-called 'Lacanian film theory' is thus the site of great conceptual confusion.'⁴

A great part of the difficulty of Lacan's seminars on vision stems from the fact that the meaning of the gaze seems constantly to shift. I would argue that the gaze

¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998).

² Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 362, 367.

³ Michel Thévoz, *Le Miroir infidèle* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1996), 8; my translation.

⁴ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), 73.

occupies four different positions in these seminars, corresponding to four different readings of Lacan's notoriously elusive object *a*. I will very briefly outline these four readings of the gaze, dwelling at slightly more length on the latter two, before discussing the movement between the four different positions in the context of the circuit of the drive.

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The gaze as lost object

On one reading of the seminars on vision, the gaze stands for something that is radically lost to what Lacan describes as the geometrical vision of the eye and, by extension, to consciousness itself. Like the unconscious, the gaze reveals itself only to an oblique approach. In Lacan's analysis of Hans Holbein's 1533 painting, *The Ambassadors* (fig. 1) the gaze is located in the distorted shape in the foreground of the painting, inaccessible to distinct vision and yet sufficiently registered to provoke the viewer to look back at it as she leaves the room, thereby clearly perceiving, for the first time, the angled skull.

Between the eye and the gaze, according to Lacan, 'there is no coincidence, but, on the contrary, a lure.'⁵ As Lacan says of our relation to the real, 'The appointment is always missed.'⁶ He evokes the discordance between eye and gaze with the phrase '*what I look at is never what I wish to see.*'⁷ The moment of losing the gaze, the initial 'moment

⁵ Lacan, *Book XI*, 102.

⁶ Lacan, *Book XI*, 128.

⁷ Lacan, *Book XI*, 103.

of seeing,⁸ for example the moment of perceiving the skull in Holbein's painting, is the closest the subject can get to an awareness of the gaze, because while the gaze is present to that subject the ego is not. The gaze is, in other words, irretrievably lost to the eye, and 'I,' of the subject.

This interpretation of the gaze as the thing that is radically lacking from vision is consistent with Lacan's definition of the object *a* in the course of that seminar and elsewhere: 'The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking.'⁹ The subject finds itself upon the lack of the object *a*, such that there exists between subject and object *a* 'an identity that is based on an absolute non-reciprocity.'¹⁰

The gaze as substitute object

According to a second strand of meaning in Lacan's seminar on the gaze, the latter is not, crucially, what the eye lacks, but rather the imagined object that comes to fill in for that lack. It is the substitute object rather than the radically lost object. Lacan evokes the idea of a fantasized gaze located on the far side of appearances. The idea that an artist's gaze is somehow manifested in the canvas is associated by him with the modern age.

However, the fantasized presence of the gaze is nothing new, according to Lacan; in the

⁸ Lacan, *Book XI*, 114.

⁹ Lacan, *Book XI*, 103.

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 653.

past it was often God's gaze that was imagined, religious icons serving as 'a go-between with the divinity.' In short, 'There always was a gaze behind.'¹¹

As Lacan pointed out almost ten years prior to the seminars on the gaze, the fantasized gaze turns the subject into an object: 'The gaze is not necessarily the face of our fellow being, it could just as easily be the window behind which we assume he is lying in wait for us. It is an *x*, the object when faced with which the subject becomes object.'¹² As this quotation suggests, the fantasy of an invisible, external gaze is not always reassuring.

Lacan sometimes describes the object *a* as an object that substitutes for a primordial lost object rather than itself constituting a radically lost object. It would therefore serve as symbol of the lost object.¹³ For example, the cotton reel that substitutes for the mother and compensates for her absence in the infant's *fort-da* game, described in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, is designated by Lacan as the object *a*.¹⁴ One function of the object *a* is thus to '[fill] the gap constituted by the inaugural division of the subject.'¹⁵ As Ellie Ragland puts it, the object *a* is 'a palpable something one seeks to replace loss itself.'¹⁶

¹¹ Lacan, *Book XI*, 113.

¹² Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. J. Forrester (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 220.

¹³ Lacan states elsewhere that 'a symbol comes to the place of lack constituted by the "missing from its place".' Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, 607.

¹⁴ Lacan, *Book XI*, 62, 239.

¹⁵ Lacan, *Book XI*, 270.

¹⁶ Ellie Ragland, 'The Relation Between the Voice and the Gaze,' in *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts*, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, Maire Jaanus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 198. Ragland asserts that 'objet *a* is a symbol denoting both an empty *place* in being and body and the "object" that one chooses to stop it up because this void place produces anxiety' (189).

The gaze as cause of fascination

In a third version of the gaze, as presented in Lacan's seminars on the gaze, it is a cause of visual fascination. No longer primarily either a lack or a prop, this gaze magnetizes the eye, inspiring 'the feeling of strangeness.' It causes a suspension of the subject's self-mastery. For example, Lacan describes the gaze as dominating the dreaming or hallucinating subject: 'The subject does not see where it is leading, he follows.'¹⁷ When one dreams of a butterfly, one is, effectively, a butterfly, according to Lacan, as subject-object divisions no longer pertain while one is under the gaze.

The viewer of a painting is also placed under the influence of this gaze: 'in front of the picture, I am elided as subject of the geometral plane.'¹⁸ The effect of painting is one of captivation. The subject's eye attaches itself to an image, such that s/he is no longer distinct from the image. Under the gaze, thus, s/he becomes 'the stain' ('la tache').¹⁹ Lacan points to the fascination exerted by Holbein's painting as illustrative of the fact that the subject under the gaze is 'caught, manipulated, captured, in the field of vision.'²⁰

¹⁷ Lacan, *Book XI*, 75.

¹⁸ Lacan, *Book XI*, 108.

¹⁹ Lacan, *Book XI*, 74; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre XI: Les Quatre Concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), 86. It may not be a coincidence that the term *la tache* is suggestive of *l'attache* (the attachment, tie). Philippe Julien describes fascination as the 'moment of arrest of social temporality by visual spatialization,' and sums up its effect as follows: 'captured by the image, I become it.' Philippe Julien, *Pour lire Jacques Lacan: le Retour à Freud*, 2nd ed. (Paris: E.P.E.L. 1990), 54.

²⁰ Lacan, *Book XI*, 92.

Lacan finds evidence for this argument in the phenomenon of animal mimicry, which testifies to ‘the pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen.’²¹ Taking Roger Caillois’s lead in positing an analogy between animal mimicry and painting, Lacan asserts that both the animal and the painter become a ‘picture’ under the gaze. According to Lacan, the painter does not represent a visible scene; rather, he responds to something in that scene. What governs the painter’s rhythmic movements, and the colours falling ‘like rain from the painter’s brush,’ is not any conscious intention on the part of the painter, for Lacan, but ‘something else’ (‘cet autre chose’).²² Lacan has already described the object *a* as ‘cet autre chose’ at the heart of painting, and as the thing with which ‘the painter as creator’ enters into ‘dialogue.’²³ The cause of the painting is therefore the gaze as object *a*. According to Lacan, the gaze that causes a bird to shed its feathers, a snake its scales, and a tree its caterpillars and its leaves, is also the thing that causes a painter to let colours fall from his brush: ‘The subject is not completely aware of it – he operates by remote control.’²⁴ The artist voluntarily loses his or her will or ego, allowing himself to be captivated by the gaze, thereby becoming temporarily like the sleeper or the animal.

Lacan relates an anecdote about standing on a fishing boat as a young man, with a sense of being a spot in the picture, ‘watched’ by a sardine tin glistening on the surface of the water: ‘It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated – and I am not speaking metaphorically.’²⁵ The subject is ‘vanishing,’ itself a ‘punctiform object’ or object *a* while under the sway of the

²¹ Lacan, *Book XI*, 74.

²² Lacan, *Book XI*, 114; Lacan, *Livre XI*, 129.

²³ Lacan, *Book XI*, 112.

²⁴ Lacan, *Book XI*, 115.

²⁵ Lacan, *Book XI*, 95.

gaze.²⁶ Fascination involves a loss of ego and control: ‘the subject in question is not that of the reflexive consciousness, but that of desire.’²⁷ Under the gaze, according to Lacan, ‘I am *photo-graphed*.’²⁸

In Lacan’s early work, the *a* can denote the captivating specular image upon which the ego finds itself in the mirror stage. The stasis produced by fascination is associated by Lacan with the pleasure principle, which acts as a barrier to the real, maintaining the subject on the side of the symbolic.²⁹

The gaze as cause of separation

Despite the temporary threat that fascination poses for the ego, the moment of stasis is, for Lacan, a formative one: ‘Fascination is absolutely essential to the phenomenon of the constitution of the ego.’³⁰ The ego is not present while the subject is captivated, but captivation is nevertheless a crucial step in the foundation of the ego. In a fourth modality of the gaze as described in Lacan’s 1964 seminars, it is the cause not of fascination but rather of the subject’s separation from fascination. It is the cause, that is, of the subject’s ‘fading’ or ‘aphanisis,’ that is, of the subject’s disappearance or petrification into the signifier.³¹

²⁶ Lacan, *Book XI*, 83.

²⁷ Lacan, *Book XI*, 89.

²⁸ Lacan, *Book XI*, 106.

²⁹ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York, London: Routledge, 1992), 119, 134.

³⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. S. Tomaselli (Cambridge University Press: 1988), 50.

³¹ See for example Lacan, *Book XI*, 207–208 and Lacan, *Écrits*, 550.

In this version of the gaze, it serves as an index of a beyond, of the symbolic order which, in Lacan's theory, provides an outlet from the imaginary dual relation, moving the subject from demand, or the absorption in the drive, to the assumption of desire. The gaze is thus symbolic of 'the lack that constitutes castration anxiety.'³² It permits a detachment (a *dé-tache-ment*?) from the captivating image. The painter's mimetic activity differs from that of the mimetic animal precisely because of his or her ability to manipulate the gaze:

Only the subject – the human subject, the subject of the desire that is the essence of man – is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself in it. How? In so far as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze. The screen is here the locus of mediation.³³

If the mask is here referred to in the context of what differentiates humans from animals, it is also strongly associated in the seminars on the gaze with the sexual function of travesty.³⁴ It is thus implied that the difference between painting and animal mimicry hinges on a certain management of the sexual instinct. In humans, that management amounts to symbolization, or the institution of a split between the conscious and the unconscious: 'Masquerade has another meaning in the human domain, and that is precisely to play not at the imaginary, but at the symbolic, level.'³⁵

³² Lacan, *Book XI*, 73.

³³ Lacan, *Book XI*, 107.

³⁴ Lacan, *Book XI*, 100, 107.

³⁵ Lacan, *Book XI*, 193.

Painting is described by Lacan as the transformation of an act into a gesture of showing destined for the other.³⁶ If Lacan states of the mimetic crustacean that ‘It becomes a stain, it becomes a picture, it is inscribed in the picture,’³⁷ the painter makes himself a ‘picture’ under the gaze, submits himself to the scopic drive, only in order to symbolize that experience for the other. With the term ‘the laying down of the gaze’ (‘la *déposition du regard*’),³⁸ applied to the painter’s response to the gaze, Lacan puns on two meanings of *déposition*: deposing and testimony. The painter breaks from the captivating hold of the external gaze by invoking the gaze of a third party: ‘It is through this dimension that we are in scopic creation – the gesture as displayed movement.’³⁹ According to Lacan, a gesture differentiates itself only retroactively from an act, that is, only at its terminal moment. If this moment of showing, or *donner-à-voir*, constitutes the terminal moment of the ‘desire *on the part of* the Other,’ it also initiates the painter’s desire, or ‘*the desire of the Other*’; the meeting between the paintbrush and the canvas marks a separation from the gaze that is also a re-entry into symbolic relations, ‘the relation to the other.’⁴⁰ The painter’s ‘moment of seeing’⁴¹ is thus the terminal moment of the captivating gaze, and the initial moment of symbolic vision. For Lacan, the painter must submit to the scopic drive before achieving ‘a signifying shaping of the real.’⁴²

³⁶ On the ethical status of the gesture, being the address to the other, see Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge: Book XX: Encore*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. B. Fink (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 101.

³⁷ Lacan, *Book XI*, 99.

³⁸ Lacan, *Book XI*, 114; Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre XI*, 130.

³⁹ Lacan, *Book XI*, 117.

⁴⁰ Lacan, *Book XI*, 114–115.

⁴¹ Lacan, *Book XI*, 114.

⁴² Lacan, *Book XI*, 40.

Painting is described by Lacan as ‘a play of *trompe-l’œil*.’⁴³ The kind of trick that is at stake in painting is different from ‘the natural function of the lure.’⁴⁴ Art, unlike animal mimicry, reveals its own artifice. This revelation is exemplified, for Lacan, by the *trompe-l’œil*: ‘What is it that attracts and satisfies us in *trompe-l’œil*? When is it that it captures our attention and delights us? At the moment when, by a mere shift of our gaze, we are able to realize that the representation does not move with the gaze and that it is merely a *trompe-l’œil*.’⁴⁵

By indulging the viewer’s visual demand, and by allowing him or her subsequently to renounce the imaginary relation to the visual object, painting plays a civilizing role:

Broadly speaking, one can say that the work calms people, comforts them, by showing them that at least some of them can live from the exploitation of their desire. But for this to satisfy them so much, there must also be that other effect, namely, that *their* desire to contemplate finds some satisfaction in it. It elevates the mind, as one says, that is to say, it encourages renunciation.⁴⁶

The work of art functions as what Lacan calls a *dompte-regard* by inviting fascination only in order to put an end to it. It satisfies the gaze only in order to bring about a separation from the gaze. Fascination exposes the subject to splitting, as suggested by the mythic properties of the evil eye, whose effect is described by Lacan as an experience of

⁴³ Lacan, *Book XI*, 103.

⁴⁴ Lacan, *Book XI*, 111.

⁴⁵ Lacan, *Book XI*, 112.

⁴⁶ Lacan, *Book XI*, 111.

deathly stasis.⁴⁷ It is thus that the Lacanian gaze can be described by Ragland as a ‘castrating force.’⁴⁸ Richard Feldstein, similarly, writes that ‘Every time the gaze falls upon us, we face a psychic rupture.’⁴⁹ Holbein’s painting functions as an allegory or model of all paintings, according to Lacan, in so far as it traps the subject into submitting to the ‘pulsatile, dazzling and spread out function’ of the gaze, symbolized by the ‘magical floating object’⁵⁰ in the foreground of the picture, before reintroducing him or her to symbolic, castrated vision, emblemized by the death’s head: ‘This picture is simply what any picture is, a trap for the gaze.’⁵¹ Falling under the gaze is a prerequisite to separation from it.

The object *a*, according to Bruce Fink, is ‘a reminder that there is something else, something perhaps lost, perhaps yet to be found.’⁵² Just as the bobbin marks the absence of the mother even while substituting for her, the object *a* serves as a pointer to or index of lack:

Being selected as the index of desire from among the body’s appendages, object *a* is already the exponent of a function, a function that sublimates it even before it exercises this function; this function is that of the index raised toward an absence

⁴⁷ Lacan, *Book XI*, 115, 118.

⁴⁸ Ellie Ragland, *Essays on the Pleasure of Death: From Freud to Lacan* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 39.

⁴⁹ Richard Feldstein, ‘The Phallic Gaze of Wonderland,’ in *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan’s Four Fundamental Concepts*, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, Maire Jaanus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 168.

⁵⁰ Lacan, *Book XI*, 92.

⁵¹ Lacan, *Book XI*, 89.

⁵² Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton University Press, 1995), 94.

about which the ‘it’ [*est-ce*] has nothing to say, if not that that this absence comes from where it speaks [*ça parle*].⁵³

It is the intuition of a lack in the image that permits the infant to separate from the imaginary relation to the mother or specular other.⁵⁴ The object *a*, understood as lack, has the effect of permitting the subject’s renewal of desire and release from captivation.

John Rajchman points out that, because of the importance to psychoanalysis of representing the real, ‘there is a curious kinship between analytic and aesthetic experience.’⁵⁵ For Lacan, in fact, aesthetic beauty itself plays an ethical role to the extent that it offers an ideal, a ‘beyond,’ to aspire to.⁵⁶ In the mirror stage, it is the ideality of the specular image that both captivates the infant and brings about the need for separation. This leads Lacan to pose ‘the question of the meaning of beauty as formative and erogenous.’⁵⁷ The effect of beauty on desire is described by Lacan as ‘that most strange and most profound of effects’; it does not altogether extinguish desire, but it seems, for

⁵³ Lacan, 571.

⁵⁴ See for example *Écrits*, 55, 582. John P. Muller summarizes the situation as follows: ‘Lacan stresses that the aim of analysis is the recognition and articulation of desire. Desire emerges in the gap or lack (*manque*) opened by the separation between the infant’s fantasy and the mother’s reality. This separation is due to the mother’s intermittent absence and the child’s realization that the mother has other objects of desire besides the child.’ John P. Muller, *Beyond the Psychoanalytic Dyad: Developmental Semiotics in Freud, Peirce, and Lacan* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 132.

⁵⁵ John Rajchman, *Truth and Eros: Foucault, Lacan, and the Question of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 71.

⁵⁶ Rajchman paraphrases Lacan’s view, theorized in *Seminar VII*, as follows: ‘In painting we would love what remains “invisible” in the visions it offers us; in architecture what is “uninhabitable” in the habitations it makes for us; in literature what is “unsayable” in what it says to us. Each art would then find a way to recreate the *vide* of our *âmes*.’ *Truth and Eros*, 75.

⁵⁷ Lacan, *Écrits*, 77.

Lacan, to give a sense of the possibility of its extinction: ‘the beautiful has the effect, I would say, of suspending, lowering, disarming desire. The appearance of beauty intimidates and stops desire.’⁵⁸ Beauty thus temporarily suspends our subjection to the movements of desire (which is always the desire of the Other). In our mute fascination with the beautiful object, we come under the sway of the scopic drive, and in subsequently renouncing our imaginary relation to the object we satisfy the drive’s requirement for non-satisfaction and again re-enter the symbolic by assuming the Other’s desire as our own.

The always renewed re-institution of desire is at the core of Lacanian ethics. In order to renew one’s desire, it is necessary first to fall sway to the drive. In *Seminar XI*, the satisfaction of the drive’s requirements, as for example in the viewing of art, becomes the ethical goal of analysis.⁵⁹ After the seminars on the gaze, the object *a* appears in *Seminar XI* as the libido or genital drive. This ‘pure life instinct’ is the ‘organ’ from which the subject separates in order to exist in society.⁶⁰ Because this instinct is ‘irrepressible,’ however, the subject must renew continually her detachment from the libido, so as neither to revert to an undetermined ‘*hommelette*,’⁶¹ nor to become frozen as a signifier. The subject is truly itself, according to Lacan, only in the passage from attachment to detachment: ‘The subject is this emergence which, just before, as subject, was nothing, but which, having scarcely appeared, solidifies into a signifier.’⁶² The Lacanian subject has, therefore, ‘no other being than as a breach in discourse’ and

⁵⁸ Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 248, 238.

⁵⁹ See Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 205–217.

⁶⁰ Lacan, *Book XI*, 198.

⁶¹ Lacan, *Book XI*, 198, 197.

⁶² Lacan, *Book XI*, 199.

‘manifests itself in daily life as a fleeting interruption of something foreign or extraneous,’ ‘a pulsation, an occasional impulse or interruption that immediately dies away or is extinguished.’⁶³

Each of my four readings of the gaze has been shown to correspond to a mode of the subject’s relation to the object a ($\$ \diamond a$) as formulated by Lacan.⁶⁴ The four-fold structure worked out here might be read as corresponding to Lacan’s description of the subject’s relation to the object a as one of ‘envelopment-development-conjunction-disjunction.’⁶⁵ The quartet is a recurrent figure in *Seminar XI*, in which the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis, the four partial drives, the four elements composing the montage of the drive, and the four ‘vicissitudes’ of the drive are all invoked. Indeed, Lacan draws attention to the pattern by stating that ‘it is curious that there are *four* vicissitudes as there are *four* elements of the drive.’⁶⁶ Furthermore, while for Freud the drive combines active, passive, and reflexive modes, Lacan invents in *Seminar XI* a fourth mode, which contains the others, and which he claims involves a ‘movement of appeal’ toward the Other.⁶⁷ Lacan’s seminars on the gaze mix and match the various versions of the object a in a way that seems designed to confuse the auditor-reader. Their logic would seem to mimic the visual anamorphosis that they take to emblemize the workings of the gaze. It is possible that the concept of the gaze outlined in *Seminar XI* is resistant to understanding precisely because it obeys laws similar to those governing the gaze itself. In other words, Lacan’s logic of the gaze may operate to

⁶³ Fink, *Lacanian Subject*, 41.

⁶⁴ Fink offers the following gloss: ‘S with the bar through it stands for the subject as split into conscious and unconscious, a stands for the cause of desire, and the diamond stands for the relationship between the two.’ *A Clinical Introduction*, 56.

⁶⁵ Lacan, *Écrits*, 542 n. 17.

⁶⁶ Lacan, *Book XI*, 165.

⁶⁷ Lacan, *Book XI*, 196.

captivate us by means of its elusiveness; an elusiveness that may ultimately be maddening enough to force us to renounce our search for it and symbolize our failure.

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