

## A Brief History of *Gaze*

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*L'absence de la parole s'y manifeste par les stéréotypes d'un discours où le sujet,  
peut-on dire, est parlé plutôt qu'il ne parle.*

—Jacques Lacan

*Nous voulons vivre dans l'idée des autres d'une vie imaginaire, et nous nous efforçons pour cela de paraître.*

*Nous travaillons incessamment à embellir et conserver notre être imaginaire et négligeons le véritable....*

*Grande marque du néant de notre propre être, ... d'échanger souvent l'un pour l'autre.*

—Blaise Pascal

I recently tried to show, with the case of *interpellate* and its fellow-traveler *hail*, how one specific translation of an essay by Louis Althusser contributed to the formation of the academic register—in particular to the subset of academic discourse I referred to as “profspeak”.<sup>1</sup> I pointed out, among other things, that the ill-chosen *interpellate* had caught on, in a perverse sort of way, precisely because its very oddity and opacity suited the novelty of the signified it was being asked to convey, giving it the sort of “sacred-cow” status to be expected of a “term”.

In the present essay I'll be attempting to elucidate the far more complex process by which the word *gaze*, itself an artifact of far-less-than-felicitous translations of Foucault and Lacan, has come to be a register-marker of Anglo-American academic discourse, from the conceptually sophisticated writings of the Anglo-American Lacanians (*the idealizing, judgmental object a Lacan called the gaze*) right down to the clumsy shibboleths of profspeak (*Some second-wave feminist viewpoints would argue whether [models or beauty-pageant contestants] are actually willing, noting that they may be merely seeking to conform to the hegemonic norms constructed to the benefit of male interests that further underline the power of the male gaze; or again In the perspective of male gaze as merely possessing a gaze, the position of a female possessing the gaze is then the female assuming the male gaze<sup>2</sup>.*) Here, as in the case of *interpellate*, less-than-adequate translations have played an all-important role.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Folkart. “French Theorists, North American Scholiasts”, in L. Bowker, ed., *Terminology, Lexicography, Translation. Studies in honour of Ingrid Meyer*, University of Ottawa Press, 2006, p. 121-131.

<sup>2</sup> These specimens of the in-lingo (“shibboleths”) used to prove membership in the academic tribe are from the Wikipedia entry “Gaze” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaze>).

## I. THE ENGLISHING OF SARTRE, MERLEAU-PONTY AND FOUCAULT

The antecedent of the Anglo-American *gaze* is, of course, the notion of *regard*, central to the conceptual fields developed at length—and in varying ways— in the writings of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault and Lacan. There can be no doubt that current Anglo-American academic discourse is the tail-end of a prodigious flowering of reflection revolving around the notion of *le regard*, as Sartre (*L'Être et le Néant*, 1943), Merleau-Ponty (*Le visible et l'Invisible*, 1964), Foucault (*Les Mots et les Choses*, 1966; *Surveiller et Punir*, 1975) and Lacan (*Écrits*, 1966; *Séminaires*, 1952-1980) were all coming to grips, in the Paris of the mid- to late twentieth century, with the profound philosophical implications of seeing and being seen.<sup>3</sup> With the exception of the later Lacan, the preciousness of whose performances in the later *Séminaires* bordered at times on the self-indulgent, these reflections read like essays: Sartre and Foucault were magnificent writers, and even Merleau-Ponty's preliminary notes published posthumously have a certain compact elegance.

Throughout these writings, the noun phrase *le regard* is used fluently and colloquially; nowhere does *regard* exhibit the rigidly constrained semantic and combinatorial properties of an actual term. Yet the translators— Hazel Barnes (Sartre), Alphonso Lingis (Merleau-Ponty), and Alan Sheridan (Foucault and Lacan)— consistently treated the word as a unit of translation unto itself, forcing it into highly unidiomatic TL collocations and thus setting it up, formally at least, as a rigid designator, if not an actual term. It is the translators, then, who, with their fixed, context-insensitive equivalents —Hazel Barnes's "The Look", Alan Sheridan's "the gaze"— created a pseudo-term where none existed as such in the French texts. It is tempting, indeed, to conjecture that the translation of difficult or merely complex texts has a strong tendency to terminologize—particularly when carried out by people lacking the requisite language skills, subject expertise or translational savvy.

Admittedly, *regard* can be a fairly difficult word to translate: everyday English offers few direct deverbals but a broad spectrum of context-sensitive verb forms: *to look, stare, eye, leer, observe, scrutinize, glance, glare, view, peer, watch*, and yes, even *gaze*—many of which could be used to construct appropriate renderings of the uncontrived uses of *regard* throughout these writings. Profspeakers show a singular preference for the noun *gaze*, which far outnumbers occurrences of the verb, but no competent translator would choose to write "a jealous husband

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<sup>3</sup> Not suprisingly, there was a fair amount of cross-fertilization. Lacan was an attentive (and admiring) reader of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, and attended a number of Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France; Foucault in turn sat in on some of Lacan's seminars.

observing another man's *gaze towards his wife*" where she could opt for verbal constructions such as "*the way the other man was looking (or gazing) at*" the wife in question. The translator's skill consists precisely in knowing how to re-embodiment in the TL the appropriate *effets de sens*. Where the translator with an inadequate command of the SL or of the ST content will latch onto a one-size-fits-all equivalent, assuming that certain items must be "respected" as more or less sacrosanct terms, and transforming them into rigid designators, the skilled translator will find many different, context-appropriate renderings<sup>4</sup>.

To be sure, one of the most scrupulous translator-commentators of Lacan, Anthony Wilden, has condemned in no uncertain terms the way Freud's early translators operated on "the assumption that a key word like *Vorstellung*, for instance, was to be rendered by whatever English word seemed to fit the particular context, without the reader being advised of the semantic choice that had been made" [Wilden 1981 (1968): xviii]. Wilden's remarks would seem to be at odds with my position that *regard* could have been dealt with more satisfactorily as part of the micro-contexts in which it occurred, rather than as a unit of translation unto itself. It must be noted, though, that Wilden was talking about entire morpho-semantic fields, in Freud, whereas *regard* is bound by no such ties to morphologically related items (other than *regarder*). What Wilden is taking these translators to task for is the fact that:

... as late as 1954 (in *the Origins of Psychoanalysis*), *Wortvorstellung* ("word presentation") and *Sachvorstellung* ("thing presentation") were still obscured by the renderings "verbal idea" and "concrete idea"—repeating the translations of the 1920's—and the English-speaking reader was left with no sure way of correlating these terms in significant contexts with *Entstellung* (translated "distortion"), with *Darstellung* ("representation", "performance"), with *Darstellbarkeit* ("representability"), or with *Vorstellung* itself ("image", "thought", "idea"). [Wilden 1981 (1968): xviii]

And since there are no occurrences of the word *regard* in the only Lacanian text Wilden himself seems actually to have translated, there's no way of telling if he would consistently have chosen *regard* as his unit of translation and rendered it each time by a single, invariant "equivalent".

The result of improper translation practice, at any rate, is that contemporary Anglo-American academic discourse, which is hugely indebted to these translations, teems with *gazes*—far more per square foot than there ever were *regards* in the great forebears.

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<sup>4</sup> Sandra Smith, for example, has translated Irène Némirovsky's 300-plus-page novel, *Suite française*, without once resorting to *gaze* as a rendering of *regard*. It goes without saying that Smith's units of translation invariably exceeded the single lexical item: *il la suivait d'un long regard* (328) > *he would watch her for a long time as she walked away* (280); *une charmille où on était à l'abri de tous les regards* (324-5) > *a bower where no one would be able to see them* (276); *Elle leur lança un regard* (301) > *She glared at them* (254); *son regard profond et pur* (176) > *his pure, intense expression* (139), etc.

### Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) and Hazel Barnes (1956)

Sartre, fine writer that he is, constructs far-reaching conceptual systems without ever abusing language. A whole section of *L'Être et le Néant* is devoted to “Le Regard”—*cette liaison fondamentale qui doit faire la base de toute théorie d'autrui*, as he puts it (p. 303).<sup>5</sup> Sartre’s remarks, crucial as they are to the conceptual edifice he is putting together, are couched in a transparent—and generally paraphrasable—register of discourse, one that embodies the most abstruse concepts in concrete realia:

.... Cette révélation ne saurait découler du fait que *mon* univers est objet pour l’objet-autrui, comme si le regard d’autrui, après avoir erré sur la pelouse et sur les objets environnants, venait, en suivant un chemin défini, se poser sur moi. J’ai marqué que je ne saurais être objet pour un objet: il faut une conversion radicale d’autrui qui le fasse échapper à l’objectivité. Je ne saurais donc considérer le regard que me jette autrui comme une des manifestations possibles de son être objectif: autrui ne saurait *me* regarder comme il regarde le gazon. (p. 303)

My sense, from translating particularly significant fragments of this essay, is that while the *concept* of “seeing-being-seen” is central, there is nonetheless considerable leeway in the vocabulary that can be used to give voice to it in a language such as English. As in the writings of Lacan and Foucault, *regard* appears to anchor a key conceptual field, without however actually being a term in the strict sense of the word: there is no necessarily one-to-one relationship here between the concept and the signifiers in which it is *expressed* (almost in the biological sense). This has obvious implications for the translator. Both *regard* and *regarder* enter into standard collocations which in many cases should be taken as the units of translation. *Je ne saurais donc considérer le regard que me jette autrui comme une des manifestations possibles de son être objectif: autrui ne saurait me regarder comme il regarde le gazon* [Sartre 1980[1943]: 303] could readily be rendered as “*It would be out of the question for me to assume that **the way another is looking at me is just another manifestation of his being-as-object: the other cannot conceivably look at me the way he looks at the grass***”; or alternatively as “*It would unthinkable for me to assume that **in looking at me my semblable is merely manifesting his being-as-object***”; or again as “*I cannot reasonably consider that **looking at me is just another way in which my semblable manifests his being-as-object***”.

<sup>5</sup> Sartre, *L'Être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Paris: Gallimard (1980 [1943]). Troisième Partie, “Le Pour-autrui”, chapitre premier, *L'existence d'autrui*, IV.—“Le Regard”.

Yet if we look at the standard translation of *L'Être et le Néant*,<sup>6</sup> what seems to be going on is (at least the first step in) a protracted process of terminologization, with each and every occurrence of *regard* being rendered as *look*:

Therefore I can not consider **the look which the Other directs on me** as one of the possible manifestations of his objective being — Barnes 1956: 256-257.

True, judging by her “Translator’s Introduction” (pp. viii-xliii), Barnes seems to have an in-depth grasp of Sartre’s ideas, which she articulates with what seems to be real authority. Her writing is conceptually demanding, but clearly formulated and constructed so that the flow of argumentation emerges effortlessly. Her vocabulary is well-formed, not un-necessarily out of the ordinary, but rather chosen to be adequate to the concepts it is meant to express:

.... There is, in short, a power of withdrawal in consciousness such that it can nihilate (encase with a region of non-being) the objects of which it is conscious. Imagination requires two of these nihilating acts. When we imagine, we posit a world in which an object is not present in order that we may imagine a world in which our imagined object is present. I do not imagine a tree so long as I am actually looking at one. ... Then we posit the imagined object as existing somehow apart from the world, thus denying it as being part of the existing world. — Barnes 1956: xiii

This, as opposed to profspeak, is the discourse of a writer in control of both content and the ways to convey it: Barnes, we sense, feels no need to throw around gratuitously convoluted vocabulary.

Compare, now, with the way Barnes translates: where Sartre has written:

Tout regard dirigé vers moi se manifeste en liaison avec l’apparition d’une forme sensible dans notre champ perceptif, mais contrairement à ce qu’on pourrait croire, il n’est lié à aucune forme déterminée. Sans doute, ce qui manifeste *le plus souvent* un regard, c’est la convergence vers moi de deux globes oculaires. Mais il se donnera tout aussi bien à l’occasion d’un froissement de branches, d’un bruit de pas suivi du silence, de l’entrebâillement d’un volet, d’un léger mouvement d’un rideau. Pendant un coup de main, les hommes qui rampent dans les buissons saisissent comme *regard à éviter*, non deux yeux, mais toute une ferme blanche qui se découpe contre le ciel, en haut d’une colline. ... Or, le buisson, la ferme ne sont pas le regard: ils représentent seulement l’*oeil*, car l’*oeil* n’est pas saisi d’abord comme organe sensible de vision, mais comme support du regard.— *L'Être et le Néant*: 303-4.

Barnes has him saying :

**Every look directed toward me** is manifested in connection with the appearance of a **sensible form** in our **perceptive field**, but contrary to what might be expected, it is not connected with any

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<sup>6</sup> *Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology. Translated and with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1956. Part three, “Being-for-Others”, chap. one, IV. “The Look”.

determined form. Of course **what most often manifests a look** is the convergence of two **ocular globes** in my direction. But **the look will be given** just as well on occasion when there is a rustling of branches, or the sound of a footstep followed by silence, or the slight opening of a shutter, or a light movement of a curtain. During an attack men who are crawling through the brush apprehend as **a look to be avoided**, not two eyes, but a white farm-house which is outlined against the sky at the top of a little hill. ... Now the bush, the farmhouse are not **the look**; they only represent the eye, for the eye is not at first apprehended as a **sensible organ** of vision but as **the support for the look**. — *Being and Nothingness*, 257-8. My emphasis.

This passage is symptomatic: while Barnes has her own good grasp of Sartre's philosophy — she appears to be one of the people who “invented” Sartre for the Anglophone world<sup>7</sup>— her knowledge of French<sup>8</sup> and her purely translational skills are quite simply not up to the task. She lacks in particular the skill to break away from the microstructures of the ST (what Jean Delisle has referred to as “l'affranchissement des structures”). *Globes oculaires* (“eyeballs” to you and me) gets rendered as *ocular globes*; *organe sensible* (“sensory organ”) becomes *sensible organ*; equally word-bound are her *sensible form* and *perceptive field*. Her translation gives the distinct impression that she'd run up against a “wall of language” which blocked her view of what was “on the other side” of the French and stymied her attempts to reword, let alone appropriate, it. (One wonders, of course, how Barnes, given her less-than-adequate French, acquired the understanding of Sartre's system that she displays in her introduction: if, as one might suspect, it was through the academic tradition emerging from prior translations into English, it is quite likely that what I'll be referring to later on as *conceptual drift* may already be at play here.)

Of particular interest is the way—formally at least— Barnes treats *regard* as if it were a term, taking the word itself as her unit of translation and rendering it as *look*,<sup>9</sup> in every instance.

Cette révélation ne saurait découler du fait que mon univers est objet pour l'objet-autrui, **comme si le regard d'autrui, après avoir erré sur la pelouse et sur les objets environnants, venait, en suivant un chemin défini, se poser sur moi** — Sartre 1980[1943]: 303

becomes

<sup>7</sup> “Hazel Estella Barnes (b. 1915) is an American philosopher, author, and translator. Most well known for her popularization of existentialism in America, Dr. Barnes translated the works of Jean-Paul Sartre as well as writing original works on the subject”. (Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hazel\\_Barnes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hazel_Barnes))

<sup>8</sup> Barnes's naïve fascination with common garden-variety items betrays the shallowness of her French. Cf. the note she appends to her translation of Sartre's “[les yeux] restent dans l'état de «mise hors circuit»” (Sartre 304)— “Literally, ‘put out of circuit’ (*mise hors circuit*). Tr.” (Barnes 258, note 16).

<sup>9</sup> Even as far back as 1946 — ten years before Barnes did her translation— *look* had acquired the sense it has in current popular culture: Christian Dior's *New Look*.

This revelation can not derive from the fact that my universe is an object for the Other-as-Object, **as if the Other's look after having wandered over the lawn and the surrounding objects came following a definite path to place itself on me.** — Barnes 1956: 256-7.

In nearly every case, though, *regard* and its collocations could have been rendered far more idiomatically, without in the least diluting the full import of Sartre's writing, simply by working with the larger units of translation that would suggest themselves to anyone with a minimum of translation savvy. The hybrid *Seeing-being-seen* would be an especially effective rendering of the section heading, "Le Regard", conveying as it does the reciprocity that Sartre (and those who follow him) will be stressing:

**My awareness of being seen** is invariably triggered by the perception of some sort of physical phenomenon; contrary to what one might think, though, **this sense of being observed** does not correlate with any one specific type of phenomenon. Admittedly, **what most often triggers the sense of being seen** is two eyeballs swivelling in my direction. **But this sense of being seen can also be triggered** by branches cracking, by the sound of a footstep followed by silence, by a shutter opening just a crack, or the flutter of a curtain. Armed men crawling through the underbrush try to **keep out of sight / out of view**, not of a pair of eyes, but of those white farm buildings outlined against the sky, way up there on the hill. ... Now, the bushes and farm buildings **do not in themselves constitute surveillance / are not in themselves capable of watching**; they merely represent the *eye*, for the eye is apprehended primarily not as a sensory organ, but **as the medium of surveillance / as the apparatus of watching.** — my translation.

Barnes falls short of the mark, a) because her knowledge of French is too superficial for her to be able to read through Sartre's language and go straight to the content it is conveying, and b) because she lacks the purely translatorly skill of "lectécriture"— knowing how to re-embodiment the content in English.

Yet another symptom of Barnes's tendency to elevate the colloquial to the dignity of the term is her use of capitalization: where Sartre used the common garden-variety *autrui*, Barnes writes "the Other"— a portentous signifier indeed, one begging for an influx of deep, "philosophical" meaning. (Contrast this rather arbitrary capitalization with the highly motivated approach of an Anthony Wilden: when Wilden capitalizes key items in his rendering of Lacan, it is less a "metaphysical" gambit than a device for distinguishing between French doublets that would otherwise have identical outcomes in English: "'Language' for *langage* ('language' for *langue*); 'Knowledge' for *savoir* ('knowledge' for *connaissance*)"<sup>10</sup>).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Wilden's Introduction to his translation of Jacques Lacan, *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981[1968], p. xv:

... I have also employed capitalization elsewhere to distinguish or emphasize certain words or concepts: "Language" for *langage* ("language" for *langue*); "Knowledge" for *savoir* ("knowledge" for *connaissance*); "Truth" for *vérité*; "the Symbolic," "the Imaginary," and "the Real" for *le*

### Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964) and Alphonso Lingis (1968)

Yet another text which explored the problematics of seeing-being-seen is Maurice Merleau-Ponty's posthumous work *Le visible et l'Invisible* (1964), translated by Alphonso Lingis in 1968 as *The Visible and the Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty's is in some respects a distinctly instrumental language, one which—like the language of, say, particle physics, is “transparent”: understanding the conceptual referents is everything. Lacking the requisite subject expertise, I must limit myself to commenting, from the outside, on some of the purely textual aspects of his final work. Reconstituted posthumously from the ms and notes Merleau-Ponty was working on at the time of his sudden death, *le Visible et l'Invisible* is pretty much all bare-bones philosophical argumentation, with little or no belletristic flesh, and few if any of the concrete examples Sartre uses to illustrate his propos. This is a work that makes few concessions to the reader, who is assumed to be fully conversant with the most rigorous and technical forms of contemporary philosophical discourse. A passage such as the following, while not in itself particularly difficult to understand or to translate—

On n'évite donc pas, en faisant de la relation ambivalente la forme canonique de la relation avec autrui et en mettant au premier plan l'objectivation que je subis, d'avoir à reconnaître une perception positive de l'ipséité par une ipséité extérieure (p. 102)

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Assuming the ambi-valent relation to be the canonical form of relationship to another and emphasizing the objectivation imposed upon me in no way circumvents the necessity of recognizing that one selfness / ipseity is positively perceived by another selfness / ipseity outside it (my translation)

— nonetheless poses difficulties for the translator who, lacking familiarity with the canonical equivalents for items such as *ipséité* (is it *selfness*, or *ipseity*?), hesitates in constructing a translation register. It is not impossible that Merleau-Ponty, had he lived, might have “rounded out” his text somewhat, filed away its angles; the ms was, after all, a preliminary draft. As it stands, though, such writing makes considerable demands on the translator's philosophical culture (more so than does Sartre, whose developments tend to carry more flesh on their bones). The translator must either have prior familiarity with Merleau-Ponty's work (and that of the philosophers to whom he is indebted) or be a “quick study” when it comes to arriving at a deep

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*symbolique, l'imaginaire, and le réel*. Because of its special meaning in Lacan, however, “Imaginary” is always capitalized, even as an adjective, whenever it is a question of the Imaginary order.

understanding of the content through the very act of translating (*lectécriture* is, after all, the most profound way of reading).

The ST, then, is a mere approximation to what it might have been had Merleau-Ponty not been cut short in May 1961 at the age of 53. One can always speculate about a “best-possible” rendering— an involved and passionate translation that could provide a deep enough and committed enough reading-in to bring these posthumous fragments to fullness and fruition<sup>11</sup>. What concerns us, here, though, is the actual translation that has channelled *Le visible et l’Invisible* into the English-speaking world, Alphonso Lingis’s 1968 rendering, as published by Northwestern University Press, the publisher of a number of previous Englishings of Merleau-Ponty. Like Barnes, Lingis shows himself in his authoritative Translator’s Preface (pp. xl-lvi) to be something of a subject expert, even as he expresses his indebtedness to Claude Lefort (who established the French text from Merleau-Ponty’s ms) “for his patient and generous help in the interpretation of the French manuscript” (lvi).<sup>12</sup>

When it comes to the actual translation, though, Lingis’s rendering (like Barnes’s) falls far short of the subject expertise promised in his introduction. With his choice of *look* Lingis follows in the footsteps of Hazel Barnes (see the acknowledgement on the copyright page); at

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<sup>11</sup> As Claude Lefort reflected, in his beautiful postface to *Le Visible et l’Invisible*:

...l’oeuvre naît au moment où elle se ferme. Elle est désormais ce qu’elle dit et rien d’autre, parole pleine qui ne se rapporte qu’à elle-même, ne repose que sur elle-même, et où s’efface le souvenir de son origine. (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 337). ....D’où vient au lecteur cette inflexion du regard, quand l’écrivain disparaît? (ibid: 339)

Yet, as Lacan recognized, even once the author is dead, and beyond all possibility of direct dialogue with his readers, his text remains to guide the translator as she reads-in to it whatever she is in the fullness of herself and in a world that has moved on since the work was written. Lacan, indeed, felt himself *regardé*, *sinon vu* — under the eye of, if not actually seen— by the long-dead Freud:

... Being alive in a world whose epistemologies have changed, Lacan “sees” new things by elaborating new concepts like *objet a* .... However, this could only succeed if one acknowledged that the field had been opened by another whose gaze and signature should not be elided. The name of an Other who had, above all, written texts is the name of an Author to whom Lacan vowed to return constantly but not slavishly. He could see and speak truly because Freud was still “regarding” him. — Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Clearly, it can only be as a non-philosopher that I’m using the term “subject expert”. Yet Lingis’s credentials are indeed those of an expert:

Alphonso Lingis is an American philosopher, writer and translator... His areas of specialization include phenomenology, existentialism, modern philosophy, and ethics. ... Lingis .... pursued graduate study at the storied University of Leuven in Belgium. His doctoral dissertation... was a discussion of the French phenomenologists Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. Returning to the United States, Lingis ... quickly [gained] a reputation as the preeminent English translator of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas.” — [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphonso\\_Lingis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphonso_Lingis).

times he also uses *gaze*. Overall, his translation is so slavishly word-bound as to make it difficult to assess the extent of his familiarity with Merleau-Ponty:

Supposons même qu'autrui soit **le titulaire X de ce regard que je sens posé sur moi** et qui me fige (Merleau-Ponty, p. 102)

becomes

Let us even suppose that the other be **the X titular of this look which I feel posed upon me and which congeals me** (Lingis, p. 72)

but could have been rendered far more idiomatically (and far less opaquely) as *Let's admit for the sake of argument that **this sense of being seen, and immobilized / categorized, originates in / is triggered by the X who is looking at me;** or Let's admit for the sake of argument that my semblable is **the source, X, from which emanates the act of seeing that has immobilized / defined me;** or even Let's admit for the sake of argument **that the other is the proprietor, X, of the gaze that has immobilized me / stopped me in my tracks.***

So word-bound is the translation that it's hard to tell where Lingis's difficulties lie: is it lack of understanding, or lack of familiarity with the basic patterns of French that has him rendering *le titulaire X* by the meaningless *the X titular*? Once again we run into the strange phenomenon of a translator who, while seemingly on top of the conceptual system—witness the eloquent summary in Lingis's introduction—is stymied by the language enfleshing it: as if French had risen up, between him and Merleau-Ponty, like a dense thorn-hedge to be hacked through as best one can.<sup>13</sup> Just how these people acquired their subject expertise when they clearly had such a struggle with the French language once again raises the possibility of “conceptual drift”: if they gained their initial familiarity with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty through translations of previous works, they may well have merely been perpetuating the same translation register and (subtly skewed?) understanding of these works. Be that as it may, what interests us here is the way

<sup>13</sup> The inadequacies of Lingis's French are all the more puzzling that he did his doctoral work in Belgium (perhaps in the Flemish Leuvan, though, rather than the Walloon Louvain-la-Neuve).

Still it's intriguing to speculate: why is it that some translators can assimilate content once it's been divorced from its body-in-language, but struggle so desperately to confront content with its body on? Why does Hazel Barnes gape at Sartre's *mise hors circuit* as if were some strange animal in a zoo, *le comble de l'exotisme* (p. 258 n.16)? why is Alphonso Lingis *bemused* by *médusée*— so bemused he feels the need to supply the French word in parentheses after rendering it as “petrified” (p. 72)? Lack of familiarity with the French, for sure. But a Fred Reed just learning French, back in the late seventies, was already producing polished translations (and has since gone on to win a couple of Governor General's awards). Just what is it separates the word-bound from the liberated?

Lingis, like Barnes, tends to treat *regard* as a unit of translation unto itself—thus promoting the signifier *look* to the dignity of a quasi-term.

Both Barnes and Lingis chose *look* rather than *gaze* as their invariant-inflexible rendering for *regard*. What I've been drawing attention to with these examples is, not the precise translation equivalent, but rather the fact that one invariant rendering, one rigid designator is used, regardless of context. What's at work here, in short, is a process of (quasi-)terminologization: the word *regard* is always, and invariably, taken as a unit of translation unto itself, and rendered, invariably and always, by a context-insensitive equivalent. It is with the translations of Foucault and Lacan that *gaze* appears as the invariant equivalent for *regard*.

## Michel Foucault in English

### *The Order Of Things* (1994[1970])

Foucault is a magnificent writer: his is a poet's sense of rhythm, image, imagery compacted into metaphor. The liminal section of *Les Mots et les Choses* is a profound meditation on Velasquez's "Las Meninas": Foucault draws from the painting so much of what it has to convey that the essay is often cited by art historians; the writing which embodies these insights has a real beauty of its own.<sup>14</sup> The translation first published in 1970 as *The Order of Things* is far more professional than the translations we've seen thus far. For reasons I can't begin to fathom, it remains uncredited.<sup>15</sup>

In many instances, *gaze* would indeed be appropriate to convey the way the painter is looking out of the canvas at his model, and beyond, to the viewers standing in the space Velasquez has set up for them to move into, century after century:

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<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

<sup>15</sup> *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. A translation of *Les Mots et les choses*. New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1994[1970]. I can find no mention of the translator, only some rather cryptic references to "the publisher", in the "Publisher's Note" on p. viii: "The publisher ... agreed with the author on the alternative title *The order of things*, ..... The publisher has ... retained the author's references to French works etc."

Foucault 1966: 19

Cette main habile est **suspendu au regard** ; et **le regard**, en retour, repose sur le geste arrêté. Entre la fine pointe du pinceau et **l'acier du regard**, le spectacle va libérer son volume.

uncredited translation 1994 [1970] : 3

The skilled hand is suspended in mid-air, **arrested in rapt attention on the painter's gaze**; and the **gaze**, in turn, waits upon the arrested gesture. Between the fine point of the brush and **the steely gaze**, the scene is about to yield up its volume.

But this passage, like so many others throughout the essay, could easily have been rendered without recourse to *gaze*:

The skilled hand **waits for the eye**; and the **eye**, in turn, contemplates the unfinished work of the hand. Between the fine tip of the brush and the **sharp-as-steel focus of the eye**, the scene will emerge in all its fullness. — my translation.

Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find contexts where alternative renderings would not work at least as well as *gaze*:

Foucault 1966: 20

...il se situe précisément en ce point aveugle, en cette cache essentielle où se dérobe pour nous-mêmes notre **regard** au moment où nous regardons.

uncredited translation  
1994[1970]: 4

... it is situated precisely in that blind point, in that essential hiding-place into which our **gaze** disappears from ourselves at the moment of our actual looking.

B.F.

... it occupies precisely the blind spot, the inevitable abyss, into which **vision** vanishes, failing us even as we look

<p>Foucault 1966: 21</p> <p>Au moment où ils <b>placent le spectateur dans le champ de leur regard</b>, les yeux du peintre le saisissent, le contraignent à entrer dans le tableau, lui assignent un lieu à la fois privilégié et obligatoire, <b>prélèvent sur lui sa lumineuse et visible espèce</b> ... Il voit son invisibilité rendue visible pour le peintre et transposée en une image définitivement invisible pour lui-même.</p>	<p>uncredited translation 1994[1970]: 5</p> <p>As soon as they <b>place the spectator in the field of their gaze</b>, the painter's eyes seize hold of him, force him to enter the picture, assign him a place at once privileged and inescapable, <b>levy their luminous and visible tribute from him [x]</b> ... He sees his invisibility made visible to the painter and transposed into an image forever invisible to himself.</p>	<p>B.F.</p> <p>By the very fact of <b>alighting on the viewer</b>, the eyes of the painter capture him, force him into the painting, assign him a place that is at once privileged and obligatory, <b>draw from him his visibility, his being-in-light</b> ... The viewer sees his own invisibility made visible for the painter, then transposed into an image he himself will never be able to see.</p>
<p>Foucault 1966: 22</p> <p>... La lumière, en inondant la scène ..., enveloppe les personnages et les spectateurs et <b>les emporte, sous le regard du peintre, vers le lieu où son pinceau va les représenter.</b> ...</p>	<p>uncredited translation 1994[1970]: 6</p> <p>... The light, by flooding the scene..., envelops the figures and the spectators and <b>carries them with it, under the painter's gaze, towards the place where his brush will represent them.</b> ....</p>	<p>B.F.</p> <p>... The light floods into the scene ..., envelops sitters and spectators, and <b>conveys them, under the eye of the painter, to the place where his brush is poised to represent them.</b></p>
<p>Foucault 1966: 23</p> <p>... Il y a bien quelques têtes qui s'offrent de profil : mais aucune n'est suffisamment détournée pour regarder, au fond de la pièce, ce miroir désolé, petit rectangle luisant, qui n'est rien d'autre que visibilité, mais sans aucun <b>regard</b> qui puisse s'en emparer, la rendre actuelle, et jouir du fruit, mûr tout à coup, de son spectacle.</p>	<p>uncredited translation 1994[1970]: 7</p> <p>... There are, it is true, some heads turned away from us in profile: but not one of them is turned far enough to see, at the back of the room, that solitary mirror, that tiny glowing rectangle which is nothing other than visibility, yet without any <b>gaze</b> able to grasp it, to render it actual, and to enjoy the suddenly ripe fruit of the spectacle it offers.</p>	<p>B.F.</p> <p>... True, a number of faces are seen in profile, but none are turned far enough, towards the back of the room, to see this small shining rectangle of a mirror standing all by itself, this pure visibility with no <b>gaze / eye</b> taking it in to bring it into the moment, and harvest like a fruit suddenly ripened the spectacle it offers.</p>

All in all, this uncredited translation is distinctly better than the translations done by Barnes and by Lingis. (And many of the above examples might well attest to what Foucault may have gleaned from attending some of Lacan's seminars.) Even here, though, the "convenience" of

resorting to the one-size-fits-all equivalent *gaze* is offset by a certain amount of clumsiness—with no discernable gain in clarity.

***Discipline and Punish* (1995[1977])**

As Hazel Barnes did with *look*, Alan Sheridan, in translating *Surveiller et Punir*,<sup>16</sup> turns *gaze* into a rigid designator which he uses as the invariant equivalent for *regard*. Like Foucault's other, uncredited, translator, Sheridan evinces a better grasp of the SL than does Barnes. Even so, like Barnes, he falls into the trap of word-for-wording, with the result that *gaze*, like Barnes's *look*, behaves like a quasi-term.

Like Sartre, Foucault has a great deal to say about seeing—in particular about *surveillance* and a type of all-seeing “inspection house”, the *panopticon*—without, however, seeming to use *regard* as an actual term. Foucault conveys the notion of *surveillance* through an extensive lexical field—*yeux*, *observation*, *regard*, *surveillance*, etc.—no one element of which predominates. *Regard*, in particular, enters into collocations that would call for a variety of context-sensitive renderings. Had Sheridan been more adept at the business of “lectécriture”, Foucault's *regard* would have given rise to a wide range of distinct, collocationally determined renderings: *Il est un regard normalisateur* (186) might have become “It is a form of inspection designed to standardize”, or “a normalizing form of inspection”, instead of “It is a normalizing gaze” (184); *Un pouvoir qui ne se manifeste que par son seul regard* (190) might have been rendered as “a power manifested solely by surveillance”, or “by the scrutiny it exercezes”, or again by “the scrutiny it subjects them to”, rather than by “a power that was manifested only by its gaze” (188); *L'inspection fonctionne sans cesse. Le regard partout est en éveil.* (198) might have translated as “Inspection is unrelenting”, or “never lets up. Surveillance [or vigilance] is everywhere,” instead of “Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere” (195).

True, there's always the possibility that Sheridan's choice of the (to my ear) old-fashioned-sounding *gaze*, and indeed his translation register as a whole, may have been influenced by the eighteenth-century English text which very explicitly inspired whole sections of Foucault's work (Jeremy Bentham, *Panopticon, or, the Inspection House, &c*, ca 1791): Sheridan does after all have recourse to Bentham for the original wording of the passages that Foucault himself had translated into French. But antiquated though Bentham's language is, I can find no occurrences of *gaze* in the digitized version made available by Project Gutenberg. And, while a quick scan of Bentham's original did yield quite a few items that could be incorporated into a translation

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<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir. Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard, 1975; *Discipline and Punish. The birth of the prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, New York: Random House, Vintage Books 1995[1977].

register (*inspection-house; annular inspection gallery; field of inspection; the field of inspection might be dilated to any extent; extent and facility of inspection; without an abatement of that vigilance with regard to safe custody; contrivances for seeing without being seen, etc.*), there would be a distinct danger in modelling the language of a translation along the lines of Bentham's writing— and not just because Bentham's lexicon rings old. The real danger would be in discounting the “conceptual drift” that quite likely occurred when Foucault himself appropriated Bentham's discourse.

And *gaze* is not the only instance of word-boundedness in the Englished Foucault. Where Foucault's *écriture* (administrative ou judiciaire) unambiguously designates bureaucratic paperwork, record-keeping, registers, Sheridan's word-bound and wide-of-the-mark *writing* was bound to introduce a certain amount of drift, at best, or scatter, at worst, sopping up the ongoing preoccupations of contemporary critical discourse. Had *écriture* been translated correctly, and multiply—*records / registers / administrative documents / paperwork / record-keeping*, depending on the context—the tendency to epistemological inflation would have been nipped in the bud. *Writing* was bound to get swept away into deep, dark, Derridean waters, but a pedestrian item like *paperwork* leaves little to read into. Sheridan has a consistent tendency to take his translation equivalents straight from the bilingual dictionary. *L'essaimage des mécanismes disciplinaires* (213) becomes the involuntarily picturesque *swarming* (vs proliferation, or dissemination) of *disciplinary mechanisms* (211). *Masses compactes, grouillantes, houleuses* (202: “dense, disorderly, teeming masses”) gets rendered as *compact, swarming, howling masses* (Sheridan 200)<sup>17</sup>. And where Sheridan neglects to avail himself of the services of a bilingual dictionary, he falls in with “faux amis”: *ce qui entraîne trois inconvénients majeurs: l'ignorance de Dieu, la fainéantise ...; et la formation de ces troupes de gueux, toujours prêts à provoquer les désordres publics* (212) becomes *this involves three major inconveniences [vs “dangers”, or “drawbacks”]: ignorance of God, idleness..., and the formation of those gangs of beggars, ....* (210).

Sheridan's translation does justice to neither the brilliance of Foucault's writing nor its profundity (where great writing is concerned, loss of “form” is inevitably loss of “content”). And it is harder to read than the original (too bad for the legions of students introduced to Foucault this

<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Sheridan's *ruined prisons, littered with mechanisms of torture* (205) brilliantly escapes the trap of word-boundedness (*prisons in ruin, \*overpopulated and filled with instruments of torture*) into which the unvisualizing translator could be misled by Foucault's [*les*] *prisons ruinées, grouillantes, et peuplées de supplices que gravait Piranese* (Foucault 207). Clearly, Sheridan, much to his credit, rather than merely working from Foucault's words, was visualizing the actual engravings, with their eerily *empty* prisons.

way). As a general rule, heavy-handed translations generate more conceptual drift than do competent ones. Not only do they deprive the TL reader of the esthetic experience that is an integral part of writings such as Foucault's, but they more or less inevitably skew our understanding of these seminal texts. This conceptual drift will of course be accentuated, sometimes quite creatively, by the ensuing work of exegesis and commentary. But reading Foucault in a heavy-handed translation is no more reading Foucault than reading Helen Lowe-Porter is reading Thomas Mann.

It should nonetheless be stressed that, despite its lack of professional polish, Sheridan's translation has played a highly productive role in the development of Anglo-American academic discourse— and not just in the obvious way of giving the Anglo-American academic community access to the reflexion developed in *Surveiller et Punir*. As was the case with Brewster's *interpellate*, the very unidiomaticity of Sheridan's *gazes* and *writings* may well have been precisely what pre-disposed unilingual Anglophone readers to elevate them to the dignity of terminology— thus fomenting further register-formation and theorization. How often, after all, does one encounter, in general or literary texts, the “essentialist” noun phrase *the gaze*?<sup>18</sup>

In a perverse sort of way, then, translators like Sheridan made a strange contribution all their own by providing a signifier so vast, so spacious, so portentous that it seemed to be begging for tenants: “Signifier to let,” they might just as well have advertised. With their one-size-fits-all renderings of *regard*, they set the stage for a protracted process of term-formation in English. What they created were rigid designators, context-insensitive signifiers the very range and oddness of whose combinatorial behaviour made it difficult to assign any hard-edged, sharply focused content. *The gaze, the voice* : might as well capitalize them: *The Gaze, The Voice*. At the level of the signified, neither “the look” nor “the gaze” were sharply enough defined to enter into the sort of 1-1 correspondance typical of the terminological sign. Where term-formation, *stricto sensu*, involves taking a word that already has a broad, if fuzzy, range of meaning, and narrowing it down to a sharply focussed bundle of relevant features, what Sheridan et al created was, not a term, but a pure signifier haloed with such a nebulous potential for meaning as to be

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<sup>18</sup> “The concept of **gaze** (often also called **the gaze** or, in French *le regard*),” begins the Wikipedia entry for “Gaze”.

Prof-speakerly usage appears all the clumsier when compared with spontaneous occurrences of *gaze*, e.g. in literary texts. To take just one small sampling, novelist Alan Cumyn makes generous use of *gaze* and other *verba videndi*, without once using the noun phrase “the gaze”: *I hate the way she gazes up at him; he follows my gaze; Father does not return her gaze; I stay in her gaze too long; an accusatory gaze; there is an odd moment under his gaze; he continues to settle his gaze hard a me; at a gaze from his wife; the two of them were locked in a gaze far beyond my ability to understand; Margaret gazes away throughout, lost in some other thought; Margaret looks around as she sings, ... scanning the congregation, and then her gaze settles on somewhere to the front and the right.* — Cumyn 2003, *passim*.

almost devoid of content. By translating *le regard* as *the gaze*, irrespective of the collocations it entered into, Sheridan et al reified it into the pure and vacuous signifier of some rarefied, philosophically pregnant but as yet unspecified Essence, a rigid designator fairly begging to be invested with Deep Meaning.

## II. TRANSLATING LACAN

The patron saint (or saint homme, or sinthome?) of all these *gazes* is assuredly Jacques Lacan, under whose invocation whole volumes of commentary and exegesis have been devoted to discussing the intricacies, deep-meanings and implications of *the gaze*. Yet here we run up against something of a paradox. Whereas Lacan's *regard* fitted in colloquially and inconspicuously with its unexceptional and idiomatic French contexts<sup>19</sup>, *gaze* took on an arcane status precisely because of its abnormally high frequency and the oddly unidiomatic collocations it was forced into through translation. The translators supplied the rigid signifier; all the unilingual exegetes had to do was read-in whatever signifieds they chose to develop within their various frames of reference.

The proliferation of *gazes* was thus seeded by the translations themselves, with their artificially (and unjustifiably) high frequency of the word. John Forrester's choice of *gaze* to render each and every one of Lacan's *regards* could most certainly be challenged<sup>20</sup>. If we can momentarily divest ourselves of the habitus of seeing *gaze* as the one-and-only, always-already-there and *necessary* embodiment of what Sartre and Lacan were talking about, it becomes clear that alternative and more idiomatic equivalents exist. A rendering such as ***My sense of being seen is totally independent of whether or not, for example, I see the other person's eyes*** is every bit as effective in conveying the full import of the points Sartre and Lacan were making as the "translationese" ***The gaze in question must on no account be confused with the fact, for example, of seeing his eyes:***

[Sartre's] entire demonstration [in the third part of *Being and Nothingness*] turns around the fundamental phenomenon which he calls the **gaze**. The human object is originally distinguished, *ab initio*, in the field of my experience, and cannot be assimilated to any other perceptible object, by virtue of being an object which is looking at me. Sartre makes, on this point, some very subtle distinctions. The **gaze** in question must on no account be confused with the fact, for example, of seeing his eyes. I can feel myself under the **gaze** of someone whose eyes I do not even see, not even

<sup>19</sup> For the 38 occurrences in the *Séminaires*, see Krutzen 2000, pp. 649-650.

<sup>20</sup> John Forrester, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated with notes by John Forrester.* Book I. Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954. Cambridge University Press, 1988.

discern. All that is necessary is for something to signify to me that there may be others there. This window, if it gets a bit dark, and if I have reasons for thinking that there is someone behind it, is straightaway a **gaze**. From the moment this **gaze** exists, I am already something other, in that I feel myself becoming an object for the **gaze** of others. But in this position, which is a reciprocal one, others also know that I am an object who knows himself to be seen. — Forrester 1988: 215

On the other hand, there are cases where *gaze* is undoubtedly the best equivalent, as when Sylvania Tomaselli renders an account of the Wolf-man's dream, in Book II of the Seminar<sup>21</sup>:

.. It is a stagnant analysis which promises to be interminable, when at last the dream appears, reactivated by a specific occasion in the life of the subject, and its great importance deriving from having been repeated many times over, from a given epoch in childhood on.

What is this dream? It is the apparition, through a suddenly opened window, of the sight of a large tree, on whose branches wolves are perched. ... As you know, this dream turns out to be extremely rich, and the associations it triggers will lead Freud and his subject to nothing less than to the discovery, purely posited, reconstructed, of the primal scene.

The primal scene is reconstructed from the cross-checking which takes place in the course of analysis, but isn't relived. Nothing emerges in the memory of the subject ... which might lead to talking about the resurrection of the scene, but everything forces one to the conviction that it did indeed happen in this way. So in this respect there's a far more significant gap between this scene and what the subject sees in the dream than the normal distance between the latent content and the manifest content of a dream. And yet, in both cases, we have a fascinating vision, which for a time suspends the subject in a state of captivation in which he loses himself. To Freud, the vision of the dream seems like the reversal of the fascination of the **gaze**. It is in the **gaze** of these wolves, so anxiety-provoking in the account of it given by the dreamer, that Freud sees the equivalent of the fascinated **gaze** of the infant confronted with the scene which profoundly marked him in the imaginary and redirected his entire instinctual life. We find there is something like a unique and decisive revelation of the subject, in which an indefinite something that is unsayable is concentrated, in which the subject is lost for a moment, blown up. As in the dream of Irma's injection, the subject decomposes, fades away, dissociates into its various egos. ... — Tomaselli 1988: 175-6.

Tomaselli translates clumsily, locked into the micro-structures of the ST: *It is a stagnant analysis...; It is the apparition, through a suddenly opened window, of the sight of a large tree...; The primal scene is reconstructed from the cross-checking which takes place in the course of analysis, but isn't relived...; Nothing emerges in the memory of the subject ... which might lead to talking about the resurrection of the scene....; We find there is something like a unique and decisive revelation of the subject, in which an indefinite something that is unsayable is*

<sup>21</sup> Sylvania Tomaselli, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Sylvania Tomaselli, with notes by John Forrester.* Book II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955. New York / London: W.W. Norton. 1988.

Note that this summary of the Wolf-man's dream is provided, not by Lacan himself, but by one of the participants in the seminar.

*concentrated, in which the subject is lost for a moment, blown up.*<sup>22</sup> But *gaze* here is certainly the best— the most contextually and conceptually appropriate— choice to convey the steady, almost contemplative stare of the wolf (whether fixing its prey or symbolising the fascination of the small child surprising its parents in the act of making love). In texts such as these, the multiplicity of context-specific, content-appropriate renderings includes, but is not limited to, *gaze*.

### “La Schize de l’oeil et du regard”

Indeed, there is one case in which the rendering *gaze* would seem to be valid, if not actually incontournable. The section of Séminaire XI devoted to “La schize de l’oeil et du regard” is of the utmost interest from the standpoint of the translation and dissemination of highly elaborated (if not downright arcane) constructs. For starters, the textological status of this transcription— like that of the *Séminaires* as a whole— is notoriously problematic<sup>23</sup>: this of course complicates

<sup>22</sup> Contrast with my own rendering of the passage:

... The analysis is going nowhere, threatens to drag on interminably, when the subject relates a dream triggered by a specific incident in his life, one whose full significance can be seen from the fact that it has recurred a number of times since a certain point in his childhood.

So what is this dream? A window opens suddenly, revealing a huge tree on whose branches wolves are perched. ... As you all know, this dream is an extremely evocative one, triggering associations that will lead Freud and the subject right back to the primal scene / that will enable Freud and the subject to reconstruct the primal scene, in a purely speculative way.

The primal scene—rather than being re-lived— is reconstructed by putting together corroborating fragments that will emerge throughout the analysis. The subject relates no specific memories .... out of which the scene could be said to have been resurrected, but everything nonetheless converges to the certainty that it did indeed take place as depicted. The gap between the primal scene and its depiction in the dream is thus far greater / far more significant than the usual distance between the latent and manifest contents of a dream. Yet both instances involve a fascinating vision which holds the subject suspended for a certain length of time, lost and captivated / lost in his own captivation.

For Freud, the scene depicted in the dream reverses the fascination of the act of seeing / of the gaze // turns the fascinated act of seeing around. The gaze / eyes of the wolves, so dreadful in the dreamer’s own account / The wolves staring at him, which the dreamer relates with such anxiety, are the equivalent of the fascination with which the child contemplates / gazes upon the scene that was to have such a profound effect on his Imaginary as to distort his entire instinctual life. What Freud saw there was a sort of singular and decisive revelation / manifestation of the subject, one in which something ineffable is concentrated, and in which the subject is for an instant lost and fragmented .....

The subject falls apart, vanishes, dissociates into its various [egos].

<sup>23</sup> The seminars were one-off, oral performances. Reconstructing them from tapes and participants’ notes was a problematic undertaking at best: gaffes such as *speculum* (pour *spectaculum*) *mundi* (“nous sommes des êtres regardés, dans le spectacle du monde” (*Quatre Concepts*, p.87) suggest that the transcription contained many a slip— disastrous in a text which demands such sharply focussed attention to the twists and turns of lexicon, syntax and content. As Jacques-Alain Miller pointed out:

...On ne peut ... tenir pour [l’original] la version que fournit la sténographie, où le *malentendu fourmille, et où rien ne vient suppléer le geste et l’intonation.* — Jacques Lacan, *les Quatre Concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, Texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller (Livre XI, Séminaire de 1964), Paris: Seuil, 1973, p. 308 (my emphasis).

the work of exegesis, making it impossible in many cases to arrive at single-valued interpretations. Add to this the fact that Lacan's constructs would seem to be resistant to the very processes inherent in term-formation. As Alan Sheridan has remarked, "Lacan's work ... is peculiarly resistant to interpretation of a static, defining kind. ... In certain cases, ... Lacan has preferred that a term be left entirely unglossed, on the grounds that any comment would prejudice its effective operation" (Sheridan 1977: 277). The very fact that "interpretation" plays a role at all implies that we are not dealing with fully terminologized constructs such as density ( $\rho$ ), wavelength ( $\lambda$ ) or frequency ( $\nu$ ), and points to the lability of Lacan's conceptual apparatus. "It is less a matter of defining deliberately elusive concepts [here] than of understanding their dynamic usage in several contexts" (Rabaté 2003: 7). Even so, this section of Séminaire XI clearly shows Lacan working out a crucial distinction between *l'oeil* and *le regard*—a dichotomy which (taken merely at the level of the "head-words") really puts the translator into English on the spot :

85 **L'oeil et le regard**, telle est pour nous la schize dans laquelle se manifeste la pulsion au niveau du champ scopique.

116 [Le peintre] **donne quelque chose en pâture à l'oeil**, mais il invite celui auquel le tableau est présenté à **déposer là son regard**, comme on dépose les armes. [...] Quelque chose est **donné non point tant au regard qu'à l'oeil**, quelque chose qui comporte **abandon, dépôt, du regard**.

118 **Triomphe, sur l'oeil, du regard**.

132 C'est à ce registre de **l'oeil comme désespéré par le regard** qu'il nous faut aller pour saisir le ressort apaisant, civilisateur et charmeur, de la fonction du tableau.

Compared with languages to which oppositions such as *Auge* vs *Blick*<sup>24</sup> or *occhio* vs *sguardo* come naturally, English is at a distinct disadvantage here. Passages such as these give some legitimacy to the rendering *gaze* (not only the easiest, but perhaps, in some micro-contexts, the only rendering), as carried into the work of qualified exegetes such as Ragland-Sullivan. (They in no way, though, legitimize the monolithic use of *gaze* in the translation of authors such as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Foucault.)

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Similarly, Jean-Michel Rabaté remarks that "If Lacan's writings are now available in two dense collections ..., the seminars make up a larger but more problematic sequence of oral texts partly edited or rewritten. ... the kind of interactive performance I have described makes it impossible to produce a definitive version of these seminars. (*The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, p. 10)

Oddly enough, the *Séminaires* seem to have seeded far more scholia than the magnificent *Écrits*, whose textological status raises no such issues. Can it be that the scholiasts thrive on fuzz?

<sup>24</sup> Whether or not the thinking theorist will choose to avail herself of this accident of lexical segmentation is a different story. Ulrike Haß uses the three-fold *Sehen / Gesehenwerden / Zusehen* in addition to the binary opposition *Auge* vs *Blick*. — <http://www.theaterforschung.de/rezension.php4?ID=139>, 3 September 2007.

Even here, though, it is not clear that *gaze* should be the one-and-only choice to render the multiple nuances conveyed by Lacan's *regard*, so varied are the effets de sens created in contexts that range from the straightforward:

87: N'y a-t-il pas de la satisfaction à **être sous ce regard** dont je parlais tout à l'heure en suivant Maurice Merleau-Ponty, **ce regard qui nous cerne, ce qui fait d'abord de nous des être regardés**, mais sans qu'on nous le montre?

97 En tant que je suis **sous le regard**, écrit Sartre, je ne vois plus l'oeil qui me regarde, et si je vois l'oeil, c'est alors **le regard** qui disparaît.

to the exquisitely abstruse:

85 Dans notre rapport aux choses, tel qu'il est constitué par la voie de la vision, et ordonné dans les figures de la représentation, **quelque chose glisse, passe, se transmet, d'étage en étage, pour y être toujours à quelque degré éludé—c'est ça qui s'appelle le regard.**

89 **Le regard peut contenir en lui-même l'objet *a* de l'algèbre lacanienne** où le sujet vient à choir, et ce qui spécifie le champ scopique, et engendre la satisfaction qui lui est propre, c'est que là, pour des raisons de structure, la chute du sujet reste toujours inaperçue, car elle se réduit à zéro. Dans la mesure où **le regard, en tant qu'objet *a***, peut venir à symboliser le manque central exprimé dans le phénomène de la castration, et qu'il est **un objet *a* réduit, de par sa nature, à une fonction punctiforme, évanescence,**— il laisse le sujet dans l'ignorance de ce qu'il y a au-delà de l'apparence—cette ignorance si caractéristique de tout le progrès de la pensée dans cette voie constituée par la recherche philosophique.

121 **L'objet *a* dans le champ du visible, c'est le regard.**

Things are further complicated by the fact that throughout this section of the Seminar, Lacan has a distinct tendency to flip-flop playfully back and forth between the technical and the colloquial. Georges Mounin has pointed out how Lacan determinologizes, taking items that have a very specific status in Marxist discourse or in Saussuran linguistics (*dialectique*, *signifiant* and *langage* are Mounin's examples), and watering them down to suit his purposes (the first stage, no doubt, in a process through which these terms will eventually be reduced to the shibboleths by which the "profs" identify themselves). Mounin's remarks corroborate my own sense that Lacan's writings fluctuate between termness and quasi- or pseudo-termness—an observation that has immediate implications for the translator attempting to come to terms with the ways(s) *regard* could be rendered in "La schize de l'oeil et du regard".

Lacan plays with the "technical" and colloquial senses of other crucial items as well—notably *tableau* and *tache*. The contextual meanings of *tableau* range from "painting":

106 Dans **le tableau de Holbein**, je vous ai tout de suite montré [...] le singulier objet flottant au premier plan

to “tableau vivant”<sup>25</sup>:

110 .....[moi, au milieu de] ces types qui gagnaient péniblement leur existence ....—moi, **je faisais tableau** d’une façon assez inénarrable.

to “the overall, the macroscopic picture which enframes the subject and his field of vision”:

113 Il est pourtant un domaine phénoménal—infiniment plus étendu que les points privilégiés où il apparaît—qui nous fait saisir, dans sa véritable nature, le sujet en survol absolu. ... Il y a des faits qui ne peuvent s’articuler que de la dimension phénoménale du survol par quoi **je me situe dans le tableau comme tache**—ce sont les faits de mimétisme.

114 C’est dans ce domaine, en effet, que se présente la dimension par où le sujet a à **s’insérer dans le tableau**.

to the highly abstruse (or so it seems to me) constellation of constructs towards which the entire text is converging:

111 C’est là quelque chose qui fait intervenir ce qui est élidé dans la relation géométrale—la profondeur de champ, avec tout ce qu’elle présente d’ambigu, de variable, de nullement maîtrisé par moi. C’est bien plutôt elle qui me saisit, qui me sollicite à chaque instant, et fait du paysage autre chose qu’une perspective, autre chose que ce que j’ai appelé **le tableau**.

115-116 Qu’est-ce que la peinture? Ce n’est évidemment pas pour rien que **nous avons nommé tableau, la fonction où le sujet a à se repérer comme tel**.

In all these cases, it is the way the French lexicon is structured—the relative elasticity of the French *tableau*— which allows Lacan to use one and the same signifier both colloquially and “abstrusely”.

Similar remarks apply to Lacan’s use of the all-important *tache*, which morphs, over the course of the seminar, from the straightforward notion of the eye-like spot, or marking, on an insect’s wing (the ocellus):

86 ... s’agissant de telles manifestations mimétiques, et spécialement de celle qui peut nous évoquer la fonction des yeux, à savoir les ocelles, il s’agit de comprendre s’ils impressionnent—c’est un fait qu’ils ont cet effet sur le prédateur ou la victime présumée qui vient à les regarder—s’ils impressionnent par leur ressemblance avec des yeux, ou si, au contraire, les yeux ne sont fascinants que de leur relation avec la forme des ocelles. Autrement dit, ne devons-nous pas à ce propos distinguer la fonction de l’oeil de celle du regard?

<sup>25</sup> OED *tableau* 3b: “(tableau vivant)... the sudden creation of a striking or dramatic situation” — a shade of meaning well known to James Joyce’s Gerty MacDowell: “It would have served [Edy] just right if she had tripped up over something accidentally on purpose with her high crooked French heels on her to make her look tall and got a fine tumble. *Tableau!* That would have been a very charming exposé for a gentleman like that to witness” (*Ulysses*. New York: Random House–Modern Library, p. 353).

Cet exemple distinctif [...] n'est pour nous qu'une petite manifestation d'une fonction à isoler—celle, disons le mot, de la *tache*. Cet exemple est précieux pour nous marquer la préexistence au vu d'un donné-à-voir.

- 109 Aussi bien n'y a-t-il pas que l'oeil à être photosensible... Toute la surface du tégument ... peut être photosensible, et cette dimension ne saurait être réduite d'aucune façon dans le fonctionnement de la vision. Il est une certaine ébauche d'organes photosensibles qui sont les **taches pigmentaires**.

to the far more abstruse notion of the subject as a “blot”, the subject as its own blind-spot:

111 Et moi, si je suis quelque chose dans le tableau, c'est aussi sous cette forme de l'écran, que j'ai nommée tout à l'heure **la tache**.

113 ... Il y a des faits qui ne peuvent s'articuler que de la dimension phénoménale du survol par quoi **je me situe dans le tableau comme tache**—ce sont les faits de mimétisme.

113-114 ...C'est à cette forme tachée que le crustacé s'accommode. **Il se fait tache, il se fait tableau, il s'inscrit dans le tableau**. C'est là ce qui est à proprement parler le ressort original du mimétisme. Et, à partir de là, les dimensions fondamentales de l'inscription du sujet dans le tableau apparaissent infiniment plus justifiées que ne peut nous le donner, au premier abord, une divination plus ou moins tâtonnante.

and, finally, to the notion that *la tache* functions the same way as *le regard*:

86-87 LACAN ... **Si la fonction de la tache est** reconnue dans son autonomie et **identifiée à celle du regard**, nous pouvons en chercher la menée, le fil, la trace, à tous les étages de la constitution du monde dans le champ scopique. On s'apercevra alors que **la fonction de la tache et du regard** y est à la fois ce qui le commande le plus secrètement, et ce qui échappe toujours à la saisie de cette forme de la vision qui se satisfait d'elle-même en s'imaginant comme conscience.

The ST, then, is characterized by an elasticity in the use of *tableau*, *tache* and *regard* that cannot be achieved in English by any single lexical item mapped over, one-to-one, from the French. It is this fluctuation which indicates that, as crucial as these items may be, we are dealing not with bona fide terms but rather with conceptual fields and the words that “head” them. One-to-one mappings simply will not work.

### **Alan Sheridan's Lacan (1977)**

Sheridan's translation adds (multiple, and egregious) deficiencies of its own to an already problematic undertaking. For one thing, it's excruciatingly word-bound. Passages such as the following (ils sont légion) give the impression that Sheridan, faute d'avoir compris, is clinging desperately to the slick and slippery surface of Lacan's text:

Lacan 113-114

Un petit crustacé qu'on appelle *caprella*, **et auquel on ajoute un adjectif, *acanthifera***, quand il niche au milieu de ces sortes d'animaux, **à la limite de l'animal**, qu'on appelle des briozoaires, ... imite ce qui, dans **cet animal quasi-plante** qu'est le brizoaire, est une **tache—à telle des phases du brizoaire, une anse intestinale fait tache, à une autre, quelque chose comme un centre coloré fonctionne**. C'est à cette **forme tachée** que le crustacé s'accommode. Il se fait **tache**, il se fait **tableau**, il **s'inscrit dans le tableau**. C'est là ce qui est à proprement parler le ressort original du mimétisme. Et, à partir de là, **les dimensions fondamentales de l'inscription du sujet dans le tableau apparaissent infiniment plus justifiées que ne peut nous le donner, au premier abord, une divination plus ou moins tâtonnante**.

Sheridan 99

Let us take an example chosen almost at random [...] that of the small crustacean known as *caprella*, **to which is added the adjective *acanthifera***. When such a crustacean settles in the midst of **those animals, scarcely animals**, known as briozoaires, what does it imitate? It imitates what, in **that quasi-plant animal** known as the briozoaires, is a **stain—at a particular phase of the briozoaires, an intestinal loop forms a stain, at another phase, there functions something like a coloured centre**. It is to this **stain shape** that the crustacean adapts itself. It becomes a **stain, it becomes a picture, it is inscribed in the picture**. This, strictly speaking, is the origin of mimicry. **And, on this basis, the fundamental dimensions of the inscription of the subject in the picture appear infinitely more justified than a more hesitant guess might suggest at first sight**.

B.F.

... A tiny crustacean, *Caprella*, **species *acanthifera***, when it settles among the sort of **quasi-animals** known as bryozoa, imitates a feature of **that half-plant, half-animal creature** that is for all intents and purposes a **spot (in one phase of the bryozoon's life cycle, it's a loop of intestine that functions as a spot, in another phase it's a sort of coloured centre)**. **This spot-like structure** is what the crustacean imitates. **It becomes a spot, poses, becomes part of the picture**. This is mimicry at its most basic. Such an example **does far more to convince us that the subject is fundamentally / inherently a part of the picture than any more or less improvised speculation**.

In some places, the translation becomes so word-bound, and so nonsensical, as to give the distinct impression that Sheridan hasn't the foggiest idea what Lacan is talking about:

Lacan 107

...Ce qui fait la faute de la référence à l'instinct, si confuse, c'est qu'on ne s'aperçoit pas que l'instinct, c'est **la façon dont un organisme a à se dépêtrer aux meilleures fins avec un organe**.

Sheridan 102

... What is wrong about the reference to instinct, a reference that is so confused, is that one does not realize that instinct is **the way in which an organism has of extricating itself in the best possible way from an organ**.

(What Lacan actually meant was more like: *Appeals to the fuzzy notion of instinct overlook the fact that instinct is the way an organism does what it can with the organ it's been given.*)

When Lacan uses examples drawn from the hard sciences to make his point, Sheridan's word-for-wording becomes even more mindless. Clearly, in rendering the following, Sheridan has made not the slightest effort to familiarize himself with the rudiments of stellar classification, let alone explore the elementary references to the anatomy and physiology of the eye:

Lacan 116-117

En d'autres termes, il s'agit de poser maintenant la question de ce qu'il en est de l'oeil comme organe. [...] **Tout ce qui est dans l'organisme comme organe se présente toujours avec une grande multiplicité de fonctions.** Dans l'oeil, il est clair que des fonctions diverses se conjuguent. **La fonction discriminatoire s'isole au maximum au niveau de la fovea, point élu de la vision distincte.** Il se fait autre chose sur tout le reste de la surface de la rétine, **injustement distingué pas les spécialistes comme lieu de la fonction scotopique.** Mais la, le chiasme se retrouve, puisque c'est ce dernier champ, **soi-disant fait pour percevoir ce qui est dans des effets d'éclairement moindre, qui donne au maximum la possibilité de percevoir des effets de lumière.** Une étoile de cinquième ou sixième grandeur, si vous voulez la voir—c'est le phénomène d'Arago—ne la fixez pas tout droit. C'est précisément à regarder un tout petit peu à côté qu'elle peut vous paraître.

Sheridan 101-102

In other words, we must now pose the question as to the exact status of the eye as organ. [...]. **Whatever appears in the organism as an organ is always presented with a large multiplicity of functions.** In the eye, it is clear that various functions come together. **The discriminatory function is isolated to the maximum degree at the level of the fovea, the chosen point of distinct vision.** Something quite different occurs over the rest of the surface of the retina, **incorrectly distinguished by specialists as the locus of the scotopic function.** But here, too, **chiasma is to be found,** since it is **this last field,** supposedly created to perceive things in diminished lighting, which provides **the maximum possibility of perceiving the effects of light.** **If you wish to see a star of the fifth or six [sic] size,** do not look straight at it—this is known as the Arago phenomenon. You will be able to see it only if you fix your eye to one side.

B.F.

This brings us to the question of the eye as organ. [...]. **Every single organ in an organism carries out a wide variety of functions.** It is clear that a number of different functions work together in the eye. **Visual acuity is maximal in the fovea centralis.** Other functions are performed by the rest of the retinal surface, **incorrectly designated by the specialists as the blind spot.** **This is where the optic chiasma comes in,** since **this structure,** supposedly designed to facilitate seeing in dim light, **is the centre of greatest sensitivity to light.** **Stars of the fifth or sixth magnitude are best observed,** as Arago discovered, not head-on but a little to the side

So mechanical is Sheridan's translation that it degenerates in places into pure gobbledygook:

The lure plays an essential function therefore. It is not something else that seizes us at the very level of clinical experience, when, in relation to what one might imagine of the attraction to the other pole as conjoining masculine and feminine, we apprehend the prevalence of that which is presented as *travesty*. —Sheridan 107

Even Lacan at his finest can fall victim to unvisualized, *unthinking* renderings such as the following:

This fact is observable **in the variously modulated scale of what may be included, ultimately, under the general heading of mimicry**. It is this that comes into play, quite obviously, both in sexual union and in the struggle to the death. In both situations, **the being breaks up, in an extraordinary way, between its being and its semblance**, between itself and that paper tiger it shows to the other. In the case of display, usually on the part of the male animal, **or in the case of grimacing swelling by which the animal enters the play of combat in the form of intimidation**, the being **gives of himself, or receives from the other**, something that is like a mask, a double, an envelope, **a thrown-off skin, thrown off in order to cover the frame of a shield**. It is through this separated form of himself that **the being comes into play in his effects of life and death**, and it might be said that it is with the help of this doubling of the other, or of oneself, that is realized the conjunction from which proceeds the renewal of beings in reproduction. — Sheridan 107 (my emphasis).

What Lacan actually meant was more like

This can be observed **over a wide and varied range of what could generally be classed as mimicry**. It comes into play very obviously in courtship displays and in fights to the death. **There is a striking disparity between what the creature is for itself and the appearance it creates for the outside**, between its actual self and the paper-tiger image it projects. Whether it's sexual display (usually by the male) **or the puffing up and baring of teeth used to intimidate an adversary, the animal puts on, or witnesses in the other**, a mask-like something, a duplicate self that functions like an envelope, **a second-skin / detachable skin covering the armature / thrown over the frame of a shield**. It is through **this form separate from itself that the living being engages in the business of living and of dying / transacts life and death / transact its life and death** ; it is this duplicate of the other, or of one's self, that enters into the couplings [through which species perpetuate / renew themselves]

And indeed the beautiful passage at the very end of “La schize” is marred by a gross (and spuriously “metaphysical”) misreading: Sheridan has grasped neither the French expression *faire un sort à* nor the pattern of meaning into which Lacan has integrated it:

Lacan 131-132

*Invidia* vient de *videre*. L'*invidia* la plus exemplaire, pour nous analystes, est celle que j'ai depuis longtemps relevée dans Augustin **pour lui donner tout son sort**, à savoir celle du petit enfant regardant son frère pendu au sein de sa mère, le regardant *amare conspectu*, d'un regard

Sheridan 115-116

*Invidia* comes from *videre*. The most exemplary *invidia*, for us analysts, is the one I found long ago in Augustine, **in which he sums up his entire fate**, namely, that of the little child seeing his brother at his mother's breast, looking at him *amare conspectu*, with a bitter look, which

amer, qui le décompose et fait sur lui-même  
l'effet d'un poison.

seems to tear him to pieces and has on himself  
the effect of a poison.

Add to this the mindless goofs (*je suis dans le tableau* > “I am **not** in the picture,” p. 96); the constant misreadings (*Ce voir à quoi je suis soumis d'une façon originelle* [= from the instant of my birth], p. 84 > “this seeing, to which I am subjected **in an original way**” p. 72; ... *ce que nous trouvons à l'horizon et comme butée de notre expérience*, p. 85 > “what we find on the horizon, as the **thrust** of our experience,” 72-73); and the passages that reveal, not only Sheridan's difficulties with basic French structures, but a sentence-by-sentence approach which shows him incapable of grasping even paragraph-level patterns of meaning:

109

**Aussi bien n'y a-t-il pas que  
l'oeil à être photosensible...**

Toute la surface du tégument ...  
peut être photosensible, et cette  
dimension ne saurait être réduite  
d'aucune façon dans le  
fonctionnement de la vision. Il est  
une certaine ébauche d'organes  
photosensibles qui sont **les taches  
pigmentaires**.

Alan Sheridan: 94

**Furthermore, it is not that  
the eye has to be photo-  
sensitive**—we know this. The  
whole surface of the tegument  
... may be photo-sensitive, and  
this dimension can in no way be  
reduced to the functioning of  
vision. There is a certain  
adumbration of photo-sensitive  
organs in the **pigmentary spots**.  
...

B.F.

**So the eye is not the only site  
of photosensitivity..** .... The  
entire surface covering an  
organism may well be  
photosensitive, and this  
photosensitivity is in no way  
limited to the function of vision /  
sight. One rudimentary form of  
photosensitive organ is the  
**pigmented spot.** / **Pigmented  
spots** constitute one rudimentary  
form of photosensitive organ. ...

Even more unfortunate perhaps than the egregious blunders is the ongoing accretion of minute misrenderings and miniscule misreadings. The resulting low-level background noise makes it tougher to slog through the translation, when it does not lead to outright confusion. What deep meaning, the earnest reader who takes Sheridan's translation almost as revelation will wonder, what deep meaning is Lacan conveying when he says *the artist intends to impose himself on us* (Sheridan 100)? The reader's earnest cogitations are a sheer waste of time and hermeneutic energy: what Lacan actually said was *c'est comme sujet, comme regard, que l'artiste entend, à nous, s'imposer* (p. 115), which flows seamlessly out of its context and, competently translated, would read *it is as a subject, a way of seeing, that the artist intends to command our attention*.

What interests us most, though, is Sheridan's recourse to rigid, 1-1 mappings. While Lacan's German translator, Norbert Haas, uses both *Tableau* and *Bild*,<sup>26</sup> and adopts a very explicit strategy to convey the multiple effets de sens of the latter ("*Bild* ] *tableau*"; "*Bild* ] *image*", etc.), Sheridan opts for a single "equivalent" throughout — *picture* :

92 In Holbein's **picture** I showed you...the singular object floating in the foreground...

96 ... I, at that moment—as I appeared to those fellows who were earning their livings with great difficulty...— looked like nothing on earth. In short, I was rather **out of place in the picture**.

98... There are facts that can be articulated only in the phenomenal dimension of the overview by which **I situate myself in the picture as stain**—these are the facts of mimicry.

100: What is painting [ < la peinture ] ? It is obviously not for nothing that we have referred to as a **picture** the function in which the subject has to map himself as such. But when a human subject is engaged in making a picture of himself, in putting into operation that something that has as its centre **the gaze**, what is taking place? In the **picture**, the artist, we are told by some, wishes to be a subject, and the art of painting is to be distinguished from all others in that, in the work, it is as subject, as **gaze**, that the artist **intends to impose himself on us**.<sup>27</sup>

Even where Lacan makes it abundantly clear that that he is talking about artistic creation, and the work of composition (which the simple-minded "picture" in no way conveys), Sheridan's mechanical 1-1 approach misses Lacan's reflection on the mise en forme that manifests the presence of the painter in the painted:

Lacan p. 123

C'est bien là un des traits qu'on semble n'avoir guère vu dans la création picturale. **C'est pourtant un jeu captivant que de retrouver dans le tableau** ce qui est, à proprement parler, composition, lignes de partage des surfaces créées par le peintre, lignes de fuite, lignes de force, **bâtis où l'image trouve son statut**—

Sheridan, p. 108

This is certainly one of the features that scarcely seems to have been noticed in pictorial creation. Yet rediscovering in the **picture** what is, strictly speaking, composition, the lines dividing the surfaces created by the painter, vanishing traces, lines of force, **frames (bâtis) in which the image finds its status** is a fascinating game—

<sup>26</sup> See, for example:

*Zwar zeichnet sich in der Tiefe meines Auges das Bild ] tableau. Das Bild ist sicher in meinem Auge. Aber ich, ich bin im Tableau.* Haas 1996[1987]: 102

and:

*In der Tat ist eher [die Feldtiefe] es, die ... etwas anderes macht .... als das, was ich »Tableau« gennant habe.* —ibid.

<sup>27</sup> See my rendering, below.

Yet in rendering *tache*, even Sheridan, despite his predilection for a quasi-terminological uniformity and his earlier recourse to the puzzling *stain*<sup>28</sup> is forced to anticipate the shifting effets de sens by introducing the strategic doublet *stain* / *spot* at one point in his translation:

97 ... And if I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen, which I earlier called **the stain, the spot.**

### **Conceptual fields vs rigid designators: towards a new translation of Lacan**

Clearly, a new translation of Lacan's "Schize de l'oeil et du regard" is in order, one that would use a field approach rather than the word-bound, one-to-one mappings of a Sheridan. (If *seeing* was good enough for John Berger, surely there are alternatives to *gaze* and its clumsy collocations.) The work of translation involves actualizing conceptual clusters, particularly the two main clusters headed, respectively, by (the monovalent) *oeil* and (the multivalent) *regard*, rather than mapping multivalent items such as *regard*, *tableau*, *tache* onto single-valued, monolithic English equivalents, no matter how ungainly—and "noisy"—the collocations into which they will be forced in the TT.<sup>29</sup> While the translator may choose *gaze*, or *seeing-being-seen* as her head-word, she should feel free to "express" (as in biology) the concept with a variety of "phenotypical" realizations.<sup>30</sup> Instead of scrambling after a one-size-fits-all equivalent for items such as *regard*, *tableau*, *tache*, then, the translator will treat these items as the nuclei of conceptual fields to be actualized through a variety of context-appropriate renderings, including *gaze* (for *regard*) and possibly *tableau* (for *tableau*). What this demands of the translator is (precisely as in technical or scientific translation) that she come to an understanding—a deep, overall understanding— of the constructs Lacan is working out, an understanding that goes beyond what's expressed at the surface of the text: in a word, that she evolve a sub-text. The question is now: can such a field approach be made to yield a coherent rendering? Is it possible to convey the full force of Lacan's reflection without sticking to a single-valued equivalent for key items such as *regard* and *tableau*?

<sup>28</sup> Perhaps, as Ryan Fraser has suggested (personal communication), under the influence of Derrida's *trace*?

<sup>29</sup> I am not suggesting that "idiomaticity" per se is to be valued. What I am saying is that "counter-idiomaticity" should be *functional*, not the accidental result of unskilled translation. Whatever arguments one can make for trying to convey Lacan's style, the fact remains that these seminars, addressed to clinicians as well as theorists and philosophers, have of necessity an instrumental component that will only be distorted, or "noised", by non-functionally-relevant unidiomaticity (klumpiness). No, "idiomaticity" is not an end in itself, but neither is klumpiness (peace be to the "foreignizers").

<sup>30</sup> One might just as usefully borrow the notation of phonology / phonetics, using [*gaze*], or [*seeing/being seen*] for the underlying notion, and /observe/, /look/, etc. to designate various context-appropriate realizations.

In order to answer this question I've done extensive "test-translations" of passages that present particular difficulties. This has helped me to come to a deeper understanding of Lacan's text, to see how the conceptual field *regard* evolves as it works its way through the text, and to group together, in an open-ended cohort of "phenotypes", the items that presented themselves, in the course of the translation, as renderings suited to specific contexts. I've integrated these insights into a sort of translator's sub-text which, like the actor's sub-text, or the understanding a technical translator needs to acquire before tackling a text outside her normal field of practice, spells out more, and more explicitly, than may ever be needed in "the finished product"<sup>31</sup>:

*L'oeil* is a given, one which lies within the realm of anatomy and physiology. It conveys the "mere" act of seeing, as light from an object outside us impinges on our retinas, rods and cones. *Le regard* is a construct, one which is best described in terms of, for want of a better word, *subjectness*. Whether as seeing, being-seen, anticipating-being-seen or desiring-to-be-seen, it plays a crucial role in the construction of the subject. By extension, where *l'oeil* is short-hand for seeing naked, without priming or preconceptions, *le regard* is a way of seeing elaborated over the course of our history as subjects, a mode of viewing freighted with preconceptions, expectations, desires, and demands<sup>32</sup>.

The way of seeing which defines the subject, whether this way of seeing is profoundly original or prisoner of the already-seen-already-painted, is a construction of the world—and the way we construct the world for ourselves constructs us as subjects. Where *oeil* is the naïve, the simple, the native eye, clear and unprejudiced-unprimed, more or less free of the already-seen, *le regard* is, at its best, the artist's creative way of visually constructing the world (*c'est comme sujet, comme regard, que l'artiste entend, à nous, s'imposer*, p. 115); at its worst, the always-already-all-knowing eye, jaundiced and judgmental, the culturally and psychologically tainted eye, a mode of seeing pre-conditioned by needs and demands before it even claps eye on the painting. And we all of us, in between, have our own *regard* — a way of seeing informed by that eternal lack which drives desire and its *objets a*.

The dichotomy *oeil vs regard* can also be framed in terms of the opposition between nature and art. The birds fooled into pecking at Zeuxis's painted grapes (pp. 118 and 127) are merely obeying a hard-wired impulse. But when Zeuxis himself is tricked into looking for the

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<sup>31</sup> See my remarks, in *Second Finding*, concerning the subtext I created to construct a world, a "Real", out of which to translate Saint-John Perse (Folkart 2007: 186).

<sup>32</sup> Freighted, ultimately, with the internalized Other (Lacan's *l'Autre*) who conditions our way of being in the world, with our anxiety about not being up to this Other's expectations, our desire to be this Other's one-and-only.

painting he believes to be underneath the veil painted by his rival, Parrhasios, his is a way of looking framed by expectation, one that goes beyond face-values. And indeed, Lacan's remarks on the transaction between artist, work of art, and viewer are particularly profound. Like any other subject, the artist constructs himself as a way of seeing—one which, while more innovative, more profoundly original than that of the average art-lover, is to be distinguished from the way the world actually “is”. (Cf. Lacan's remarks (p. 127) to the effect that no bird would be taken in by Caravaggio's grapes.) Where the painter has the talent to apprehend—and “express”—the world in ways that go beyond the already-painted, your average viewer tends to want more of the same; locked into the already-seen-already-painted, he has to transcend his own expectations of what “Art” is supposed to provide. *Ça [lui] élève l'âme, comme on dit*<sup>33</sup>. Painter and viewer are both in the business of constructing the world for themselves. The difference is that the painter does it with a depth of perception, an originality quite beyond the means of the average viewer *qua* viewer: painting makes manifest the profound patterns of a profound mind, hand and eye. This is why the work of art demands that the viewer *dépose son regard* (p. 116), set aside her templates, desires and preconceptions, break with the already-seen and the norms of viewing art, in order to lose herself in an act of contemplation—sublimation—that lifts her out of herself. (I'm keenly aware that my reading of Lacan, here, reflects the preoccupations that inform my entire *Second Finding*—quite possibly a “conceptual slippage” of my own.)

What the painting demands in other words—like the poem, the work of art in general—is negative capability, a break with old ways of seeing and being: a break with precisely the mode of seeing whose absence elicits Lacan's contempt for expressionist art (which he sees as pandering to the good-burgher notion of what “art” is supposed to be):

<sup>33</sup> Lacan 126 :

..... l'oeuvre, ça les apaise, les gens, ça les reconforte, en leur montrant qu'il peut y en avoir quelques-uns qui vivent de l'exploitation de leur désir. Mais pour que ça les satisfasse tellement, il faut bien qu'il y ait aussi cette autre incidence, que leur désir, à eux, de contempler y trouve quelque apaisement. Ça leur élève l'âme, comme on dit, c'est-à-dire ça les incite, eux, au renoncement. Ne voyez-vous pas que quelque chose ici s'indique de cette fonction que j'ai appelée du *dompte-regard*?

I interpret *dompte-regard* and *renoncement* as *losing one's self* in the act of contemplation. Cf:

Lacan p. 126

... peut-être le temps est-il venu où nous pouvons interroger avec profit ... ce qui est en jeu dans la création artistique. Il s'agit pour nous de la création comme Freud la désigne, c'est-à-dire comme sublimation, et de la valeur qu'elle prend dans un champ social.

B.F., test-translation

... it is time, perhaps, to reflect on..... what's involved in artistic creation. For us, creation is what Freud considered it to be: an act of sublimation, and the value such an act takes on in the social sphere.

LACAN, p. 116

Ce qui fait problème, c'est que toute une face de la peinture se sépare de ce champ— la peinture expressionniste. Celle-là, et c'est ce qui la distingue, elle donne quelque chose qui va dans le sens d'une certaine satisfaction—au sens où Freud emploie le terme quand il s'agit de satisfaction de la pulsion—**d'une certaine satisfaction à ce qui est demandé par le regard.**

B.F., test-translation

The problem, though, is that there is one whole area of painting—expressionism— for which this does not hold true. What sets expressionist painting apart is the fact that it provides a sort of satisfaction—in the Freudian sense that it satisfies a drive — **by giving the already-all-knowing eye what it wants to see.**

Where *oeil* translates single-valuedly, then (though explications or glossings such as *the native, unjudgemental and unprejudiced eye* may usefully be brought into play, especially when renderings such as “the judgemental eye”, or “the already-all-knowing eye” are used to express the notion of *regard*), *regard* generates an open-ended field of contextual allomorphs most effective in specific contexts. (Clearly, this translator's sub-text is nowhere near as neat-n'-tidy, as dichotomized and hard-edged as the vademecum available on the websites. It is nonetheless essential if I am to have the slightest hope of translating this text.)

Absent a one-to-one mapping of the multivalent *regard*, what strategies can be deployed to make these “field-based” translations as coherent and as cohesive as possible, as effective as possible in conveying the ideas Lacan is working through? One such technique is the recourse to “multiplets”, the idea being to set certain items up as quasi-synonyms, or at least bring them into close conceptual proximity to one another, early on in the translation. Thus, for Lacan's *tableau* and *regard*:

Lacan 115-116

Qu'est-ce que la **peinture**? Ce n'est évidemment pas pour rien que nous avons nommé **tableau**, la fonction où le sujet a à se repérer comme tel. Mais quand un sujet humain s'engage à en faire un **tableau**, à mettre en oeuvre **ce quelque chose qui a pour centre le regard**, de quoi s'agit-il? Dans le tableau, l'artiste, nous disent certains, veut être sujet, et l'art de la peinture se distingue de tous les autres en ceci que, dans l'oeuvre, **c'est comme sujet, comme regard, que l'artiste entend, à nous, s'imposer.**

B.F., test-translation

What is **painting**? It's clearly no coincidence that I've been using **the words painting, and tableau**, to refer to the function through which the subject comes to recognize himself as such / manifests itself as such. But just what is involved when a human subject decides to transform this into a **painting**, embodying in a work of art **this something which revolves about seeing**? Some would say that the painting is a way for the artist to assert himself as subject, and that the art of painting differs from all others in that it is as subject, **as seeing, as gaze / as a mode of seeing sui generis**, that the artist intends to command

<p>Lacan 116</p> <p>J'avancerai la thèse suivante—assurément, dans le <b>tableau</b>, toujours se manifeste quelque chose du <b>regard</b>. Le peintre le sait bien, dont la morale, la recherche, la quête, l'exercice, est vraiment, qu'il s'y tienne ou qu'il en varie, la sélection d'<b>un certain mode de regard</b>. A regarder des <b>tableaux</b> même les plus dépourvus de ce qu'on appelle communément le <b>regard</b> et qui est constitué par une paire d'yeux, des <b>tableaux</b> où toute représentation de la figure humaine est absente, tel paysage d'un peintre hollandais ou flamand, vous finirez par voir, comme en filigrane, quelque chose de si spécifié pour chacun des peintres que vous aurez le sentiment de la présence du <b>regard</b>.</p>	<p>our attention.</p> <hr/> <p>B.F., test-translation</p> <p>My position is that any <b>painting</b> invariably manifests, one way or another, <b>a way of seeing</b>. The painter is perfectly aware of this; indeed his whole aim — his ethics, his technique, his experimentation, his hard work— is to give priority to <b>a specific way of seeing</b>. Even those <b>paintings</b> which offer no obvious, first-degree representation of <b>seeing</b>, in the everyday sense of a pair of eyes, even those paintings from which all representation of the human form is absent (a Dutch or Flemish landscape, say), convey, as if woven into their very canvas, something so specific to their creators that the viewer feels himself in the presence of a <b>mode of seeing sui generis</b> / senses <b>the seeing immanent in them</b></p>
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One might eventually consider strategies such as those mobilized by Lacan's German translator, Norbert Haas [1996(1987)], who is extremely sensitive to the multiple effets de sens of key items and consistently "backs up" his German equivalents with the French items: *Etwas anderes wäre die Funktion des Trugs, Köders* [ *leurre* (106); *Und sollte ich etwas sein in diesem Bild* [ *tableau, dann auch in der Form dieses Schirms, den ich eben »Fleck« nannte* (103); ... *weil ich damals also ein unsäglich komisches Bild* [ *tableau gemacht haben muß. Oder vielmehr: Ich fiel aus dem Bild heraus* [ *je faisais tant soit peu tache* [ *ich machte mehr oder weniger einen Fleck im Bild* (102).

Yet another technique is supplementation, expansion, glosing (micro-commentaries). [Le peintre] *donne quelque chose en pâture à l'oeil, mais il invite celui auquel le tableau est présenté à déposer là son regard, comme on dépose les armes* (Lacan 116) might be rendered as:

Something is held out to the eye, but the viewer is asked / expected to lay aside his **critical gaze**, as one lays down one's arms.

or, even more abundantly:

Something is held out to **the simple, the native eye** rather than **the knowing gaze**, and that something necessitates **that the gaze be set aside, the already-all-knowing eye, and the burden of already-seen it carries with it.**

Taking this one step further, the translator might even be prepared— au risque de surcharger le TA— to replace crucial items by whole chunks of exegesis, as in one of the passages where Lacan resorts to the short-hand *dompte-regard*:

Lacan 124-125

... Vous avez bien vu d'ailleurs, la dernière fois, qu'après avoir formulé **ce qu'il y a dans la peinture du *dompte-regard*, c'est-à-dire que celui qui regarde est toujours amené par la peinture à poser bas son regard**, j'amenais aussitôt ce correctif que **c'est pourtant dans un appel tout à fait direct au regard que se situe l'expressionnisme.**

B.F., test-translation

..... You will recall from last time how I expressed the view that **painting always forces the viewer to set aside his expectations and preconceptions, sidelining the preconditioned ways of seeing / forces the viewer to lose himself in contemplation**—only to rectify my remarks by pointing out that expressionist painting, quite the contrary, appeals directly to **the already-all-knowing eye, the gaze, the consecrated hackneyed way of seeing / panders to the clichés of viewing art.**

And in the particularly beautiful passage where Lacan cites, as the purest example of *invidia*, Saint Augustin's example of the small child torn apart by a bitter sense of foreclosure as he witnesses the *Befriedigung* of a sibling nursing at his mother's breast, *le regard* might well be rendered by an allusion to its status as objet *a*— the title to which this entire section of Séminaire XI is subordinated is, after all, “DU REGARD COMME OBJET PETIT a”<sup>34</sup>:

Lacan 131-132

*Invidia* vient de *videre*. L'*invidia* la plus exemplaire, pour nous analystes, est celle que j'ai depuis longtemps relevée dans Augustin pour lui donner tout son sort, à savoir celle du petit enfant regardant son frère pendu au sein de sa mère, le regardant ***amare conspectu, d'un regard amer***, qui le décompose et fait sur lui-même l'effet d'un poison.

[...]

Telle est la véritable envie. Elle fait pâlir le sujet devant quoi?—devant l'image d'une complétude qui se referme, et de ceci que le petit *a*,

B.F., test-translation

*Invidia* derives from *videre*. The classic form of *invidia*, for us analysts, is that depicted by Augustin in a passage which I long ago singled out in order to give it the prominence it deserves— that of the small child observing an infant brother at his mother's breast, ***amare conspectu, oh! bitter to behold!, taking it in with a bitterness*** that undoes him and acts like a poison on him.

[...]

Such is the true nature of envy. Just what makes the subject grow pale with it? The sight of a completeness from which he is henceforth

<sup>34</sup> The small-*a* object— objet du désir, objet éternellement manquant— being any stand-in, anything that in the real world evokes the big-*A* Other (*Autre*) we've internalized, bringing us to our knees before the judgement we expect to be passed on us or putting us at the mercy of whomever we turn to for validation.

le *a* séparé à quoi il se suspend, peut-être pour un autre la possession dont il se satisfait, la *Befriedigung*.

C'est à ce registre de l'oeil comme désespéré par le regard qu'il nous faut aller pour saisir le ressort apaisant, civilisateur et charmeur, de la fonction du tableau.

foreclosed, the realization that the small *a* he yearns for but is now cut off from can belong to another to whom it brings *Befriedigung*, the satisfaction of a basic drive.

It is this—the way the eye is thrown into despair by what the subject desires to see — which explains how painting / visual art soothes, civilizes and entrances.

The title, finally, I would render in a way that embodies my understanding of the entire text: *La schize de l'oeil et du regard* > *Eye vs gaze: the naïve vs the desiring-demanding eye*.

The new translation would have to work with the defects as well as the strong points of the Séminaires. Where Lacan—or the editors of the transcriptions—are fuzzy and self-contradictory (e.g., p. 111),<sup>35</sup> the translator would have to ditch the verbal text and work from the diagrams, where they exist (e.g. on pp.106 and 121)—precisely as the technical translator does, if she's any good. The new translator<sup>36</sup> would indeed have to proceed as with any highly technical text, working her way into the conceptual world of Lacan before even beginning anything like a concerted translation. And this she would have to do by using Lacan to explain Lacan, eschewing most, if not all, of the commentary (especially that in English, which arose from a deeply flawed translation and has for decades been feeding off itself).

The new translation would also, I believe, have to break with the poncifs regarding Lacan's style, as articulated by Georges Mounin among others:

Il ne serait pas illégitime d'enfermer Lacan dans son style; de le caractériser, de le définir, de le psychanalyser même sur le seul examen de son style. Lui-même en effet, dès la première ligne de son gros recueil, place ce style au premier plan, comme égal au sujet qu'il traite, comme commandé—c'est son mot—par ce sujet. ... [Il le justifie en 1966] comme une «barrière» [...] opposée aux «interprétations abérrantes», à l'«exploitation», vulgarisatrice qu'on a faite de sa pensée: «Tout est organisé, dit-il, pour interdire que ces textes soient lus en diagonale.» — Georges Mounin, “Quelques Traits du Style de Jacques Lacan”, in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, no. 173 (1er janvier 1969), 84-92.

<sup>35</sup> “Le corrélat du tableau, à situer à la même place que lui, c'est-à-dire au-dehors, c'est le point de regard. Quant à ce qui, de l'un à l'autre, fait la médiation, ce qui est entre les deux, c'est quelque chose d'une autre nature que l'espace optique géométral, quelque chose qui joue un rôle exactement inverse, qui opère, non point d'être traversable, mais au contraire d'être opaque—c'est l'écran.”

<sup>36</sup> Ideally, a team of subject-experts and translators, similar to the team put together in France to produce a fresh translation of Freud.

Mounin's remarks read like an avatar of Buffon's perennially misquoted *le style, c'est [de] l'homme*. (And the remarks attributed to Lacan read like an avatar of Mallarmé's contemptuous *si le lecteur moyen croit comprendre quoi que ce soit à ma poésie, c'est qu'il y a malentendu*.) Why, though, should the translator prendre au pied de la lettre the idiolect that emerges from these more or less inaccurate attempts to transcribe the essentially untranscribable? My sense is that the importance attributed to (the superficial manifestations of) Lacan's oral style is exaggerated—possibly because the style has appeared so impenetrable to so many (which is ultimately why *regard* has been reified into a term). If the translator were to take literally the injunction to preserve Lacan's style, would she have to introduce gallicisms as equivalents of Lacan's anglicisms, imitate his fausses élégances (*Certes me faudra-t-il indiquer que ...*), perpetuate his “mistranslations” (*amare conspectu > d'un regard amer*), cook up grammatical lapses of her own to “match” the solecisms evident in the transcriptions? Would she, finally, have to be bound by the “equivalents” Lacan wanted to impose upon his translators (*manque-à-être > want-to-be*, cited in Sheridan 1977: 281)?<sup>37</sup> Just where should she draw the line between transcription errors and “Lacanian” errors?

My contention is that Lacan should be translated *instrumentally*, despite the putative importance ascribed by so many commentators to his style. This is not to gloss over the textuality of Lacan's writings, or to deny the limitations of the instrumental approach to philosophical texts, as pointed out so cogently by Annie Brisset and Pascal Gin. It might be of use in this respect to attempt a distinction between *voice* and *style*. Voice is of course manifested through style, but it might be extremely useful to treat style as a surface manifestation, a sort of “phenotype”, with voice considered as the underlying “genotype”. In this perspective, voice is a set of underlying tendencies (amplitude vs sparseness, musicality (rhythm, sound-play) vs instrumentality, exuberance vs sobriety, purism vs laxism (in word-choice, syntax, etc.), mixedness vs uniformity of register, ornamentation and language-play vs plainness, etc.). The ideal, given this distinction between “voice” and “style”, would be to keep Lacan's playfulness, rhythmicity, delight in language, baroque exuberance—his passion, in a word—without attempting to preserve the klunkier aspects of his style (anacolutha, fausses élégances, anglicisms (*éluder*)). Respecter le souffle, sinon les manifestations superficielles au niveau du “style”.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See also Sheridan's remark to the effect that Lacan insisted that “‘*objet petit a*’ should remain untranslated, thus acquiring, as it were, the status of an algebraic sign” (Sheridan 1977: 282). Cf. my comments on Saint-John Perse's clumsy interferences in T.S. Eliot's rendering of his “Anabase” (*Second Finding*, p. 271 n.10, p. 278 n.52).

<sup>38</sup> Poet and translator Philippe Jaccottet stressed “l'impérieuse nécessité de restituer un *ton* de voix entendu dans le texte étranger, une *respiration* ... et surtout un *souffle*. ... Dans sa poésie, Jaccottet tente ... de se faire le porte-parole de la «voix du monde», en s'effaçant derrière elle, comme il tente de «donner voix»

Would such a field approach provide a truly coherent reading of Lacan? I can't really say without having a far deeper understanding of the Séminaires than I do. What's clear is that Lacan should be translated all over again, *ex nihilo*. Where a re-translation would revisit the text in the light of the huge body of scholastic commentary that has piled up since the first renderings, a new translation should be a return to Lacan, paralleling Lacan's own *turn to Freud*. If the Academy has done so much (some of it excellent) with such a deficient translation, just think what could arise out of an elegant (in the mathematical sense) one.

### III. TRANSLATION AND TRANSMISSION: CONCEPTUAL DRIFT, CREATIVE EXEGESIS, AND THE INRUSH OF MEANING

The blatant deficiencies of translations such as Sheridan's raise a number of questions. How did a translation that falls so far short of understanding Lacan— one that hasn't even dealt properly with his surface structures, let alone delved under them— come to be a font of terminology, a template for countless scholia, discussions, elaborations and extrapolations of Lacan's thought in the English-speaking world?<sup>39</sup> The flippant (and sadly all too plausible) answer is: *Au pays des aveugles.....*<sup>40</sup> And, unfortunate though it is that such an amateurish translation should have set the standard for both terminology and register of discourse, this is a fact of scholarly transmission, and we have to live with it.

A second, more probing, question has far-ranging implications and deserves a more thoughtful answer. Given their obvious linguistic limitations— without exception, these translators demonstrate a blatant lack of translational skills and a far-less-than-adequate command of French<sup>41</sup> — how did *borgnes* such as Barnes, Lingis and Sheridan acquire the easy familiarity

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aux auteurs qu'il traduit." —Christine Lombez, *Transactions secrètes. Philippe Jaccottet poète et traducteur de Rilke et Hölderlin*. Artois Presses Université 2003, p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> And not just in the English-speaking world: as absurd as it may seem, Sheridan's translation, rather than Lacan's original or Norbert Haas's rendering into German (first published in 1978), seems to have served as the basis for some of the work done in German ("Ganze oder zerstückelter Körper", <http://sth.web-publishing.ch/data/img/p02d11koerper.pdf>).

<sup>40</sup> Laurence Wright (*The Looming Tower*) contends quite plausibly that the catastrophic failures of US intelligence have been largely due to a catastrophic lack of agents fluent in Arabic and familiar with the cultures of the Middle-East. And the failure of CSIS to prevent the Air India disaster might well be attributable, among other things, to a lack of expertise in Punjabi.

<sup>41</sup> Both Lingis (gawking at Merleau-Ponty's use of *médusé*: "it is not a nameless catastrophe that leaves me petrified (*médusé*)", p.72) and Barnes (with her *ocular globes* and the startled little gasp that Sartre's *mise hors circuit* elicits from her ("Literally, 'put out of circuit' (*mise hors circuit*). Tr.", p.258, n.16) provide fine examples of what I refer to as the "tourist trap syndrome" (*Second Finding*, p. 310). Sheridan's blunders in rendering Foucault and Lacan are surprising in light of the fact that Sheridan had been a *lecteur d'anglais* at the Lycée Henri IV, in Paris, possibly around the time Lacan and Foucault were lecturing.

with the constructs of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Lacan evidenced in the peritextual materials with which they've supplemented their translations? The answer would seem to be: through translations and commentaries in English (including, in some cases, their own) — a case of translation and commentary feeding on themselves. Barnes and Lingis, generally credited with introducing Sartre and Merleau-Ponty to the English-speaking world, seem to have invented Anglophone existentialism and phenomenology out of their own, laboured readings of the French originals. What they give us in their prefaces is, naturally enough, their own understandings of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty—readings which (though dragged back through the thorn-hedge of the original French) came to be the “received versions” of these philosophers. And when Sheridan elucidates Lacan, his reading is quite possibly filtered— and skewed— through layers and layers of prior translation and commentary. Translation feeding on translations, commentary spawning commentary and, in the process, begetting all manner of distortions and slippages, large and small: this is what I refer to as *conceptual drift*. Slippage and drift are inevitable in commentary, translation or even just quotation. The question is whether these slippages are productive, in which case one can speak of *creative exegesis*, and *conceptual drift* becomes a value added that drives scholarly discourse forward by preventing it from stagnating in the already-said. Unproductive slippages are random; they produce *conceptual scatter*, add no value, tend to cancel one another out, generate noise at most, and produce no meaningful conceptual drift.

Decades ago Georges Mounin alluded to the way Lacan himself made a practice of borrowing—and twisting out of shape— items from various fields of discourse that had caught his fancy, watering them down or thinning them out until they bore little resemblance to the way they'd been understood in the sources from which they'd been purloined. *Dialectique* (misappropriated from Marx), *signifiant* and *langage* (misappropriated from Saussure) were the examples Mounin cited. To which one might add the fumisteries incorporated into “l'algèbre et la topologie lacaniennes”, as denounced, some thirty years after the fact, by Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont (Mounin was being critical, Sokal and Bricmont, merciless.) But this magpie approach is inherent in the creative processes that move scholarship forward. Eye-catching signifiers get snatched up like shiny baubles and flown off into faroff branches where—if the magpie is clever, or assiduous, enough— they get worked into glittering new nests of constructs (Kaja Silverman inventing out of whole cloth a distinction between *hail* and *interpellate* [Folkart 2006: 130];

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And Lingis, suprisingly, did his doctorate in Belgium.

various theorists distinguishing *the look* from *the gaze*, and *the gaze* from *the glance*<sup>42</sup>). When conceptual drift takes on a momentum and a direction of its own it can be a pre-condition for intellectual progress, even as it moves further and further away from the texts that gave birth to it. (When momentum and direction fail to develop, drift degenerates into the random conceptual scatter of profspeak.) Creative slippages and skewings are what prevent scholarly discourse from turning endlessly on itself.

Translation alone, then, cannot explain why there are so many more *gazes* in contemporary academic discourse than there were *regards* in the great fore-runners. Translation was only part of the process. The contributions of Barnes, Sheridan, et al were relayed by creative exegesis, and by the conceptual drift that necessarily accompanies it: the interpretation of specific concepts and lexical items has the effect of shifting, not only their content, but their “value” (in the Saussurian sense), or relative weight, within any given conceptual edifice. When Barnes renders Sartre’s *autrui* by *the Other*, she turns a mild-mannered, bespectacled nonentity of a word into a larger-than-life super-signifier waiting for a suitably grandiose signified to rush in and fill it up. The very oddness of the combinatorial behaviour into which the one-size-fits-all equivalent is forced seems almost to induce a sort of epistemologically elevated status.

A veritable “theory of the gaze” has evolved out of Anglo-American exegesis of the works of Lacan, in particular. As Jean-Michel Rabaté has noted, “a whole critical industry has sprouted from Lacan’s remarks on the gaze and vision, often applied to film” (2001: 11). Some of this exegesis has been profoundly meaningful: *the idealizing, judgmental object a Lacan called the gaze* (Ragland-Sullivan and Bracher 1991: 13). [...] *the gaze exceeds the ocular act of looking, although looking seeks to know or understand. Rather, the gaze turns us inside/out. Are we seeing, looking, or looked at? While looking certainly offers pleasure ..., Lacan’s gaze is commensurate—not with the eye, but—with jouissance encountered on the side of anxiety and idealizations: judgment, narcissistic fantasies, threat, the presence of a void. The gaze and the voice constitute component parts, of a superego-like constellation Lacan called the ideal ego where unconscious fantasies dwell*, writes Ragland-Sullivan (1991: 73). *The gaze marks the point in the object (in the picture) from which the subject viewing it is already gazed at, i.e., it is the*

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<sup>42</sup> “Some theorists make a distinction between *the gaze* and *the look*: suggesting that *the look* is a perceptual mode open to all whilst *the gaze* is a mode of viewing reflecting a gendered code of desire ... others relate the ‘gaze’ to cinema and the ‘glance’ to television - associations which then seem to lead to these media being linked with stereotypical connotations of ‘active’ (and ‘male’) for film and ‘passive’ (and ‘female’) for television ...” — Daniel Chandler, “Notes on the Gaze: Forms of Gaze” [www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/gaze/gaze02.html](http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/gaze/gaze02.html) (consulted 3 September 2007).

*object that is gazing at me. [...] the gaze functions thus as a stain, a spot in the picture disturbing its transparent visibility [...]. The gaze as object is a stain preventing me from looking at the picture from a safe, “objective” distance, from enframing it as something that is at my grasping view’s disposal, explains Žižek (1991: 125).*

Along with the qualified exegetes, though, came the camp-followers, the malapropists, the mouthers of misunderstood words. As the Wikipedia corpus cited at the beginning of this essay shows, the pseudo-term *gaze* has taken on a life of its own— almost as if this rigid translation equivalent acquired its status precisely because of its alluring fringe of indeterminacy. The very emptiness of the signifier was an invitation for meaning to rush in. And rush in it did: people sensed, consciously or not, that they could do with it what they wanted. The past couple of decades have witnessed the trivialization of hard-edged, hard-won concepts into fuzzy shibboleths. When one and the same author, in one and the same article, uses *gaze* to flaunt his familiarity with Foucault (*the panoptic power of the gaze*), with Lacan (*objects of the gaze, subjects of the gaze*) and, unwittingly, with Danielle Steele (a jealous husband eyes another man’s *gaze towards his wife*), it’s fair to speak of terminological promiscuity. And where terminology is concerned, too much meaning is no meaning at all.

Passé un certain point, though, the work of translation and commentary becomes irreversible. However unsatisfactory the readings and renderings through which the Barneses, the Lingises and the Sheridans have brought “Les Parisiens” into the Anglo-American world, we have to live with them. And live with them we do: witness the proliferation of books, articles, websites. Some of the websites in particular (Felluga, Chandler), with their rational, pedagogical layouts, give a strikingly crisp and tidy account of what in the originals (at least in Lacan) can at times seem shifting, labile, amorphous— and bewildering. For better or for worse, they serve as *vademecum*, digests of the Anglo-American Academy’s received version of the *Séminaires*. In a very real way, their “faithfulness” to the actual conceptual system elaborated by Lacan is beside the point.

It’s useless to rail against ideas transforming themselves through corruptions and misreadings of all kinds—as absurd as bemoaning the way the Latin *aqua*, “corrupted” in the mouths of non-native speakers in the far reaches of the Imperium, morphed into *eve* here, *eau* there, *agua* elsewhere. Just as language necessarily changes in between the teeth and soft palates of speakers who haven’t quite clued into the niceties of syntax or phonology, ideas morph out of shape—then go on, with a bit of luck, to new and vigorous reincarnations. As for the promiscuous use of terminology—precisely because it has little more than shibboleth content— it has a way of trickling down, from profspeak to popspeak. *The film keeps us on our*

*epistemological toes*, intones a film critic on CBC Radio. A stand-up comedian, relating how he finally gave up his day job and decided to go full-time funny, refers to the process as *a paradigm shift*; Ford wittily advertizes its latest crossover model as *a six-speed paradigm shifter*. (Let's not even mention the residual puritanism that keeps *gender* cropping up on forms to which the expected answer is either "Male" or "Female"). *Gaze*, too, is popping up in unexpected places and collocations: *Keep your gaze on the floor*, advises *Abs on the Ball*; and a group of human kinetics researchers have even been able to demonstrate that *goalies keep their gaze on the puck* (who knew?)

If there's anything to be perplexed about, it's the dynamics of academic publishing and consumption, the rush to market, the pressure to get translations into print— even infra-mediocre ones whose perpetrators have had neither the time nor the competence to come to a deep understanding of the ST, let alone rewrite it adequately in the TL. True, even the klunkiest, most inaccurate translations make a real, if unforeseeable, contribution. And it will be argued that translators of, say, Lacan wouldn't have had the time to put in the enormous effort to "make sense" of Lacan for themselves, let alone check out the examples drawn from the hard sciences. In hindsight, though, when one considers the decades-long afterlife of these translations, and the whole, in some respects wonky, structure built upon them by the Anglo-American Academy, it would appear far more "cost-effective" to invest whatever it takes to come to grips with the interesting— and often extraordinarily beautiful— patterns of these extraordinarily interesting minds.

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