

The Politics of the Gaze: Foucault, Lacan and Žižek

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Abstract

Joan Copjec accuses orthodox film theory of misrepresenting the Lacanian gaze by assimilating it to Foucauldian panopticon (Copjec 1994: 18–19). Although Copjec is correct that orthodox film theory misrepresents the Lacanian gaze, she, in turn, misrepresents Foucault by choosing to focus exclusively upon those aspects of his work on the panopticon that have been taken up by orthodox film theory (Copjec 1994: 4). In so doing, I argue, Copjec misses key parallels between the Lacanian and Foucauldian concepts of the gaze. More than a narrow academic dispute about how to read Foucault and Lacan, this debate has wider political significance. In particular, using Slavoj Žižek's work, I show that a correct account of the panoptic gaze leads us to rethink the question of how to oppose modern techniques of surveillance.

Keywords: Film theory, the gaze, Lacan, Foucault, Copjec, Žižek.

Introduction

In her book *Read My Desire*, Joan Copjec launches an ambitious criticism of film theory (by which she means orthodox 1970s psychoanalytic film theory associated with Mulvey, Metz et al.). Film theory, she argues, misunderstands the Lacanian gaze in Foucauldian terms (Copjec 1994: 19). To be specific, she asserts that, while claiming Lacanian roots, film theory draws its concept of the cinematic gaze from the panoptic gaze that Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*: “My argument,” she says, “is that film theory operated a kind of ‘Foucauldinization’ of Lacanian theory” (Copjec 1994: 19).

In this article I argue that Copjec or at least the film theory from which she draws her account of Foucault, misrepresents his account of the panopticon. In particular, I argue that Foucault’s concept of the panoptic gaze has more in common with Lacan’s concept of the gaze than Copjec allows. This criticism of Copjec is not meant as a defense of film theory, however. On the contrary, I conclude that although film theorists are correct to note the similarities between the Foucauldian and Lacanian gazes, they do so only by misrepresenting both of them. More than a narrow academic dispute about how to read Foucault and Lacan, this debate has wider political significance. In particular, using the work of Slavoj Žižek, I show that a correct, more Lacanian account of the panoptic gaze leads us to rethink the question of how to oppose modern techniques of surveillance.

Copjec on the Lacanian Gaze

Copjec illustrates the Lacanian gaze by an autobiographical story that Lacan tells about his youthful encounter with a Breton fisherman:

I was in my early twenties...and at the time, of course, being a young intellectual, I wanted desperately to get away, see something different, throw myself into something practical....One day, I was on a small boat with a few people from a family of fishermen....as we were waiting for the moment to pull in the nets, an individual known as Petit-Jean...pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can...It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me – *You see that can? Do you see it? Well it doesn’t see you* (Lacan 1981: 95; Copjec 1994: 30–31).

In Lacan’s little story, the gaze is grounded in a concrete object: a sardine can that sporadically catches the light and blinds the young Lacan. In and of itself the object is of no significance, a shiny piece of industrial waste floating on the sea. But the physiological discomfort occasioned by the flashes of light from the can blends with and reinforces a qualitatively similar affect in the young Lacan that comes from a quite different source. To be specific, he experiences a feeling of discomfort, which, rather than physiological in origin, is occasioned by a lurking political guilt at his own privileged position in relation to the working class fishermen. As a result, the flashes of light bring to the surface, indeed create in the

young Lacan a palpable and excessive anxiety, even shame, about who he is and what he is doing. (This is what Freud calls “unrealistic anxiety” – an anxiety that is in excess of what its apparent object merits). In short, the discomfort that accompanies the physiological difficulty that the young Lacan experiences in looking at the can contributes to a self-centered anxiety about his identity. This anxiety, in turn, is transformed into an experience of being externally scrutinized – an anonymous look from elsewhere by an invisible other before whom the young Lacan is reduced to anxiety and shame.

In Freud’s terms, we may say that the scrutiny that the young Lacan directs outwardly at his surroundings encounters resistance from the blinding light reflected by the tin can; and as a result the scrutiny “turns around”, that is, reflexively turns back upon Lacan, at the same time as it switches from active to passive voice – from “I look” to “I am looked at”. (Freud, *Instincts and Vicissitudes* 1997: 92–94). To put it in general terms, because it encounters an uncomfortable resistance, a conscious look that is directed outwards transforms into a self-consciousness that returns to its agent as anxiety in relation to the scrutiny of an externalized anonymous Other. Lacan refers to the latter scrutiny, but also to the object that is its source as “the gaze”.¹

In terms of the example of the sea-faring tin-can, the gaze may be thought of as an external point from which an anxiety provoking look assails the subject. But, and this is crucial, the point in question is definitely not an eye that looks back at the subject, let alone a mirror in which the subject sees himself looking. On the contrary, it is a point of failure in the visual field – in the case of the tin can, a point where perception breaks down and the stuff out of which perceptions are constituted, namely light, becomes visible. Of course, not any such points of failure qualify as a gaze. As Lacan emphasizes, a gaze must also precipitate anxiety (specifically what Freud calls “unrealistic anxiety”) which, in turn, transforms the viewer’s look into a self-directed, passive “being looked at”: “That which is gaze is always a play of light and opacity. It is always that gleam of light...which prevents me, at each point, from being a screen”. The gaze, Lacan then adds, “is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of...the lack that constitutes castration anxiety...It surprises [the viewer]...disturbs him and reduces him to a feeling of shame” (Lacan 1981: 96, 72–73, 84). More specifically, Lacan points out, the gaze must function as an object around which the exhibitionistic and voyeuristic impulses that constitute the scopic drive turn – in short, the gaze must be an object of the scopic drive, producing not merely anxiety but also pleasure (Lacan 1981: 181–183).

Lacan further elaborates this account of the gaze with a story that he borrows from Sartre:

The gaze that I encounter ...is not a seen gaze [that is, not an eye that I see looking at me] but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other...the sound of rustling leaves heard while out hunting...a footstep heard in a corridor...[the gaze exists] not at the level of [a particular visible] other whose gaze surprises the subject looking

through the keyhole. It is that the other surprises him, the subject, as entirely hidden gaze (Lacan 1981: 84, 82).

Here the gaze corresponds to a point of failure in the field of the visible not because (as in the case of the tin can) it dazzles the eye, but rather because the subject becomes aware of it aurally rather than visually. This story makes the point that, although in some situations a visible object (or at least a source of light) is located in the place from where the gaze emanates, this is by no means the rule. In the case of Sartre's story, for example, an aural rather than visual object stimulates the effects of the gaze. To be specific, "noises off" create recognition that, although there is nothing to be seen, there is something present. Thus *by totally non-visual means* the subject is brought to recognize that there is a hole, a lack, in his visual field – a something that, because it is present but cannot be seen, functions as a point of failure of the visual field.

In terms of these two examples it is possible to understand Lacan's rather enigmatic remarks that the gaze is "governed" by "the function of the stain" (Lacan 1981: 74). Since a stain blocks vision rather than offering itself as a thing to be seen, it constitutes a disruption, a point of indeterminacy in the visual field, where the subject fails to see. Of course, just as for Freud not any cigar is a phallic symbol, not any stain sustains the function of the gaze. On the contrary, a stain is associated with a gaze only in so far as it precipitates (unrealistic) anxiety but also precipitates the double transformation in the voyeuristic act of looking that Freud describes in *Instincts and Vicissitudes*, through which the stain becomes an object of the scopic drive: first, a transformation into the "reflexive middle voice" – "I look at myself" – followed by a second transformation into the passive "I am looked at".

Foucault on the Gaze

In this section I argue, contra Copjec, that there exist far-reaching similarities between Foucault's concept of the panoptic gaze and the Lacanian gaze. As a source for Foucault, Copjec takes the position advanced by the feminist branch of (1970s) film theory, according to which the subjectivity of women is "inevitably bound up with the structure of the look and the localization of the eye of authority...she carries her own Panopticon with her wherever she goes, her self image a function of being for another" (Copjec 1994: 13). According to this position, via a simple process of pressing upon individuals an image of how to be a subject, the panoptic gaze has a constitutive impact upon the subjectivity of the individuals in its field of view: "The techniques of disciplinary power (of the construction of the subject) are conceived as capable of 'materially penetrating' the body in depth without depending on the mediation of the subject's own representations...[let alone] though having first to be interiorized in people's consciousness." Even in the act of resisting, Copjec continues, "(Foucault's) panoptic argument...is unable

to conceive of a discourse that would refuse rather than refuel power”. In short, resistance becomes a sham – even where it exists, it is taken into account in advance; indeed, merely serves to incite new and more subtle processes of oppression.²

In sum, according to Copjec, despite all of his talk about resistance, the Foucault promoted by feminist film theory turns out to be “ultimately resistant to resistance” (Copjec 1994: 18). In particular, Copjec maintains that, according to Foucault, even as it engages in acts of resistance, the modern subject is determined as a direct reflection – a reflex – of the image that is implicit in the social relations of power in which it participates and through which it is “subjected” – an image that takes into account the acts of resistance through which the subject futilely attempts to resist what it takes to be its image. Copjec argues that feminist film theory extends these ideas to social arrangements in general, including power relations that exist between a cinematic audience and the cinematic apparatus: “the images presented on the screen are accepted by the subject as its own ...the image seems...to perfectly represent the subject” (Copjec 1994: 21, 23).

Copjec then goes on to argue compellingly that orthodox feminist film theory, especially Laura Mulvey, wrongly equates this panoptic concept of the gaze to the Lacanian gaze. Copjec argues this point on the basis of Lacan’s *Seminar XI*, according to which the gaze is neither a specular image of the subject, nor the look by another that places the subject under scrutiny. Instead, as we saw in the previous section, it is a point of *failure* in the visual field, where, because the subject cannot see or be seen properly, s/he is discommoded, made anxious. For Copjec, this Lacanian gaze emerges as not only different from but also far more threatening than the panoptic gaze that orthodox feminist film theory draws from Foucault: “Lacan does not ask you to think of a gaze as belonging to an Other who cares about who or where you are, who pries, keeps tabs on your whereabouts, and takes note of all your steps and missteps, as the panoptic gaze is said to do....The horrible truth, revealed to Lacan...is that *the gaze does not see you*. So if you are looking for confirmation of the truth of your being or the clarity of your vision, you are on your own” (Copjec 1994: 36).

But, I now argue, feminist film theory’s mistaken account of the Lacanian gaze is coupled with, indeed matches, an equally mistaken account of the Foucauldian panoptic gaze; and whereas Copjec spots the first mistake she chooses to overlook the second – indeed, reproduces it (albeit with the rather grudging caveat that her account of Foucault on the panopticon is “not dispersed throughout Foucault’s work” – Copjec 1994: 5). The mistake in film theory’s account of Foucault is clear from even the most cursory examination of *The History of Sexuality volume I*, where Foucault roundly takes to task the model of subjectivity for which “confronted by a power that is law, the subject who is constituted as subject – who is ‘subjected’ – is he who obeys” (Foucault 1990: 85). Against this, Foucault writes: “We must construct an analytics of power that that no longer takes the law as a

model and a code.” In particular, Foucault is at pains to emphasize that the panopticon works by a process of interiorization that mediates any collective image of how to be in terms of highly personalized preconceptions: “Two different things are involved here: the observing gaze, the act of observation on the one hand, and internalization on the other” (Foucault 1996: 232). As such, and this is the key point, it is clear that for Foucault the panoptic gaze does *not* in and of itself determine subjectivity. In particular, Foucault denies the politically pessimistic claim that, even in their acts of resistance, subjects are condemned to conform to the same predetermined and limited range of blueprints for how to be and what to do.

Indeed, by driving a wedge between power relations and relations of domination, Foucault leaves open a space for creative acts of resistance – what he calls “practices of freedom”: “The idea that power is a system of domination that controls everything and leaves no room for freedom cannot be attributed to me” (Foucault 1996: 441). To be specific, he insists upon a distinction between, on the one hand, “power relations” that, by being “mobile, reversible and unstable” leave a space for practices of freedom, and, on the other hand, a “system of domination that controls everything and leaves no room for freedom” (Foucault 1996: 442). He argues further that practices of freedom are not only compossible with, but also necessary for the operation of the system of power relations: “power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free” (Foucault 1996: 441). Foucault’s central point, then, is that, modern power relations depend upon practices of freedom, but such dependence in no way compromises the status of the practices in question as bona fide acts of resistance. On the contrary, the modern juxtaposition of exercises of power with acts of resistance merely points to the existence of struggle, something that is impossible in older style systems of domination.

What do such practices of freedom look like? In his *History of Sexuality volume I*, where his concern is with the system of power relations through which the modern regime of sex has been established, Foucault characterizes such practices in terms of a “different economy of bodies and pleasures” (Foucault 1990: 159) that “counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibilities of resistance” (Foucault 1990: 157). Or as he puts it in a later interview: “For centuries people generally, as well as doctors and even liberation movements, have always spoken about desire and never about pleasure. ‘We have to liberate desire,’ they say. [I say] No! We have to create new pleasure. And then maybe desire will follow” (Foucault 1996: 384). Here Foucault contrasts his own radical political project for developing alternative regimes of pleasure with more traditional projects of the liberation of sexual desire, such as D.H. Lawrence’s *cri de coeur* to liberate sex, as well as its later sixties incarnation (Foucault 1990: 157). Foucault argues that, by focusing on the liberation of sexual *desire*, neither of the latter projects of liberation end up producing real sexual freedom, but instead merely straight-jacket sexual practices

within new and equally rigid normative frameworks that limit physical practices for producing pleasure.³

Contra Copjec, then, it is clear that Foucault, like Lacan, acknowledges that the established system of law and order (what Foucault calls “the system of power relations” and Lacan refers to as “the symbolic register”) fails to convey let alone impose determinate guidelines for subjectivity. Foucault makes this point in rather different terms than Lacan, however. Lacan indicates that the source of the gaze is a “stain”, a point where what “we try to apprehend...seems to elude us” (Lacan 1981: 93). The term “seems” in the phrase “seems to elude” is key here. What we “try to apprehend” merely *seems* to elude us rather than actually eluding us. Why? Because there is nothing there to be eluded – to quote a favorite Žižekian phrase: “the real secret is that there is no secret”. In other words, the stain, like a Rorschach ink blot, is indeterminate not in the weak sense that its identity is hidden or uncertain, but rather in the strong sense of totally lacking a precise identity. Indeed, its power to evoke interpretation lies precisely in this indeterminacy, which precipitates viewers into a struggle to read something where, other than an allusion to/illusion of meaning, there is nothing to be read.

Foucault, by contrast, argues that, in the context of the panopticon, because everyone, including the scrutineers, is under scrutiny, there is no absolute certainty, no God’s eye point of view from which a trustworthy picture is revealed: “In the panopticon everyone is watched, according to his position within the system, by all or by certain of the others. Here we have an apparatus of total and mobile distrust, since there is no absolute point” (Foucault 1996: 235). The resultant gaze, Foucault concludes, “is at once collective and anonymous” – carrying instructions from everyone and everywhere and yet from no one and nowhere, a heteroglossia of voices that depends for its appearance of univocality upon a retrospective interpretative gesture by each and every audience member as s/he struggles to make sense of the inchoate stream of signs that assail her/his ears from all sides. Contra Copjec, the effect of this heteroglossia is *not* a “simple atomization and multiplication of subject positions” (Copjec 1994: 18). Instead, by removing the “absolute point” in relation to which the truth is judged, Foucault renders the truth-content of each and every message indeterminate: where there is no principle for judging the truth, truth becomes indeterminate. This indeterminacy, in turn, creates a need and ultimately a space for the practices of freedom through which subjects resolve the indeterminacies in the messages from the Other that assail them from all sides. In short, by reading Foucault’s reference to a “mobile distrust” as an index of indeterminacy, Foucault’s account of the gaze converges with Lacan’s.

But, and here I come to my key question, does this convergence between the Foucauldian and Lacanian gazes amount to more than a trivial analogy? Remember that the Lacanian gaze is distinguished not merely by its formal properties: not any stain is the site of a gaze. Indeed, as I indicated above, in order to count as a gaze, a stain must precipitate (unrealistic) anxiety but also function as what Lacan

calls “an object of the drive”, specifically the scopic drive, and as such act a site for the circulation of both voyeuristic and exhibitionistic impetuses that, working together, create pleasure (Lacan 1981: 181–183). But isn’t this also how Foucault describes the panoptic gaze? “The [voyeuristic] pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the [exhibitionistic pleasure] that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it... These attractions, these evasions, these circular incitements have traced around bodies and sexes, not boundaries not to be crossed, but *perpetual spirals of power and pleasure*” (Foucault 1990: 45).⁴ As such, the Foucauldian gaze, no less than the Lacanian gaze, seems to be a site of operation of the scopic drive, and, it seems, the two gazes – Foucault’s and Lacan’s – take on a substantial relation of coexistence if not identity.

Conclusion

It is clear that the film theoretic account of Foucault that Copjec uses, misrepresents Foucault’s concept of the panoptic gaze, and that this misrepresentation, in turn, is responsible for her insistence upon a gap between the Foucauldian and Lacanian concepts of the gaze. By correctly representing Foucault, I have closed this gap. A fortiori I have changed the exclusively conservative political valence that, in virtue of its function as a disciplinary tool that supports the status quo, has come to be associated with the panopticon. In particular, I allow that, like the Lacanian gaze, and depending on context, the Foucauldian gaze may have *either* disruptive, Dionysian effects *or* conservative, Apollonian effects.⁵ Foucault’s “practices of freedom” are one way of thinking the possibility of disruptive effects. Rather than pursuing this line of thought at an abstract level, however, I turn finally to Slavoj Žižek’s work, in particular his concept of overconformity, in order to show that, by reconceiving the panoptic gaze along the lines that I have suggested, new political possibilities arise for opposing modern regimes of surveillance.

Central to Žižek’s account of the modern state is the concept of “an obscene underside of the law”, namely widespread practices – petty tax evasion, speeding, walking on the grass, etc – which, although strictly speaking illicit, are unofficially tolerated. This network of practices is sustained thanks to what Žižek calls an “ideological phantasy” that keeps them an “open secret” – everyone knows about and participates in them in private, but no one mentions them, let alone publicly flaunts participating in them. Such practices constitute points of failure of the law in so far as they fall in an indeterminate zone in relation to legal categories: on the one hand, in so far as they are tolerated they are not straightforwardly illegal, but, on the other hand, neither are they legal; and as such, constitute a fundamental illegality at the heart of the legal system. Žižek’s point is that, rather than undermining the law, the obscene underside of the law sustains it – the law is tol-

erated because of the little secret pleasures that people derive from its obscene underside. In Lacanian terms, we may say that the obscene underside of the law is the set of necessary but repressed points of failure of the legal system – in short, it is the symptom of the legal system. In particular, in the context of a legal state apparatus that is held in place by a panoptic system of surveillance, the obscene underside of the law is a liminal zone of high anxiety that, like the Emperor's body under his new clothes, is obscenely visible to each of his subjects in the privacy of their own visual field, yet must be shrouded in a cloak of invisibility in the public realm. This is the site of the gaze.

How are we to oppose such a system, which seemingly coexists with, indeed depends upon its own systematic transgression? According to Žižek, not by acts of resistance, since the system is readily able to accommodate, indeed depends upon such acts.⁶ Instead, Žižek suggests opposition through acts of overconformity, which, rather than protesting let alone breaking the law, insist upon it to the letter, even when ideological “common sense” suggests otherwise. In particular, this means a refusal to turn a “blind eye” from manifestations of law's obscene underside. As Žižek puts it: “Sometimes, at least – the truly subversive thing is not to disregard the explicit letter of Law on behalf of the underlying fantasies, but to *stick to this letter against the fantasy which sustains it*....Is not an exemplary case of such subversion-through-identification provided by Jaroslav Hášek's *The Good Soldier Schweik*, the novel whose hero wreaks total havoc by simply executing the orders of his superiors in an overzealous and all-too-literal way (Žižek 1997: 30, 22, 31).

What constitutes such strategies of overconformity in the context of a modern panoptic regime of surveillance? Answer: openly/publicly sticking to the letter of the law by refusing the cloak of invisibility that shrouds the law's points of failure; in other words, by refusing to indulge what Žižek calls “the ideological fantasy”, orchestrating a direct encounter with the *objet a qua* gaze. To put it in Žižek's terms, it is a matter of “actively endorsing the passive confrontation with the *objet a*, bypassing the intermediate role of the screen of fantasy” (Žižek 1997: 31). To be specific, it is matter of not merely saying but also acting out publicly what everyone knows in private but dares not say: not merely announcing in public that the Emperor is naked, but arresting him for indecent exposure. By Lacanianizing Foucault, as I have done here, we are able to understand the logic behind such heterodox strategies for opposing modern regimes of surveillance.

Where, then, does this leave Copjec's *bête noir*, orthodox feminist film theory? Where too does it leave Copjec's critique? Answer: Feminist film theory, I have argued, makes two mistakes: first (as Copjec correctly points out) it is mistaken in its account of Lacan; second (as Copjec chooses to overlook) it is mistaken in its account of Foucault as well. Despite this doubling of mistakes, however, feminist theory (unlike Copjec) is correct in equating the Lacanian gaze with Foucault's. But, I have argued, this is only because the mistake it makes in its account of the

Lacanian gaze matches the mistake it makes in its account of the Foucauldian gaze. By contrast, because she corrects one and only one of these two mistakes, Copjec ends up by erroneously denying the close relation between the Lacanian and Foucauldian gazes. A new film theory seems called for, that correctly analyzes both Foucault and Lacan, and thus recognizes that, despite their undoubted differences, there exist close parallels between their accounts of the gaze.

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Notes

- 1 Lacan, it may be surmised, is well aware of the Freudian explanation of this phenomenon. See for example, Lacan's remarks on sado-masochism immediately following a mention of Sartre's little story of the gaze, sado-masochism being Freud's primary example of the "turning around" of the drive and the construction of a reflexive "middle voice" (Freud 1997: 83; Lacan 1981: 182–183).
- 2 There is a question whether Copjec takes this position as being Foucault's, or takes it merely as feminist film theory's account of Foucault. In line with the first alternative she says "The arguments I will critique are *not* dispersed throughout Foucault's work" (Copjec 1994: 5, my emphasis). But in line with the second alternative she says unequivocally that she is arguing against a historicist tendency that she detects in Foucault, which is represented in "His [Foucault's] belief that every form of negation or resistance may eventually feed or be absorbed by the system of power it contests" (Copjec 1994:10). Perhaps the best way to respond to this ambiguity in Copjec is to say that Copjec's project is avowedly a defense of Lacan against a certain line of argument that has been spoken in "the name of Foucault" (if not by Foucault himself) (Copjec 1994: 4). My interest, by contrast, lies in the converse project: namely speaking in the name of a different Foucault, one who, I would argue, is equally present in his texts (especially the later interviews) and has a strong and rather direct affinity with Lacan .
- 3 In a later interview, Foucault tells us that a practice of freedom means "not being a slave to oneself and one's appetites;" more broadly it means a "care for the self" that is ethical insofar as it is also "a way of caring for others" (Foucault 1996: 437). In another interview Foucault identifies "practices of freedom" as "strategic games as a source of bodily pleasure" such as S/M sexual practices, in which the roles of master and slave are fluid, consensual and easily reversed rather than constituting fixed positions: "the S/M game is very interesting because, unlike other strategic relations that have been "stabilized through institutions," "it is always fluid" (Foucault 1996: 387).
- 4 Note, too, that Foucault conceives pleasure not along traditional lines as a secondary spin-off from the satisfaction of desire. Instead, like Lacan, he conceives pleasure as an altogether more fundamental phenomenon. Specifically, he claims that bodies and pleasures find ways

to flourish in any social situation – even, indeed especially, the most repressive; and he uses the term “sexuality” to designate the bodily practices, through which people find such pleasures. He goes on to argue that desire is a secondary spin-off from the embodied practices of producing pleasure. Specifically, since the eighteenth century, desire has been constituted through the discursive processes of retrospectively assigning motives, including desires, to the agents of such practices. Such motives, especially desires, take what amounts to an ideological status as parts of a person’s essential being – his or her “sexual identity” – for which Foucault reserves the term “sex” (Foucault 1976/1990: 19–23, 47–48, 150–159).

- 5 I owe this point, and much else besides, to Jennifer Friedlander. Lacan argues that, in relation to the viewing subject, the picture always “has a relation with the gaze” (Lacan 1981: 101). But, he continues, the relation in question is not always a matter of “being a trap for the [viewer’s] gaze”. On the contrary, for some pictures, it is a matter of “invit[ing] the person to whom this picture is presented to lay down his gaze there as one lays down one’s weapons. This is the pacifying, Apollonian effect of painting. Something is given not so much to the [viewer’s] gaze as to the eye” (Lacan 1981: 101). In Lacan’s terms, this is a matter of the picture feeding the viewer’s *desire to see* “*You want to see? Well, take a look at this*” (Lacan 1981: 101, italics Lacan’s) rather than the picture providing a site of operation for the viewer’s gaze that by providing a point around which the scopic drive turns, enables the production of pleasure. Very roughly, one might say, figural works fall in the, Apollonian category of pictures. By contrast, impressionism (Cézannes *little blues, little whites, little browns*) expressionism, anamorphosis and *trompe l’oeil* fall in a second, Dionysian category of paintings, which feature indeterminate visual objects (Lacan 1981: 114, 109, 88, 112). For example, in viewing a work of *trompe l’oeil* the charm – the pleasure – lies in knowing very well that what I see is a fake, but even so (by contrast with a straightforward fake) continuing to be taken in by the illusion (Lacan 1981: 112). The indeterminacy here is a matter of a pleasurablely unsettling and sustained conflict between intellectual and experiential engagement with the work. In the case of impressionist works it is somewhat different. From one and the same perspective the viewer can see images as well as the little dabs of colors out of which the images in question emerge (as in a Rorschach ink blot). But because the invisibility of the little dabs of color is a condition of the images taking on focus the images lose a certain degree of determinacy: they haunt the canvas like spirits who have failed to totally manifest.
- 6 Here, despite Žižek’s at times virulent criticism of Foucault, we see an interesting convergence between Žižek’s Lacan and Foucault. On the basis of this convergence, as well as Copjec’s similar attitude to Foucault, we may speculate that Foucault functions as a sort of obscene underside, even symptom, of Lacan. Here, despite Žižek’s at times virulent criticism of Foucault, we see an interesting convergence between Žižek’s Lacan and Foucault. On the basis of this convergence, as well as Copjec’s similar attitude to Foucault, we may speculate that Foucault functions as a sort of obscene underside, even symptom, of Lacan.

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