

LACAN'S ENCOUNTER WITH A BUDDHIST STATUE AND THE GAZE AS *OBJET a*

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Summary: The article examines Lacan's use of a personal experience recollected from his recent vacation in Japan, recorded in *Seminar X* (1962-1963) *Anxiety*. This experience occurred in connection with a Japanese Buddhist statue, and the contemplative relation Lacan observed with respect to it. Lacan utilises his recollection of this experience in his teaching activity, specifically to introduce the question of the *objet a* in the scopic field. In order to use this experience Lacan was led in the seminar to comment on the relation between psychoanalysis and Buddhism, specifically on the statement that "desire is illusion" and on the central Buddhist teaching of "non-duality" and the article revisits Lacan's discussion. Lacan also gave the iconographic references which he understood to characterise the statue in question. Some research work reveals the possible identity of this Buddhist statue, both in terms of its actual location and its iconography and identifies it as the "Pensive Prince" or the Bodhisattva Maitreya, situated in Chūgūji monastery at Nara. The article then offers a commentary and analysis of Lacan's theory of the relation between the eye and the emerging concept of the gaze, in order to illustrate the operation of desire in the field of vision. It shows how Lacan has utilised an example of sublimation in the scopic field in order to communicate to his listeners a development in his theory concerning the gaze as partial object of the scopic drive as well as an historical-cultural sublimation, as exemplified in the Buddhist statue.

Key words: *Objet a*, The Gaze, Buddhist Statue, Seminar X, Japan.

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Introduction

Following the *Ethics* seminar of 1959-1960 in which Lacan elaborated the concept of *das Ding*, the question of the thing's correlation with the partial objects which make up the real of the drive took precedence, leading to further explorations concerning the relation between this "real thing" and desire. The *Ethics* seminar had elaborated a revision of the concept of sublimation, especially in the

cultural form that Lacan seems to valorise above the others: sublimation in art. From *Seminar VIII, Transference* (1960-1961), through *Seminar IX, Identification* (1961-1962) to *Seminar X Anxiety* (1962-1963), Lacan had been approaching the question of the *objet petit a*, from various angles and approaching the real dimension of the object in the fantasy.¹ By the beginning of *Seminar X* Lacan had extended Freud's partial objects of the polymorphous perverse libidinal being to include the voice and the gaze. These were aspects of the drive which Freud had touched upon but had not theorised to any great extent.

In *Seminar X* Lacan discusses at different points three of the "great world religions": Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism. Each in its specific form, is utilised to illustrate something about the dialectic of desire in the constitution of the subject with the intent of demonstrating something concerning his discourse on anxiety. The question is how to situate anxiety as this is encountered in psychoanalytic experience with respect to desire and the Other. Anxiety will come to be thought of as a certain encounter with the desire of the Other; as a limit experience and signal of the edge of the ego; and as a mode of defence against *jouissance*. Anxiety will be seen as taking different forms in relation to the range of the partial object, the *objet a*, of which the gaze forms a novel element.

Lacan's discussion of Buddhism, in the lesson of the 8th May 1963, (given in Miller's edited version the title *Les paupières de Bouddha*, the eyelids of the Buddha, already suggesting the relation between desire and the gaze) is such that he resumes by reviewing what he had said at the end of the previous lesson concerning the practice of circumcision in ancient Hebrew and Egyptian civilisation. The practice of circumcision is described as introducing and symbolising the entrance of the subject into the economy of desire, involving the symbolic inscription of "some permanent relationship to a lost object as such" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 213), and it is only in the dialectic with the lost object, this object as cut off, that desire can be sustained and which allows this relationship of distance for the subject to the ultimate object of desire, the real thing at the heart of human being. In the Hebrew bible, Lacan observes, circumcision is not limited to describing the operation usually connoted but is more widely utilised,

1. I have consulted both the English translation of the unedited manuscript (Lacan, 1962-1963) and the edited translation of *Seminar X* (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]) throughout, however the French edited version (Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]) has also been utilised.

"what is involved is always an essential separation from a certain part of the body, a certain appendix, from something which in a function becomes symbolic of a relationship to the body itself henceforth alienated, and fundamental for the subject" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 1). Lacan aims to define this cut of the signifier which always leaves a real remainder, a remnant of the body in the real, something separated from the body, yet which belongs to the subject. Becoming a desiring subject through this cut, subject to a law which governs the economy of desire, always maintains this relation to the lost object, to that part of ourselves of our living being, of our "body", as the immediacy of the real, which we have given up, lost, precisely in order to enter the symbolic as a speaking being. For Lacan this is the essential significance of the castration complex, an imaginary possible lack being replaced by a symbolic lack.

In the course of this seminar, Lacan had been approaching the question of the significance of anxiety and its relation to desire and *jouissance*. In effect, anxiety separates and maintains a distance between desire and *jouissance* and yet indicates the latter, as a signal of that remainder or remnant of the relation to the real, after the cut of the signifier instates the subject in the symbolic order. Desire, and hence anxiety, is to be thought in relation to the desire of the Other, and is caught up with the lost object as this structures the unconscious, which Lacan introduces into psychoanalytic theory and elaborates throughout *Seminar X* as the *objet petit a*, a remnant of the primordial experience of the infant in relation to the body and the mother that has become separated, cut off, and which henceforth haunts human experience as a fundamental lack or gap, a lost object. Lacan will conceive this structurally as the cause of desire. Lacan claims that what he is attempting to circumscribe, and bring to a concept, to define, has never been situated within psychoanalytic theory before, it has never been given its coordinates in "its ultra-subjective radiance (*son rayonnement ultra-subjectif*)" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 214; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 248), in the "pure function of desire" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 214). It is towards situating this function that Lacan wants to advance the formation of the *objet a*, which he calls here "the object of objects (*l'objet des objets*)" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 214; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 248).

Lacan, Buddhism and the work of art

Lacan articulates the possibility of dialogue between Buddhist thought and practice, and his approach to psychoanalysis in the interpretation of the statement that "desire is illusion". In Lacanian psychoanalysis desire is also considered an "illusion" in a certain sense, or perhaps better fictive, and founded upon a fundamental lack or gap introduced into the structure of human experience. The structuring of the subject, occurs through entering into language as a speaking being. This cut incarnates that which is lost and given up through this process, an originary *jouissance*, a pre-linguistic experience of the body, around which an economy of desire can form itself. The desiring subject is always in search of this lost *objet a*, the ultimate yet prohibited object of desire, with its aim displaced within the multitude of objects encountered in the world (the metonymy of desire), yet none of which, in the end, truly satisfies. If there is an essential thematic of Lacan's revision of psychoanalysis, it is surely to re-centre it as the theory and practice of desire, a problematic knowledge concerning desire.

Traditionally writers have often approached Buddhism as a religion and as such it is compared with Western religious forms. It can be approached in this manner, yet Buddhism, which originated at a certain point in Indian history and culture, has also been approached by scholars as a psychology, a philosophy, a psychophysical technique, ranging from rational to more mystical practices (such as Buddhist Tantric practices) for achieving enlightenment or truth, or as a soteriological way, as Lacan comments, a path to "salvation".² Buddhism can also be approached through its art, literary, plastic and other forms of art, including those practices elaborated in forms which can also be regarded as works of art, the forms of meditation.

2. For an account of Western culture's changing appreciation of Buddhism in its many forms see the work by Batchelor (1994) *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture*. A good historical and conceptual introduction to Mahāyāna Buddhism can be found in Williams (1989) which details and explores many of the key concepts and different schools. Particularly informative for Lacan's exploration of the meaning of the Bodhisattva is his chapter in this work on "The path of the Bodhisattva" (Williams, 1989: 185ff). See also the comprehensive introduction to this ideal by Sangharakshita (1999). For a general and concise introduction to Buddhism in all its forms, and with a short chapter specifically on the character of Japanese Buddhism, see Skilton (1994). With particular reference to Zen Buddhism in Japan one can consult the classic text by Heinrich Dumoulin (1990), *Zen Buddhism: A History, Volume 2, Japan*.

Buddhism could be taken as corresponding, in its cultural sphere, with what, in the West originated with the Greeks, as a "form of philosophy". Indeed, many thinkers, including psychoanalysts, have hazarded the comparison between Socrates, and the historical Buddha. I do not intend to approach this question here, except to note that Buddhism addresses the question of human desire and suffering, and in so doing has over the centuries, elaborated in its various forms different strategies with respect to desire and knowledge, which could be called an ethics, and which, invites comparison with psychoanalysis. Lacan is not alone in showing an interest in Buddhism, or contributing to a conversation between it and psychoanalysis. Over the history of psychoanalysis, and within different schools, there have been various attempts to elaborate this possible connection and conversation.³

Introducing a discussion of Buddhism into his seminar, Lacan presupposes that his audience already has a certain understanding of Buddhist "aims, the principles of the dogmatic recourse [...] [and] ascetic practice" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 222)⁴ and are also familiar with a formula which "interests us in the keenest possible way in terms of what we [...] [psychoanalysts] articulate here" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 10). This formula is a central teaching of Buddhism, according to Lacan: that "desire is illusion" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 222). He explains that whilst illusion necessarily refers to the register of truth, it cannot be the final truth. In the enunciation of "is illusion" the meaning of this "is" remains problematic, being is problematic. Yet to claim that desire is illusion is to say that it has no support, prospect, or aim, that it is not something ultimate, or in Buddhist formulations "empty", devoid of self identity or essence. Illusion is related to ordinary experience of duality, whilst the truth is realised in the experience of non-duality. The experience of non-duality implies also the ordinary experience of duality, otherwise there

3. For a recent collection of essays from various theoretical perspectives see Safran (2003). In particular for a Lacanian perspective see Moncayo (2003) in this collection. It would be enough to mention in passing the proximity of Lacan's theory of the ego and its functioning with the ego or self as this is regarded in Buddhism as the seat of illusion, or that the three fundamental passions of love, hate and ignorance which Buddhist iconography represents at the centre of the "wheel of existence" as pig, chicken and snake, are those three passions of the ego which structure, for Lacan, the dimension of the imaginary.

4. It might be argued that Lacan is wrong to call Buddhism an "ascetic practice" as it was in relinquishing the various forms of ascetics that the historical Buddha discovered what came to be called the "Middle Way" and achieved awakening. For the legend of the life of the Buddha see Gethin (1998). See also the classic work, although dated in some respects, by the great translator of Buddhist texts Edward Conze (1951), *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*.

could be no such experience of non-duality as a truth beyond the illusions of duality. The experience of non-duality is also described as that of "emptiness" such that: "The emptiness of emptiness is the fact that not even emptiness exists ultimately, that it is also dependent, conventional, nominal, and, in the end, that it is just the everydayness of the everyday" (Garfield & Priest, 2003: 15).

Freud who was perhaps (mis)informed on Buddhism through a reading of Schopenhauer, used the term nirvana in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920g) and even established a distinct principle with the name of nirvana principle (and related this to the death drive). Freud likened the goal of Buddhism to the move towards zero energy or force, and the death drive is connected with immortality (cf Laplanche, 1976). Lacan argues that Buddhist *nirvāṇa* should not be viewed as reduction to nothingness, the kind of negation involved being very particular: a not to have, a certain freedom from the cycle of suffering, correlated with the experience of non-duality. What is involved in the Buddhist practitioner's relation to *nirvāṇa* as the desired state of being, is articulated in "every formulation of Buddhist truth" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 223), in terms of non-dualism, or the One. For Lacan *nirvāṇa* is not negation and is misinterpreted as nihilistic, as a pure reduction to nothingness, but a not to have, in which we can hear a response to desire. A desire to extinguish desire is in itself still a desire and "if there is an object of your desire, it is nothing other than yourself" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 10). If Lacan introduces the *objet a* as essential to desire, indeed its cause, he claims "the business of dualism and non-dualism take on a completely different relief" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 223). If it is a question not of an imaginary projection of an inside onto an outside in relation to the object of desire, that which is "myself" on the outside is not projected there but cut off from me. In order to illustrate the meaning of non-dualism Lacan provides two examples taken from his experience of Buddhism. The first is the reference to the mirror within Buddhism especially with the enigmatic "mirror without surface in which nothing is reflected" (*Ibid.*:223). Buddhist experience for those who practice and live it, Lacan suggests, "presupposes a striking reference to the function of the mirror in our relationship to the object" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 10). Lacan had made he claims an allusive reference to this surfaceless mirror long ago in his paper on psychical causality (Lacan, 2006 [1946]: 123-158). It is with regard to the sense that can be given to the function of the mirror in this dialectic concerning the recognition of what we contribute or not

with desire Lacan remarks, that "the eye is already a mirror [...] [and as such] organises the world in space, that it reflects what in the mirror is reflection, and there is no need for two opposing mirrors for an infinite regress of reflections such as in the 'hall of mirrors' [...]" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 11). The image that is formed in the eye, in the pupil requires from the beginning a correlate which is not an image. Hence once there is an eye and a mirror which produces "an infinite deployment of inter-reflected images" (*Ibid.*). This brings us back to "the privileged point which is at the origin" (*Ibid.*), and which relates to the same point in mathematics between the one and the zero. He goes on to discuss non-dualism through a number of mirror effects such as the multiplication of an image in opposed mirrors, the infinite regress of inter-reflected images in which One and many are conjoined, emphasising that "before space there is a One that contains multiplicity" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 224). Lacan further illustrates non-dualism through a discussion of his experience of the great Buddha statue at Kamakura. This art work of the image of the Buddha is complemented by a thousand smaller Buddha images in its vicinity. The innumerable statues of the Buddha, even though each is distinct, all represent the Buddha, and each and every sentient being is to be regarded as a possible Buddha, although due to defects and obstacles arising from the egocentric perspective this may never be realised by the subject. The One in many, which is nevertheless identified with the final One "with its completed access to non-dualism, in its access to the beyond of every pathetic variation and every cosmic change" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 11-12) illustrates non-dualism. The Buddha images offer a thousand and one supports to this One.

Lacan visited Japan twice, in April 1963, and again eight years later in 1971 however his interest in Buddhism started much earlier.⁵ It

5. Buddhism established itself in Japan at a time when what Freud would call animistic or polytheistic belief and ways of thinking were prevalent, informing the Japanese view of the world. The advancing Buddhist discourse and practices, as elsewhere, engaged with and presented themselves in a deconstructive relation with this worldview, taking on the cultural forms and understandings prevalent within the host culture, and deploying its teaching of the Buddha Dharma through these very forms and language. Buddhism through this strategy "developed into a tremendously eclectic system encompassing the pre-existing autochthonous religions (a system known as the merger of Buddha and the gods)" (Shingu, 2005: 51). Lacan, it seems, had an enduring interest in Japan, Japanese culture and people and the possibility of psychoanalysis beyond the European cultural sphere. However after his second visit to Japan in the early 1970's, Lacan sceptically remarked that the Japanese were not analysable! It should be remarked that whilst recapitulating his views on psychosis in relation to James Joyce in the seminar entitled *Le sinthome* in 1975-1976 (cf Lacan, 2005 [1975-1976]) Lacan commented that Catholics also were un-analysable! Miller replied that Lacan had said the same about the

was after the first visit in 1963, that Lacan mentions his intention to use a specific experience to illuminate something about desire in its relation to the Other, and the structural position of anxiety in this relation, that is, to illustrate the central theme of the seminar as this had been developing in the preceding lessons. Lacan stated that he now intended to take up this question of the cause of desire and its relation to anxiety, from a more distant point of view. This trip had brought him new experiences but more essentially what he describes as "the approach, the view, the encounter (*l'approche, la vue, la rencontre*)" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 1; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 248), with a number of works of Japanese Buddhist art, which beyond the study of texts, of the letter, or the doctrine of Buddhism, communicated to him a living tradition. These Buddhist works of art were the statues of Buddha and Bodhisattvas Lacan encountered in Japan and in particular at the temple complex of Chūgūji. During the lesson of 8th May 1963 Lacan handed out three photographs of a single Japanese Buddhist statue which he considered as "among the most beautiful" (Lacan 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 9) which he came across in the woman's monastery at Chūgūji at Nara, and of which he is to give the qualifications and denominations, its iconography.⁶ Lacan comments on the perceived astonishment of his listeners that he will use "the encounter with works of art" (Lacan 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 9) even in the limited manner such a quick visit to Japan would allow, to illuminate the proximity of Buddhist discourse to what Lacan himself is attempting to articulate with respect to the "relationship of the subject to the signifier" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 222). Specifically in relation to the fundamental stance, as he will articulate later, with respect to the Buddhist teaching, of the illusory essence of desire. However this suspected astonishment did not derive from the fact that Lacan utilised works of art in order to illuminate his discourse (as he had often done before in his seminar), but that these are "statues which

Japanese. Some of these questions and others related to psychoanalysis in Japan are addressed in Parker (2008).

6. Chūgūji temple complex at Nara, Japan, was founded in the 8th century and is today the centre of the Shingon school of Buddhism, an esoteric or tantric form of Buddhism rather than Zen. The great Buddha hall (*Daibutsuden*) is the largest wooden building in the world and it houses the world's largest bronze statue of the Buddha Vairocana, the cosmic Buddha, completed in 751. In 752 the eye opening ceremony (the eyes of the statue are a meter in length) was held with 10,000 people in attendance. The construction of this 500 tonne, 15 meter, statue used up nearly all the bronze in Japan at the time and nearly bankrupted the country. The awakening of the statue through the symbolic opening of its eyes might be noted with respect to the question of the gaze.

have a religious function" (*Ibid.*), which transcends their being, simply, as works of art. Yet it is more on the side of their being as artworks that Lacan suggests entering into their intension and origin, what they can represent, which interests him, "a certain relationship between the human subject and desire" (*un certain rapport du sujet humain au désir*) (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 222; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 257).

Lacan had previously commented on the power of works of art, including their sacred or divine function, in connection with his understanding of the Greek gods, whom Lacan considers, in contrast to the God of the monotheistic religions, to belong to the real. Two years previously, in *Seminar VIII Transference*, whilst commenting upon the occult or fetish nature of the object of desire, Lacan had been led to focus on the meaning of the Greek term *agalma*, and he had even surveyed all the passages in Greek literature where this word had been used in order to draw out from this "multiplicity of the deployment of significations [...] the central function that must be seen at the limit of the usages of this word" (Lacan, 1960-1961: 01.02.61, 6). Whilst remaining reserved concerning an approach to etymological roots, Lacan gives an overview of some of his findings, premised with the remark that the root of the term *agalma* is not that easy to determine. These roots carry such meanings as to admire, to be envious or jealous, to tolerate with difficulty, or even to be indignant all of which can be related to the French term *éclat*: to gleam, sparkle, shine out, become vivid or glow. *Agalma* as a term always refers to images, to a specific type of image with the sense of ornamentation, as that which appeals to the eyes of the gods, "the *agalma* appears [...] as a kind of trap for the gods [...] these real beings [...] which catch their eye" (*Ibid.*: 7). The gods, to whom the ornamented sacrifice is offered, are attracted by these kind of image. The object which gives an image with a certain charm or strangeness, "an unusual object [...] extraordinary" (*Ibid.*: 8), and which "for the ancients [...], [the *agalma*] is something [with] which one can capture divine attention" (*Ibid.*: 8). This word *agalma* is also used with respect to votive offerings to the gods in sanctuaries, in temples and ceremonies, to denote such objects offered, imbued with the magical power to evoke the blessings of the gods. Lacan compares the sense of these objects, their agalmatic presence, with the function of the partial object as this has been discovered within psychoanalysis, indeed as "one of the greatest discoveries of analytic investigation" (*Ibid.*: 8) yet the originality of which has been effaced within analytic discourse.

Psychoanalytic theory has effaced the meaning of the discovery of the partial object, the fundamentally partial aspect of the object, "the pivot, centre, key of human desire" (*Ibid.*: 9), in the direction of interpretation which moved towards a "dialectic of totalisation [...] the flat object, the round object, the total object, the spherical object [...] the whole other, the perfect genital object" (*Ibid.*: 9), this whole genital object being that towards which a supposed natural developmental process, or maturation, aims. By interpreting these partial objects according to a dialectic of totalisation, psychoanalysis overlooked in the question of the object of desire that "this other is [perhaps] the addition of a whole lot of partial objects (which is not at all the same as a total object)" (*Ibid.*: 9) and that Freud's *das Es* (the It or Id) may be made up of an amalgamation of partial objects. It is with the function of the object (of desire) that there corresponds the introduction into analysis of the function of the partial object. It is at the level of the eye or the gaze that Lacan is going to add to Freud's list of partial objects and is going to utilise his recent experience with a Buddhist statue to illustrate.

Lacan's report on his encounter with this Buddhist statue, "to take an angle, use an experience, to portray an encounter" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 221) will contribute to this fundamental question and lead his audience to understand something about desire. The motivating spirit of Lacan's reading of Freud is to re-focus psychoanalysis on the question of desire as its essential basis, its goal and the aim of its practice, and it is to this message that the contribution concerning Buddhism, and in particular those of Zen will be utilised. Lacan approaches these formulations of Buddhism only to highlight his particular experience, an experience which was "constituted around this statue [...] [which is] characteristic and usable" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 10).

Lacan focuses the question around the desire for spiritual realisation itself, of any seeking after truth and the desire to teach, heal, or help others towards awakening or health. Intrinsic to the bodhisattva ideal (Sangharakshita, 1999), the ideal of Mahayana Buddhism, is this moment of desire upon the threshold of attaining Buddhahood, the desire which motivates the becoming Buddha, to turn around and assist all other beings in their movement towards the awakened state. Just on the point of vanishing into complete awakening, the bodhisattva, the awakening-being, chooses to forgo this moment of complete extinction of ego based desire, and offers him or herself, as the image of a being desiring (yet hesitating in this

very desire) to be a Buddha, and as object of this desire for others. The desire for truth necessarily wants to obtain something, it has this truth as its object, even if this truth is not that of a representational knowledge, but rather, a transformation of the being of the subject, awakening or enlightenment. It is precisely this vanishing of the subject into Buddhahood which indicates the aim of the Buddhist path, the extinguishing of egoistic desire, of any desire to attain anything for *me*. Yet the image of the bodhisattva appears on this edge of illusion, (in a logic, in the sense of a logic of desire and its truth, rather than a temporal moment), poised in the act of vanishing. According to Lacan a bodhisattva (he admits to moving a bit too quickly with these statements) is "an almost Buddha" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 13), if it were a Buddha it would not be there, there would be no image, no remainder. Yet the image of the Buddha is prevalent and all pervasive throughout Asia, even though the production of a Buddha image was a fairly late artistic convention within the Buddhist schools. For the first five hundred years or so, the Buddha was indeed represented by a trace left in the world by his absence, an empty throne or a pair of footprints. The bodhisattva is the one that has turned back on the threshold in order to be there for the suffering multitude, there for the sake of showing the way, as Lacan puts it "he has not yet succeeded in disinteresting himself [...] in the salvation of humanity (*du salut de l'humanité*)" (Lacan 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 13; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 260). And to which with respect to the myriad of images of the Buddha or bodhisattvas, the practitioner owes salutation back, with thanks to those who have forgone the final departure and who remain on the threshold, offering an image of beauty.

Lacan provides some iconographic details about a particular bodhisattva named (in Sanskrit) Avalokiteśvara, widely venerated as the bodhisattva of compassion or the "one who hears the cries of the world" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 13) or "he who hears the world's laments" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 225).⁷ The photographs he passed

7. Avalokiteśvara is a later name for one of the earliest recognised bodhisattva's to emerge in iconographic recognisable form. The original name seems to have been Avalokitasvara and was also referred to as Padmapāni (the holder of the Lotus), and this remained in later representations. With respect to the gaze as partial object it is interesting to examine more closely this iconography and meaning. The name Avalokiteśvara is made up of *ava* which means down or from above; *lokita*, a past participle of *lok*, to notice, behold or observe, and *śvara* lord, ruler or master. Combined this says "the lord who gazes down (at the world)". Avalokitasvara has the ending *a-svara* (sound or noise) meaning perceiver of sounds, literally "he who looks down upon sound" these sounds being the sounds of lamentation or cries, the

around his audience on the 8th May 1963 were not of the great Buddha, Lacan claims, but supposedly of a "historical avatar of this Avalokiteśvara" (Lacan 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 13) and he understands this because his interest in Buddhism went further back than the interest in Japan his recent vacation furnished. Lacan even gestures towards a time when his occupation with psychoanalysis still allowed him time to study more broadly, and indicates his position as a student with respect to Paul Demiéville, with whom he had read the Buddhist sutra *Le Lotus de la bonne loi*.⁸ This originally Sanskrit text has been translated from the Chinese translation into English under the title of *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, and is more colloquially referred to simply as the *Lotus Sūtra* (cf Hurvitz, 1976). It was translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva and marks the historical turning point of a transformation of the Indian Avalokiteśvara, undoubtedly a masculine incarnation, into a "female divinity" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 225). This feminised bodhisattva is named in Chinese Guānyīn or Guānshìyīn, and is always represented as female in China (Blofeld, 1977). Lacan is going to comment on this transformation of male into female, and relate this to the outcome of the castration complex. In Japan the same figure is named Kannon or Kanzenon and is more often of ambiguous gender, with even the majority being masculine. In the photographs that Lacan passed around it is this bodhisattva Kannon who he claims is represented in a particular form which he further designates as Nyoirin Kannon, or Nyoirin Kanzenon and which indicates (this *Nyo i Rin*) "the wheel of desires (*la roue des désirs*)" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 226; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 261).⁹ This Chinese feminisation of a previous

expressions of suffering, the request for help towards salvation. The Lotus sutra depicts Avalokitasvara as the compassionate bodhisattva who hears the cries of sentient beings and who works tirelessly to help those who call upon him. As such we might think this image as pacifying with respect to the gaze. See Williams (1989: 228- 236) on the Bodhisattvas Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara.

8. Demiéville was a Swiss Buddhologist regarded as one of the greatest of the twentieth century. He lectured at the *École pratique des hautes études* and at the *Collège de France* concerned with the translation and analysis of Buddhist manuscripts both religious and literary. In the post war years in which Ch'an/Zen studies blossomed Demiéville brought to the attention of the West, almost half a century after their discovery, the implications of the manuscripts discovered in the cave at Mogao near Dunhuang for the history of Chinese literature and in particular for the study of early Ch'an in China. Demiéville wrote an important essay which Lacan may be gesturing towards and which he surely knew, entitled "Le miroir spirituel" (1947) translated as "The Mirror of the Mind" (1987). In this essay Demiéville compared the use of the mirror metaphor in the Chinese Buddhist and Western philosophical traditions.

9. Nyoirin Kannon is a Japanese version of the Sanskrit Cintāmanicakra Avalokiteśvara. The name is derived from the wish granting jewel (*nyoi*) and the wheel (*rin*) of the Dharma that he

masculine divinity according to Lacan indicates "the assimilation of pre-Buddhist divinities into the different stages of this hierarchy of levels [...] the forms of access to the final realisation of beauty (*de la beauté*) [...] the final understanding of the radically illusory character of all desire" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 14; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 262).¹⁰

If the photographs which Lacan passed around were that of the statue in the nunnery at Chūgūji, then it could only have been of the famous statue now recognised as that of Maitreya, the future Buddha (Guth, 1988). This is the statue also known as the "Pensive Prince of Chūgūji" and which is nowadays associated with the cult of Maitreya, and the early introduction of Buddhism into Japan in the seventh century. Indeed this statue is so famous as a work of art in Japan that it is likely that Lacan had made a special effort to view it. Guth (1988: 191) opens her article on this statue with the following words: "Few works of art in Japan are as famous to art historians and the general public alike as the main image in Chūgūji, a nunnery adjacent to Hōryūji in the historic Asuka district of Nara Prefecture. Reproduced as often in travel guides and posters as in scholarly publications, this evocative statue represents a slender, youthful being seated in pensive attitude with the fingers of his right hand supporting his head and his

holds in two of his six hands. Further iconographical and symbolic details as well as numerous images can be found in Epprecht (2007).

10. Lacan discusses perhaps three different Japanese Buddhist statues in the course of this lesson. In addition to two statues at Nara he also mentions the 13 meter high bronze Amida Buddha cast in the years 1252-1255 at Kamakura by Hisatomo Tanji and Gorōemon Ohno. It is perhaps questionable which of these statues the photographs which he passes around for the inspection of the audience represent. This ambiguity is sustained by the choice of different photographs of statues included in the French edition and the Italian translation of *Seminar X*, (the recent English translation avoids this question by not reproducing either photograph of the Buddha sculptures). The French edition includes a photograph of the Great bronze Buddha Daibutsu referred to above. It cannot be a photograph of this statue that Lacan utilises because he explicitly mentions that the statue he is discussing is made of wood and situated in a little hall. It is in the Italian edition (Lacan, 2007 [1962-1963]) however, that the photograph included supposedly represents Nyoirin Kannon, which Lacan discusses iconographically at greatest length and the experience he wishes to utilise in order to teach something about the gaze. This is the statue at the nunnery of Chūgūji, Ikarugo, in Nara. The iconography of this statue as representing a Nyoirin Kannon has been questioned and it has been more recently reclassified as a Mokuzō Bosatsu or Miroku bodhisattva, a representation of the future Buddha, Maitreya, rather than as a sculpture of Kannon (cf Sherwood, 1958). See also Guth (1988), where the statue at Chūgūji is convincingly identified as Maitreya, although as Guth states the identities of these early statues is not always so clear, and in particular this one, which is probably of Korean origin, has given rise to uncertainty as to its identity, which has perhaps been dependent on the various Buddhist schools which have owned it and their various cult and state allegiances.

bent right leg resting across the left knee. Images in this distinctive posture are known in Japan as *hanka shiyui-zō* (figure seated in meditation with one leg crossed over the other)".

The iconographic image of bodhisattva Maitreya, is poised also at the moment of entering into enlightenment as the Buddha to come, in a suspended attitude of entering the world to become the next "historical" Buddha. In this regard he is placed as a bodhisattva at this same threshold as Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva that Lacan is led to believe the statue represents, and for whom he delivers the iconographic details. In order to evoke for the reader what Lacan had perhaps experienced in the presence of this statue, and which had provoked his use of this experience in his lesson, it is worth quoting further the description of the Pensive Prince, given by Guth (1988: 194-195): "Carved of aromatic camphor wood now darkened with age and a little less than life size, the Chūgūji statue represents a slender youth attired in a skirt the ample folds of which cascade about the round seat that supports him. His chest, modelled with considerable subtlety, is bare, and his head, with elongated ears and two knots of hair, is unadorned. A few tendrils of hair fall ribbon-like over his shoulders. Setting off the elegant simplicity of his head with its dreamy, half closed eyes [!] and faint hint of a smile is a flaming aureole attached to a wooden pole behind him. This aureole, the lotiform pedestal on which his seat rests, and his elongated ears are the only features that proclaim his divinity".

She also gives some hint of the aesthetic charm of the statue, and the quality of the aura that surrounds it, as well as commenting upon the profoundness of the experience of viewing this religious work of art: "The meditating youth of Chūgūji does not project an aura of solemnity and awe, nor does he impose himself on the viewer by the directness of his gaze [!], towering scale, or sumptuous attire. He speaks instead in the familiar language of the manifest world: spirituality is expressed intuitively through the emotional suggestiveness of his pose. The remarkable grace and pliancy of its pose makes this a penetrating evocation of a being in a state of profound introspection. Through the humility of this attitude, the viewer is led to see something of the human condition. This sense of humanity, almost unique in seventh-century Japanese sculpture, gives the statue its universal appeal" (Guth, 1988: 193).

From our perspective, and given the use that Lacan is about to make of it, it is interesting that in two of the quotations given above Guth draws explicit attention to the question of the eyes ("its dreamy

half closed eyes") and the quality of the gaze (its indirectness) in her observation of the sculpture.



Meditating bodhisattva. Camphorwood; height 133cm; second half of seventh century, Chūgūji, Nara

Contemplation and the Buddha's eyelids

Lacan hoped that by distributing his photographs of the statue he would succeed in communicating a "vibration" (Lacan, 1962-1963:

08.05.63, 14; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 262), something of the experience which he details as follows: on entering the hall which houses this statue, he had encountered a Japanese man, "a simple tradesman [...] perhaps a craftsman" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 227; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 262) kneeling in meditative prayer before the image of the bodhisattva that Lacan was later informed, was a Nyoirin Kanzenon. In this encounter, Lacan emphasises the two sides of the gaze and his own observation of this meeting of eyes. This man approached very close to the statue and stared at it "he watched it like that for I couldn't say how long, I didn't see the end, because this moment corresponded to my own viewing time" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 227; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 262). Lacan was struck by the intensity and the effusion of the look with which the man regarded the statue, especially as nothing seemed to predestine this particular Japanese labourer for such absorbed communion which his conduct seemed to suggest.

From the side of the statue "the other shutter of this apprehension (*L'autre volet de cette appréhension*)" (Lacan 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 15; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 263). Lacan drew attention to the facial expression which he claimed was impossible to read, whether it is "entirely for you or entirely [focused] inward (*tout pour vous ou tout à l'intérieur*)" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 227; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 263). But it was to the particular form of the eyes or rather the poise of the eyelids that Lacan draws his audience's attention. Lacan brings into relation the question of the gaze as this is presented in the figure of the statue, specifically in the smoothed over eyelids, and the earlier question he had raised concerning the gender identity of such statues. Lacan was surprised that this question of the gender of such statues among the Japanese, which he himself regarded as most meaningful, did not seem to be important to his Japanese guides. Here Lacan finds something important with respect to "the variety of solutions to the problem of the object (*la variété des solutions du problème de l'objet*)" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 228; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 263) the object being the statue and the experience constituted around it which he has just been describing, in "the degree to which it is an object for desire (*à quel point c'est un objet pour le désir*)" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 228; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 263). And specifically as a work of art, supposed to have a religious effect with respect to the realisation of the illusory nature of desire, and also as an image expressly to be contemplated, to be looked at,

and beyond this as an offering to the bodhisattva himself, designed to catch his attention.

Lacan emphasises that this particular statue has functioned as an object for desire, an object which has been the centre of a desire sustained over centuries, in a religious context which sees desire as illusory, with the aim of practice to supposedly free oneself from all mundane desire. The eyelids of the wooden statue seem to have been an especial part of the object of veneration. Whereas the majority of Buddhist statues always have a slit for the eye which is neither closed nor half closed, but in a particular position acquired through meditative practice, on this wooden statue he is describing no such slit of the eye can be observed "it has simply, at the level of the eyes, a kind of pronounced ridge" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 228) which gives the impression of the eyes above it because of the polish of the wood. This polished surface Lacan notes is the result of centuries of rubbing at the hands of the nuns of the convent, this statue being the convents most precious treasure, and the centre of devotional practice, and the rubbing itself, supposedly to wipe away imagined tears. Although the eyes of the statue had received a high polish, the whole statue has been treated in a similar manner. This polish "represents [...] this unbelievable something (*quelque chose d'incroyable*) of which the photo here can only give you a vague reflection, of what is the inverted radiation onto it of [...] something like a long desire (*un long désir*) borne throughout the centuries by these recluses towards this divinity of psychologically indeterminate sex" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 15-16; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 264). Lacan goes on to ask concerning this object, which he describes as the most moving type of object, because it is at once a human image and something else, the question of the function of castration. In that this statue as an object for desire, at the centre of a desire sustained over the centuries, "can appear [...] in a certain context, in a certain culture as being unrelated to sex (*sans rapport avec le sexe*)" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 16; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 264), hence seems to indicate, beyond castration, a sublimation of the gaze. For Lacan the part object of the scopic drive, the gaze, is precisely the most difficult to sublimate, and in its relation to sexuality remains most intransigent.

A lack in the field of vision

The desire to see and the desire to know have long been equated in Western science and philosophy, beginning in the thought of Aristotle.

The field of desire and the object of psychoanalysis, the *objet a*, is characterised by Lacan in *Seminar X* as the field of objectality (*objectalité*), as that which lies beyond the field of scientific reason and its dialectic if this reason is defined as that of objectivity. Objectivity is the guiding ideal and end of Western scientific thinking and the correlate of a pure reason characterised by its development towards logical formalism. Objectality by contrast is concerned with the "object" of desire, as precisely that which has been elided in the concern for objectivity. Rather than being the correlate of a pure reason, it is a correlate of what Lacan calls "a pathos of the cut (*d'un pathos de coupure*)" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 214; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 248) which he claims to highlight "at its most vital point", the cut which "no *a priori* has up to now managed to reduce, of this function which is nevertheless essential to the whole mechanism of the lived experience of our mental life, the function of the cause" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 2). This cause and the function it serves in mental life Lacan claims is irrefutable and irreducible is that which has remained inaccessible to any form of rational critique. This impossibility is highlighted in and through Kant's inception of critical philosophy in his first *Critique*. The function of this cause has remained in force throughout the history of this critical philosophy seen by Lacan as characterised by the attempt to reduce this function of the cause (of desire). The persistence of this cause beyond any critical idealist reduction derives from the observation that it constitutes "this part of ourselves (*de nous-mêmes*), this part of our flesh (*de notre chair*) which necessarily remains [...] caught up in the formal machine (*prise dans la machine formelle*)" (Lacan 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 3; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 249). No matter what importance Lacan gives to a certain formalism within psychoanalysis, and the symbolic order in the formation of the subject, it is this cut which gives the framework not only of psychoanalytic thinking but also of the "transcendental aesthetic" proper to this discourse. It is this part of the body that we part from, that we give up, the piece of flesh which is torn from the body, which in turn circulates within the symbolic order, caught up in the symbolic machine. It is that which can never be reintegrated or accounted for through the signifier or the image, this object as lost, and which corresponds to different levels of the experience of the symbolic cut upon the body of the drives, and which is to be taken as a partial object to which the science of the objectal (directed towards the object of desire) corresponds. The cause of desire corresponds with something omitted in the consideration of

knowledge which is precisely the question of the desire which animates this knowledge and which forms the blind spot in the function of traditional and critical theories of knowledge. The desire in seeing is essentially related to this "blind spot" that Lacan will go on to formulate through his theory of the gaze.

A psychoanalytic critique must go beyond a psychological approach to vision. The relationship of the subject to the signifier necessitates the structuring of desire in the phantasm (the fundamental structuring of our fantasy life which sustains desire through this relation to images) which from now on in Lacan's theory also must include a real dimension. In the phantasm the function of *objet a* is defined as that which necessarily at some phase of phantasmatic functioning is effaced and disappears. It is this *aphanisis* (disappearance) of the *objet a*, this disappearance of the partial object in so far as it structures a certain level of the phantasm, "this is what we have the reflection of in the function of the cause" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 218) and every time we find ourselves confronted with this something unthinkable for critical thinking (yet irreducible for it), when we find ourselves confronted by the final functioning of the cause "we have to seek out its foundation, and its root in this hidden object, in this object in syncope" (*Ibid.*: 218) as fading, disappearing. If this certainty maintains itself despite all criticism through the development of modern metaphysics, it is because it is the shadow of something else "of another certainty [...] that of the anxiety linked to the approach to the object" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 5). Anxiety, Lacan defines as that which does not deceive, the only certainty, "anxiety precisely in so far as every object escapes it" (*Ibid.*: 5). This certainty which knowledge seeks in its foundation of truth is "a displacement, a certainty that is secondary in relation to the certainty of anxiety" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 218).

A more radical questioning of the function of knowledge than has previously been articulated in Western philosophy and which psychoanalysis necessitates with its question of the desire within knowledge, places psychoanalysis at the level of a possible dialogue with Buddhist thought, which likewise begins from this problem of desire in the function of knowledge and its relation to the phantasm (illusion). This is one of the implications of Lacan's discourse here when he says that this questioning of desire in the function of knowledge is what he hopes to make his audience glimpse in relation to what has "been done elsewhere" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 6). What does Lacan mean by this formula that there is already

knowledge in the phantasm? What is the nature of this knowledge which "is already in the phantasm"? (*Ibid.*: 6). When a human being becomes a speaking being, when there is a subject who speaks, the speech of this subject is already "implicated in his body (*impliqué dans son corps*). The root of knowledge is this engagement in the body" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 6; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 253). What is meant by the implication or the engagement of the body is that the speaking being in order to speak must engage with the "chain of the signifier (*chaîne du signifiant*)" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 7; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 254) and from which point there is a fundamental emergence of the subject in the dialectic of desire. Therefore "it is because there is always in the body, and by the very fact of this engagement in the signifying dialectic, something separated, something sacrificed, something inert from then on, this pound of flesh" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 7). The development of the dialectic of desire through the different organisations of the drive, and the different forms of partial object involved, each has its own form of anxiety associated with it. For each partial object there is a cut which separates a part of the body which from then on is lost, yet which structures the subject with respect to desire.

At the end of the lesson of the 8th May 1963 Lacan pauses in his discourse on the Buddhist statue to assess where this discussion has led him. In the following lesson he summarises this question as to how "a whole field of human experience [...] that puts itself forward as constituting a kind [...] of salvation, the Buddhist experience, posited as its grounding principle that *desire is illusion*" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 231). Lacan asks what this could possibly mean both for the Buddhist and for the psychoanalyst, for his teaching, if this formula can have a sense "it is a matter of knowing where the sense can be introduced and in a word where the lure (*le leurre*) is" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 15.05.63, 1; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 266). Lacan will come to formulate his understanding of this formula, that desire is illusion in that it is "always addressed elsewhere, to a remainder, to a remainder constituted by the relationship of the subject to the Other" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 15.05.63, 10-11). Lacan's approach here links desire to the function of the cut and the remainder, to the different organisations of the structuring of the drive which characterise the polymorphous perverse libidinal being and its different relations to the partial objects of the pre-oedipal structuration of the drive in relation to demand. This remainder, the partial object, is what sustains and animates desire. Here Lacan uncharacteristically speaks in term of "stages". The oral

stage is characterised by "a certain relationship between demand and the veiled desire of the mother" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 228), whereas the anal stage involves the "coming into play, for [the infant's] desire, of the demand of the mother" (*Ibid.*: 228), a certain unveiling of the mother's demand, and "at the stage of phallic castration, the 'minus-phallus' (*moins-phallus*)" which Lacan calls "the entry of negativity with regard to the instrument of desire when sexual desire as such emerges in the field of the Other" (*Ibid.*: 228).

However these three stages as outlined and the forms of separation which characterises each do not exhaust the structure of the *objet petit a* and it is to illustrate one of the additional forms of this *a* that Lacan had spoken earlier in the lesson of the 8th May about the mirror. Lacan had mentioned the relation between the mirror and the eye and stressed the importance of the mirror metaphor in certain Buddhist discourses (cf the earlier mention of Demiéville's 1947 article on "Le miroir spirituel"). Lacan stresses that it is not the mirror of the mirror stage of which he is speaking, of "narcissistic experience, of the image of the body as a whole, but of the mirror in so far as it is the field of the Other" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 16) and in which, through its reflection, there appears "for the first time, if not the *a*, at least its negative place (*du moins sa place*)" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 16; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 264) which motivates and is the radical mainspring for the "passage from the level of castration to the mirage of the object of desire (*le ressort radical qui fait passer du niveau de la castration au mirage de l'objet du désir*)" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 08.05.63, 16; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 264) which is symbolised in Lacan's discourse by $(-\varphi)$. Lacan again returns to this question in the following lesson on 15th May 1963 named in the edited version *The Mouth and the Eye*. Here he approaches this question through the organisation of the drive with respect to the object: the oral, the anal, and the phallic object, a series which he refuses to complete with the genital object which he no longer considers homogeneous with this series. The object in Freudian theory, according to Lacan, is to be defined in its function by its place at *a*, and as the remainder "of the subject's dialectic with the Other" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 230), the lack in the Other as the field of desire, is not exhausted by this list but is in need of being completed.

What is in question are the various forms and levels of the remainder of this structuring dialectic, more specifically in this context of the discussion of the mirror and the Buddhist image, of a particular form "some cut (*coupure*) happening in the field of the eye,

of which the desire attached to the image is a function" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 15.05.63, 1; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 265). Lacan also adds during *Seminar X* in his completion of forms and levels of this remainder, of the *objet a*, the partial object "voice". Even though desire is to be located, linked to the function of the cut and the remainder, related to the partial object, "the lack to which satisfaction is linked is something else" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 231). It is in the distance, the non-coincidence of this lack with the function of desire for the subject (where desire is structured in the phantasm and in the vacillations of the subject in relation to the partial object) that anxiety arises. This is why Lacan argues "at each stage in the structuring of desire, if we want to understand what is involved in the function of desire, we must ascertain what I call the anxiety-point (*le point d'angoisse*)" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 231; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 266). It is the consideration of this distance between the structuring of desire in relation to the partial object and a more primordial lack, which will allow Lacan to take a step beyond Freud, and his "apparent impasse" of the "castration complex" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 231), and the "insufficiency through which the relationship of desire to the object which is fundamental, is not distinguished at every level from what is involved as a lack constitutive of satisfaction" (Lacan, 1962-1963: 15.05.63, 10). The illusory nature of desire beyond symbolic castration, the operation of the phallus in its negative form, inasmuch as desire is always addressed elsewhere, to the remainder, leads Lacan into a discussion of the particular form of the remainder, of that which is "concealed in the most secret mettle of what I put forward long ago in the shape of the mirror stage, and which compels us to organize, within the same relation, desire, the object, and the anxiety-point" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 240) as he had just articulated with respect to the oral drive. Here it is a question of the form of remainder which the cut at the level of the eye introduces, this "new" partial object "namely, the new object *a* [...] to which the previous lesson [on the Buddhist stature] was an introduction, the eye" (*Ibid.*: 240).

The time honoured spiritual practices, which Lacan here describes as "mystic", of those who recognise and seek a way beyond the mundane regulation of desire, and deal with this reality through a discipline of purification, have often articulated this in terms of the relation between essence and appearance. These traditions have not neglected to emphasise the power of fascination which the realm of appearances the visual field holds, and the necessity of overcoming

the fascination which desire so easily sticks to and gets caught up in within this field. This element of fascination in the function of the gaze (*regard*) which seems to completely absorb the subject, is in itself enigmatic, but this "point of irradiation (*point d'irradiation*)" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 241; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 278) allows him to put in question "what the field of vision reveals in the function of desire" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 241). Those who have sought to detach themselves from and elucidate this form of major capture of human desire, this attachment to appearances in the mystery of the eye, have everywhere availed themselves of "the fantasy of the third eye (*le fantasme du troisième œil*)" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 242; Lacan, 2004 [1962-1963]: 278). On all the images of the Buddha, for example, this third eye is always somehow indicated. In meditative or contemplative practice which is an approach to this partial object of the desire in the eye or the gaze, what is brought in as correlative of the *petit a* of the phantasm "is something we can call a zero point" (Lacan, 2014 [1962-1963]: 242), which comes to occupy the whole field of vision, and which acts as a source of appeasement, pacification of the gaze. This appeasing contemplation aims at a kind of suspension of the fascination which the field of vision brings with it and its *déchirement du désir*, being ripped apart by desire. Lacan observes that: "[T]he Buddha's image seems to carry us towards this zero point to the very extent that its lowered eyelids protect us from the fascination of the gaze while at the same time indicating it to us. This figure is, within the visible, entirely turned towards the invisible, but it spares us this invisible [...] this figure assumes the anxiety-point fully unto itself and suspends, apparently cancelling out, the mystery of castration. This is what I wanted to indicate to you last time with my remarks and the brief enquiry [...] on the apparent psychological ambiguity of those figures" (*Ibid.*: 242).

The cut between the eye and the gaze

A year later in *Seminar XI* Lacan returns to the function of the gaze, inspired by the recent posthumous publication of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Le visible et l'invisible* (1964). Here Lacan elaborates in greater detail and depth the question of the gaze as partial object, as a form of the *objet a*, and makes a clearer differentiation between the eye (the field of the visible) and the gaze, as that which is excluded from his field yet which functions therein with respect to desire

(Lacan, 1977 [1964]: 82-85). The eye is that which takes in the visible field of objects in the world, yet the gaze is something different. The visible world is dependent upon the eye of a seer or seeing, yet this eye is placed in dependence upon something which is prior to our own eyes, and this is the pre-existence of the gaze. Lacan distinguishes here between seeing and being seen "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides" (*Ibid.*: 72). The aspect of seeing which remains in effect after the operation of symbolic castration, remains attached to the drive as a real lack. Lacan states "the eye and the gaze – this is the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field" (*Ibid.*: 73). The gaze is invisible to the eye yet surrounds and incorporates it. It is this that in relation to visible objects is eluded and yet which operates as the cause of desire in the scopic field. Lacan stresses that we are first looked at, we are first an object of the gaze in the spectacle of the world and that this "being looked at from all sides" is elided in waking life where the physical eye functions in relation to the visible objects, yet this experience of the gaze can powerfully return in our dreams.

The gaze as *objet a* manifests itself where the subject of the signifier fails and as such it can come to symbolise the central lack experienced in the phenomenon of castration. The gaze is something cut off, separated from the eye, yet which belongs to it. Lacan adds this partial object, the gaze, to the list of partial objects, and the scopic drive to the constitution of the organisation of the drives along with the oral, the anal and the invocatory. Yet this scopic aspect of the drive is also that aspect which most successfully eludes the function of castration. The subject as speaking subject is split between conscious and unconscious and this split is determined by a privileged object which has emerged from the primal separation from the mother, and which has given rise to a self mutilation. The scopic drive element of the *objet a* comes to figure in the fantasy. The subject as desiring remains dependent on this object split off yet attached to the body. Of all these partial objects which the subject relies upon in the register of desire, the gaze, Lacan contends, is the most inapprehensible. Lacan describes it as the underside of consciousness and as having the structure of "inside out". This is not a gaze that is seen, but a gaze that is unrecognised by the subject in the field of the Other. It is not found in the eyes of others but only beyond these eyes, beyond the presence of others looking at me. The gaze is related to the manner in which the subject maintains itself in the function of desire. In the field of vision the gaze is symbolic of the function of lack, and hence as cause of the

desire to see. As symbolic of this lack it operates from that place where the subject of the signifier is annihilated, from that place which is created through the function of the signifier itself, through the function of castration (- ϕ). This operation links the subject with its organisation of desire into the framework of the fundamental drives. The subject in question is not that of reflective self awareness or consciousness, but that of desire. This subject is itself caught up, manipulated and captured, by the field of vision.

Lacan contends that painters and artists have grasped this gaze, and that it structures the work of art. The painting, the picture, and other plastic arts such as sculpture, have a relation to the gaze, both the gaze that frames the artist and the gaze in relation to the spectator or contemplator of the art work. There is always something of the gaze indicated in and through the plastic work of art which presents something to be looked at, and offers a satisfaction to the eye. So the function of the painting or sculpture gives a relation between the viewer and the desire on the part of the artist to offer something to be seen. However the gaze is not simply what the artist sees or creates as a seen object before his or her own eyes, and it is not simply that which the spectator, the contemplator of the artwork, sees, before their own eyes. The gaze is beyond both these pairs of eyes. The artist addresses the desire to see, and offers an object to be seen, hence a desire which dwells in the eye. However in doing so the artist invites the spectator to lay down the gaze through offering a specific object for contemplation, for satisfaction of the desire to see. This is the pacifying (what Nietzsche called the Apollonian) effect of painting or sculpture. The actual art work is given not so much to the gaze as to the eye, it is a visual object in the field of vision, yet it involves a satisfaction of the desire to see. It invites the laying down or tempering of the gaze.

Lacan sums up his interpretation of the function of the gaze through two aphorisms which determine the relation of the subject to the gaze or the effect of the gaze on the subject: you never look at me from the place from which I see you; and, what I look at is never what I want to see. In the contemplation of the picture, the painting or sculpture, or other object of plastic art, the eye seeks relaxation from the gaze, beyond all appearances there is this "nothing" of the gaze. The scopical dimension of the drive here is the same function of the *objet a* as that from which the subject in order to constitute itself as subject has separated itself off as organ. The gaze substitutes for the symbol of lack, the phallus, not as such but insofar as it is lacking

through the operation of the castration complex. *Objet a* is most evanescent in its function of symbolising the central lack of desire, which Lacan has already indicated in the algorithm $(-\phi)$. The *objet a* in the field of vision is here named by Lacan the gaze as opposed to the eye. In the scopic field the gaze is outside, I am the one looked at, I am a picture. This function is found at the heart of the institution of the subject in the visible where the subject is determined by an external gaze. The human subject as subject of desire, the essence of being human, is however, not entirely caught up in the field of the imaginary, but maps himself or herself in the field of the imaginary through relating this to symbolic coordinates.

In the scopic field things look at me and yet I see them, and the artwork offers something specifically for visual contemplation. There is a certain taming of the gaze in the contemplation of the picture, the painting, sculpture or work of art. In the artwork the desire to see is focused and finds a partial satisfaction which encourages renunciation. Icons, idols, holy images and objects, statues representing divine figures, hold us under their gaze, however the value of the icon or idol is that the god or divine personage it represents is also looking at it. It is intended to please the god, to act as a lure. The artist in creating the specific image is playing with the image which may arouse the desire of the god. This image is a go-between with the divinity. There is a taming, civilizing, and fascinating power in this function of the picture, or object of plastic art. The fetish character of the object, for example in the statue of the god, is such that the hidden object of desire, the "agalmatic object" is within. The accent is placed on the fetish character of the object around which there is constituted some magical power, and all kinds of effects are constituted around it. The fetish, the magical, extraordinary object, is something more than the image, the idol or icon, not merely a reproduction, image or representation, but explicitly a being set up in the field of the visible which mediates the invisible dimension of the object of desire in this field, the gaze.

Conclusion

Lacan throughout his evolving discourse often utilised works of art, both literary and plastic, in order mainly to illustrate his psychoanalytic theory. In *Seminar X* he uses the specific experience of observing the "meeting of gazes" of a Japanese man contemplating a Buddhist statue and the "gaze" of the statue which has been identified

in this paper as that of Maitreya, the future Buddha, at Nara. In so doing he not only illustrates something about the gaze as partial object, but also alludes to the Buddhist sublimation of the gaze in the contemplation of the Buddhist art work. Although scholarly opinion has changed as regards the iconographic identity of the statue in the years since Lacan visited Japan, his exploration of Buddhist ideas and concepts concerning desire and non-duality are in themselves illuminating. As such Lacan reminds us of his own abiding interest in Buddhism and makes a contribution to the ever evolving conversation between Buddhist thought and practice and that of psychoanalysis.

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